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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

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Enter *Homo Oeconomicus*:

Civic Motivation and Civic Education in Aristophanic Comedy

by

Konstantinos Karathanasis

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2022

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Konstantinos Karathanasis

Washington University in St. Louis

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Timothy J. Moore, Chair

By the mid-fifth century BCE, the Athenian *polis* had introduced payments for the performance of an array of civic duties, and Aristotle suggests in his *Politics* that the effectiveness of monetary incentives in greasing the wheels of a state's apparatus was widely recognized. In Aristophanic comedy, these incentives are systematically presented as the strongest motivational factor for everyday citizens who participated in judge-panels or the Assembly.

In three Aristophanic plays, incentives and the behavioral problems surrounding them are a major component of the plot. In *Knights*, old Demos is a self-serving individual who takes advantage of equally self-serving *rhētores* for the sake of satisfying his desire for state payments. In *Wasps*, Philokleon and his peers admit that their motivation to volunteer as judges is not based on any sense of civic duty but on a desire to maximize their individual utility. Finally, in *Assemblywomen*, male characters frame their civic participation in terms of profit-maximization. Some scholars have considered this negative portrayal of everyday citizens proof of Aristophanes' conservatism. We see the playwright's criticism in a new light, however, if we examine his commentary on Athenian public finance through the lens of behavioral science.

Since the 1980's, social psychologists, behavioral economists, and political scientists have documented extensively the negative impact of incentives on civic behavior, observing that they prompt the adoption of a market mentality that undermines prosocial preferences such as altruism and the sense of duty. Examined against the background of this research, Aristophanes' preoccupation with public finance gives us a glimpse into the negative effects of monetary incentives on Athens's civic culture. At the same time, the three plays under examination offer visions of a better democracy, where ancestral virtues are restored, and altruism is the primary factor of civic motivation. This dissertation thus offers a reevaluation of Aristophanic comedy in terms of its value as a historical source, its political outlook, and its institutional function within Athens's democracy.

Introduction

A recurring theme of Aristophanic comedy is the public finance of Athens, especially the extensive disbursements of public funds so as to compensate the citizens' performance of civic obligations. The monetization of Athens's civic culture is brought up more or less in the entirety of Aristophanes' surviving work, but three out of the eleven plays provide an extensive commentary on the subject, especially with regard to civic motivation. First, *Knights* shows how, with monetary gain detrimentally ingrained in the political ethos of Athenians, political subsidies are a tool in the hands of self-serving *rhētores*. Second, in *Wasps*, the citizens manning the courts are shown to be motivated by anything but a sense of civic duty; hence, their loyalty lies with *rhētores* moving motions for extended political subsidies. Finally, in *Assemblywomen*, the women of Athens deplore the lack of civic-mindedness in the men, who are said to be so narrowly profit-driven that they expect compensation like wage-laborers when it comes to performing any public service. These three plays thus portray Athenian citizens as motivated solely by material self-interest and a dysfunctional civic culture, in which money is the prime—if not the sole—motivational factor behind civic engagement.

In his preoccupation with the infiltration of money into the public life of classical Athens, Aristophanes' portrayal of everyday citizens as narrowly profit-driven and selfish has been deemed proof of his elitist or even anti-democratic views. My aim, however, is to demonstrate that, if contextualized historically, Aristophanes' commentary on the civic behavior of his fellow citizens lends itself to a radically different reading, namely an attempt at civic education. A main objective of this dissertation is to establish the realism informing Aristophanes' political commentary, which entails distortions for comic effect but like a distorting mirror still reflects observable reality. To this end, the comic account of the Athenians' profit-driven civic behavior is examined against

some of the recent advances in behavioral science. As the latest research in social psychology and behavioral economics suggests, external motivational factors like monetary rewards can attenuate intrinsic motivational factors, such as altruism or one's sense of duty. From this perspective, humorous distortions notwithstanding, the descriptive value of Aristophanic comedy increases exponentially since it emerges as an invaluable document for the interplay between political subsidies and Athens's civic culture. At the same time, through its treatment of profound civic problems, Aristophanes' critical commentary reveals the educational function of comic theater within the broader institutional context of Athenian democracy.

On the level of methodology, the theoretical advances in the various disciplines of social science "have long been sources of productive approaches by which classicists have sought to gain a better understanding of ancient Greece."¹ Still, even for enthusiastic proponents of interdisciplinarity, such approaches also encounter scholarly skepticism. Some might regard an exploration of Athenian history and its reflection in the plays of Aristophanes through the lens of modern behavioral science as anachronistic. As we shall see in detail below, however, there is no reason to assume that the behavioral makeup of pre-modern and modern agents was radically divergent in all respects. On the contrary, the behavioral profile sketched by experiments and empirical observations for citizens of modern societies vis-à-vis monetary incentives illuminates the one sketched by Aristophanes for his fellow citizens. By describing his world as he saw it, Aristophanes presents us with an image that next to its comic potential also fits closely with the predictions of modern behavioral science regarding the effects of incentives on civic behavior.²

¹ Ober (2018), 1. This statement is found in the introduction to an edited volume, the contributions to which illuminate the multifaceted and productive ways the methods of social science can be implemented in the field of ancient Greek History.

² As formulated by Ehrenberg (1962, 8), comedy provides "excellent evidence of many real facts, above all those relating to the general conditions of life which form the background of the comic plot, a background self-evident to poet and audience."

Consequently, a behavioral science approach to Aristophanes' commentary on civic behavior promises an enhanced understanding not only of the object of his satire but also of the factors that shaped Athens's civic culture in the late fifth and early fourth centuries.

Before exploring the benefits of the approach suggested above, an overview of the analysis of civic motivation in social science is necessary. Accordingly, the remainder of this introduction is divided into four sections that engage with three different yet interrelated topics. The first section looks into the history of the modelling of human motivation, focusing especially on incentives and the ways they can affect the motivation informing civic behavior. The second and third sections establish the applicability of modern theoretical models to Greek antiquity. In particular, the second section examines Athenian public finance and the implementation of political subsidies as incentives for bolstering civic engagement. The third section explores the nature of Athens's economy, the behavioral disposition of its agents, and the way the former would foster profit-maximizing mentalities. Finally, after a comprehensive review of the scholarly debate over the relation between Aristophanic comedy and Athenian politics, the third section argues that Aristophanes' preoccupation with civic behavior was part of a humorous yet edifying criticism of the democratic *status quo*.

I. Human Motivation and the *Homo Oeconomicus*

Ever since the time of Plato and Aristotle, political philosophers have been preoccupied with theorizing optimal public governance, and in so doing the relationship between individual and society has been a key concern. For centuries, good governance was deemed to stem from making good citizens by harnessing human passions, especially through laws; yet the philosophical

paradigm did not remain static.³ During the Renaissance, after the decisive break introduced by the philosophical view of humanity as dominated by passions instead of reason, good governance was conceived less as the aggregate of the quality of a society's citizens and more as the effective regulation of citizen interactions via institutions. Subsequently, during the Enlightenment, with political philosophers gradually dropping their attempts to theorize the making of "good" citizens, emphasis began to be laid on the design of institutions that would successfully channel human individualism and pervasive moral failure into communal interests. Therefore, economics, a then-nascent discipline focused on wealth production, provided a theorizing basis that gradually would come to dominate the modern discourse on human motivation.

The birth of economics out of moral philosophy during the eighteenth century came along with an espousal of material self-interest as the cornerstone of human motivation. This behavioral principle originated in the writings of the discipline's founder, Adam Smith, who propounded the idea that one's pursuit of self-interest unwittingly, yet frequently, promotes the interest of a society *in toto*—the so-called "invisible hand" theorem. Among theorists of what would later be known as the "classical school" of economics, Smith's methodological assumption turned into an axiom for the analysis of human behavior within economic settings. As formulated by John Stuart Mill:

[Political Economy] makes entire abstraction of every other human passion or motive... [it] considers mankind as occupied solely in acquiring and consuming wealth; and aims at showing what is the course of action into which mankind, living in a state of society, would be impelled, if that motive... were absolute ruler of all their actions.⁴

Equally, the advent of the "neoclassical school" of economics in the late nineteenth century brought a theorizing of human rationality that was based on the same assumption. "The first principle of economics," Francis Edgeworth wrote, "is that every agent is actuated only by self-

³ On the evolution of the philosophical paradigm on governance, see Bowles (2016), 1-37.

⁴ Mill (1846), 566.

interest.”⁵ Consequently, the working hypothesis of the so-called *homo oeconomicus* became an orthodoxy, its core assumption being that the motivation of human beings is primarily guided by a desire to maximize their individual profit, while their rationality is exerted in figuring out the most efficient ways to that end.

For early economic theorists, as Mill’s conditional generalizing above suggests, the motivational abstraction of the *homo oeconomicus* was a deliberate simplification, applicable for the sake of heuristics strictly in the realm of wealth production.⁶ Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, after the field of economics made a hard turn towards positivism and eventually got divorced from moral philosophy, the *homo oeconomicus* would come to cross epistemological barriers.⁷ The mathematical models of economists led to a dynamic development of abstract theorizing that gained cross-disciplinary popularity, especially with regard to the modelling of human behavior. Despite the dissonant voices warning against the limited heuristic utility of the economist’s model, the appeal of the *homo oeconomicus* was strong, as the rationality of the economic man offered an actor of conveniently calculable predictability.⁸ At the same time, self-interest, which was once deemed a guiding principle only for the profit-maximizing mentality

⁵ Edgeworth (1881), 104.

⁶ For the intricate intellectual history of the *homo oeconomicus* model within the discipline of economics, see Zouboulakis (2014).

⁷ The history of economics as a moral science is discussed by Alvey (1999), who traces the first palpable evidence for its transformation into a positivist approach to human behavior in the works of Alfred Marshall (1842-1924).

⁸ As argued by Simon (1947), humans are incapable of making entirely rational decisions as premised by economists, since the information asymmetry involved in every decision-situation restricts us to a “bounded rationality.” On the other hand, considering the inconsistency that we tend to exhibit in our preferences, Sen (1977) criticized the consequentialism of the *homo oeconomicus* model, arguing that factors like commitment, which economists deemed “irrational,” are in fact a quintessential part of human rationality. Finally, from the perspective of our cognitive biases, Kahnemann and Tversky (1979) demonstrated that in decision-situations involving risk we tend to make up our minds based on generalized assumptions, so more often than not the supposedly perfect rationality of the *homo oeconomicus* is violated.

characterizing the domain of economic activity, came to be a guiding principle for the rationality undergirding utility and thus for the modelling of all human interactions.⁹

A consequence of the above development was the progressive manifestation of “economic imperialism,” since the assumption of utility-maximization started asserting descriptive authority over domains of human activity not traditionally considered by economists.¹⁰ The existence of individual preferences and their impact on human behavior were recognized by economists, yet they were deemed beyond the scope of economic analysis. In terms of interactions within a civic setting, individual preferences were considered rational and hence self-interested; thus, to study them in further detail was deemed pointless.¹¹ On that account, the axiomatic acceptance of self-interest and the capacity of markets to regulate it led to an elevation of incentives, both positive (rewards) and negative (fines), to a *sine qua non* for the design of social policy and institutions.¹² In addition, economists considered material interests and moral sentiments to be separable within the scope of utility maximization, but what they “missed is the possibility that moral and other pro-social behavior would be affected—perhaps adversely—by incentive-based policies designed to harness self-interest.”¹³

For many decades there was no body of evidence which could help quantify or calculate people’s non-economic preferences, so the economists’ approach to human motivation seemed justified. Still, much of human behavior violated the utility function standards underlying

⁹ As emphatically argued in Becker’s (1976, 14) influential study on human motivation, “all human behavior can be viewed as involving participants who maximize their utility from a stable set of preferences and accumulate an optimal amount of information and other inputs in a variety of markets.”

¹⁰ Lazear (2000) defends “economic imperialism” by arguing that the cross-disciplinary adoption of economic methodology is justified on the basis of its superiority.

¹¹ For an overview of the economic theories on pro-social behavior, see Meier (2006).

¹² See Grant (2011), 15-28.

¹³ For the so-called “separability assumption” in economics, see Bowles (2016), 16-25, quotation from 21.

canonical economic theory, and civic behavior was always a textbook case. For example, during his Distinguished Lecture on Economics in Government in 1994, Henry Aaron inquired:

Why do people vote, give to political parties, and invest money and effort in politics when any B- student in intermediate theory could demonstrate that such behavior, which typically has negligible effect on achieving its putative objective, is irrational within the accepted framework of utility maximization?¹⁴

Political engagement was one of the several, long-recognized “anomalies” highlighted in Aaron’s lecture, in which he called for the adoption of a new approach to human behavior in economics—one that admits the multiplicity of utility functions recognized in sociology and psychology and goes beyond the rigidity of a model couched on rational cost-benefit analyses.

Aaron’s lecture represented the tipping point of a long evolutionary process in the theorizing of human motivation in social science. For pro-social behavior in particular, the impact of monetary incentives on motivation became a subject of vigorous inquiry after the pioneering work of Richard Titmuss, a social worker who established social policy as an academic discipline. In 1970, Titmuss published a comparative study on the way several countries secured human blood for transfusion, in which he expounded the fundamental qualitative differences between two systems. On the one hand, the approach exemplified by the United States was to rely for the most part on a for-profit, privately operated market mechanism, which treated human blood as a commodity and appealed for donations through the prospect of utility. On the other hand, the approach exemplified by the United Kingdom was to rely exclusively on a state-operated, non-market mechanism, which appealed for donations through altruism and thus treated this act of giving as an indicator of social value. Comparing and contrasting the two systems, Titmuss found that the private market in blood posed more dangers to the health of both donors and recipients

¹⁴ Aaron (1994), 9.

and seemed to produce more shortages of blood in the long run.¹⁵ The most intriguing aspect of the study was its sociological claims regarding the negative effect of incentives *qua* external motivation on social values *qua* intrinsic motivation. Particularly, Titmuss argued that the use of economic incentives to attract blood donations prompted the adoption of a market mentality, which diminished internalized moral incentives and thus reduced the supply of donors. The reasoning behind his thesis was that altruism and other social values abound in ordinary human beings, but the introduction of a market system in an altruism-driven sphere of activity contaminates voluntarism and restricts the “freedom to give” by eradicating the satisfaction taken from an act of giving within a gift relationship.¹⁶ Consequently, Titmuss maintained that incentive-based public policies were compromising preexisting values that lead people to act in socially beneficial ways.

At the time of publication, Titmuss’s study was challenging the modelling of human motivation in economics, especially the efficacy of incentives for the successful design of social policy. The argument about the effect of incentives on intrinsic motivation excited skeptical interest; yet, given the methodological popularity of the *homo oeconomicus* model, it was no surprise that the argument about public policy was met with outright disapproval.¹⁷ To challenge the efficiency of public policies built upon the assumption of a universal propensity for utility maximization was one thing, but to claim that such policies diminish people’s intrinsic motivation and social values was to throw down the morality gauntlet to economists.¹⁸ In the 1970’s, inasmuch as hard evidence for the influence of intrinsic motivation on individual behavior was absent, the

¹⁵ Titmuss (1970), 157. In terms of blood donations, Titmuss’s conclusions about the private market were endorsed by McLean and Poulton (1986) during the AIDS crisis.

¹⁶ Titmuss (1970), 243.

¹⁷ The reviews by Solow (1971), Arrow (1972), and Bliss (1972) are indicative.

¹⁸ In Titmuss’s own words (1970, 198): “Altruism, in giving to a stranger, does not begin and end with blood (or other organs). It may touch every aspect of life and affect the whole fabric of values... If dollars or pounds exchange for blood, then it may be morally acceptable for a myriad of other human activities and relationships also to exchange for dollars and pounds. *Economists may fragment systems and values; other people do not*” (emphasis added).

challenge Titmuss posed to traditional economic thinking was regarded as a feeble one. Moreover, his claim that there was a direct correlation between incentives and the impairment of intrinsic motivation within social settings bore a significant burden of proof, given that it was based on the single phenomenon of blood donation. Thus, for the time being, the *homo oeconomicus* model prevailed, given that the effects of incentives were deemed both measurable and predictable, but winds of change soon started blowing from the field of social psychology.

After a series of experiments in the course of the 1970's and 1980's, social psychologists were able to analyze and measure empirically how positive external motivation, like a reward, reduces or "crowds out" an individual's intrinsic motivation to act; thus, they developed the so-called "crowding theory."¹⁹ The crowding-out effect was attributed to what was termed "the hidden cost of reward," meaning a reward's impairment of its recipients' self-determination when perceived as contempt towards their competence to perform a task or as an attempt to control them.²⁰ For economists working on social policy, crowding theory raised the stakes for the modelling of human behavior in non-economic settings, since in their point of view "people's pro-social behavior should depend on the relative cost: the more expensive pro-social behavior is, the less it should be undertaken."²¹ Accordingly, during the 1990's, the standard methodological approach in economics was to be revisited and eventually refined.

In 1992, Bruno Frey published a study that pushed for a new paradigm for human behavior, based on a merging of the economists' *homo oeconomicus* and the sociologists' *homo socialis* into what he termed the *homo oeconomicus maturus*.²² In other words, he attempted to provide a

¹⁹ See the contributions in Lepper and Greene (1978).

²⁰ For an overview of the relevant research, see Deci and Ryan (1985).

²¹ Meier (2006), 18.

²² Frey (1992), 118-125.

nuanced analysis that would combine the proclivity of people towards utility maximization as well as the social determination detected in their behavior. According to Frey, “[b]oth views of man have their strengths: economics seems to be better equipped to explain *changes* in human behaviour, while sociology seems to be better equipped to explain historically existing *levels*.”²³ In implementing this paradigm, the psychologists’ crowding theory was gainfully employed, and when Frey attempted to test empirically its significance about human motivation in the context of civic behavior, the results were groundbreaking.

One of the most significant empirical tests took place in Switzerland in the 1990’s, where Frey and his collaborator, Felix Oberholzer-Gee, recorded the reaction of citizens in various communities regarding the placement of a nuclear waste repository in their territory.²⁴ The Swiss government had identified possible sites where the siting of such a facility would pose the least environmental hazard for the country, so the citizens living around those sites were interviewed in order to gauge their willingness to make a sacrifice for the communal good. Under canonical economic theory, such a venture is typically resisted as a locally unwanted project (the so-called “Not-In-My-Back-Yard” syndrome), until an implementation of proper incentives tips the cost-benefit balance. However, while more than 50% of the Swiss citizens who were interviewed agreed to host the repository in their community, the acceptance rate fell to 24% when the Swiss government decided to offer a monetary compensation. For Frey and Oberholzer-Gee, this staggering reduction represented the crowding-out effect of the monetary incentive on the sense of civic virtue engendered by an acceptance of the noxious facility.

²³ *ib.* 11.

²⁴ Frey and Oberholzer-Gee (1997).

Pursuing further research on motivation and civic behavior, Frey assembled empirical evidence which suggested that laws and other rules (i.e. negative incentives) are as conducive to the crowding-out of civic virtues as monetary incentives. In the resulting publication, he recognized that his work echoed “the well-known concern by Titmuss (1970) ... [that] inadequate public policy (in his case material rewards) destroys the moral incentives to donate voluntarily.”²⁵ Subsequently, in a book-length study detailing his own and others’ experiments and empirical observations, Frey formulated five propositions concerning the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic human motivation in general. Specifically, he maintained that: 1) intrinsic motivation is fundamental for all economic activities; 2) the use of monetary incentives reduces intrinsic motivation under identifiable and relevant conditions (crowding-out effect); 3) external interventions, like commands or regulations, can equally crowd-out intrinsic motivation; 4) under some conditions, external interventions may enhance intrinsic motivation (crowding-in effect); 5) changes in intrinsic motivation can spill over to areas not directly affected by monetary incentives or regulations (spill-over effect). The conclusion reached by Frey was straightforward: “Pricing and regulating are not the only way to run a society.”²⁶

Three years after the publication of Frey’s monograph, a notable contribution to the modelling of civic behavior came from Elinor Ostrom, a political scientist who would later receive a Nobel Prize in economics. Ostrom published a paper in which she examined the observed willingness of individuals to undertake costs for the sake of achieving collective outcomes next to the factors affecting their motivation.²⁷ The result was a challenge to the widely accepted need of incentives for policy-design, as Ostrom demonstrated that external motivation endorses self-

²⁵ Frey (1997b), 1044.

²⁶ Frey (1997a), 1-39, quotation from 3.

²⁷ Ostrom (2000).

interest, promotes collective inaction, and eventually crowds out all those values connected to citizenship in a society of democratic institutions. A decade later, the ethics behind the implementation of incentives drew a philosophical attack by Ruth Grant, who, focusing on the way incentives impair voluntarism, emphasized that “[p]olitical problems are not always reducible to engineering problems.”²⁸ In the same vein, assessing the civic damage of the “market triumphalism era” and the extension of market-oriented thinking into aspects of life traditionally governed by non-market norms, the political philosopher Michael Sandel deplored the moral problems generated by the fact that “we drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society.”²⁹ Consequently, literature on incentives started laying emphasis on the fact that their crowding-out effect on intrinsic motivation was most noxious in civic settings; hence, the theory underlying the design of public policy in economics was calling for further refinement.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, as the results of behavioral experiments with human participants gained epistemological standing, the subdisciplines of behavioral and experimental economics allowed for further documentation of the motives informing collective action across cultures, as well as the effect of incentives.³⁰ Behavioral economists demonstrated that a fundamental motivational factor for our actions in both economic and non-economic environments is our social preferences: “altruism, reciprocity, intrinsic pleasure in helping others, inequity aversion, ethical commitments, and other motives that induce people to help others more than would an own-material-payoff maximizing individual.”³¹ In this regard, after surveying the results of fifty experiments both in the field and in laboratory settings, Samuel Bowles and Sandra

²⁸ Grant (2011), quotation from 133.

²⁹ Sandel (2012), quotation from 10.

³⁰ For the establishment of experimental economics, see Mestelman (2000). For a defense of the importance of experimental findings for economic theory, see Bowles (2016), 69-75.

³¹ Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 370.

Polanía-Reyes argued that although Titmuss and the subsequent literature were right in tracing the crowding-out of social preferences back to incentives, to reduce the role of incentives in the implementation of public policy would not offer a panacea.

As demonstrated by Bowles and Polanía-Reyes, incentives and social preferences may be substitutes (crowding-out) as well as complements (crowding-in), and experiments show that their interaction cannot be construed on a single pattern. Incentives affect social preferences because targets react to their mere presence (categorical crowding-out) or to their extent (marginal crowding-out). In the former case, offering an incentive to motivate an action discourages people from engaging in that very action, while in the latter, offering a small incentive might be less motivationally efficient than a larger one. Moreover, Bowles and Polanía-Reyes distinguished between “state-dependent” and “endogenous” social preferences, as some of our preferences are situation-specific while others are culturally conditioned behavioral constants. On that account, they ascribed the causality behind the effect of incentives on social preferences to different reasons.

As regards state-dependent preferences, given the acute sensitivity of human behavior to the nature of a decision-situation, the presence or extent of an incentive is a carrier of information and situational cues.³² Accordingly, in keeping with the research of psychologists, Bowles and Polanía-Reyes described the three (partially overlapping) causes for the crowding-out effect of incentives *qua* information on social preferences.³³ The first cause is the information that incentives provide about the person implementing it, since a principal implementing an incentive reveals information about his or her own intentions and beliefs about the targets of the incentive, and about the nature of the incentivized action. If an incentive for an action is perceived by targets

³² For a detailed overview, see also Bowles (2016), 84-110

³³ For the psychological analysis of incentives *qua* situational cues, see Lepper et al. (1982).

as an attempt by the principal to take advantage of them, then they will be less willing to undertake it; thus, the crowding-out stems from the “bad news” communicated by the incentive.³⁴ The second cause is the frame suggested for the decision-situation, as an incentive can signal the type of situation and hence the behavior appropriate for its targets. After the implementation of an incentive, an action within a non-economic setting may be equated by targets to an action within an economic one, as incentives can trigger “moral disengagement;” thus, targets start acting in a payoff-maximizing mode of thought.³⁵ Finally, the third cause for the crowding-out of state-dependent social preferences is the experimentally recorded “control aversion” exhibited by people in various settings. Specifically, in consideration of the fundamental human desire for self-determination, social psychologists have demonstrated that an incentive might compromise its targets’ sense of autonomy, since it can signal an attempt on behalf of the principal to control them.³⁶ Furthermore, as regards actions that people would otherwise perform gladly, the implementation of an incentive can be perceived as an “overjustification,” which equally leads to aversion due to negative effects on the targets’ sense of autonomy.³⁷

In terms of endogenous social preferences, Bowles and Polanía-Reyes claimed that the extent to which a society uses incentives may affect the way its members learn new social preferences or update preexisting ones. In this case, incentives have long-term effects that persist for decades, if not entire lifetimes; hence, as one would assume, the crowding-out of endogenous social preferences cannot be measured in short-term experiments. Still, as suggested by a small

³⁴ Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 372-373, 388-390.

³⁵ *ib.* 373, 390-398. For the phenomenon of “moral disengagement,” see Bandura (1991). Behavioral experiments including a brain scan of the participants revealed that incentives can actively affect our brain processes, as their implementation appears to relocate neural activity from the brain’s limbic system (associated with affective and deontological processes) to the prefrontal cortex (associated with deliberative and utilitarian processes); see Bowles (2016), 103-107.

³⁶ See Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999).

³⁷ Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 373-374, 398-400.

number of long-term experiments, societies that appeal to the utility maximization of their members in non-economic settings eventually prompt them to adopt a utility-maximizing mentality to the detriment of their social preferences.³⁸ This effect is attributed to two uncontroversial aspects of cultural evolution:

First, people tend to adopt ways of behaving (including the preferences that motivate them) that they perceive to be common, independently of expected material payoffs of these behaviors. Second, the presence of incentives may lead people to interpret some generous and other-regarding acts as instead being expressions of self-interest induced by the subsidy.³⁹

In other words, the crowding-out of social preferences can be so prevalent in a decision-situation that economic motivation eventually becomes a norm that perpetuates itself through cultural transmission. Equally, for people interested in an activity for the sake of social utility (i.e. their self-image or the honor accrued by performing it), the introduction of an incentive may prompt them to avoid it lest they be perceived by peers as egoists instead of altruists.⁴⁰

Since Frey's study in 1997, next to the extensive documentation of the crowding-out effect of incentives on social preferences, further documentation has appeared for the crowding-in effect as well. An incentive, as shown by Bowles and Polanía-Reyes, can potentially provide "good news about the principal or it may lead to moral engagement rather than its opposite," while "[m]arket interactions may also favor the endogenous evolution of social preferences."⁴¹ Accordingly, it appears that incentives *per se* are not the root cause of the crowding-out phenomenon; rather, it is the meaning conveyed by incentives to their targets.⁴² Regarding, then, people's civic behavior and contribution to public goods, this long evolutionary process in the modelling of human

³⁸ *ib.* 383-388.

³⁹ Bowles (2016), 120.

⁴⁰ For the utility of social reputation as a motive for prosocial behavior, see Bénabou and Tirole (2006).

⁴¹ See Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 401-410.

⁴² *ib.* 418-419, as well as Bowles (2016), 84-110, where the thesis is further elaborated.

motivation, involving decades of data collection and experiments, has led to a partial vindication of Titmuss's original thesis.⁴³ External motivation in the form of economic incentives has proven to be detrimental for internal motivation fueled by social preferences, since a disproportionate appeal to the *homo oeconomicus* gradually drives away pro-social attitudes in the members of any given society. Nonetheless, on the civic level, instead of dismissing the use of incentives altogether, behavioral economists currently recognize that humans are motivated by a combination of social preferences and utility maximization. As a consequence, a successful model for public policy demands a sophisticated appraisal of the former so as to make both motivational factors work synergistically.⁴⁴

II. Athenian Public Finance and Incentives

At this point, a challenge manifests itself for the classicist regarding the extent to which an application of this modern theorizing to the society of classical Athens is justified. In order to address this challenge, two interrelated questions call for an answer. The first question is whether classical Athens was a society that implemented incentives in the civic sphere, or—in proper social science terminology—interventions with an aim to influence behavior by altering the cost of a targeted activity. If the answer to this question is positive, one is prompted to inquire into the heuristic value of modern analyses regarding the effects of a price system on civic behavior. The second question, then, is whether the behavioral disposition of fifth- and fourth-century Athenians bore any similarity to the one assumed for citizens of modern societies.

⁴³ “The discipline of economics, which had spurned Titmuss a generation earlier,” Bowles (2016, 155) observed, “eventually rediscovered him.” For further experimental testing of Titmuss's thesis about blood-donations, see Mellström and Johannesson (2008).

⁴⁴ See Bowles (2016), 187-223.

Regarding the use of monetary rewards as incentives, the Athenian *polis* certainly employed payments for incentivizing the civic engagement of its citizens. Indeed, such payments were a landmark of democratic public finance across the Greek world.⁴⁵ Moreover, political payments in Athens are actively described as attempts to incentivize citizens to participate in the deliberative and juridical functions of their *polis*. For example, while discussing strategies for designing lasting constitutions, Aristotle insists that (*Pol.* 1298b):

συμφέρει δὲ δημοκρατία ... πρὸς τὸ βουλευέσθαι βέλτιον τὸ αὐτὸ ποιεῖν ὅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν δικαστηρίων ἐν ταῖς ὀλιγαρχίαις (τάττουσι γὰρ ζημίαν τούτοις οὓς βούλονται δικάζειν, ἵνα δικάζωσιν, οἱ δὲ δημοτικοὶ μισθὸν τοῖς ἀπόροις).

It befits democracy... in terms of better deliberation to do the same thing that is done with regard to courts in oligarchies (for they impose fines against those whom they wish to serve as judges so that they do serve, whereas democrats disburse payments to the needy).⁴⁶

In general, according to Aristotle, negative incentives for the well-to-do and positive incentives for the poor are characteristic motivational tools of oligarchic and democratic regimes, respectively.⁴⁷ As a result, it appears that by the fourth century, whatever the nature of a *polis*' constitution, the effectiveness of incentives in greasing the wheels of the political apparatus was recognized across the Greek world.

For Athens, given the necessity of mass participation in its democracy, scholars have long recognized that payments were introduced in order to achieve the proper function of the judiciary system, as judges were “needed more frequently than ordinary citizens could afford to abandon

⁴⁵ Although not exclusive to Athens, payment for political services was a phenomenon exclusive to democratic regimes; see de Ste. Croix (1975). Grant (2011, 14-30) provides a short history of incentives as part of political science terminology. In terms of historical span, Grant's account does not go beyond early twentieth-century America, but this does not mean that it would be anachronistic to label as “incentives” various public payments with an aim to motivate specific behaviors in antiquity. Herzog (2013, 858), in view of Polybius' account (6.39) of the material incentives that Romans instituted in order to inspire their soldiers to be valorous, notes that “[w]hat matters, as Grant would agree, is not whether the Greek language had the word [i.e. for incentives] but whether people grasped the concept... and this policy suggests that the Romans did.” For the concern of Greek authors with incentive problems and rational choice, see Ober (2009).

⁴⁶ Translations of all sources are my own, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁷ See Arist. *Pol.* 1297a.

their day-to-day business.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, the administration of an empire led to an inflation in legal business and the number of trials taking place in Athens.⁴⁹ Accordingly, Perikles pioneered court-pay at around the middle of the fifth century, and soon after his death, Kleon is said to have raised the original rate of two obols per day to three.⁵⁰ Considering that court-service was necessary for ensuring the public good of the rule of law, the introduction of court-pay evidently aimed at incentivizing the citizens’ participation. On that note, our sources never mention—or even hint at—shortages of judges after the reforms of Kleisthenes in 508 BCE down to the radical empowerment of popular courts after the reforms of Ephialtes in 462 BCE; thus, it is unclear whether court-pay was also a measure against widespread abstention.⁵¹ There can be no doubt, however, that the relative cost an individual citizen had to undertake for court-service in Athens’s preindustrial society was prohibitive.⁵² On that account, Aristotle seems to be right in noting that it was exactly this cost that Athenians sought to balance out via subsidies that would provide underprivileged citizens with adequate leisure.⁵³

Sometime during the late 430s and the mid-420s BCE, payments of varying amounts were also introduced for members of the Council as well as for all those serving on the different

⁴⁸ Rhodes (1992) ad 27.3; cf. also Sinclair (1988), 20; Stadter (1989), 117; Kallet (2007), 77.

⁴⁹ Harris (2019), 405-406.

⁵⁰ Introduction of court-pay: cf. Arist. *Pol.* 2.1274a8-9; [*Ath. Pol.*] 27.3 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.; Plut. *Per.* 9.1-5 with Stadter (1989) ad loc.; Hansen (1991), 188-189. Date of introduction: cf. Rhodes (ib.); Fornara and Samons (1991), 67-75; Blok (2009), 148 n. 23. For Kleon and the increase in the rate of court-pay; cf. Σ^R ad *Vesp.* 88, Σ^V ad *Vesp.* 300, Σ^R ad *Av.* 1541. Rosivach (2010, 148 n. 20) maintained that the most probable date for Kleon’s policy is 427/6 BCE, when he served in the Council.

⁵¹ For the gradual “democratization” of the Athenian polity, see Ostwald (2000). In terms of shortages of judges, the only time this seems to be implied in our sources is for the years following the destructive end of the Peloponnesian War, but inability to fill judge-panels at that time most probably indicates, as Sinclair (1988, 131) put it, “demographic and manpower problems rather than problems of apathy.”

⁵² According to bouletic quotas, Osborne (1985, 68-72, 88) calculated that ca. 39% of Athenians lived further than 24 km from the city of Athens; hence, for many, a trip to the city and back would be a considerable investment of time and money. See also Ober (1989), 130 with n. 64. For a recent survey of the reality of travel within Attica through the use of computational analyses, see McHugh (2019).

⁵³ Arist. *Pol.* 4.1293a κοινωνοῦσι δὲ καὶ πολιτεύονται διὰ τὸ δύνασθαι σχολάζειν καὶ τοὺς ἀπόρους λαμβάνοντας μισθόν (“they share and take part in the government because even the poor are able to enjoy leisure by receiving pay”). See also Sinclair (1988), 119-123.

magistracies of the Athenian democracy.⁵⁴ According to the *Athenian Constitution*, the combined proceeds of imperial tribute and taxes allowed for the upkeep of 20,000 men, among whom those serving in civic functions included the “six thousand judges... five hundred members of the Council... as many as seven hundred magistrates at home and as many as seven hundred abroad.”⁵⁵ Regarding the number of magistrates during the fifth century, this passage from the *Athenian Constitution* was considered corrupt in the past; yet, after exhaustive surveys of literary and epigraphical sources, the accuracy of the figures for both internal and external magistracies is currently deemed to be beyond reasonable doubt.⁵⁶ It therefore appears that in the course of the fifth century, the posts in the juridical and executive functions of the Athenian *polis* came to be fully subsidized.

The last area of political activity to undergo an implementation of incentives in the Athenian democracy was the participation in the core deliberative body of the *polis*. The Athenian Assembly required a quorum of 6,000 citizens for some categories of business, and this has been taken as evidence for its general—but not necessarily guaranteed—attendance size.⁵⁷ On that note, a fascinating aspect of the incentives pertaining to Assembly-going is that they began as negative. In Aristophanes’ *Akharnians*, Dikaiopolis, frustrated with the emptiness of the Pnyx during a designated Assembly-meeting day, bemoans the fact that his fellow-citizens “are chattering in the Agora, jumping and ducking the vermillion-dyed rope.”⁵⁸ As the scholia inform us, the vermillion-

⁵⁴ Hansen (1991, 225-265) provides a thorough overview of the Athenian magistrates and the Council. For the latest views on the date of introduction of bouletic and magisterial payments, see Rosivach (2010); Pritchard (2015), 63-64. On the amounts of payment, see Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 62 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

⁵⁵ Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 24.3 συνέβαινε γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν φόρων καὶ τῶν τελῶν καὶ τῶν συμμάχων πλείους ἢ δισμυρίουσ ἄνδρας τρέφεσθαι. δικασταὶ μὲν γὰρ ἦσαν ἑξακισχίλιοι ... βουλή δὲ πεντακόσιοι ... ἀρχαὶ δ’ ἑνδημοὶ μὲν εἰς ἑπτακοσίους ἄνδρας, ὑπερόριοι δ’ εἰς ἑπτακοσίους†.

⁵⁶ See Meiggs (1972), 205-215; Hansen (1980); Pritchard (2015), 64-66.

⁵⁷ On the issue of attendance for the Athenian Assembly, see Hansen (1976); (1996), 29-33; Sinclair (1988), 114-119. For the size of the Assembly that could be accommodated on the Pnyx in the fifth century, see Hansen (1987), 12-19; (1996), 23-29.

⁵⁸ Ar. *Ach.* 21-2 οἱ δ’ ἐν ἀγορᾷ λαλοῦσι κᾶνω καὶ κάτω | τὸ σχοινίον φεύγουσι τὸ μεμιλωμένον.

dyed rope was used in chasing people from the Agora into the Pnyx, as public slaves stretched it while crossing the area so as to stain the clothes of any loiterers, who were subsequently fined.⁵⁹ Apparently, the use of such a device would not be necessary if Assembly-meetings were well-attended. At the end of the fifth century, however, the restitution of the democracy brought along the implementation of positive incentives for Assembly-goers as well. As related in our sources, Agyrrhios first proposed a payment of one obol for those in attendance; then, by the time Aristophanes' late plays were staged, Assembly-pay was three obols, and its rate was incrementally raised throughout the fourth century.⁶⁰

The extensive implementation of incentives appears to have increased the political power of underprivileged Athenian citizens.⁶¹ This effect becomes evident in the responses of reactionary elites, who were not looking upon public payments with favor.⁶² In fact, the resulting empowerment of poor Athenians was so effective that during the anti-democratic coup of 411 BCE the foremost measure taken by the oligarchs was the abolition of payments for political services.⁶³

⁵⁹ cf. Σ^{REI}h ad *Ach.* 21-2; *Poll.* 8.104. For a detailed account, see Appendix III.

⁶⁰ cf. *Ar. Eccl.* 289-95, 392-5; *Plut.* 329-31; *Arist. [Ath. Pol.]* 41.3 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

⁶¹ For the introduction of court-pay as an economic policy promoting an expanded political participation by Athenians of lower socio-economic strata, see Kallet (2007), 76-78. For the role of political subsidies in curtailing elite patronage in Athens, in conjunction with other Periklean financial policies, see Millett (1989); Alwine (2016). For an analysis of the relationship between political subsidies and patronage in the Greek world, see Maehle (2018).

⁶² For a discussion on the general attitude of elites towards the poor, see Rosivach (1991). Especially regarding court-pay, Plato (*Grg.* 515e) has Socrates voice during a conversation with Kallikles the criticisms circulating against Perikles for corrupting the Athenians with public payments, making them “idle, cowardly, talkative, and avaricious” (διαφθάρηναι ὑπ’ ἐκείνου ... πεποικέναι Ἀθηναίους ἄργοις καὶ δειλοῦς καὶ λάλους καὶ φιλαργύρους, εἰς μισθοφορίαν πρῶτον καταστήσαντα). Nonetheless, Kallikles is quick to point out that Socrates merely reproduces the criticism of elites (τῶν τὰ ὄντα κατεαγόντων); cf. Dodds (1959) ad loc. The same criticism, probably echoing Plato's *Gorgias*, is reported in *Arist. [Ath. Pol.]* 27.4 as well as *Plut. Per.* 9.1; cf. Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

⁶³ *Thuc.* 8.65.3 λόγος τε ἐκ τοῦ φανεροῦ προεῖργαστο αὐτοῖς ὡς οὔτε μισθοφορητέον εἴη ἄλλους ἢ τοὺς στρατευομένους οὔτε μεθεκτέον τῶν πραγμάτων πλέοσιν ἢ πεντακισχιλίοις (“As proclaimed in public before, their call was for no payment to be given to anyone other than those in military service, and that no more than five thousand men were to share in the government”). Public payments were equally halted during the tyranny of the Thirty (404-403 BCE); see Rosivach (2011), 182 with n. 23. For the coup of 411 BCE as an example of counter-democratic economic policy, see Rosivach (2014), 180-182.

Accordingly, the Athenian democracy appears to have been inextricably bound with the use of incentives for motivating the participation of citizens to fundamental civic functions.⁶⁴

This extensive use of incentives in the civic sphere had started to affect the behavior of Athenians, especially in terms of what Bowles and Polanía-Reyes termed endogenous preferences. Apparently, given the gradual implementation of incentives across the spectrum of public life in the course of some sixty years, the price system employed by the Athenian *polis* so as to motivate its citizens to perform their civic obligations created a norm.⁶⁵ As a matter of fact, the maintenance and expansion of political payments became such a priority that it formed an essential criterion behind major political decisions. In 415 BCE, for example, when deliberating whether to launch an expedition of unprecedented size to Sicily, Athenians, according to Thucydides, decided favorably under the rationale that a successful operation would spell immediate profit and “a never-ending fund for political pay in the future.”⁶⁶ If the implementation of a price system in the civic sphere indeed impacted the way Athenian citizens updated their preferences, one has to investigate their behavioral disposition within economic settings. Therefore, in order to establish whether modern categories have any descriptive potential for the pre-modern society of classical Athens, the long-debated nature of the ancient Greek economy demands some detailed consideration.

⁶⁴ Finley (1985, 86-88) drew a direct link between Athens’s political culture and imperial revenue, arguing that “the full democratic system of the second half of the fifth century B.C. would not have been introduced had there been no Athenian empire.” Nonetheless, given that Assembly-pay and other political payments were introduced during the fourth century, Hansen (1987, 48) correctly counterargued that “the running of the democracy was not based on imperial revenue... [as] the system of political pay reached its summit when Athens had lost its empire.” For the function of Athenian democracy as inherently dependent on coined money, see Trevett (2001).

⁶⁵ For the way political payments factored into the creation of a habit that shaped the socio-political ethos of Athenians during the classical period, see Burke (1992).

⁶⁶ Thuc. 6.24.3 ὁ δὲ πολὺς ὄμιλος καὶ στρατιώτης ἔν τε τῷ παρόντι ἀργύριον οἴσειν καὶ προσκτήσεσθαι δύναμιν ὅθεν αἰδίον μισθοφορὰν ὑπάρξειν. As noted by Hornblower (2008, ad loc.), this passage along with Ar. *Vesp.* 684-5 express popular perceptions regarding the way the Athenian *polis* budgeted for political payments.

III. The Greek Economy and the *Homo Atheniensis*

In 1973, with the publication of *The Ancient Economy*, Moses Finley settled one debate only to spark another. In keeping with the ideas of Max Weber and Karl Polanyi regarding the pre-capitalist *homo politicus* and his embedded economy, Finley brought the debate of the previous century between modernists and primitivists to a halt.⁶⁷ Modernists argued that the Graeco-Roman economy was a market economy, different from modern ones only in degree, while for primitivists markets played such a limited role that the economy could be nothing but crude and minuscule.⁶⁸ On the contrary, Finley claimed that in the ancient Mediterranean world there was no meaningful distinction between the realms of society and economy; thus, by implication, a debate over where to place the economies of Greeks and Romans on a spectrum between simplicity and complexity in comparison to modern ones was meaningless. Within this conceptual framework, there was no place for the modern *homo oeconomicus* and his rationally informed, profit-maximizing mentality in the pre-modern world of the status-maximizing *homo politicus*. The former lives in societies where markets have an autonomous standing, the latter in societies where markets are entirely subordinate to the needs of the community and aim at self-sufficiency.⁶⁹

Before the turn of the twenty-first century, the popularity of Finley's "substantivist" approach (i.e. influenced by the sociological claim that pre-modern economies were oriented towards immediate needs rather than growth) spelled decline for "formalist" approaches (i.e. those influenced by the neoclassical economic paradigm and its emphasis on rationality and utility

⁶⁷ On the concept of economic embeddedness, see Polanyi (1977). For a lucid exposition of Finley's intellectual debts to Max Weber and Karl Polanyi, see Finley (1999), ix-xxiii (foreword by Ian Morris to the 3rd edition).

⁶⁸ The primitivist view has its origin in Bücher's (1893) exposition of the ancient economy, and the modernist one in the polemical responses by Meyer (1895) and Beloch (1902). For an overview of the primitivist-modernist controversy, see Bresson (2016), 1-4.

⁶⁹ Finley (1999), 150-176.

maximization as formal human characteristics).⁷⁰ Nonetheless, this so-called New Orthodoxy was not without critics.⁷¹ Early criticism underlined that Finley's model was based on a form of crude primitivism, barely defensible when juxtaposed to what our ancient sources record about trade, industry, banking, and non-agricultural economic activities.⁷² Subsequently, after the turn of the second millennium, the extended integration of archaeology into the methodological approaches of ancient historians led to incisive critiques against the stagnation Finley assumed for the ancient economy. As suggested by archaeological data, during the first millennium BCE the Greek world witnessed an overall rise in people's standards of living, which evinces a reality of economic growth that is at odds with the substantivist view.⁷³ Therefore, staunch adherence to the Finleyan version of the ancient economy started waning, but its influence on the perception of markets and their role in the socio-economic life of Greek antiquity proved to be ingrained far deeper.

As Edward Harris and David Lewis recently pointed out, "Finley excluded the full range of types of markets that lie between the extremes of the world market and household self-sufficiency in necessities."⁷⁴ This observation was part of a critique not only against the substantivist doctrine, but also against the way post-Finleyan attempts to account for economic

⁷⁰ For an account of the formalist-substantivist controversy, see Bresson (2016), 5-15. In scholarly studies on the ancient economy, substantivist approaches tend to echo the tenets of primitivism, given that arguments for a non-growth-oriented economy lean towards a representation of a stagnant economy. For the way substantivism and formalism tend to coalesce with primitivism and modernism respectively, see Amemiya (2007), 57-61.

⁷¹ An approving analysis of the "New Orthodoxy" and its tenets is offered by Hopkins (1983, ix-xiv)—the very scholar who named it.

⁷² For a concise overview of the criticisms against Finley's model until 1999, see Finley (1999), xxiii-xxxi. For more recent criticisms against Finley as well as the scholarship following his model, see Harris and Lewis (2016), 1-7.

⁷³ For the issue of economic growth in Greek antiquity, see Starr (1977); Millett (2001); Saller (2002). Despite an insistence on alleged limits Greeks perceived for the production and consumption of goods, Millett's—in essence—substantivist analysis is counterfactual. Additionally, Millett's argument on constant warfare being an impediment to economic growth in Classical and Hellenistic Greece has been refuted by Fachard and Harris (2021). According to Morris (2005), the increase in size for Greek houses between 800 and 300 BCE is indicative of improved standards of living, and so is the health and nutrition of Greek populations, which Kron (2005) showed to be unexpectedly high, based on anthropometric studies of skeletal remains. For a detailed overview of studies on standards of living, production, consumption, and wealth distribution along with their positive implications about economic growth in the ancient Greek world, see Ober (2010).

⁷⁴ Harris and Lewis (2016), 5.

growth in the Greek world continued to downplay the role of markets.⁷⁵ In their introduction, Harris and Lewis lay the ground for an edited volume, the contributions in which explored in detail how the expansion of market exchange in fact played a major role in achieving growth and enhancing economic performance. On that account, the alleged ideology of “self-sufficiency” undergirding the substantivist approach, meaning the idea that Athenians abided by social norms that prompted them to avoid reliance on markets, underwent a sustained refutation. As demonstrated by Harris and Lewis, we should not envision “the average citizen farmer as being isolated from markets... nor should we think of him as cherishing an ideology of economic self-sufficiency and isolation.”⁷⁶ Moreover, the close analysis of institutions provided by the volume’s contributors further illuminated the systematic attempts on behalf of Greek states to lower transaction costs and bolster market exchange.⁷⁷

The latest focus of ancient historians on institutions in order to explain the nature and growth of the economies around the ancient Mediterranean world has its theoretical underpinnings in New Institutionalism, and particularly New Institutional Economics and its emphasis on transaction costs.⁷⁸ The tenets of this relatively recent theoretical approach led Alain Bresson into influential studies on the various environmental, social, and political constraints that gave the ancient Greek economy its shape.⁷⁹ Following the arguments of Bresson, Harris, and Lewis, it appears that markets, as domains of social interaction, were far more extensive than what substantivist scholarship had envisioned in the past.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *ib.* 6-8.

⁷⁶ *ib.* 25-28, quotation from 28.

⁷⁷ *ib.* 28-31. More recently, Harris (2020a) provided an analysis of the way the rule of law guaranteed a regulation of markets, which in turn allowed for an expansion of market exchange and economic growth.

⁷⁸ For the theoretical concepts of New Institutional Economics and its historical perspective, see North and Thomas (1973); North (1990); (2005).

⁷⁹ See Bresson (2000); (2016).

⁸⁰ See also Migeotte (2009) and his arguments for the Greek economy being a “multimarket” economy.

Regarding the behavioral disposition of Athenians, Bresson refuted the substantivist view about a general absence of a profit-maximizing market mentality in the ancient Greek world. In particular, given that the political and religious discourse is the symbolic form of a society's system of reproduction, he noted that:

[T]he claim, in the tradition of Weber or Finley, that in Classical antiquity *homo politicus* put the economy in the service of politics is a contradiction in terms: *qua* state, the ancient city is only a form of organization in the system of reproduction, and it cannot be separated from the economic system. To put the point concretely: through both their private activities and their participation in the life of the city, citizens had a sense of their economic interests, and constantly imputing “irrational” behaviors to them grossly contradicts the information in our sources.⁸¹

As a result, in the last two decades the vision of Greek antiquity as a non-market and “irrational” (vis-à-vis the *homo oeconomicus* model) world has broken irredeemably under the pressure of the latest advances in economic theory, sober reassessments of our ancient sources, and—most importantly—hard evidence. Yet, the fact that Athenians were exposed to market exchange and its underlying profit-maximizing mentality is not an *ipso facto* validation for a conventional formalist approach towards their economic or social behavior.

In terms of “rationality” for Athenian agents, it is clear that neither the *homo oeconomicus* nor the *homo politicus* model provides a reliable *a priori* gauge for human motivation.⁸² One then is prompted into a qualitative search for the *homo Atheniensis*: the agent whose behavioral characteristics are peculiar to the economic and socio-political environment of Athens during the classical era. The first attempt to sketch such a behavioral profile since the move of ancient economic history past the modernist-primitivist and formalist-substantivist controversies was penned in 2018 by David Lewis. After surveying the evolutionary course of ancient economic

⁸¹ Bresson (2016), 24.

⁸² For an epistemological critique of the economists' under-socialized and the sociologists' over-socialized human agent, see Granovetter (1985).

history, Lewis noted that Finley’s critics had sidestepped the main argument that formed the basis of his thesis. According to Finley, the primary factor behind the stagnation of the ancient economy was the “over-riding values” that informed an averse mentality towards moneymaking for the landed elites.⁸³ Starting thus from the premise that the vibrant and growing economy of the Greek world could not have been created by individuals entertaining the kind of unproductive mentality posited by Finley, revisionist work for the most part engaged in reverse-engineering.⁸⁴ On the contrary, given the recently admitted motivational importance of social norms and the flawed rationality of the *homo oeconomicus*, Lewis maintained that behavioral economics allows for a moderated formalist approach that refines our picture of the ancient economy and its agents.⁸⁵ Subsequently, after surveying our sources regarding Greek attitudes towards moneymaking, Lewis concluded that a profit-maximizing mentality was there, but social norms prescribed an accumulation of wealth that “was not compatible with self-seeking behaviour that lost sight of one’s obligations to society at large, or a drive for wealth that knew no limits, *koros*.”⁸⁶ Similarly, in the most recent survey of our ancient sources on activities and behaviors associated with profit-maximization, Michael Leese argued that in “ancient Greece as in the modern world, self-interested rationality existed in conjunction with social interests, and was driven by irrational emotional impulses at the most elemental level.”⁸⁷

In conclusion, we can be confident both that incentives were used in Athens’s civic sphere of activity and that Athenian citizens *qua* economic agents were in many ways similar to citizens

⁸³ See Finley (1999), 59-61.

⁸⁴ See Lewis (2018), 15-19. Thompson (1982) was the first to track down in our ancient sources evidence for entrepreneurial mentality. In the same vein, Christesen (2003) demonstrated that, in fourth-century Athens, investments in mining were informed by economic rationalism.

⁸⁵ Lewis (2018), 20-32.

⁸⁶ *ib.* 32-41, quotation from 40.

⁸⁷ Leese (2021), quotation from 222.

of modern societies in their behavioral disposition. As seen above, incentives were an essential tool in the design of Athenian public policy, given that a price system was in operation so as to guarantee the proper function of the political apparatus from the mid-fifth century all the way to the end of the Athenian democracy. At the same time, as recent scholarship suggests, the Athenian *polis* fomented the expansion of market exchange in the economic sphere, thus rendering the profit-maximizing mentality of a market setting a routine mode of thinking. Certainly, such a regular exposure to market norms had a positive impact beyond economic growth.⁸⁸ As discussed above, however, the impact of an expansion of market norms into the non-economic sphere of activity is not unequivocally positive. Considering, then, the evolution in the discourse of economic theory and economic history, it appears that pre-modern and modern agents were not identical in their economic behavior and thinking but they also were not as alien as previously assumed. On that account, it is all the more plausible that incentives impacted the way Athenians formed and updated their social preferences just as the latest research in behavioral science suggests for citizens of modern societies. Therefore, an important question to ask is “could an Athenian become more of a *homo oeconomicus* with regard to civic behavior?” and the answer, as for any society extensively reliant on incentives, seems to be an unambiguously positive one.

IV. Aristophanes, Comedy, and the *Polis*

After this review of behavioral models, motivational and behavioral issues generated by the implementation of incentives, and advances in the study of the Athenian economy and society, it

⁸⁸ Based on the results of recently conducted behavioral experiments, it has been argued that markets have a “civilizing effect.” In those experiments, the participating agents who lived in more market-oriented societies tended to be more fair-minded and generous, and an explanation suggested for this behavior is that in market-oriented societies “people learn from their market experiences that fair dealing with strangers is often profitable;” see Bowles (2016), 131-145, quotation from 143.

is high time we turned to Aristophanes. To assess the relevance of the above for the study of Aristophanic comedy one is unavoidably faced with a question regarding its political outlook. To put it bluntly, why should we assume that Aristophanes, as a playwright, cared about the civic behavior of his fellow citizens?

From the archaic period onwards, when coinage started circulating widely in the Greek world, a certain preoccupation with matters economic started manifesting itself across literary genres.⁸⁹ In the heyday of substantivism, Leslie Kurke explored the negative moral assessment of coinage in Herodotus, Pindar, and other lyric poets, arguing that within archaic Greece's "gift economies" coinage was deemed a representation of functionalism and deceit.⁹⁰ From a different perspective, the work of Lisa Kallet on Thucydides revealed how money provided a fulcrum point for the historian's analysis of the motives shaping Athenian foreign policy, while she also demonstrated how Athenians of the fifth century became conditioned to think in terms of money and equate it with power.⁹¹ Finally, Richard Seaford systematically analyzed the preoccupation of Aeschylean tragedy with the interplay between the limits of ritual and the limitlessness of monetized wealth within the culture of the democratic *polis*.⁹² In his regard, Aristophanes can be seen as yet another Greek author interested in the political and ideological tensions stemming from monetization. Still, as we shall see, his preoccupation with money had to do primarily with its status as a motivational factor in the context of Athens's civic culture.

Making a case for Aristophanes' treatment of a fundamentally political theme like civic behavior, the engagement of his comedy with the political discourse of its time is hereby taken for

⁸⁹ For the origins of coinage, see Howgego (1995), 1-22; von Reden (1997), 156-161.

⁹⁰ Kurke (1991); (1995); (2002). The methodological approach of Kurke's work relies on Karl Polanyi's concepts of embedded and disembedded economic relations, as well as Parry and Bloch's (1989) theory on transactional orders. For a critique against the symbolism-focused analysis of Kurke, see Kroll (2000).

⁹¹ Kallet (1993); (1994); (2001).

⁹² Seaford (2003/4); (2004a); (2004b); (2012a); (2012b).

granted. An analysis of his commentary on Athens's civic culture, however, has implications for the overall political perspective of his work. On that account, an engagement with an academic controversy is necessary since the relationship between Aristophanes and contemporary politics has been a subject of a long-standing and vigorous debate.⁹³

At the heart of the debate over the political perspective of Aristophanic comedy lies the interpretation of two of its fundamental aspects. On the one hand, the expressly political parts of the plays' content, especially the *nominatim* invective against prominent personalities of Athenian politics and the satire against phenomena like political corruption. On the other hand, Aristophanes' self-fashioning as a civic educator, which manifests itself in declarations about comedy knowing "what is right," his audience being taught "a lot of good things," his plots having "a point," and the duty of his Choruses being "to offer good advice and teaching."⁹⁴ Taking these aspects of Aristophanic comedy into account, scholars have analyzed its political commentary in divergent ways, for the most part arguing in favor of either a neutral or a partisan outlook.

The idea of a politically neutral comedy was first formulated by Arnold Gomme, who claimed that as an artist Aristophanes was simply trying to create probable and consistent characters, and while he had political opinions of his own, those are irrelevant to our understanding of his plays.⁹⁵ Gomme's approach attracted several followers, who attempted to corroborate his

⁹³ In the United Kingdom, the debate over Aristophanes' political outlook and the influence of his work has its origins back in the late eighteenth century; see Walsh (2009).

⁹⁴ cf. *Ach.* 500-1 τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγφδία. | ἐγὼ δὲ λέξω δεινὰ μὲν δίκαια δέ ("for *tragedy* knows what is right too. I will say terrible things, but right things nonetheless"), 656 φησὶν δ' ὑμᾶς πολλὰ διδάξειν ἀγάθ', ὥστ' εὐδαίμονας εἶναι ("he says [sc. the poet] that he will teach you a lot of good things, so that you are blessed"); *Eq.* 509-10 νῦν δ' ἄξιός ἐσθ' ὁ ποιητής, | ὅτι τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν μισεῖ τολμᾶ τε λέγειν τὰ δίκαια ("but our poet today is worthy of this [sc. the Chorus becoming his mouthpiece], because he hates the same men we do and he dares speak the truth"); *Vesp.* 64 ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον ("but our little story has a point"); *Ran.* 686-7 τὸν ἱερὸν χορὸν δίκαιόν ἐστι χρηστὰ τῇ πόλει | ξυμπαραίνειν καὶ διδάσκειν ("it is right for our sacred chorus to join in recommending and teaching good things to the city"). For a concise discussion on Aristophanes' educational claims next to similar claims in other poetic genres, see MacDowell (1995), 3-6.

⁹⁵ Gomme (1938)

tenets by stressing comedy's lack of influence on real-life political events, the way the competitive context of dramatic festivals dictated the genre's content and goals, and the pure escapism of comic plots next to their hackneyed vision of communal solidarity.⁹⁶ Recently, the tenets of the politically neutral approach have been articulated in full by Douglas Olson, who argued that the main goal of comedy was to make audiences laugh, and its political education—if there was any at all—was only incidental. From this perspective, Aristophanes' comedy stresses the fraudulent nature of radical democracy (which Olson defines as a government for the people by the people), given its systematic presentation of Athenians as deceived by their supposed protectors as well as being unable to look out for their own best interests. Closing thus on a pessimistic note, Olson concluded that Aristophanic plays are devoid of any obvious positive teaching, while their consistently favorable reception by democratic audiences was due to “their lack of a practical political program, combined with their despairing attitude toward the people's ability to govern themselves.”⁹⁷

Contrary to the politically neutral approach, Aristophanes' commentary on Athenian political life has also been read as part of a partisan agenda, which for some scholars was a conservative or even anti-democratic one.⁹⁸ In response to Gomme, who deemed the search for any serious political inquiry in comedy to be futile, Geoffrey de Ste. Croix argued that comedy, like the work of a political cartoonist, has to be first and foremost funny, but that does not mean its political message lacks seriousness. In view of that, considering that prominent upper-class *rhētores* like Alkibiades or Nicias never receive a treatment equal to their up-and-coming counterparts—the so-called “new politicians” of Athens—de Ste. Croix concluded that

⁹⁶ For the first line of argument, see Lloyd Stow (1942); Heath (1987). For the second, see Dover (1972); Halliwell (1984); Rosen (1988), 59-82; (2010); (2012). For the third, see Konstan (1995).

⁹⁷ Olson (2010), quotation from 68.

⁹⁸ Based on analyses of comic allegory, Vickers (1997; 2015) and Sidwell (2009) argued for a deep involvement in democratic party-politics on Aristophanes' part. The methodology underlying their readings, however, has been largely discredited; see Dover (2004); Rothwell (2011); Major (2017)

Aristophanes entertained the political views of a conservative of the “Kimonian variety.”⁹⁹ Dismissing thus Aristophanes’ portrayal as an artist working within the conventions of a genre, de Ste. Croix portrayed him as an elitist playwright, whose work projected a nostalgia for the “good old days” when political power was not misused in the hands of the rank and file.¹⁰⁰

Following de Ste. Croix’s tenets of comic conservatism, Paul Cartledge saw in Aristophanes an Athenian of essentially anti-democratic sentiments, which were artfully hidden in his plays under the veneer of comedy for the sake of success in dramatic competitions.¹⁰¹ Especially with regard to political payments, “[i]n over half of the extant plays,” Cartledge noted, “jurors and jury service are censured on the grounds that jurors are in it mainly for the money... and not at all out of a sense of civic duty or pride;” thus, he concluded that Aristophanes was hostile to “the very democratic jury-system as such.”¹⁰² In the same vein, based on observations of material realia pertaining to the theater of Dionysus, Alan Sommerstein argued that comic plays were written to please an audience of upper-class citizens, and hence Old Comedy was bound to be conservative as a whole.¹⁰³ Finally, in keeping with Sommerstein’s thesis, Markus Asper claimed comic performances stabilized citizens as a group by prompting them to laugh together (socio-positive bond) or laugh against the same target (socio-negative bond); thus, Aristophanes’ seeming preoccupation with “new politicians” catered to the tastes of upper-class audiences.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ de Ste. Croix (1972), 355-376. Connor (1971) labeled as “new politicians” the Athenians who rose to political prominence after the death of Perikles, on the assumption that they did not belong to the traditional elite associated with agriculture, but cf. Harris (2013a), 319-320.

¹⁰⁰ In a similar vein, Rosenbloom (2002; 2014) traced in Old Comedy a constant and aggressive criticism against “new politicians” as well as a strong advocacy for the restoration of a pre-demagogic *polis*, in which landholders hold hegemony in the interests of sociopolitical harmony.

¹⁰¹ Cartledge (1990), 43-53.

¹⁰² *ib.* 52.

¹⁰³ Sommerstein (1996); (1998b); (2014).

¹⁰⁴ Asper (2005).

Against the politically conservative approach, other scholars have ascribed to Athenian comic theater a political outlook fundamentally in favor of radical democracy and even anti-elitist. Jeffrey Henderson argued that comedies were a clear and compelling expression of what ordinary citizens thought regarding the current political issues; hence, comic playwrights were the “constituent intellectuals” of the Athenian democracy. In this respect, Old Comedy enjoyed as a genre the right of bringing up for public consideration ideas and attitudes that might be judged too provocative for other settings (e.g. forensic or symbouleutic oratory) as well as of speaking for groups whose ambitions and concerns might otherwise have been ignored. Additionally, according to Henderson, the political discourse of comedy was based on the ideological premise that the people rightly exercised political control, and the structure of the standard comic plot (a person coming out on top of his or her betters by means of intelligence and determination) supported this vision.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, seeing comedy as the only forum where we hear the voices of fictional ordinary citizens, John Zumbrennen contended that Aristophanes used those voices as a medium to empower real ordinary citizens to become political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and of modes of action necessary to realize them. According to Zumbrennen, then, Aristophanes consistently fashioned a critical anti-rhetoric that appealed to ordinary citizens and aided them in revealing the masks worn by self-serving elites.¹⁰⁶ Finally, Edith Hall suggested that the superpowers of the Aristophanic heroes represent the shared consciousness of the masses empowered by the democratic regime—superpowers that disappeared in later stages of Athenian comedy, “when the democracy was etiolated in the wake of the Macedonian conquest.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Henderson (1990); (1998).

¹⁰⁶ Zumbrennen (2004). In the same vein, Zimmermann (2006) argued that the satire of prominent individuals in Aristophanic comedy functions as an exclusionary device that aims to strengthen the group identity of the *demos*.

¹⁰⁷ Hall (2020a), quotation from 99.

In retrospect, considering this drastic divergence between scholarly analyses, what can be said about the relationship between Aristophanes and contemporary politics? Did his comedies express (overtly or covertly) the ideology and interests of his conservative socio-economic peers, or did they celebrate democracy and all its constituents? Was Aristophanes just working within genre conventions and audience expectations so as to come out victorious in dramatic competitions, or did he also have educational goals?

With regard to Aristophanes' ideological allegiances, it should be noted that despite their longevity the arguments on which the tenet of comic conservatism was based have proven unable to hold their ground. In terms of content alone, Kenneth Dover already stressed some fifty years ago that "there is nothing in Aristophanes to suggest that he believed Athens would be a better and wiser community if political and juridical power were restricted to one class."¹⁰⁸ More recently, the basis of the much-vaunted thesis of de Ste. Croix sustained a forceful rebuttal by David Pritchard, who demonstrated that Aristophanes subjected every type of leading citizen to slander and abuse, from which Athenian elites were not left unscathed.¹⁰⁹ According to Pritchard, Aristophanes' biting satire conformed to a genre of popular literature, which was created by elites with the intent to cater to the approval of non-elite audiences. Regarding the latter point, David Roselli argued at length about the diversity of Athenian theater audiences, thus challenging Sommerstein's thesis of a preponderantly elite composition.¹¹⁰ Moreover, a decisive blow against the tenet of comic conservatism came from an institutionalist perspective. In an analysis of the

¹⁰⁸ Dover (1968), xxi.

¹⁰⁹ Pritchard (2012). See also Storey (2012), where he discusses how the *proboulos* in *Lysistrata* (387-613) is the most conservative political figure to appear on the Aristophanic stage and at the same time the one to receive the most merciless abuse.

¹¹⁰ Roselli (2011). In the most recent discussion on the issue of theater audiences, Robson (2017) points out that both Sommerstein and Roselli agree on the audience's diverse composition, and argues that Aristophanes' use of both low- and high-brow humor aimed at catering for such an audience.

democratic nature of Athenian institutions, Mirko Canevaro explained how the masses controlled them; hence, institutionally “authorized” cultural forms, like comic theater, were bound to reflect the ideology of those masses rather than that of a parochial and conservative elite.¹¹¹

An institutionalist approach to comic theater, like the one propounded by Canevaro, not only dispenses with indefensible interpretations of its political outlook but also opens up new avenues for the assessment of its function. For Aristophanes in particular, given the lack of any firm ground on which to argue for him promulgating an elitist or anti-democratic ideology, the question as to whether the political content of his plays served an exclusively comic purpose becomes central. Recently, from the politically neutral approach, Ralph Rosen set forth a key issue on the matter, namely the seriousness that can be assumed for Aristophanes’ political commentary and our ability to discern and establish it. After demonstrating that a satirist’s posturing as a truthful voice against contemporary ills is a diachronic convention of satire as a genre, Rosen asserted that “the problem of Aristophanic politics can never be fully resolved.”¹¹² The stated reason is that political satire poses as a serious medium of moral inquiry but constantly undermines any pretense of seriousness through comedy, so to track down Aristophanes’ political agenda is impossible.¹¹³ This is a point that any reader of Roland Barthes’s essay *La mort de l’auteur* would concede gladly; yet, in its extension to the political education of Aristophanic comedy, this analysis meets with objections.¹¹⁴ Arguing that the far-reaching appeal of satire rests on its ultimate goal being “to expose noncontroversial vices (such as greed, hypocrisy, corruption),” Rosen maintained that this exposé is essentially nothing more than comic platitude, and the satirist’s advice towards

¹¹¹ Canevaro (2016). For a discussion on tragedy as a discursive democratic institution and the way it used certain mythical narratives in order to reaffirm the values and ideology of democratic Athens, see Barbato (2020).

¹¹² Rosen (2020), quotation from 11.

¹¹³ For Aristophanes’ political posturing being artistically deliberate and hence a source of analytical frustration, see also Silk (2000), 44-48.

¹¹⁴ See Barthes (1984), 61-69.

rectification just generic feel-good rhetoric.¹¹⁵ Such a reductive approach to the political content of comedy depends on a denial of any seriousness in a playwright's political commentary, which in turn seems to depend on one's inability to pinpoint a political agenda for the playwright himself. Whatever the specifics of Aristophanes' own political views, however, his artistic medium was bound to have a pro-democratic outlook, and an analysis of his commentary from this perspective has generated an array of compelling studies on Aristophanic comedy as a venue for the discourse of democratic politics and ideology.¹¹⁶

Along with the way comedy trafficked in the ideological discourse of Athens's democracy, scholars have long recognized the seriousness informing its commentary on the shortcomings of the democratic *status quo* as well as its advice towards rectification. Already in the 1990's, Josiah Ober classified playwrights of Old Comedy as "immanent critics" of Athenian democracy, who tried to achieve political reform by appealing to traditional ideals; thus, Aristophanes was a poet "in effect hired to educate the citizenry."¹¹⁷ Of course, not all such critics shared the same reform vision, but they did share a sense of a problematic *status quo* and a need to communicate their analysis of its problems. According to Ober, then, comic playwrights were attempting to make their audiences realize that the world was not always what democratic ideology made it out to be,

¹¹⁵ Rosen (2020), 19-22, quotation from 19.

¹¹⁶ Reading comedy as a medium for ideological unity, McGlew (2006) argued that by concentrating on common goods, like peace and personal freedom, Aristophanes presented his audiences with stories that rehearsed an ideology of social and political cohesion. On the other hand, examining the inextricable connection between drama and democratic political culture, Rosenbloom (2012) expounded how comedy elicited anger and indignation, which along with tragedy's pity and fear appear to have been the four emotions forming the basis to the psychology of democratic citizenship. In a similar vein, Nelson (2014) maintained that Aristophanes' political content mainly addressed an existential issue underlying the nature of the democratic *polis* itself, namely the inherent contradiction in a citizen's desire to be part of a *polis* while refusing to accept that the collective "us" determines an identity for each individual "me." Finally, as a conclusion to his discussion of the relationship between drama and democracy, Carey (2019, 247) noted that "[t]he Pnyx and the courts share themes, values and concerns with the theatre. And tragedy and comedy complement the Pnyx and the courts by offering additional space for political thinking... working at different degrees of remove from practical politics."

¹¹⁷ Ober (1998), quotation from 126. For Aristophanes' sense of the seriousness of the issues addressed in his comedies, see Wright (2012), 18-20.

so comic theater was an institutionalized means for Athenian citizens to confront problems in the intellectual structure of their state. In the same vein, Wilfred Major observed that Aristophanes “consistently dramatizes a faith in the core processes of the Athenian democracy, even as he sharply attacks its institutions when they fail to function properly.”¹¹⁸ On a more pragmatic level, after scrutinizing the attacks of modern scholarship against the ancient critics of democracy, Harris demonstrated that to label all criticism against democracy as “undemocratic” is misleading. In fact, Harris drove the point home by showing the close alignment of the successful motion by a certain Patrokleides in 405 BCE with the *parabasis* of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (686-705), in which the Chorus prompt Athenians to pardon the soldiers involved in the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE and relax their anger.¹¹⁹ Consequently, given that Aristophanes went to great pains to claim an educational function for comedy—or at least *his* comedy—it is not specious to argue that his success as a playwright depended on his unique achievement of giving “good advice to the Athenians while never ceasing to entertain them.”¹²⁰

As an artist abiding by the institutional expectations of his medium, Aristophanes exposed mass audiences of Athenian citizens to an edifying scrutiny of public life, and the fact that he was keenly interested in their civic behavior is telling. With regard, then, to the original inquiry of this section, it appears that the reason for Aristophanes’ preoccupation with the civic behavior of Athenians is that he deemed it problematic. As already noted, and will soon be explored in detail,

¹¹⁸ Major (2013), quotation from 131.

¹¹⁹ Harris (2005), especially at 14-15. For the motion of Patrokleides, see Andoc. 1.80. On the issue of whether the political advice in the *parabasis* of the *Frogs*, as the first *hypothesis* asserts, was the reason for a reperformance of the play, see Rosen (2015).

¹²⁰ MacDowell (1995), 356. Taplin (1983) has long demonstrated that the coinage *τρῦγοδία*, which Aristophanes used to describe his genre (cf. *Ach.* 499-500, 886, *Vesp.* 650-1, 1537), signaled the poet’s educational aspirations. Equally, as noted by Sommerstein (1992), surviving fragments attest that playwrights of Old Comedy claimed originality in terms of skill and dramatic technique, but Aristophanes stands out for his claim to giving good advice to Athenian citizens. On the figure of the comic poet as educator in general, and of Aristophanes in particular, see Bertelli (2013); Kanavou (2016).

Knights, *Wasps*, and *Assemblywomen* dramatize a detrimental shift in the behavioral gears of Athenians, from a behavior informed by altruism to one informed by calculations of material utility. In view of that, a behavioral science approach to these plays enhances our understanding of them in two critical respects. First, it grounds the plays' content historically and corroborates the value of comic theater as a source for Athenian culture.¹²¹ Second, it enables a refined appreciation of the plays' political commentary and Aristophanes' educational goals. As we shall see, besides revealing the deleterious effects of the implementation of a price system on Athens's civic culture, Aristophanic comedy systematically presents the efficient function of Athenian democracy as contingent on civic altruism.

In keeping with the approach outlined in the course of this introduction, the first chapter explores the way *Knights* presents the problem of political leadership in Athens as an issue stemming from a profit-maximizing behavior on the part of Athenian citizens. Under the persona of Paphlagon, Kleon claims the spotlight of the play's satire; hence, *Knights* has been traditionally read as an *ad hominem* attack, the reasons behind which have been varied. After a close examination and historical contextualization of the attack, I argue that Aristophanes was not so much pursuing a feud as scrutinizing developing tactics in Athenian politics, namely the self-serving abuse of Athens's judicial system of which Kleon was an outstanding representative. At the same time, with political subsidies emerging as a means to subsistence during the tense period of the Peloponnesian War, *Knights* presents Kleon not only as a connoisseur of vexatious litigation but also as an adept manipulator of the people by means of public finance. Court-pay is time and again mentioned as Demos' choice food and the tool used by Paphlagon to secure his stewardship.

¹²¹ In his rebuttal of de Ste. Croix's outright condemnation of the historical value of Aristophanic comedy, Pritchard (2012, 43) demonstrated that Aristophanes' plays—with all due caveats—are "valuable evidence for Athenian popular culture." As a matter of fact, despite the many years since its publication, Ehrenberg's (1962) study on the value of Old Comedy as a source of social and economic history remains fundamental.

Interestingly, though, Demos himself admits to putting up with corrupt *rhētores* as long as there is some monetary profit to be had. In view of that, it appears that Aristophanes directed his satire against a notorious practitioner of political tactics that vitiated the rule of law but also against citizens whose profit-maximizing mentality enabled the phenomenon. Thus, a behavioral science approach to *Knights* suggests a certain amount of realism for its commentary, since the “moral disengagement” associated with the implementation of incentives sheds new light on the attenuated civic-mindedness castigated in the play and documented in our historical record. Besides being critical, however, by making a protagonist out of a self-less everyday citizen *Knights* also projects to its audience the necessity for a vigorous civic engagement, and the restoration of Demos’ early-fifth-century self speaks to the play’s advocacy for civic altruism.

The second chapter examines the issues of motivation dramatized in *Wasps*, as the play delves into the self-interested behavior of Athenian elders manning the courts as well as that of their politically apathetic antagonist. By the time they appear on stage, the Chorus make clear that they see court-service as a source of income and that they follow the orders of Kleon; thus, along with Philokleon, they engage in unseemly civic behavior that directly contradicts the judicial oath. In the same vein, Philokleon defends court-service with arguments that form a pyramid of personal utility-maximization, on the apex of which stands court-pay. On that account, the way Bdelykleon convinces Philokleon and his peers on the basis of financial considerations that court-service is a degrading activity exposes the profound moral disengagement of the latter. Meanwhile, Bdelykleon’s arguments map onto the psychological mechanisms to which behavioral scientists attribute the crowding-out effect of incentives. Accordingly, a reading of *Wasps* through the lens of behavioral science reveals the behavioral similarities between pre-modern and modern agents vis-à-vis incentives, as well as the way incentives would have promoted among Athenians the kind

of self-interested behavior exemplified by Philokleon and the Chorus. Once again, however, Aristophanes' political commentary is not engaging in criticism just for the sake of criticism. With the theme of education being a core thematic axis of *Wasps*, Philokleon's lack of civic-mindedness is juxtaposed with the similar lack of civic-mindedness in Bdelykleon, who strives to introduce his father into a lifestyle characterized by political apathy. Therefore, the devastating results of Philokleon's re-education and adoption of the civic mindset espoused by his son project the necessity for an altruistic civic engagement oriented towards the public good.

The third and final chapter is a reading of *Assemblywomen*, with a focus on its treatment of the ever-expanding implementation of incentives in Athens's civic sphere of activity. The play's political commentary touches on ineffective deliberation and dysfunctional legislation, both of which are attributed to civic motivation. As the women of Athens join Praxagora and go through the last preparations before their *coup d'etat*, we learn that within the civic sphere the men do not care about anything beyond getting paid. Indeed, the dialogue between Praxagora's husband, Blepuros, and his friend, Khremes, makes clear that the interest of the two men in Assembly-meetings lies first and foremost in getting the three obols of Assembly-pay. Given that Assembly-pay was introduced at the end of the fifth century and that *Assemblywomen* touches on the same motivational issues as did *Knights* and *Wasps*, it is argued that Aristophanes' long-term documentation of crowding-out in his comedy reveals the cultural effects of incentives. In particular, the play shows that the implementation of a price system in every aspect of Athens's civic sphere of activity has produced a civic culture that threatens the very existence of Athens's democratic regime. As Praxagora wins over the men to the dissolution of democracy and the institution of a gynaeocracy with materialistic promises, Athenians are shown to be so prone to

material self-interest that they readily abandon their franchise and give in to a *status quo* that proves to be anything but a paradise.

The conclusion further contextualizes the effects of the widespread implementation of incentives on Athens's civic culture. The common denominator behind the political problems identified in *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Assemblywomen* is the self-interested behavior of citizens, whose civic engagement is motivated solely by monetary considerations. This kind of base civic behavior was not just fodder for comedy. On the contrary, taking the crowding-out effect of incentives into account, Aristophanes' commentary appears to have targeted existing and observable shortcomings in Athens's civic culture, which for the most part seem to have stemmed from moral disengagement. The fact that crowding-out indeed affected the society of classical Athens is corroborated not only by criticisms found in other sources about the greed characterizing the masses but also by historical accounts of events where monetary profit was the key concern for profound political decisions. On that account, the wide span of time for which Aristophanes documents Athenian civic behavior renders his comedy an invaluable document for the evolution of social preferences in the Athenian body politic—an issue of immense significance for understanding Athens's vicissitudes during the late fifth and early fourth centuries. Finally, Aristophanes' critical outlook on the moral disengagement exhibited by Athenians in the civic sphere is not a disengaged and elitist playwright's way of producing laughter. The three plays examined in the course of this study certainly made their audiences burst into raucous laughter but, by promulgating civic altruism and a civic engagement oriented towards communal rather than individual utility, they also contributed to their civic education.

Chapter 1: *Knights*

Produced for the Lenaia of 424 BCE, Aristophanes' *Knights* presents the struggle for the stewardship of an Athenian household between a Sausage-seller and a Paphlagonian slave, which unfolds in a series of three *agōnes* (235-1263). The first *agōn* takes place before a Chorus of Athenian knights (235-497), the second one reportedly before the Council (611-690), and the third one—after a short bout in front of the household (691-755)—before a notional Assembly (756-1263). During these contests, the Sausage-seller strives to prove that he has all the credentials necessary for the stewardship, which paradoxically means proving himself to be a worse scoundrel than Paphlagon; yet he carries the day only after showing his selfless devotion to the head of the household, old Demos. In the end, the Sausage-seller rejuvenates Demos and swaps places with Paphlagon, who is condemned to a life of disgrace near the city's gates (1316-408).¹

The prologue establishes that the play is a political allegory. The two house slaves opening the stage protest that the newly-bought slave from Paphlagonia harasses and gets the best of the rest of them (1-5), since he figured out how to manipulate their owner: “Demos from the deme of Pnyx, a boorish, bad-tempered, bean-chewing, difficult, and half-deaf old man.”² Although rare, Demos is attested as a personal name in Athens, but the demotic fashioned after Pnyx, the place where the Athenian Assembly met, readily gives away the allegorical context.³ Demos stands for his namesake, the citizens of Athens, and his slaves for *rhētores* who pledge themselves to the citizens' service; thus, the struggle for Demos' stewardship is a struggle for political prominence.⁴

¹ Contrary to the traditional interpretation, Edmunds (1987b, 43) argued that by the end of the play Demos undergoes only a beauty treatment, but Olson (1990) aptly defended Demos' rejuvenation.

² *Eq.* 40-3 νῶν γάρ ἐστι δεσπότης | ἄγροικος ὀργὴν, κυμοτρῶξ, ἀκράχολος, | Δῆμος Πυκνίτης, δύσκολον γερόντιον | ὑπόκωφον.

³ See *LGPN* II s.v. Δῆμος. For Demos as a character in Greek literature in general and in Old Comedy in particular, see Reinders (2001), 28-71 and 123-130 respectively.

⁴ As noted by Lauriola (2017), the word δῆμος is polysemous, but it is usually employed to denote poor citizens or “the masses” as opposed to the rich or “the few,” the dividing line being leisure from work; hence, any attempt to

Considering that the Paphlagonian slave is a persona of Kleon, *Knights* has been read traditionally as a “demagogue comedy” satirizing the foremost “demagogue” of the day.⁵ In a recent analysis of the play’s political commentary, however, Robin Osborne challenged the reductivism of readings of comedy’s humor as single pointed. In his view, when we appreciate the complex mechanics of humor, then “we see also that the politics of an Aristophanic play can lie neither in its particular jokes, nor any claims that may be made in them, nor in its plot; the politics lie in the themes that the play explores.”⁶ The main political theme identified for *Knights* is “the relation between the individual political adviser and the corporate body in receipt of advice.”⁷ According to Osborne, then, the play asks whether prominent political figures like Kleon pander to the appetites of Council members and Assembly-goers in the manner of a shrewd domestic slave who has figured out his owner’s appetites and feeds him accordingly.

Undoubtedly, the relationship between *rhētores* and the Athenian body politic is at the forefront of *Knights*, and the most persistently explored aspect of this theme is the way political payments factor into this relationship. As declared in the prologue (46-72), after figuring out old Demos’ ways, Paphlagon secured his stewardship by using flattery, foodstuff, appropriation of other slaves’ services, and oracles. Although shrouded in metaphor, the “foodstuff” used for

further narrow down the meaning of δῆμος in Aristophanes is fraught with difficulties, as he makes a deliberately playful use of its polysemy. Regarding the two slaves opening the play, although never named in the text, they are identified as “Demosthenes” and “Nikias” in the MSS. For the debate over their identification, see Dover (1972); (2004); Sommerstein (1980); Henderson (2003a); (2014). In keeping with Henderson’s arguments, I choose to retain their anonymity.

⁵ This tradition starts with the very *uita Aristophanis* (codd. VE), where we are told that “being at strong enmity with the leading *rhētōr* Kleon, he composed *Knights* against him” (10-11 διεχθρεύσας δὲ μάλιστα Κλέωνι τῷ Ἰδημαγωγῷ καὶ γράψας κατ’ αὐτοῦ τοὺς Ἰππέας). A detailed account of this tradition in scholarship would call for a study in its own right, but its pervasiveness manifests itself even from a cursory examination of commentaries and general overviews of Aristophanic comedy produced in the last five decades; cf. Dover (1972), 89; Sommerstein (1981), 2; MacDowell (1995), 80; Cartledge (1990), 46; McGlew (2002), 98; Lowe (2007), 12; Rosen (2010), 246; Anderson and Dix (2020), 15-17. For “demagogue comedy” as a subgenre of Old Comedy, see Sommerstein (2000).

⁶ Osborne (2020), 37.

⁷ ib. 38-41, quotation from 38.

cajoling Demos is unmistakable in its connection to judiciary proceedings and hence the pay citizens received for serving as judges (50-1, 799-800, 904-5). From that point on, even though explicit reference to court-pay is made only twice (255, 800), allusive references to public payments pervade the play (715, 774, 798, 905, 1019, 1090-1, 1100-6, 1125-6, 1167-220, 1350-3). Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the political commentary of *Knights*, those passages demand closer attention.

This chapter explores the centrality of the way money shaped Athens's political and civic milieu as a theme of *Knights*. On the one hand, public payments are problematized in their potential use as a tool in the hands of self-serving *rhētores*, and this is most explicitly seen when Paphlagon proclaims that he knows “all too well what Demos feeds on” (715 ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ αὐτὸν οἷς ψωμίζεται). On the other hand, public payments are presented as the stimulus for a debased civic behavior aiming solely at profit-maximization, which old Demos drives home by confiding to the Chorus that he deliberately keeps a villain as his steward for the sake of getting his “daily pap” (1125-6 ἥδομαι | βρύλλων τὸ καθ’ ἡμέραν). As a result, through the relationship between Paphlagon and Demos, the play presents a distressing state of political affairs as the result of a reciprocal relation between two equally self-interested parties.

In the context of the above analysis, the amount of historicity going into Aristophanes' portrayals of Paphlagon, as a persona of Kleon, and Demos, as a personification of Athenian citizens, is a fundamental concern. As will be argued below, the fact that Paphlagon is a litigious brawler and uses public money as a means to curry favor with Demos speaks to the ways Kleon accrued political capital. Old Demos, in turn, exhibits qualities and attitudes that would be expected of poor elderly Athenians, who were the majority on judge-panels as well as the citizens most prone to develop a profit-maximizing civic behavior. Despite its humorous distortions, then,

Aristophanes' *Knights* reflects Athens's socio-political reality, and the realism of its reflection becomes even clearer when examined through the lens of behavioral science. As we shall see, the deteriorated civic-mindedness of Athenians and its impact on democratic institutions as depicted in the play respectively fit the description of the "crowding out" and "spill-over" effects associated with the implementation of incentives.

Finally, in keeping with arguments about comic poets attempting "to help educate the citizenry by serving as a social and political critic," this chapter also ventures to peek through the façade of comedy to the civic instruction intended for the audience.⁸ The commentary of *Knights* suggests that Aristophanes was critical towards political payments in their abuse by *rhētores* and everyday citizens alike; yet his criticism was not that of elitists who considered poor citizenry as a mob unable to efficiently manage public affairs.⁹ Although the play denounces the self-interest exhibited by both Demos and his slave-*rhētores*, *Knights* is far from a cry of despair. By extolling the altruism exhibited by the Sausage-seller, the closing scene projects a widespread civic engagement and the socially oriented civic behavior of the Themistoklean era as the remedies for the state of affairs during the 420s BCE. As a result, by scrutinizing how civic engagement in Athens has degenerated into petty profit-seeking while advocating for a return to past civic virtues, Aristophanes presented his audience with a play both critical and educational.

⁸ Ober (1998), 125.

⁹ MacDowell (1996, 197) correctly notes that nowhere does Aristophanes suggest that "Demos should cease to be the head of the household and the master of the slaves... [or hints] at any possibility that democracy might be replaced by oligarchy or any other form of government." For Aristophanes' positive attitude towards popular power that is collectively exercised, see Henderson (2003b).

1.1 Paphlagon-Kleon and the Democratic Courts

Starting with an analysis of Kleon's portrayal in *Knights*, it should be noted upfront that Kleon, despite being a prominent political figure, did not get in the crosshairs of Aristophanes' satire for being the undisputable leader of the Athenian people at the time.¹⁰ As a member of Athens's elite, his dynamic participation in politics certainly made him an attractive butt; thus, it is no wonder that he features in all surviving Aristophanic comedies before his death in 422 BCE (and even after).¹¹ Still, the reason for Kleon's vilification being front and center in *Knights* is not readily apparent.¹²

Some scholars have deemed Kleon's casting as Paphlagon to be the result of an axe that Aristophanes had to grind.¹³ In spite of the seemingly vitriolic attack against Kleon in *Knights*,

¹⁰ Given the readings of *Knights* as a "demagogue comedy" and the assertion of the *uita Aristophanis* that the play "scrutinized Kleon's omnipotence" (11-2 ἐν οἷς διελέγχει αὐτοῦ... τὸ τυραννικόν) one should be cautious. The applicability of the term "demagogue" in its modern sense with reference to antiquity has long been contested; see Finley (1962). Recently, Rhodes (2016, 244-251) advised against the assumption concomitant to the term's usage about a stable, person-based political leadership in Athens, which misrepresents Assembly meetings as consisting of "a few performers on one side and a passive audience on the other." In fact, the idea of a person-based political leadership in Athenian democracy is a product of Thucydides and the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*. Rhodes (ib. 254-257) effectively demonstrated that Thucydides' conflicting pairs of speeches were set-pieces in an impressionistic depiction of actual Assembly meetings, while Frost (1968, 110-112) has long questioned the rigidity of the divide between political leaders (προστάται τοῦ δήμου vs. προστάται τῶν γνωρίμων) and their agendas in Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 28. Therefore, as Rhodes (ib. 259) pointed out, Kleon and other *rhētores* obtained preeminence by speaking in the Assembly as often as they could, but it is clear that the Athenian citizens "listened to them and they listened to occasional speakers, and sometimes they voted as Cleon wanted but sometimes they did not." Equally, although the fourth century has traditionally been considered to be a time of political professionalism, Hansen (1984) has shown that the number of Athenian citizens active in the Assembly was significantly large.

¹¹ cf. *Ach.* 5-8, 377-82, 502-8, *Vesp.* 1284-91, *Pax* 43-8, 269-73. Old Comedy generally targeted all those occupying a place in the spotlight of Athenian politics or culture; see Sommerstein (1996). As regards Kleon's socio-economic status, despite his comic portrayal as an upstart rogue who clawed his way to prominence from the rank and file, he certainly was a member of Athens's elite; cf. Connor (1971), 168-175; *APF* 8674. On that note, Kleon has been considered to be a representative of a "new" industrial elite that opposed Athens's old agricultural elite; see Connor (1971), 151-163; Rosenbloom (2004). Nevertheless, this assumption has been proven fallacious; see Harris (2013a), 319-320. For Kleon's family, connections, and political agenda, see Saldutti (2014), 15-68.

¹² According to the *uita Aristophanis* (10-12), Kleon was vilified due to Aristophanes' animosity (διεχθρεύσας δὲ μάλιστα Κλέωνι), so *Knights* was meant to scrutinize Kleon's "embezzlements and political omnipotence" (διελέγχει αὐτοῦ τὰς κλοπὰς καὶ τὸ τυραννικόν).

¹³ For historicizing accounts of the conflict between Kleon and Aristophanes, as attested in the latter's comedies, see Carawan (1990); Atkinson (1992); Sommerstein (2004). According to Rosen (1988, 59-82), the comic reports on the purported animosity between playwright and political figure were part of a literary convention. Still, the extent to which reality fueled comedy and vice versa cannot be known in this case.

however, it has been observed that when it comes down to details of actual misdeeds “it is less easy to make definite claims.”¹⁴ Indeed, even with an extravaganza of bribery allegations, the only thing at stake for Paphlagon is getting away with venality, as Demos, “enveloped in the fog of war,” remains blind to his chicaneries (803 ὑπὸ τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τῆς ὁμίχλης ἃ πανουργεῖς μὴ καθορᾷ σου).¹⁵ A similar allegation is found in Thucydides, who maintained that Kleon, as the principal warmonger during the Peloponnesian War, opposed peace negotiations because “his evildoing would become apparent and his slanders less credible” (5.16.1 καταφανέστερος νομίζων ἂν εἶναι κακουργῶν καὶ ἀπιστότερος διαβάλλων).¹⁶ For Thucydides, this remark has been considered notoriously biased and the motives ascribed to Kleon subjectively conjectural.¹⁷ On the subject of Kleon’s malfeasance, then, our sources are unreliable, and the accusations in comedy so extravagant as to be preposterous.¹⁸ At the same time, although Aristophanes denounces the Peloponnesian War time and again in his plays, the attitude adopted in *Knights* is

¹⁴ Robson (2009), 170. Similarly, Osborne (2020, 30) argued that if we take Kleon to be the target of the play, “then Aristophanes engages in anything other than precision bombing.” For the ancient tradition of commonplace yet unfounded bias against Kleon, see Dorey (1956).

¹⁵ cf. *Eq.* 326-7, 402-5, 438-40, 706-7, 801-9, 832-5, 927-940, 985-96, 1196-8.

¹⁶ For the correspondence between the Thucydidean and the Aristophanic portrayal of Kleon, see Burns (2014). According to Lafargue (2013, 19-35), the antipathy of Aristophanes and Thucydides towards Kleon was the result of opposing political views.

¹⁷ Hornblower (1996) ad loc; Kallet (1993), 179-180. On the subjectivity going into the participial expression of motivation in Thucydides and the historian’s open hostility to Kleon, see Lang (1995) especially at 50. Indeed, as discussed below, Kleon was politically vexatious, but whether he was so for the sake of slander and evildoing is a matter of perspective.

¹⁸ For the inaccuracy and subjectivity of Kleon’s portrayal in both Thucydides and Aristophanes, see Biles (2016). Certainly, bribery was a reality that Athenian law sought to circumscribe; see MacDowell (1983). Yet, as shown by Taylor (2001), the fine line separating gift-exchange from bribery in Greek politics was exploited for the sake of slander; hence, accusations about bribery were common currency in Attic comedy and oratory, regardless of substance. Bugh (1988, 109-111) and Carawan (1990, 141-146) attempted to historicize the reference of *Ar. Ach.* 5-8 and the scholia to a bribe that Kleon had to relinquish, arguing (based on *Eq.* 361, 927-40) that the knights exposed Kleon in an out-of-court indictment [i.e. προβολή; cf. Harrison (1971), 59-64] for receiving money from Milesians to reduce their tribute quota. The older interpretation of the passage in *Akharnians*, which is endorsed by Olson (2002, ad *Ach.* 6-8), posits that the noted bribe was part of a fictional stage trial in Aristophanes’ *Babylonians*. To my mind, the most compelling evidence for Kleon’s clear record is the absence of evidence itself. A slip of the tongue by the actor Hegelokhos became an overkill of a joke in Attic comedy; see Dover (1993) ad *Ran.* 303f. Therefore, if bribery allegations against Kleon had any claim to veracity, then the arsenal of comic playwrights—and, of course, embittered historians—would be replete with unequivocal references to confirmed cases of past malfeasance.

not a clear-cut negative one.¹⁹ As a result, the reason for Kleon being the prime target of *Knights* cannot be ascribed incontrovertibly to venality or war-related politics.

On closer inspection, Kleon was ideally cast for the role of Paphlagon for being an outstanding representative of a new style of politics—with the spectacle of his idiosyncratic oratory adding to his comic appeal.²⁰ In a study of democratic legal culture in Athens, Edward Harris analyzed how the novel practice of using the courts to eliminate one’s political rivals during the Peloponnesian War vitiated the rule of law.²¹ In this context, considering Paphlagon’s litigious attitude against his opponents and his fastidious use of legal vocabulary, Kleon is identified as the man “either primarily responsible for this change or the most accomplished practitioner of the new tactics.”²² A straightforward allusion to Kleon’s use of such tactics is the “dog trial scene” of *Wasps*, where the dog of Kydathenaeum (i.e. Kleon) denounces the dog Labes (i.e. the general Lakhes) for stealing a large chunk of cheese and devouring it by himself (i.e. for embezzling public money).²³ Consequently, assuming that Aristophanic comedy bears testimony to real-life practices for the elimination of political opposition, Kleon provided an ideal persona for the scrutiny of a developing phenomenon—much as Socrates did in *Clouds*.²⁴

¹⁹ According to Worthington (1987), *Knights* does not express outright anti-war sentiments, as at the time Aristophanes understood the advantageous position of Athens after the victory at Sphacteria in 425 BCE. For a general discussion on the Peloponnesian War as a theme in Old Comedy, see Konstan (2010). For expressions of dissent within Athenian society, see Boegehold (1982).

²⁰ Paphlagon’s blustering (137, 256, 274-6, 286, 304, 311, 487, 863, 919-22, 1018) corroborates the information of our ancient sources about Kleon’s non-conformist and vociferous style of oratory; cf. Thuc. 3.36.6; Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 28.3; Plut. *Nic.* 8. For the intense aural ambience and the role of θόρυβος in Athenian courts and Assembly, see Bers (1985) and Tacon (2001) respectively.

²¹ See Harris (2013a), 305-344.

²² Harris (2013a), 316. For Paphlagon’s litigiousness, cf. *Eq.* 235-9, 258-63, 278-79, 300-2, 304-10, 442-3, 475-9, 626-9, 825-6. In the full analysis of the gradual breakdown of the rule of law, Harris expounds on the eventual cross-contamination of the *polis*’ executive and judiciary functions during the Peloponnesian War and how it factored into Athens’s eventual defeat.

²³ cf. *Vesp.* 891-1008 with MacDowell (1995) ad 240 and Biles and Olson (2015), lii-lvi.

²⁴ As noted by Konstan (2011, 88), “Socrates provided a good target for a satire on the new learning and rhetoric, for he was typical enough to represent the movement as a whole and at the same time sufficiently idiosyncratic to be readily identifiable as a unique personality.” For Socrates’ portrait in *Clouds*, see Dover (1968), xxxii-lvii. For the portrayal of Kleon in *Knights* and that of Socrates in *Clouds* as cases of “deep parody,” see Gerolemou (2020).

The question at this point is how someone could manipulate a judicial system that was based on sortition and randomly appointed judges from a body of 6,000 volunteers.²⁵ As expounded by Harris, the Athenian legal system had five weaknesses that made its manipulation possible. In particular, 1) the indiscriminate sortition of judges could jeopardize impartiality, as it would be difficult for a defendant to obtain a fair trial before a panel of embittered citizens after a military or political setback; 2) the bare majority required for verdicts made it relatively easy for an accuser bringing a public charge to secure a conviction; 3) contrary to modern practice, accusers in public cases were not held to a stricter standard of proof than those in private cases; 4) trials taking place in a single day made judges susceptible to hasty verdicts; 5) for public cases, contrary to private ones, there was no system of appeals.²⁶ Yet, even with the conceivable exploitation of compromised impartiality, lax standards of proof, hasty procedures, and lack of appeals for public cases, Kleon's ability to secure bare majorities for successful prosecutions was not just a matter of litigative savvy.

The Peloponnesian War served as a catalyst for the vitiation of the rule of law, since its tense climate gave occasion to circumstances easily exploitable by prosecutors as regards the judges' impartiality. More importantly, however, the stress of the war on Athenian finances "put pressure on the courts to convict wealthy men and to collect large fines or to confiscate their estates," in order to secure adequate public funds that would translate into court-pay.²⁷ In the corpus of Lysias, we find two striking cases of defendants protesting during wartime the inclination of courts to convict innocent men and confiscate their properties in order to balance the public

²⁵ For the general organization of democratic juridical bodies, see Hansen (1991), 178-196. On the issue of sortition and one's chances of being selected for court-service out of the 6,000 volunteers, see Mirhady and Schwarz (2011).

²⁶ Harris (2005), 21-22; (2013a), 317-318.

²⁷ Harris (2013a), 318-319. In the fourth century, there were occasions when the operations of courts were suspended due to the lack of the funds necessary for the judges' stipends; cf. Dem. 39.17 with Rhodes (2013), 218 with n. 105.

budget and secure payments for the judges.²⁸ *Knights* speaks to this situation explicitly at the end of the play, when the Sausage-seller magically rejuvenates old Demos, and they go over Demos' new attitudes. To the question as to what will happen to a prosecutor who threatens judges into convictions by stressing the prospective lack of pay (1359-60 οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῖν τοῖς δικασταῖς ἄλφριτα, | εἰ μὴ καταγνώσεσθε ταύτην τὴν δίκην), Demos, contrary to how things transpired in the past, responds that henceforth the said prosecutor shall be put to death.²⁹ Thus, with everyday citizens in need of money aiding and abetting the manipulation of courts by self-serving *rhētores*, Aristophanes presents juridical misconduct during the Peloponnesian War as the result of a bilateral operation of self-interested parties.³⁰

Criticism against the joint abuse of the Athenian judicial system by *rhētores* and everyday citizens is also expressed earlier in the play. Specifically, when Paphlagon is attacked by the Chorus and cries (255-7):

ὦ γέροντες ἡλιασταί, φράτερες Τριωβόλου, | οὐδ' ἐγὼ βόσκω κεκραγῶς καὶ δίκαια
κᾶδिका, | παραβοηθεῖθ', ὡς ὑπ' ἀνδρῶν τύπτομαι ξυνωμοστῶν.

Alas, old judges, brethren of Triobolos, whom I feed while blaring things both just and unjust, come to my rescue, as I am belted by conspirators!³¹

²⁸ cf. Lys. 27.1, 30.22. Isocrates (15.160) hints at the practice continuing into the fourth century as well. The abuse of the judicial system in order to attack the elite was not a phenomenon exclusively attested in Athens's democracy; see the discussion of Harris (2006, 138) on similar cases in Korkyra and Sikyon.

²⁹ For ἄλφριτα in line 1359 as a paraprosochian substitution for "court-pay," see Anderson and Dix (2020) ad loc.

³⁰ In the fourth century, Isocrates similarly claimed that those "living off the courts and Assemblies and the income from these are compelled by need to be under their control [sc. *rhētores*] and to show them gratitude for their impeachments and indictments and other *sykophantiai*" (8.130 τοὺς δ' ἀπὸ τῶν δικαστηρίων ζῶντας καὶ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ τῶν ἐντεῦθεν λημμάτων ὑφ' αὐτοῖς διὰ τὴν ἔνδειαν ἠναγκασμένους εἶναι, καὶ πολλὴν χάριν ἔχοντας ταῖς εἰσαγγελίαις καὶ ταῖς γραφαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις συκοφαντίαις ταῖς δι' αὐτῶν γιγνομέναις). For Aristophanes using the "state as household" political imagery in a way that reflects badly on Demos' servants but also Demos himself, see Brock (2013), 28.

³¹ The phrase γέροντες ἡλιασταί is not court-specific, but a blanket term for the entire body of judges. For the use and significance of the term "Heliastia" and its cognates, see Hansen (1982).

This metadramatic plea clearly addresses those in the audience who would be identified with old Demos in his appetite for “three-obol meals.”³² Consequently, despite its brevity, Paphlagon’s appeal calls for unpacking, since it is loaded with implications about Kleon, the Athenians manning the courts, and the relationship between them.

On a first level, Paphlagon’s claim to be “feeding” the judges (256 οὐς ἐγὼ βόσκω) has been linked to the excess of prosecutions that Kleon brought to court, since convictions generated revenue and hence guaranteed public payments.³³ The same idea is also expressed when Paphlagon exclaims that he will feed and provide for Demos “by all means, figuring out fairly and unfairly whence he will get his three obols” (799-800 πάντως δ’ αὐτὸν θρέψω ἄγ’ καὶ θεραπεύσω, ἰ ἐξευρίσκων εὖ καὶ μιαρῶς ὀπόθεν τὸ τριώβολον ἔξει). Therefore, Kleon’s aggressive prosecutions are said to be conducive to building rapport with citizens who treat court-service as a source of income.

The characterization of the judges as “brethren of Triobolos” (255 φράτερες Τριωβόλου) underlines how Kleon’s policymaking was as significant for his relationship with judges as his prosecution tactics. As mentioned earlier, Perikles was the one to introduce court-pay, but several ancient scholia to Aristophanes attribute to Kleon a 50% increase, raising the original rate of two obols per day to three.³⁴ Harris argued that Aristophanes presents Kleon being popular with judges “not for increasing their pay, but for providing cases for them,” as the former is of no benefit “unless there was someone bringing frequent prosecutions.”³⁵ Still, the two reasons entertained for Kleon’s popularity are not mutually exclusive. In the play, a systematic advocacy for increased

³² For the continuous mixture of Demos as a dramatic persona and Demos as an allegory for Athenian citizens in *Knights*, see Sommerstein (1981) ad 50.

³³ See Anderson and Dix (2020) and Sommerstein (1981) ad loc.

³⁴ See Introduction, p. 18 n. 50.

³⁵ Harris (2013a), 316 n. 49.

disbursements of public funds and doles is one of the reasons for Paphlagon being in Demos' good graces.³⁶ What establishes the importance of Kleon's policymaking is Paphlagon's reference to the judges' alleged phratry. As social groups of neither exclusively personal nor exclusively local character, phratries have been described as natural communities whose members shared activities and interests.³⁷ On that account, as "brethren of Triobolos," old judges are joined together not only in manning the courts but also in worshipping the phratry's purported founder-hero, whose name is evocatively fashioned after the rate of court-pay introduced by Kleon.³⁸

Finally, lines 255-7 suggest that Kleon's prosecutions and financial policymaking afforded him a support group instrumental for the success of his political tactics. Based on Paphlagon's age-specific reference (255 ὦ γέροντες ἡλιασταί), the members of this support group are said to be drawn from a particular segment of the Athenian population. Although any Athenian citizen over the age of 30 was eligible for court-service, in Aristophanic comedy judges are typically portrayed as old men, and several complementary facts suggest that late-fifth-century courts were manned

³⁶ In his defense for protracting the Peloponnesian War, Paphlagon adduces oracles proclaiming that "one day, if he [sc. Demos] stands fast, he must judge cases in Arkadia for five obols" (797-9 ἔστι γὰρ ἐν τοῖς λογίοισιν ἰὼς τοῦτον δεῖ ποτ' ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ πεντωβόλου ἡλιάσασθαι, ἢν ἀναμείνῃ). Subsequently, in order to gain ground on the Sausage-seller during their *agon*, Paphlagon promises that he shall provide Demos "with a bowl of three-obol-soup for doing absolutely nothing" (904-5 ἐγὼ γὰρ φημί σοι παρέξειν, ἰὼ Δῆμε, μηδὲν δρῶντι μισθοῦ τρύβλιον ῥοφήσαι). Finally, when removed from his position as Demos' steward, Paphlagon hastily resorts to a last-minute promise for free barley, to which Demos responds that he has had enough of such deceitful promises; cf. *Eq.* 1100-3 ΠΑΦ: μήπω γ', ἰκετεύω σ', ἀλλ' ἀνάμεινον, ὡς ἐγὼ ἰκριθᾶς ποριῶ σοι καὶ βίον καθ' ἡμέραν. ΔΗΜ: οὐκ ἀνέχομαι κριθῶν ἀκούων· πολλάκις ἔξηπατήθην ὑπὸ τε σοῦ καὶ Θουφάνου. For Thouphanes, his relationship with Kleon, and the policymaking implied in these lines, see Sommerstein (1981) ad loc.

³⁷ See Lambert (1993), 237-242. On the link between a phratry's members, based on the fact that phratries could split and fuse in response to social or demographic pressures, Lambert (ib. 107-112) argued that there is no ground on which to assume that a phratry was a kinship group of blood ties.

³⁸ In their commentary editions, Sommerstein (1981 ad 255) as well as Anderson and Dix (2020 ad 255-7) print φράτερες τριωβόλου, and translate the phrase as "brethren of the Order of the Three Obols" and "brethren of the three obols" respectively. Both these readings take τριωβόλου as an appositive genitive that next to φράτερες would denote the name of the phratry to which the judges belong. Nonetheless, such a reading runs counter to the way phratry membership was expressed. As demonstrated by Lambert (1993, 9-10), phratry names were formed and used like patronymics (e.g. Ἀχινιάδαι) or demotics (e.g. Θυμαϊτάδαι), and "the eponym was generally regarded as *archegetes* or founder-hero, not ancestor;" hence, line 255 should read ὦ γέροντες ἡλιασταί, φράτερες Τριωβόλου. For epigraphically attested expressions of phratry membership, see ib. 279-370.

primarily by 59+ year-old citizens of the non-leisure class (see Appendix I).³⁹ In view of that, demographic considerations shed an ominous light of realism on Aristophanes' commentary on the abuse of Athens's judicial system during the late fifth century.

Inasmuch as 59+ year-old citizens would constitute 6-8% of the total male population (3,600-4,800/60,000) at the time, for a body of 6,000 their age group could represent maximally 80% of the total volunteers for court-service for a given year.⁴⁰ Even if a median of 7.5% for leisure-class citizens is deducted on the assumption that financial considerations would not affect their civic engagement, the maximal percentage of representation for non-leisure-class elders remains at a high 74%.⁴¹ This percentage looks even more formidable vis-à-vis the fact that on "a normal court day the Athenians had to use 2,000-3,000 men from the jury list to pick up by lot 1,500-2,000 jurors."⁴² Therefore, given the reasons for Kleon's rapport with elderly judges, the

³⁹ cf. *Ar. Ach.* 375-6, *Eq.* 255, 977-9, *Vesp.* 133, 178, 223-4, 1075-8, *Pax* 348-52, *Lys.* 380, *Eccl.* 460, *Plut.* 277-8. For the criteria of eligibility for service in the juridical body, see Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 63.3. As regards the age that would qualify someone as "old," Corvisier (2018) argued that 50 was considered the threshold of old age in ancient Greece.

⁴⁰ Given the evolution of the theme of old age in literature, from its reverence in Homer to the aversion of archaic and classical authors to its degenerative nature, it appears that the numbers of seniors started increasing during the classical period, thus making senility a more obvious social issue; see Corvisier (1985). In terms of demographics, based on a juxtaposition of the Coale and Demeny (1983) model life table for preindustrial societies and available age data from Greek antiquity, Corvisier (2003; 2018) estimated that 9% of Athenians would live up to 60 years, with sexagenarian males making up 6 to 8% of the citizens. Akrigg (2019, 12-33) provides a discussion of shortcomings for the available model life tables, but their estimated percentages for senior population are closely commensurate. Finally, in terms of general population size for the mid-fifth century, Akrigg (ib. 61-88) concludes that Hansen's (1988, 14-28) estimate of 60,000 citizens is compatible with our sources and as accurate as one could hope for considering the state of our information; yet an even higher number is equally plausible.

⁴¹ According to Ober (1989, 127-130), the Athenian leisure-class represented only 5-10% of the total population. Ober's estimate on the leisure-class is representative of the fourth century; thus, given the drop from ca. 60,000 in the fifth century to ca. 30,000 citizens in the fourth century, my argument assumes that both leisure and non-leisure-class suffered equal losses during the Peloponnesian War. Strauss (1986, 42-81) has argued that the casualties of poor Athenians were disproportionately higher than those of rich, but his argument has been challenged by Akrigg (2019, 230-243). As regards leisure-class elders and political activity, Carter (1986) discussed the various manifestations of the general quietism (*ἀπραγμοσύνη*) of Athenian elites, but his arguments have not garnered sufficient support; cf. Taylor (2007), especially at 83-84. For the inclination of elites to attend Assembly meetings rather than serve in the courts, see Sinclair (1988), 133-135.

⁴² Hansen (1991), 189. The trial before a tribunal of 6,000 judges recorded by Andocides (1.17) is an oddity.

“brethren of Triobolos” amongst them would have been instrumental in helping him achieve the bare majorities required for convicting political rivals.⁴³

In consideration of the above, the satire of *Knights* appears to be two-pronged, since it singles out Kleon for his insidious political agenda as well as everyday Athenians for acting as accessories to his manipulation of the courts.⁴⁴ Of course, the elderly were not the only demographic playing a part in this phenomenon, but apparently, given their preponderance on judge-panels, they offered an apt target for the scrutiny of an otherwise more general phenomenon. In other words, as in the case of Paphlagon-Kleon, old Demos represents all citizens susceptible to develop a utilitarian attitude with regard to their civic behavior, the biggest part of that group being the one within the character’s age-range. On that account, it is important to note that in *Knights* Athenians are denounced in their capacity as judges not just for aiding and abetting Kleon but also for doing so out of economic self-interest.

Besides the allusions examined above, the profit-maximization that drives the civic behavior of certain Athenians is expressed bluntly by Demos himself. During a lyric duet before the final *agōn*, the Chorus rebuke Demos for his gullibility towards *rhētores* and his delight in flattery, but he brazenly retorts (1121-30):

νοῦς οὐκ ἔνι ταῖς κόμαις | ὑμῶν, ὅτε μ’ οὐ φρονεῖν | νομίζετ’· ἐγὼ δ’ ἐκὼν | ταῦτ’
ἠλιθιάζω. | αὐτός τε γὰρ ἠδομαι | βρύλλων τὸ καθ’ ἡμέραν, | κλέπτοντά τε βούλομαι |
τρέφειν ἕνα προστάτην· | τοῦτον δ’, ὅταν ᾗ πλέως, | ἄρας ἐπάταξα.

There is no brain under the long hair of yours, since you think that I am absentminded while I am deliberately playing dumb. For I take pleasure in cooing for my daily pap and

⁴³ For an interesting analysis of the behavior of judges within a context of pluralistic actor preferences, see Carugati and Weingast (2018).

⁴⁴ In view of that, one should not consider that Aristophanes’ allegiance lies with his Chorus. For the satire directed against Athenian knights in the play, see Lysgaard Lech (2019).

choose to rear and keep a thief as a steward, whom I remove by knocking him down when he has gorged himself.⁴⁵

This Aristophanic song, as Parker observed, is unique “in offering an interpretation of the action which the audience would otherwise have no reason to think of,” and the interpretation is shocking.⁴⁶ The gullibility that had Demos seem like a vulnerable victim for more than half of the play is revealed to be a tool in the hands of a victimizer. Self-serving *rhētores* are deliberately led to increase public spending and later forced to “regurgitate whatever they might have stolen using the ballot-jar of the court as a probe” (1147-50 ἔπειτ’ ἀναγ- | κάζω πάλιν ἐξεμεῖν | ὅττ’ ἄν κεκλόφωσί μου, | κημὸν καταμηλῶν). Reading nine-tenths of the play as a pessimistic portrayal of Demos, Sommerstein argued that this claim to feigned gullibility and “crude calculation of self-interest is one that offers little comfort even if we believe it.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, it is not a matter of whether we take any comfort in or believe the genuineness of Demos’ twist of self-knowledge, but a matter of what *Knights* presents as the beating heart of a civic culture in decline, namely the self-interested calculation of profit-maximization.

At this point, after establishing crucial aspects of historicity in Aristophanes’ portrayal of Kleon and the Athenian judiciary, an issue of motivation comes to the fore. Considering the identification of judges with old Demos in *Knights*, the economic self-interest driving the actions of the latter by implication reflects the motivation of the former in real life. On that account, unless Aristophanes’ political commentary is to be dismissed as merely a gross exaggeration for the sake of laughter, an inquiry into the amount of distortion that reality undergoes on the comic stage in

⁴⁵ According to the “Old Oligarch,” poor Athenians were “fond of those complaisant and useful to themselves, even if bad;” cf. Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.19 γινώσκοντες δὲ τοὺς μὲν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ἐπιτηδείους καὶ συμφόρους φιλοῦσι, καὶ πονηροὶ ὄντι with Marr and Rhodes (2008) ad loc.

⁴⁶ Parker (1997), 178.

⁴⁷ Sommerstein (1981), 2.

this case is imperative. In other words, how legitimate is it to claim that economic self-interest could be a primary motivational factor for the engagement of everyday Athenians in a crucial aspect of democratic life such as court-service?

1.2 Court-Pay and Behavioral Science

The rule of law was one of Athens's most important cultural values; hence, the prospect of the judicial behavior of certain Athenians contravening civic ideals is not self-evident, and it goes without saying that it cannot be considered applicable for every Athenian citizen.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as suggested in the play, there were circumstances that would incite the adoption of utilitarian attitudes. For example, the Sausage-seller at some point warns Paphlagon-Kleon that (804-7):

ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀνάγκης ἅμα καὶ χρείας καὶ μισθοῦ πρὸς σε κεχήνη. ἢ εἰ δέ ποτ' εἰς ἀγρὸν οὗτος ἀπελθὼν εἰρηναῖος διατρίψῃ, ἢ καὶ χίδρα φαγὼν ἀναθαρρήσῃ καὶ στεμφύλω εἰς λόγον ἔλθῃ, ἢ γινώσεται οἴων ἀγαθῶν αὐτὸν τῇ μισθοφορᾷ παρεκόπτου.

[Demos] gapes at you out of need together with want and pay. But if he ever returns to the farm and spends time in peace, regains courage after eating boiled groats, and comes to eat olive cakes, he shall understand out of which goods you swindled him through pay.⁴⁹

As already noted above, the financial strains introduced by the Peloponnesian War were instrumental in fostering juridical misconduct. In lines 1121-30, however, Demos does not justify his civic behavior on a basis of need but on a basis of greed, and such a behavior can be gainfully examined against the background of the issues generated by the implementation of incentives.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the value placed on the rule of law in Athens, see Harris (2013a), 3-18.

⁴⁹ Besides court-pay, public pay (μισθος, μισθοφορά) in this passage could also encompass military payments, which many of the displaced farmers would have found profitable. Military service, both in the infantry and the navy, is identified by our sources as a major means of profit for “those in the full vigor of manhood” (Plut. *Per.* 12.5 τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἡλικίαν ἔχουσι καὶ ῥώμην αἱ στρατεῖαι τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν εὐπορίας παρεῖχον); cf. also Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 24.3 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.; Plut. *Per.* 11.4 with Stadter (1989) ad loc. According to Humphreys (1970), Athens's imperial expansion coupled with the Peloponnesian War brought about a structural change in the labor market of Attica, introducing greater dependence on public payments, and especially military ones. For the interest of Athenians in military service, particularly those of the thetic class, see Rosivach (2012a).

Although the war-induced economic strains and the socio-economic status of the majority of judges were conducive to the adoption of utilitarian attitudes, the presence of an incentive would have contributed to an exacerbation of the situation. Indeed, with Athenians supporting malicious prosecutions and even condemning wealthy defendants so as to secure a steady flow of income, it appears that for a part of Athens's judiciary motivational factors associated with the desire for the rule of law were crowded out.⁵⁰ A cause behind such a crowding-out effect can be traced back to court-pay and its effect on civic behavior *qua* incentive, given its potential to bring about what behavioral scientists described as “moral disengagement.” Furthermore, considering that court-pay was introduced more than two decades before the staging of *Knights*, its longevity in the sphere of justice administration must have been a major catalyst. After all, within any decision-situation, a move from “no incentive to a positive incentive can dramatically change the framing of the interaction and shift an individual's decision frame from social to monetary.”⁵¹

Court-pay would have a detrimental impact on the social preferences of its targets for more reasons than the way it framed court-service. In cases of externally incentivized behavior, we saw that the crowding out of social preferences can be the result of the meaning conveyed by an incentive to its target; hence, besides affecting civic behavior just by its mere presence, court-pay could be conducive to the crowding-out of social preferences on the basis of the message conveyed by its introduction. On that note, the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* provides an intriguing piece of information about the way court-pay was originally framed by the policymaker. Specifically, Perikles is said to have instituted court-pay as a political countermeasure against

⁵⁰ Bowles (2016, 46-51) characterizes the cases where the effect of an incentive is the extreme opposite of its intent as “strong crowding out.”

⁵¹ Gneezy, Meier, and Rey-Biel (2011), 200.

Kimon (27.3).⁵² Kimon, we are told, employed his enormous wealth to garner political support by offering liturgies, free meals, and handouts, so Perikles (27.4):

συμβουλεύσαντος αὐτῷ Δαμωνίδου τοῦ Οἴηθεν (ὃς ἐδόκει τῶν πολλῶν εἰσηγητῆς εἶναι τῷ Περικλεῖ, διὸ καὶ ὠστράκισαν αὐτὸν ὕστερον), ἐπεὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἡττάτο, διδόναι τοῖς πολλοῖς τὰ αὐτῶν, κατεσκεύασε μισθοφορὰν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις.

Because he was inferior in terms of private resources, following the advice of the son of Damonides of Oa (who was believed to be the mastermind behind most of Perikles' measures, due to which they ostracized him later) to give the multitude their own, instituted pay for service in the courts.⁵³

The son of Damonides, Damon, who reportedly conceived of court-pay, is a notoriously obscure figure, but recently Robert Wallace explored in detail his profile as a music theorist and radical democrat.⁵⁴ With reference to the passage above, Wallace argued that “the epigrammatic ‘give the people their own’ may have been a political slogan coined by Damon.”⁵⁵ Whether such a slogan circulated in Athens can only be a matter of speculation, but it is worth considering the impact of the attested framing of Perikles' motion for the introduction of court-pay. If the introduction of court-pay was justified on the basis of wealth distribution and not the facilitation of civic contribution, then Perikles' motion made no appeal to a synergy between incentive and social preferences.⁵⁶ Of course, court-pay might have also been framed as a tool for bolstering the citizens' ability to contribute to the quintessential democratic public good. Yet, in terms of

⁵² From the perspective of an economic rational-actor, court-pay has been shown to be one more measure, next to Perikles' citizenship law of 451 BCE and building program of 449 BCE, towards eliminating Kimonian opposition; see Lyttkens and Gerding (2018).

⁵³ cf. Plut. *Per.* 9.2 τούτοις ὁ Περικλῆς καταδημαγωγούμενος τρέπεται πρὸς τὴν τῶν δημοσίων διανομήν, συμβουλεύσαντος αὐτῷ Δαμωνίδου τοῦ Ὀαθεν, ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης ἰστόρηκε. For the evidence on the wealth of Kimon and Perikles, see *APF* 8429.XVI and 11811.VII respectively.

⁵⁴ See Wallace (2015). Given that Damonides, Damon's father, was also associated with Perikles, the fact that *Ath. Pol.* 27.4 refers to Damon by patronymic instead of proper name has long-puzzled scholarship about his chronology; see *ib.* 186-193.

⁵⁵ Wallace (2015), 118-119, quotation from 119. For the politics of Damon and his career as an adviser of Perikles, see *ib.* 51-76.

⁵⁶ Achieving an equilibrium between social preferences and incentives is a complicated matter and in no way measurable *ex ante*; see Bowles (2016), 65-75. According to Trundle (2017, 16-18), however, the implementation of incentives under Perikles eventually accomplished a further democratization of Athenian politics; hence, if the goal behind the introduction of court-pay was to inculcate civic spiritedness, the measure was successful to an extent.

reinforcing the rule of law, the evidenced framing of the incentive adds one more reason as to why it did not take long for it to backfire.⁵⁷

If the crowding-out effect of court-pay on social preferences pertaining to the administration of justice in Athens was as strong as our sources suggest, an equally serious issue comes to the fore about democratic deliberation. The crowding out of people's intrinsic motivation due to the introduction of extrinsic incentives can lead to a "motivational spill-over effect," even if the area in which the incentive was applied is not the same as the one where pro-social behavior is affected.⁵⁸ For Athens, then, Aristophanic comedy suggests that the traditional *homo oeconomicus* rationality induced by court-pay and amplified by the constraints of the Peloponnesian War had a significant spill-over into other areas of civic mindedness.

The reference to the alleged phratry of the old judges in *Knights* hints at the mutually self-interested reciprocity between ordinary citizens and Kleon extending beyond the courts and into the Assembly. In this regard, when one of the slaves imitates Paphlagon's cajolery routine, he says: "Demos, first judge one case and then take your bath; open up, gulp down, chomp, have three obols!"⁵⁹ Athenian courts would judge multiple private cases in a single day, so someone could garner political support, as explicitly suggested in *Wasps*, by proposing "that the jurors should

⁵⁷ From an elitist point of view, the courts were a tool of wealth *re*-distribution. For example, after discussing how the liturgy system enriches the poor to the detriment of the rich, the "Old Oligarch" claims that in the courts as well the poor "are not so much concerned with justice as with their own advantage;" cf. Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.13 ἔν τε τοῖς δικαστηρίοις οὐ τοῦ δικαίου αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον μέλει ἢ τοῦ αὐτοῖς συμφόρου with Marr and Rhodes (2008) ad loc. Equally, Aristotle (*Pol.* 2.1274a) argues that after Perikles public payments were constantly raised by demagogues so as to pander to the poor masses. Nevertheless, Rosivach (2014, 180) pointed out that "there is no evidence that the democratic leaders who brought in the legislation establishing and expanding the stipends for public service conceived of them as a mechanism for transferring money from the rich to the poor." In this regard, the slogan of Damon was not a call for the poor to drain the rich, but for them to claim the wealth created by their own efforts as they expanded the reach of Athens's empire; cf. Azoulay (2014), 78-83, 144-145.

⁵⁸ Frey (1997a), 35-39. The example used by Frey is indicative: children whose parents attempt to motivate them to mow the lawn by an incentive could end up being unwilling to do other housework for free as well.

⁵⁹ *Eq.* 50-1 ὦ Δῆμε, λοῦσαι πρῶτον ἐκδικάσας μίαν, ἰ ἐνθοῦ, ῥόφησον, ἔντραγ', ἔχε τριῶβολον.

have a half-holiday with a full day's pay."⁶⁰ In particular, while extolling the tremendous power of the courts, Philokleon proclaims that: "even in the Assembly, no one ever managed to get a motion passed if he did not propose that courts should adjourn as soon as they had given their first verdict" (594-5 *κάν τῷ δήμῳ γνώμην οὐδεὶς πάποτε' ἐνίκησεν, ἐὰν μὴ ἰεῖπῃ τὰ δικαστήρι' ἀφείναι πρώτιστα μίαν δικάσαντας*). In this passage, however, the implication about the use of such a proposal in order to garner political support has proven to be puzzling. Athenian courts and Assembly met on different days, so a premature dismissal of the former would not induce increased participation in the latter. In addition, increased participation in the Assembly would be redundant, given that a motion could pass with a bare majority of those present on a given meeting.⁶¹ For the passage in *Wasps*, then, Zachary Biles and Douglas Olson commented that:

Perhaps there was sufficient overlap between the citizens who attended the Assembly on a regular basis and those who served as jurors.... [T]he assumption in any case is that the members of the Assembly are identical to the jurors, so that offering something to the latter is a guaranteed way to win the favour of the former. Or it may be a mistake to look for logic here, the point being simply that politicians naturally play to the public's disinclination to work any more than it has to.⁶²

If such an overlap held true, there is more than adequate logic here, as for a *rhētōr* to propose a partial court-holiday as a rider to a bill, and thus secure a bare majority of votes, certain demographic calculations were in place.

The Athenian Assembly required a quorum of 6,000 citizens for some categories of business, and this can be assumed to be its generally expected attendance size.⁶³ In view of that, given the preponderance of Athenians citizens in the body of 6,000 judges for whom public payments would translate into subsistence or social security (see Appendix I), it only follows that

⁶⁰ MacDowell (1971) ad 594-5. Contrary to private cases, public prosecutions would take up the entire day of a given panel of judges; cf. Harrison (1971), 47 n. 4, 156; Hansen (1991), 187-188.

⁶¹ For the organization of the Athenian Assembly, see Hansen (1991), 125-141.

⁶² Biles and Olson (2015) ad 594-5.

⁶³ See Introduction, p. 19.

their representation could be commensurate in a deliberative body of the same size. Interestingly, in the prologue to *Wasps*, when the slave Sosias relates his dream of an Assembly meeting, a devouring monster (i.e. a theriomorphic representation of Kleon) is haranguing sheep that sit together, holding their walking sticks and wearing their threadbare cloaks.”⁶⁴ On that account, the fact that the motivational spill-over effect, as Frey observed, is expected to be the larger “[t]he more similar the *people* are who act in an area with or without external intervention” seems to apply.⁶⁵ Consequently, if a majority of Athenians acted as Assembly-goers on the economic motives that informed their behavior as judges, then an alarming political behavior ensues, since that majority could have imposed economically biased policymaking, the implementation of which came to the detriment of the rule of law.

Taking the above into account, it appears that the economic calculations imputed to the behavior of judges were also the result of a consolidation of political interest. It would be a mistake, however, to describe this phenomenon as a formation of a political party or support base for a specific *rhētōr* advocating favorable public spending. As demonstrated by Herman Hansen, political parties, in the sense of large groups of ordinary voters regularly following particular political leaders, did not exist in classical Athens, while coalitions of smaller groups of followers were never large enough to control the majority vote.⁶⁶ Regardless, the benefit out of political payments could have consolidated an interest group, which would attract rather than require representation, since the political sway of a populous citizen-group would have been tremendous. As the judges in *Wasps* make clear, it is not just Kleon that needs to pander to their appetites, but

⁶⁴ *Vesp.* 32-5 ἐκκλησιάζειν πρόβατα συγκαθήμενα, | βακτηρίας ἔχοντα καὶ τριβώνια | κάπειτα τούτοις τοῖς προβάτοισι μούδοκει | δημηγορεῖν φάλαινα πανδοκεύτρια with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

⁶⁵ Frey (1997a), 36, emphasis in the original.

⁶⁶ See Hansen (2014). On the absence of political parties in classical Athens from the viewpoint of political economy, see Tridimas (2011), 74-76.

anyone aspiring to political prominence. By implication, then, such an interest group was not so much prone to be manipulated by ambitious *rhētores* but rather to abuse its power and interfere with the *polis*' juridical and deliberative functions for its own benefit.⁶⁷

In summary, the judges' behavior, as represented by old Demos in *Knights*, is part of Aristophanes' commentary on multiple negative phenomena in Athens's civic sphere of activity whose origins trace back to the implementation of incentives. The vitiation of the rule of law by self-serving *rhētores* is the main object of criticism, but Kleon and his likeminded peers would have no success with their tactics if the Athenians manning the courts had moral qualms about acting in ways that would be conducive to juridical misconduct. Such moral qualms were apparently dissolved by the moral disengagement introduced and gradually solidified by the implementation of an incentive. From this perspective, Aristophanes presents a civic culture where the detrimental effects of incentives are aggravated by *rhētores* who take advantage of and at the same time pander to the profit-maximizing mentality of everyday citizens, which is already amplified within the financial context of the Peloponnesian War. Therefore, answering the question as to whether economic self-interest could be a primary motivational factor for the civic engagement of Athenians, there is much to suggest that Aristophanes' commentary—however much distorted for comic effect—was a product of observation.

1.3 Public Choice in the Age of Themistokles

The spearhead of Aristophanes' criticism against the degenerative effects of material self-interest on Athenian public life manifests itself in the use of Themistokles and his legacy as a paradigm. The era of Themistokles is extolled as an example of a time when utility was conceived in

⁶⁷ As discussed by Harris (2013b, 94-96), the ideal behind deliberation in the Assembly was not to promote the benefit of some but to determine public policy on matters affecting the community as a whole.

communal rather than individual terms. To comprehend fully why this early fifth-century figure and his time feature so prominently in *Knights*, a brief excursus is necessary.

Herodotus and Thucydides are our earliest sources on Themistokles' political career, which comprised two deeds that made history.⁶⁸ The first one was his admonition in 483 BCE to invest a windfall from the Laurium mines in building 200 triremes, which was the basis for the interpretation of the famous Delphic oracle about the “wooden walls” and the subsequent salvation of Athens during the Persian invasion of 480 BCE.⁶⁹ Following the defeat of the Persian forces, the second one was the stratagem that allowed Athenians to build their Long Walls and finish the fortification of the Peiraeus—the latter instigated by Themistokles himself back in 493 BCE.⁷⁰ For modern scholarship, the suggestion to invest the silver bonanza in a ship-building program, instead of distributing it at a rate of 10 drachmas per citizen, has been considered radical and visionary; thus, Themistokles has been invariably portrayed as the inventor of Athenian public finance. Nevertheless, after establishing that the structural changes necessary for the development of Athens's navy had already taken place in the sixth century, Hans Van Wees argued that the naval program of 483 BCE was not conceived out of the blue.⁷¹ What was radical about Themistokles' proposal was not the invention but the change in the scale of public finance, which brought about a fleet of unmatched size for the Greek world at the time.⁷² More recently, building on Van Wees' argument, Barry O'Halloran attempted to analyze further how such a change in

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive survey of the literary and archeological evidence of Themistokles' life, see Podlecki (1975).

⁶⁹ cf. Hdt. 7.140-144; Thuc. 1.14; Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 22.7; Plut. *Them.* 4, 10; Nep. *Them.* 2.2. Our sources provide conflicting data both on the amount of the silver windfall (100 and 200 talents) and the number of ships built (100 and 200 triremes). For the stalemate debate that ensued from attempts to reconcile the information, see O'Halloran (2018), 116-118.

⁷⁰ cf. Thuc. 1.89-93; Plut. *Them.* 19. According to Thucydides, the fortification of the Peiraeus was initially undertaken when Themistokles was eponymous archon (1.93.3 ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἀρχῆς ἧς κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν Ἀθηναίους ἠρξεν). Despite some attempts to challenge the traditional date for Themistokles' archonship (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.34.1), the consensus remains for 493/2 BCE; cf. Podlecki (1975), 45-66; Rhodes (1992) ad 22.7.

⁷¹ See also Haas (1985).

⁷² Van Wees (2013a), especially at 3-5 and 103-105.

public finance necessitated in turn “an intense application of a network of institutions which then triggered an avalanche of qualitative re-ordering whose political, economic and social consequences were unprecedented.”⁷³ Consequently, despite his ostracism and conviction for medism *in absentia*, the patriotic narrative of Athenians held Themistokles to be a hero of the Persian Wars and the one to lay the foundations of their naval empire.⁷⁴

In *Knights*, Themistokles is explicitly mentioned five times. The first reference appears in the prologue, and it is heroizing. The two slave-*rhētores* consider drinking bull’s blood to find relief from Paphlagon’s pestering behavior, since when it comes to dying like a real man “the death of Themistokles is preferable.”⁷⁵ The next four references appear during the notional Assembly meeting (763-959) held for Demos to appoint his new steward. As seen above, the Sausage-seller at some point warns Paphlagon-Kleon about the revelation of his venality ensuing from the advent of peace. To this warning, Paphlagon retorts that it is shameful to calumniate before the people of Athens someone “who has benefited the city more than Themistokles.”⁷⁶ Upon hearing this, the Sausage-seller remonstrates (813-8):

σὺ Θεμιστοκλεῖ ἀντιφερίζεις; ἢ ὃς ἐποίησεν τὴν πόλιν ἡμῶν μεστὴν εὐρῶν ἐπιχειλῆ, ἢ
καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἀριστώσῃ τὸν Πειραιᾶ προσέμαξεν, ἢ ἀφελῶν τ’ οὐδὲν τῶν ἀρχαίων

⁷³ O’Halloran (2018), 127. From an economics perspective, in the chapters following his analysis of Athens’s so-called Naval Revolution, O’Halloran discusses in depth the market mechanisms that allowed naval procurement (128-163), the institution of trierarchy vis-à-vis the provision of public goods (164-182), the Athenian innovations in nautical design and technology (183-211), as well as the infrastructure developments pertaining to the maintenance of the fleet (213-228).

⁷⁴ See Frost (1968), 105-110; Podlecki (1975), 86. For Themistokles’ ostracism, medism, and adventures in Asia, cf. Thuc. 1.135-6; Plut. *Them.* 23-32. The heroizing tradition around Themistokles starts in the classical period already and extends well beyond, while the narratives about his death reconcile his exile and medism with honor; see McKechnie (2015).

⁷⁵ *Eq.* 82-4 πῶς δῆτα, πῶς γένοιτ’ ἂν ἀνδρικότατα; ἢ βέλτιστον ἡμῖν αἶμα ταύρειον πιεῖν· ἢ ὁ Θεμιστοκλέους γὰρ θάνατος αἰρετώτερος. For Kurke (2002, 105-107), Themistokles is invoked throughout *Knights* as an anti-paradigm, “a kind of ‘patron saint’ presiding over the corrupted activities of the demagogues of the 420’s.” However, this reading is justified only if one sees the Sausage-seller as yet another “demagogue” that throws his hat in the political ring for the sake of swindling Demos.

⁷⁶ *Eq.* 810-2 οὐκ οὐκ δεινὸν ταυτί σε λέγειν δῆτ’ ἔστ’ ἐμὲ καὶ διαβάλλειν ἢ πρὸς Ἀθηναίους καὶ τὸν δῆμον, πεποηκότα πλείονα χρηστὰ ἢ τὴν Δήμητρα Θεμιστοκλέους πολλῶ περι τὴν πόλιν ἤδη;

ἰχθῦς καινοὺς παρέθηκεν· ἰ σὺ δ' Ἀθηναίους ἐζήτησας μικροπολίτας ἀποφῆναι ἰ διατειχίζων καὶ χρησμοδῶν, ὁ Θεμιστοκλεῖ ἀντιφερίζων.

You measure yourself with Themistokles? He found our city half full and left it full to the brim; he also kneaded the Peiraieus-cake for her lunch, and he served new fish without taking away any of the old ones. You, on the other hand, Mr. Better-Themistokles, have only sought to make Athenians the citizens of a petty *polis*, shutting them within walls and chanting oracles.

Within three lines, the Sausage-seller has set out Themistokles' legacy. To “fill the city to the brim” alludes to the reconstruction of the walls destroyed by the Persians, the “Peiraieus-cake” to the fortification of the port in connection to the city, and the “new fish” to the expansion of Athenian economy after establishing a thalassocracy.⁷⁷ Paphlagon-Kleon is deemed ludicrous for setting himself against such achievements, given that he has made Athens “smaller” by working towards protracting the war and thus, in keeping with Perikles' defensive policy, congesting the city with people.⁷⁸

As recognized by scholars, Paphlagon-Kleon's claim suggests that Kleon compared himself to Themistokles, and his unexpected yet critical success at Pylos in 425 BCE would have provided a most opportune moment for bragging.⁷⁹ In view of that, Paphlagon's attempts to

⁷⁷ See Podlecki (1975), 59-60; Marr (1966). In view of Thuc. 1.93.2 (μείζων γὰρ ὁ περίβολος πανταχῆ ἐζήχθη τῆς πόλεως), Marr reads the “new fish” as a reference to the expansion of the city's enclosed space. On the contrary, in view of Thuc. 2.38.2 (ἐπεσέρχεται δὲ διὰ μέγεθος τῆς πόλεως ἐκ πάσης γῆς τὰ πάντα), Podlecki reads it as a reference to the volume and variety of imports. Considering the pervasive use of food as a metaphor for money in the play, I read the “new fish” as a reference to the expanded economy of Athens *qua* empire; cf. Anderson and Dix (2020) ad loc. For an analysis of Athenian imperialism from an economic perspective, see Kallet (2013); Azoulay (2014), 73-78. For food metaphors about Athens's imperial revenue in *Knights*, see Anderson (2008).

⁷⁸ The participle διατειχίζων is read by Sommerstein (1981, ad loc.) as well as Anderson and Dix (2020, ad loc.) in conjunction with *Vesp.* 41 τὸν δῆμον ἡμῶν βούλεται διιστάναι (he [sc. Kleon] wants to set our people at variance), and thus as an allusion to Kleon's attempts to foment communal strife. However, in this interpretation διατειχίζω (*LSJ* s.v. “cut off and fortify by a wall, divide as by a wall”) functions as a metaphor for διίστημι (*LSJ* s.v. “to set apart, set at variance”); hence, reading the participle this way in the present context, the attempted comparison of Themistokles' territorial and economic expansion of Athens next to its contraction under Kleon seems to be lost. The verb διατειχίζω does not necessarily mean “cut off by a wall” as in “divide in halves,” but “cut off by a wall” from a notional whole, which in the context of the Peloponnesian War would be rural Attica; cf. Diod. Sic. 14.38.7 for the διατειχισμός of the Chersonese by the Spartan general Derkylidas.

⁷⁹ Podlecki (1975), 59; Sommerstein (1981) ad 812; Anderson and Dix (2020) ad 810-12. For the affair at Pylos, see Thuc. 4.3-4.41.

supplant Themistokles in the Athenian patriotic imaginary are not limited to direct claims to his legacy, but extend to explicit copycatting.⁸⁰ First, the “wooden wall” oracle gave Themistokles a certain reputation as an adroit interpreter (χρησμολόγος), to which Paphlagon-Kleon obviously aspires in his obsession with oracles.⁸¹ Second, as Themistokles constantly reminded his compatriots of his achievements, so Paphlagon-Kleon alludes to his success at Pylos *ad nauseam*.⁸² Nevertheless, the most important point that Aristophanes seems to be driving home is not Kleon’s aping of Themistokles, but rather the gradual shift of gears in terms of civic mindedness after the illustrious generation of the Persian Wars, which brings us to the fifth and final reference to Themistokles a couple of lines later.

After several rounds of threats and slanders, the Sausage-seller resorts to a trick that eventually tips the balance of the stewardship contest. In addition to a new pair of shoes (868-74), Demos is presented with a sleeved chiton, to which he exclaims (884-6):

τοιουτονὶ Θεμιστοκλῆς οὐπόποτ’ ἐπενόησεν. | καίτοι σοφὸν κάκεῖν’ ὁ Πειραιεύς·
ἔμοιγε μέντοι | οὐ μείζον εἶναι φαίνεται’ ἐξέρημα τοῦ χιτῶνος.

⁸⁰ Paphlagon’s prayer to Athena as μεδέουσα (763-4 τῆ μὲν δεσποίνῃ Ἀθηναίᾳ τῆ τῆς πόλεως μεδεούσῃ | εὐχομαι) has been identified as a direct allusion to Themistokles and a suggestion that Paphlagon is the goddess’ new favorite; see Anderson (1989). Aristophanes seems to further ridicule Kleon’s aspirations to Themistokles’ legacy in terms of education, as the latter was renowned for his lack of musical education (ἀμουσία), which he defended by saying that “he did not know how to tune the lyre and handle the harp, but to take a small and inglorious city and turn it into a glorious and great one” (Plut. *Them.* 2.3 λέγων ὅτι λύραν μὲν ἀρμόσασθαι καὶ μεταχειρίσασθαι ψαλτήριον οὐκ ἐπίσταται, πόλιν δὲ μικρὰν καὶ ἄδοξον παραλαβὼν ἔνδοξον καὶ μεγάλην ἀπεργάσασθαι). In the case of Paphlagon-Kleon, the Chorus stress (985-95) how his venality manifested itself in his “pig-education” (ὕομουσία). For musical education and its significance for statesmanship, see Hanson (2003), especially at 351-361 for Themistokles.

⁸¹ For Paphlagon-Kleon’s fixation with oracles, cf. *Eq.* 109-17, 797-800, 966-1097, 1229-48. For Themistokles as a successful interpreter of oracles, see Bowden (2003), 272-274. For the general disdain exhibited in Aristophanic comedy towards divination and similar activities, see Smith (1989).

⁸² According to Plutarch, when Themistokles had to deal with slanders from his fellow citizens due to his greatness, he “was forced to become tiresome for making them remember time and again his achievements when addressing the Assembly” (22.1 ἠναγκάζετο λυπηρὸς εἶναι τῶν αὐτοῦ πράξεων πολλακίς ἐν τῷ δήμῳ μνημονεύων); cf. also Frost (1968, 120) on the possible χορηγία of Phrynikhos’ *Phoenissae* by Themistokles. In terms of Pylos, it is repeatedly suggested in the play that Paphlagon-Kleon has run his success into the ground; cf. *Eq.* 75-6, 353-5, 702, 742-3, 843-6, 1005-6, 1058-9, 1166-7, 1171-2.

Never has Themistokles ever thought of such a thing. And yet the Peiraieus was ingenious, but to my mind it does not look like a greater invention than this chiton.

This remark shows that Themistokles was remembered for fortifying the port of the Peiraieus, but Demos, according to Anthony Podlecki, “ludicrously prefers to it the tunic which the sausage seller offers him.”⁸³ Ludicrousness aside, such a preference is in line with the kind of self-interest that old Demos exhibits throughout the play, and Aristophanes apparently suggests that the ability to appreciate the utility stemming from public investments in the long run has dissipated. In fact, this shift from a mindset of long-term, communal to one of short-term, individual utility calculation is further problematized at the end of the play in relation to Themistokles’ ship-building program.

After becoming the new steward, the Sausage-seller rejuvenates old Demos and gives him a hard lesson by pointing out past mistakes. As noted above, one of those mistakes had to do with the abuse of juridical power to guarantee adequate funds for court-pay (1356-61). In the same vein, the Sausage-seller points out that (1350-3):

καὶ νῆ Δί’ εἶ γε δύο λεγοίτην ῥήτορε, ἢ ὁ μὲν ποιεῖσθαι ναῦς μακράς, ὁ δ’ ἕτερος αὖ ἢ καταμισθοφορήσαι τοῦθ’, ὁ τὸν μισθὸν λέγων ἢ τὸν τὰς τριήρεις παραδραμῶν ἂν ὄχθετο.

If two *rhētores* made proposals, by Zeus, one to build long warships and the other to lavish money on public payments, the payment-guy would prevail over the ship-guy by far.

This dilemma between investing and disbursing public funds bears a similarity to the past that has not eluded scholarly attention. The passage clearly reaffirms the naval policy of Themistokles, as henceforth, when faced with “the decision whether to spend money on triremes or on direct pay to the citizens, Demos will build triremes.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, no such dilemma would—or did—ever present itself in the last third of the fifth century, given Athens’s navy-based offensive strategy against Sparta and its allies.⁸⁵ The passage thus makes no pretense to castigating a current political

⁸³ Podlecki (1975), 60.

⁸⁴ Edmunds (1987a), 163; cf. also Sommerstein (1981) ad loc.; MacDowell (1995), 105; (1996), 195-197.

⁸⁵ For the overall strategy employed by Athens, see Thuc. 1.140-4.

malpractice. Instead, this reference to the shipbuilding debate back in 483 BCE functions on a symbolic level, offering a model of the past on how deliberation on public goods *should* work in the present.

In the last two decades, the debate regarding the silver windfall in the age of Themistokles and its implications for the modelling of the voters involved has generated substantial literature in social science. Nicholas Kyriazis and Michael Zouboulakis have analyzed the naval program of 483 BCE as a factor of institutional change, arguing that it was opposed by rich but supported by poor citizens, as the latter saw it as beneficial for an extension of the franchise, employment opportunities, industrial development, and the acquisition of new skills—all of which led to what they term “economic democracy.”⁸⁶ Based on the concept of economic democracy and the continuous voting it required within a direct democracy, Kyriazis further argued that the choice to invest in shipbuilding represented a balance between altruism and self-interest. Even though the voters sacrificed personal consumption in the form of 10 drachmas per citizen for the public good of defense, still their desire for extended citizen rights and employment opportunities represented self-interest.⁸⁷ These motivational assessments for the vote of Athenians in 483 BCE have two blind spots. On the one hand, they unconsciously take the influence of naval warfare on the development of democracy for granted. Among ancient historians, despite the fact that some scholars propound a military determinism behind the advent of radical democracy, the exact influence of war on democratic institutions is a matter of intense debate.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the

⁸⁶ Kyriazis and Zouboulakis (2004).

⁸⁷ Kyriazis (2009), 111-116.

⁸⁸ The direct impact of war on Kleisthenes’ reforms in 508 and the expansion of the franchise—the so-called “hoplite revolution”—has been discussed from several angles, more in opposition than support, yet there still is no comprehensive study on the link between war and democratic consolidation; cf. mainly Hanson (1995); Raaflaub (2007); Van Wees (2004); (2013b), while the vast bibliography on the subject is compiled by Pritchard (2007b, 328-344). In the same vein, considering the connection that Aristotle (*Pol.* 1306a) and the “Old Oligarch” (*Ath. Pol.* 1.2) drew between naval power and institutional change, Strauss (1996) was the first to propound the idea that triremes became “schools of democracy” for poor Athenians, but this as well as other relevant arguments have not gone

altruism that Kyriazis ascribed to the motivation of poor Athenians has been called into question. Analyzing the choice of investing in defense as one consistent with the self-interest of every Athenian, George Tridimas argued that to evoke altruism to explain the vote outcome is unnecessary. Specifically, by employing economics of conflict as a methodological tool, Tridimas stressed the detail of Herodotus' narrative regarding the war that Athens was already waging against Aigina in the 480s BCE.⁸⁹ Accordingly, given that increased military expenditure would spell increased probabilities of victory, an investment of the revenue from the mines in defense would result in a larger utility payoff than any other option of money transfer, so non-economic arguments for the motivation of voters seem to be unwarranted.⁹⁰

Certainly, in his allusion to Themistokles' proposal in 483 BCE, Aristophanes was not preoccupied with how much self-interest went into the decision to invest in shipbuilding. Even if that decision were wholly self-interested by the standards of social scientists, it was an unequivocally positive one that went down in history as such. The issue addressed here seems to be the narrowing of the concept of utility entertained by Athenians in comparison to the past. This comparison is also stressed when the Chorus claim during the *parabasis* (565-80) that the generation of the Persian Wars was characterized by a heroic selflessness that is nowhere to be found anymore. In both cases, Aristophanes employs the glorious past of Athens to raise an alarm for the present, as a detrimental shift appears to have taken place in terms of civic attitude.⁹¹ After

unchallenged; cf. Ceccarelli (1993). For the debate on the political impact of naval warfare, see Pritchard (2010b), 54-57; O'Halloran (2018), 238-262.

⁸⁹ Hdt. 7.144.1 τότε Θεμιστοκλέης ἀνέγνωσε Ἀθηναίους τῆς διαίρεσιος ταύτης παυσαμένους νέας τούτων τῶν χρημάτων ποιήσασθαι διηκοσίας ἐς τὸν πόλεμον, τὸν πρὸς Αἰγινήτας λέγων (“at that time, Themistokles persuaded the Athenians to make no such distribution [i.e. 10 drachmas per citizen] but instead use the money to build 200 triremes for the war, that is, for the war with Aigina”).

⁹⁰ Tridimas (2013), 443-452.

⁹¹ Next to myths, as Boedeker (1998), 192-196) argued, the Persian Wars were an integral part of Athenian arts, especially in the search for laudable models of behavior that could help construct a past which underpins a radically innovative present. For the function of the Persian Wars in the ideological discourse of Athens, see Loraux (1986), 155-171.

“outdueling the Persians in defense of the country at Marathon” and “rubbing his rump off rowing at Salamis,” old Demos has fallen into disgrace due to an inflated economic self-interest that has rendered him myopic towards public goods.⁹² Therefore, *Knights* poignantly suggests that the veneer of heroism for those who stood against Persia is flaking, since Athenians of that generation now undertake civic duties just for the sake of material profit and usher to political prominence any sort of pseudo-Themistokles advancing their narrow self-interests. Nonetheless, given Demos’ rejuvenation at the end, the play closes on an optimistic note; thus, it is worth considering whether Aristophanes imparted any kind of advice towards rectification of the issue at hand.

1.4 Comedy and Civics I

By this time, it is perhaps clear that *Knights* is less of a criticism against specifics of political leadership and more of a commentary on the utilitarianism that brings about the kind of leadership criticized. As reiterated in the end, old Demos was willfully swindled by demophilic rhetoric (1340-5) and would support proposals of alleged demophiles for the sake of his own financial utility (1350-4); thus, the motivational disposition of ordinary citizens, especially those serving as judges, towards civic functions lies at the heart of the play’s political commentary.⁹³ In this regard, *Knights* reveals the adverse effects of economic policy that sought to incentivize civic contributions to public goods, and a behavioral science approach to the social reality of the 420s

⁹² *Eq.* 781-5 σὲ γάρ, ὃς Μήδοισι διεξιφίσω περὶ τῆς χώρας Μαροθῶνι... ἀλλ’ ἐπαναίρου, ἢ κἄτα καθίζου μαλακῶς, ἵνα μὴ τρίβῃς τὴν ἐν Σαλαμῖνι. As noted by Anderson and Dix (2020 ad 781), “[t]he Marathon reference puts Demos in his eighties at least.” In terms of age, the portrait of Demos is obviously exaggerated, but this seems to be consistent with a generation-specific portrait; cf. Handley (1993), 417-421; *Vesp.* 235-9 with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. Apparently, Aristophanes is not concerned here with demographic reality but rather with a perceived deterioration of a once glorious generation. In view of that, the valorization of a past, where both *rhētores* and people were virtuous, next to a debased present, where *rhētores* are rapacious and the people reduced to slavery, appears to have been a topos in both comedy and fourth-century oratory; see Carey (2016).

⁹³ For the topos of “*demophilia*” in Athenian political discourse and its perverse sexualized use in *Knights*, see Bennett and Tyrrell (1990), 243-252; Scholtz (2004). For the political meaning and use of ἔρωσ in fifth century Athenian democracy, see Zaccarini (2018).

BCE corroborates the realism of this revelation. As a result, given the emphasis put on the utility-maximizing mentality that detrimentally pervades key aspects of Athenian politics, the political vision espoused by *Knights* calls for a closer examination.

As noted by Sommerstein, we should not expect a blueprint for political change by a comic playwright, but the personal and institutional targets of one's satire give away "what aspects of the existing system one perceives as being in need of drastic change, and in what directions one sees it as desirable to change them."⁹⁴ In his description of the "alternative democracy" articulated in *Knights*, however, Sommerstein considers that its main features, especially the one regarding public payments, constitute the sketch of an antidemocratic program. Specifically, he made the questionable claim that Aristophanes' "alternative democracy will either abolish, or drastically curtail, public pay for civic functions, especially for jury service."⁹⁵ In consideration, then, of the fact that "it was *only* oligarchic regimes that sought to abolish jury pay," the political vision of *Knights* is deemed similar to the hackneyed vision of elitists, best expressed by the "Old Oligarch."⁹⁶ Nonetheless, in *Knights*, instead of an insistence on the dysfunctional nature of the democratic polity, there are incisive ideas towards reform, especially with regard to citizen motivation, yet those have been muddled in the eccentricity of the play's finale.

For 1315 out of 1408 lines of the play, the thematic axis of its plot is the search of Demos' slave-*rhētores* for salvation, which according to an oracle would appear in the form of another

⁹⁴ Sommerstein (2009), 206.

⁹⁵ *ib.* 207. Sommerstein follows the arguments of de Ste. Croix (1972) regarding all references to public payments in Aristophanic comedy being nothing more than "aristocratic sneer." Arguing against Spielvogel (2003, 16-19) and the passages cited in support of the claim that abolition of public payments was never among Aristophanes' proposals, Sommerstein (*ib.* 207, nn. 14 and 15) cites lines from *Knights* (51, 255, 798-807, 1359) that are simply all the references to court-pay, which never suggest or even faintly hint at Aristophanes advocating its abolition. According to Sommerstein, court-pay "makes the citizen see his civic and political activities as a source of income instead of a public duty." Although correct, this is an observation about Aristophanes' commentary on a problem stemming from incentives; thus, to project on the playwright a solution he never in fact proposes seems unwarranted.

⁹⁶ *ib.* 211-212.

villain—one who would out-Paphlagon Paphlagon (109-49). Coming from the dregs of society (178-94, 409-26, 1236-47), the Sausage-seller certainly beats Paphlagon in his own game as he reaches the apogee of bombast (285-301, 335-43, 691-727), shamelessness (356-81, 903), slander (315-8, 429-52, 461-74, 801-19, 823-35, 847-57, 896-8, 927-40), and cajolery (733-55, 769-95, 869-89, 906-11, 1154-223). Consequently, after assuming the steward’s position, he is expected to turn into one more exploiter of Demos, but one of friendlier disposition towards his fellow slave-*rhētores*. Nevertheless, when the Sausage-seller magically rejuvenates old Demos, he not only offers relief from Paphlagon’s insidiousness but also readjusts Demos’ entire political outlook.

This turn of events has been considered an inconsistency of the plot, which has led to modern assessments of the play’s dramatic structure as unsatisfactory.⁹⁷ In search of coherence, Roger Brock analyzed the ending as the convergence of a double plot structure; the salvation of Demos’ unnamed slaves who are deemed to represent honorable *καλοὶ κάγαθοί* on the one hand, and the reformation of Athenian politics on the other. In this regard, the premise of the first plot can find at best only an *optimistic* solution, given that the Sausage-seller’s stewardship does not restore the *καλοὶ κάγαθοί* to their rightful place; hence, Demos’ restoration to a conservative self, “before the rise of demagogues,” effects the *ideal* solution.⁹⁸ In a different manner, considering that *Knights* is concerned with the restoration of order to Demos’ household, Larry Bennett and Blake Tyrrell identified a factor of unification in what they termed the “*pharmakos* complex.” Plainly put, in search of a savior, the Chorus of knights support someone like the Sausage-seller since his utter loathsomeness makes him the ideal *pharmakos* for the community—a marginal figure who brings a religious solution by driving out pollution and bringing in prosperity by virtue

⁹⁷ Landfester (1967, 83-89) provides a summary of negative assessments predating the publication of his own commentary.

⁹⁸ Brock (1986), especially at 22-23.

of his standing on a polar extreme.⁹⁹ While ingenious in terms of resolving a seeming incongruity in the plot, the above analyses fall rather flat because such an incongruity does not seem to exist. Despite his obnoxious credentials, the magic that the Sausage-seller performs on Demos is not out of character; instead, it is the miraculous result following from the manifestation of an altruistic civic-mindedness.¹⁰⁰

During the third *agon*, the Sausage-seller plainly demonstrates that his aspiration to stewardship is informed by altruism rather than self-interest, as he serves Demos everything in his basket, while Paphlagon only serves the scraps of what he withholds in his basket for himself (1211-23). The altruistic motivation of the Sausage-seller is not a total surprise. Although unseen during his attempts to establish that he is worse than Paphlagon, his distinct character was hinted at quite early in the play. On entering the stage, the Sausage-seller is immediately accosted by the two slave-*rhētores* trying to make him join their cause, but he remains hesitant about his ability to become “a leader of Athens,” “a great man,” “a chief of the crowd,” and “a steward of the people.”¹⁰¹ In an attempt to convince him otherwise, one of the slave-*rhētores* recites an oracle portending Paphlagon’s demise, the message of which is part cryptic and part obvious. The first part refers to the defeat of a “leather-eagle” by a “blood-sucking snake,” and the second part explains that “the god grants great glory to the sausage-sellers, unless they prefer to sell their wares.”¹⁰² The slave-*rhētōr* obviously misses the operative word in the second part of the oracle,

⁹⁹ Bennett and Tyrrell (1990).

¹⁰⁰ The Sausage-seller is as a shameless scoundrel of the market (181 πονηρὸς κάξ ἀγορᾶς εἶ καὶ θρασύς), born to low-status parents (186 ἔκ πονηρῶν γ’), and barely literate (188-9 οὐδὲ μουσικὴν ἐπίσταμαι | πλὴν γραμμάτων, καὶ ταῦτα μέντοι κακὰ κακῶς), while his childhood was that of a delinquent; cf. *Eq.* 411-12 with Olson (2016a).

¹⁰¹ cf. *Eq.* 164 τούτων ἀπάντων αὐτὸς ἀρχέλας ἔσει; 178 ἀνὴρ μέγιστος; 191-2 ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ | ἔτ’ ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους; 212 τὸν δῆμον οἶός τ’ ἐπιτροπεύειν εἴμ’ ἐγώ.

¹⁰² *Eq.* 200-1 κοιλιοπώλησιν δὲ θεὸς μέγα κῦδος ὀπάξει, | αἶ κεν μὴ πωλεῖν ἀλλᾶντας μᾶλλον ἔλονται.

which is none other than “unless.” In other words, the Sausage-seller will never bring the current state of political affairs to a halt, unless he decides to pursue an active participation in politics.

The altruistic motivation behind the decision of the Sausage-seller to actively engage in politics is obfuscated only by the way he is argued into the quest for Demos’ stewardship, since political participation is presented by the slave-*rhētōr* as a brazen pursuit of self-interest, especially of an economic nature.¹⁰³ Under this rationale, when the Sausage-seller becomes the new steward, the same slave-*rhētōr* exclaims (1254-6):

ὦ χαῖρε, καλλίνικε, καὶ μέμνησ’ ὅτι | ἀνὴρ γεγένησαι δι’ ἐμέ· καί σ’ αἰτῶ βραχύ, | ὅπως
ἔσομαί σοι Φᾶνος, ὑπογραφεὺς δικῶν.

Hail, oh triumphant one, and remember that you have become somebody thanks to me. I only ask that I become your Phanos: a signatory of your indictments.

Evidently, the new stewardship is presumed to be yet another era of corrupt politics, only slightly moderated for the benefit of more than one self-serving *rhētōr*. Nevertheless, the request of the slave-*rhētōr* to become a crony to the Sausage-seller, as Phanos was to Kleon, goes unanswered and fades into the immediate conversation.¹⁰⁴ At this point, one must not assume that the request is met with an affirmative gesture by the actor but with an emphatic indifference, since a radical break with the past has taken place: a political layman has taken a bold step into the arena of politics and has done so for the benefit of the Athenian citizens collectively.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ cf. *Eg.* 157-8 ὦ μακάρι’, ὦ πλούσιε, | ὦ νῦν μὲν οὐδεὶς, αὔριον δ’ ὑπέρμεγας (“oh, you blessed one, you rich one, you being today a nobody but a fat cat tomorrow”), 166-7 βουλήν πατήσεις καὶ στρατηγοὺς κλαστάσεις, | δήσεις, φυλάξεις, ἐν πρυτανείῳ λαικάσει (“you shall trample the Council, humble, chain, and imprison the generals, suck cocks at the Prytaneum”), 176 διὰ σοῦ ταῦτα πάντα πέρναται (“all these [i.e. political power and institutions] are bought and sold through you”).

¹⁰⁴ See Anderson and Dix (2020) ad loc. Phanos is an otherwise unknown figure, but Aristophanes identifies him as one of Kleon’s cronies; cf. *Vesp.* 1220.

¹⁰⁵ As observed by Lauriola (2017, 364-365 with n. 96), the adjective φιλόδημος (fond of the people) appears to be an Aristophanic coinage, used to unambiguously denote one’s disposition towards the common people. In *Knights* (787), the adjective is only used to characterize the Sausage-seller. On the propounded convergence of interest across socio-economic classes in the play, cf. Hubbard (1989); Anderson (2003).

In terms of political advice, *Knights* projects the need for a vigorous engagement with politics on the part of everyday citizens. The story of the Sausage-seller, whose name is revealed to be Agorakritos (i.e. “disputant in the marketplace,” or “chosen by the Assembly”), is a story of success for the common Athenian, especially at a time when amateurism was looked down upon by habitual Assembly-speakers such as Kleon.¹⁰⁶ For example, in the famous Mytilenean debate reported by Thucydides, a reprimand is put in Kleon’s mouth regarding the ardent desire of every Athenian to make a speech, making them unable to distinguish between rhetoric and substance for the issue at hand.¹⁰⁷ In the same vein, Paphlagon-Kleon sneers at Agorakritos’ oratorical aspirations, sarcastically remarking that he was emboldened by “winning a petty lawsuit against a metic” and so thinks that he can address the people after “muttering a thing throughout the night, spouting it along the streets, and reciting it to friends until boring them.”¹⁰⁸ Despite the contempt that Kleon shows for the common denominator in the Assembly, during the Mytilenean debate it is a seeming layman—an otherwise unknown Diodotus, son of Eukrates—that overturns his motion.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, “the Sausage-Seller is the everyman who is fortunate enough to realize the political dream that Cleon, in both Thucydides and Aristophanes, ridicules: he talks his way into the center of Athenian political life and makes himself the darling of the Demos.”¹¹⁰ In view of

¹⁰⁶ *Eq.* 1257-8 ΔΗΜ. ἐμοὶ δὲ γ’ ὅ τι σοι τοῦνομ’ εὔπ’. ΑΑΛ. Ἀγοράκριτος· ἢ ἐν τὰγορᾷ γὰρ κρινόμενος ἐβουλόμην with Anderson and Dix (2020) ad loc.

¹⁰⁷ The debate regards the fate of the Mytileneans after their revolt, with Kleon arguing for putting all male citizens to death plus selling their families into slavery; see Thuc. 3.36-40, especially at 3.38.6 καὶ μάλιστα μὲν αὐτὸς εἰπεῖν ἕκαστος βουλόμενος δύνασθαι.

¹⁰⁸ *Eq.* 346-50 ἀλλ’ οἴσθ’ ὅ μοι πεπονθέναι δοκεῖς; ὅπερ τὸ πλῆθος. ἢ εἴ που δικίδιον εἶπας εἶ κατὰ ξένου μετοίκου, ἢ τὴν νύκτα θρυλῶν καὶ λαλῶν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς σεαυτῷ, ἢ ὕδωρ τε πίνων κάπιδεικνὺς τοὺς φίλους τ’ ἀνιῶν, ἢ ᾧ δυνατὸς εἶναι λέγειν. ὦ μῶρε, τῆς ἀνοίας.

¹⁰⁹ In his countermotion, Diodotus proposed a more lenient treatment for the people of Mytilene; see Thuc. 3.41-50. For Diodotus as an independent political voice and his intervention in the debate despite the general trend of political abstinence at the time, see Connor (1971), 22-25, 175-180. Ostwald (1979) attempted to save Diodotus from historical oblivion, but his arguments are highly speculative. For an analysis of the debate as a contest for the proper way to conduct deliberation in the Assembly, see Harris (2013b).

¹¹⁰ McGlew (1996), 350. As noted by McGlew (359), our ancient sources suggest that Kleon showed contempt for democratic deliberation, yet his “political nightmare, that the Athenians share a common dream to persuade the assembly, was, for Aristophanes, the first condition of political participation.”

that, some scholars have identified in Aristophanes' comic education for the ordinary citizen a lesson in political cleverness so as to keep machinations of elites in check and exercise an ideological control over intra-elite competition for the benefit of the masses.¹¹¹ As the present analysis of *Knights* suggests, however, the play is equally focused on the motivation that drives the everyman's participation in politics or scrutiny of political leadership.¹¹²

As seen above, Demos' disclosure of self-awareness in lines 1121-30 suggested a brutal game for contemporary Athenian politics, in which self-interested players seemingly alternate in the roles of victimizer and victimized, but Demos is always the player to call the shots. By introducing (or reintroducing) the factor of political altruism, the Sausage-seller transforms not the rules but the very game itself, bringing an end to the latest state of political affairs. This transformation is imperceptible to the slave-*rhētores* as well as many modern readers until its emphatic, miraculous manifestation removes all doubt. Accordingly, to read this transformation as a plot inconsistency is the side effect of focusing on the Sausage-seller as a character and not as a symbol, namely that of the selfless Athenian *homo socialis* and his ability to effect positive change.

After proving that his cunning surpasses that of Paphlagon but that his motives are selfless, the Sausage-seller returns on stage with a changed Demos.¹¹³ In his pursuit of self-interest, old Demos disregarded public goods for the sake of personal utility, but the new Demos exhibits a

¹¹¹ Henderson (1993) examined Aristophanic comedy as a forum for issues of public concern with the aim to channel elite competition into serving wider popular interests. Similarly, analyzing metatheatricality in Aristophanic comedy as a mirror image of politics, Slater (2002, 68-85) argued that through metatheater the poet attempts to re-educate his audience into being more perceptive of the "masks" elites wear in the arena of politics. Finally, for Zumbrunnen (2004) Aristophanes' aim is to encourage the potential of the everyday citizen for political cleverness that would be useful in challenging the cunning of self-serving elites.

¹¹² As noted by Harder (1997), Demos' transformation reestablishes his ability to think for himself rather than blindly assent to whatever his steward—and ἐραστής—may suggest.

¹¹³ By juxtaposing what our ancient sources tell us about the historical Kleon, Hall (2019, 81) argued that "[i]n Agorakritos, Aristophanes' experience of Cleon and the other non-aristocratic new politicians... allowed him to produce the most radical—even though fictional—political figure in ancient literature."

political farsightedness. He is now the same Demos as when he dined with heroes of the Persian Wars who established Athens as a major power in the Greek world: Miltiades, the triumphal general of Marathon, and Aristides, the first assessor of the tribute for the Delian League.¹¹⁴ New Demos has “his hair held in place by a golden cicada, radiant in the old fashion:” a style that went out of vogue after the Persian Wars.¹¹⁵ In other words, he is once again the same, visionary Demos as when he would vote for a silver windfall to be invested in public goods rather than distributed at 10 drachmas apiece. At the same time, however, by making an Athenian everyman his steward, new Demos will subject the self-interest of elites to harsh scrutiny as well.

The post-rejuvenation measures include the decimation of self-serving public prosecutors who exploited court-pay (1358-63), the payment of sailors on time (1366-8), the cessation of hoplite draft evasions through transfers (1369-71), and the prohibition of beardless leisured youths from frequenting the Agora and joining Assembly meetings (1373-83). The first measure aims at keeping in check self-serving *rhētores* who exploited court-pay for manipulating the courts. The second measure seems to suggest that the payment of poorer citizens who serve in the navy, the mainstay of Athenian power, will henceforth become a priority.¹¹⁶ The goal of the third measure is to curb the influence of elites on their military service, as exemption from hoplite service could be achieved by those wealthy enough to enjoy influence with the generals and so transfer to cavalry service instead.¹¹⁷ Finally, the fourth measure addresses the aspiration to empty rhetoric and court histrionics among young members of the elite who idle in the Agora, as now they shall be forced

¹¹⁴ *Eq.* 1325 οἶός περ Ἀριστείδη πρότερον καὶ Μιλτιάδῃ ξυνεσίτει. For the battle of Marathon, see *Hdt.* 6.108-15. For Aristides and his assessment of tribute, cf. *Thuc.* 5.18.5; *Plut. Arist.* 24.

¹¹⁵ *Eq.* 1331 ὄδ’ ἐκεῖνος ὀρᾶν τεττιγοφόρας, ἀρχαίῳ σχήματι λαμπρός. As we learn from *Thucydides* (1.6.3), wearing golden-cicada hair ornaments was fashionable before the 480s BCE.

¹¹⁶ For irregularities of pay for soldiers in general, see *Pritchett* (1971), 23-29.

¹¹⁷ See *Christ* (2004), 39.

to go hunting: an upper-class pastime of presumably good mental effects.¹¹⁸ All these measures, then, suggest that in the renewed political *status quo* elites aspiring to political leadership shall be forced by a motivationally transformed body politic to engage in communal affairs for the sake of the greater good.

Apparently, Aristophanes imparts much advice for curbing the self-interest of elites, but one is left wondering: what about the self-interest of the everyday citizen? What about the Athenians standing behind the persona of old Demos and portrayed as the most self-interested of all? Certainly, Aristophanes has not left them unscathed through the play; thus, the aphorism of the “Old Oligarch” regarding the one-sided ridicule of Old Comedy, always leaning against elites and never against the demos, seems out of place.¹¹⁹ Equally, Aristophanes does not espouse the “Old Oligarch’s” cynical attitude of excusing “the people themselves for democracy, for everyone is excusable for looking after his own interests.”¹²⁰ On the contrary, the comic poet denounces the self-interest that has turned the once glorious generation of the Persian Wars into a fifth column for the impairment of radical democracy, for which their fathers and themselves shed blood and sweat, in both external and internal struggles.

After hearing about his past mistakes, Demos feels ashamed (1355 αἰσχύνομαί τοι ταῖς πρότερον ἁμαρτίαις). His embarrassment can only mean that his rejuvenated self realizes a flaw in his character. In ancient Greek culture, shame arose from a particular act that revealed a fault of

¹¹⁸ cf. *Eq.* 1382 μὰ Δί' ἀλλ' ἀναγκάσω κυνηγετεῖν ἐγὼ with Anderson and Dix (2020) ad loc.

¹¹⁹ Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.18 κωμωδεῖν δ' αὖ καὶ κακῶς λέγειν τὸν μὲν δῆμον οὐκ ἐῷσιν, ἵνα μὴ αὐτοὶ ἀκούωσι κακῶς ... οὐχὶ τοῦ δήμου ἐστὶν οὐδὲ τοῦ πλῆθους ὁ κωμωδούμενος ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, ἀλλ' ἢ πλούσιος ἢ γενναῖος ἢ δυνάμενος (“They do not allow the demos to be a subject of comedy or abuse, so that they may not have a bad reputation... for the most part, the one to be ridiculed in comedy comes neither from the demos nor the masses, but he is rich, highborn, or influential”).

¹²⁰ Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.20 δημοκρατίαν δ' ἐγὼ μὲν αὐτῷ τῷ δήμῳ συγγιγνώσκω· αὐτὸν μὲν γὰρ εὖ ποιεῖν παντὶ συγγνώμη ἐστίν.

character and thus induced loss of esteem before the members of the community.¹²¹ In the present context, the act is to delegate political power to self-serving *rhētores* and vitiate democratic civic functions. Attempting to preserve Demos' dignity, the Sausage-seller tells him: “do not hold yourself responsible for those mistakes, but the ones who swindled you (1356-7 ἄλλ’ οὐ σὺ τούτων αἴτιος, μὴ φροντίσης, | ἀλλ’ οἱ σε ταῦτ’ ἐξηπάτων);” yet, the entire play has made explicit that the common citizen bears a significant part of the blame. The fault of character revealed by Demos' actions before his rejuvenation is the crude self-interest to which he gloatingly admitted in lines 1121-30. Nonetheless, given that court-obsessed citizens were the principal target of Aristophanes' *Wasps* only two years later, it appears that the public shaming of the behavior they embody in *Knights* fell flat—or, in keeping with the play's *ēthopoieia*, it fell on Demos' half-deaf ears.¹²²

Looking back at the play in its entirety, *Knights* presents its audience with an incisive political commentary and us, modern readers, with a trove of information on Athenians as political actors during the last quarter of the fifth century. Focusing on the developing practice of *rhētores* to abuse Athens's judicial system for their own interests, Aristophanes directs his satire against the most notorious practitioner but also against citizens who enable the phenomenon itself. Through old Demos, as the embodiment of Athenian citizenry, the play scrutinizes the civic motivation of Athenians, which is shown to have become exceedingly profit-driven. By figuring out Demos' strong inclination towards profit-maximization, Paphlagon-Kleon uses all the tools at his disposal so as to garner the favor necessary for him to maintain political prominence, and the result of this relationship is the impairment of fundamental democratic institutions. Contrary to

¹²¹ See Konstan (2003), 1042-1043.

¹²² For the shame-culture of ancient Greece and the way it generated a constant pursuit of positive reputation, see Konstan (2003), 1031-1042.

Paphlagon-Kleon's perverse love for Demos, the Sausage-seller becomes an example of the kind of love that Perikles urged Athenians to show their *polis* at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War.¹²³ Accordingly, making a protagonist out of a self-less everyday citizen, Aristophanes' *Knights* projects to its audience the necessity for a vigorous civic engagement premised on the reintroduction of altruism into their political vocabulary.

¹²³ cf. Thuc. 2.43 τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργω θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς ("you should contemplate, day to day, the power of our *polis* and become her lovers") with Hornblower (1996) ad loc.

Chapter 2: Wasps

As argued in the previous chapter, by presenting a shift in the civic motivation of the Athenian body politic towards self-interest in the course of the fifth century, *Knights* is a valuable document for the danger incentives posed to Athens's civic culture. Three years later, in his production for the Lenaia of 422 BCE, the critical eye of Aristophanes was once again fixed upon democratic institutions, and this time lawcourts were the explicit target of his satire. *Wasps* provides a detailed exposé of Athenian legal culture with regard to the citizens manning judge-panels and their motivation. Therefore, given the omnipresence of court-pay (300-1, 525, 605-6, 661-4, 684-5, 701-12, 784-5, 813, 1111-21), Aristophanic comedy once again opens up as a document for the problems associated with incentives and their effect on civic motivation.

Even though the main characters of *Wasps* are some of the most motivationally complex figures of Attic drama, the plot is simple. Two slaves open the stage bemoaning their guard-duty, since their rich snob of an owner, Bdelykleon, is bent on keeping his old father, Philokleon, in home confinement.¹ The old man suffers from “a curious disease,” which manifests itself in a frantic desire to serve as a judge in lawcourts (85-135).² When a Chorus of poor Athenian elders appear on stage to summon Philokleon on their way to the courts (230-394), Bdelykleon engages in a quarrel with them and then in an *agōn* with his father (415-759). The point of the *agōn* is to convince Philokleon to forgo court-service, which his son deems nothing more than a state of slavery and a concession to the tricks played by self-serving *rhētores*. By the end of the *agōn*, Bdelykleon wins his father and the Chorus over, but Philokleon is unwilling to abandon his favored

¹ For Bdelykleon's financial status and demeanor, cf. *Vesp.* 67-8, 135 with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

² cf. *Vesp.* 71 νόσον γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ἀλλόκοτον αὐτοῦ νοσεῖ, 87 τὴν νόσον τοῦ δεσπότη. Philokleon is also described as suffering from a form of mania (744 τότε' ἐπεμαίνετ'· ἔγνωκε γὰρ ἀρτίως). For the theme of mental disease and its structural significance in *Wasps*, see Sidwell (1989); (1990).

pastime; thus, in order to assuage his father's addiction, Bdelykleon institutes a home-court that will keep him occupied with harmless domestic cases (760-1008). A trial of such a case takes place on stage, where a dog is prosecuted for stealing a chunk of cheese. Despite his desire to convict, Philokleon is tricked into voting for acquittal, which results in a despairing withdrawal from court-service. Subsequently, for the sake of appeasing the old man, Bdelykleon attempts to introduce him to a new lifestyle and so teaches him the ways of a socialite, but to no avail (1122-264). During an off-stage symposium, we are told, Philokleon insulted the guests, ran away with the *aulos*-girl, and assaulted multiple citizens on his way back home. By the time Philokleon returns, the people he assaulted appear on stage to serve summonses, so Bdelykleon forces his father back into home confinement (1292-449). The play then closes with Philokleon coming down with a new form of mania, engaging in an endless wild dance alongside tragic choristers that brings the action to its finale (1474-537).

As in *Knights*, Kleon, his style of politics, and his manipulation of the courts loom in the background—something lucidly set forth by the very names of Philokleon (“Love-Kleon”) and Bdelykleon (“Loathe-Kleon”), the home-court scene, and the second *parabasis* (1284-91).³ Taking a cue from the telling name of the young protagonist and the leitmotif of Aristophanes’ enmity with Kleon, some scholars have assumed Bdelykleon, in his aversion to lawcourts and democratic politics, to be a mouthpiece of the playwright.⁴ Such an approach to the character and the play,

³ See MacDowell (1971), 1-4; (1995), 160-170; Lenz (1980), 15-28; Sommerstein (1983), xvi-xvii; Storey (1995); Biles (2016). The “dog of Kydathenaeum” acting as the prosecutor in the home-court scene unmistakably brings the historical Kleon to the fore; cf. *Vesp.* 894-5 ἐγράψατο | κῶων Κυδαθηναίους with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. For the dramatic function of the mockery against Kleon in *Wasps*, see Chronopoulos (2017), 106-197.

⁴ Bdelykleon’s metadramatic preamble to the *agōn* has been read as an explicit indication of the overlap between character and poet; cf. *Vesp.* 650-1 χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινῆς γνώμης καὶ μείζονος ἢ ’πὶ τρυγφοδοῖς | ἰάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετοκυῖαν (“it is difficult and requires formidable intellect, above that of comic poets, to heal the inveterate disease congenital to the city”) with Hubbard (1991), 114 n.3; Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. For a discussion of the political implications behind Bdelykleon’s reference to the “inveterate disease congenital to the city” against the background of Hippocratic imagery, see Hobe (2018).

however, is not without problems. Avowedly, Bdelykleon wants to keep his judging-obsessed father at home so as to protect him from the exploitation of Athens's judicial system and provide him a luxurious life.⁵ In achieving his first goal, Bdelykleon's success is twofold. During the *agōn*, he persuades Philokleon that court-service is unrewarding and then cures his obsession by tricking him into voting for acquittal during the home-court scene.⁶ Nevertheless, the attempt to introduce Philokleon to elite society has catastrophic results; thus, the turn of events in the last third of the play does not sit easily with arguments in favor of the identification of Bdelykleon with his artistic creator, especially in terms of political vision.⁷ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that assessments of the play's overall political outlook have been varied.⁸

In view of the above, it appears that the *ēthopoieia* of *Wasps* obfuscates its political commentary, as the complexity of its characters renders the implications of their actions elusive. Besides its *ēthopoieia*, however, the question of thematic unity presents additional challenges, as the play apparently deals with more than just Athens' judicial system. For two thirds of its plot, *Wasps* focuses on lawcourts (1-1008), then turns to the antics preceding and following

⁵ cf. *Vesp.* 504-6, 719-24, 736-42, 1003-7.

⁶ *Vesp.* 992 ἐξηπάτηται κάπολέλυκεν οὐχ ἐκόν ("he has been tricked and has acquitted him while not meaning to"). For the homeopathic properties of Bdelykleon's deception, see Sidwell (1990), 23-29.

⁷ For the identification of Bdelykleon with Aristophanes by virtue of them both being opponents of Kleon, skeptics of the democratic *status quo*, creators of theatrical illusions, and healers of disease, see MacDowell (1971), 8-9; Reckford (1977); (1987), 272-278; Hubbard (1991), 124-139; Olson (1996), 145-146; Biles and Olson (2015), xxxii-xxxiii. For justifiable objections to the identification of the character with the poet, see Slater (1996), 36, 46; Mirhady (2009), 376-377; duBois (2020), 166-167.

⁸ According to Konstan (1985), lawcourts are depicted as a bulwark of popular sovereignty but in a corrupt democracy, thus *Wasps* is "a dramatic denigration of the court system and a valorization of the upper-class ideals of withdrawal and privatism" (44); cf. also Konstan (1994), 48-50. In a different manner, Olson (1996) maintained that the play does not promote—*pace* Konstan—an anti-democratic agenda but a conservative democratic one, suggesting that a *dēmos* incapable of self-government had better "leave the details of government to others [sc. elites who have *dēmos*' best interest in mind] and enjoy the fruits of empire" (147); cf. also Biles and Olson (2015), xliv-lxii. Both Konstan and Olson espouse de Ste. Croix's tenets of comic conservatism, which apparently precludes a reading of any sort of edifying criticism in *Wasps*; yet this kind of approach has not gone uncontested. As noted by Mirhady (2009, 375-379), the play nowhere suggests that the *dēmos* should not be sovereign in the courts—just as *Knights* never does so about the Assembly—while the disastrous outcome of Bdelykleon's victory over Philokleon plainly undermines the former's political vision. Reading thus the play in a thematic continuum with *Knights*, Mirhady argued that *Wasps* highlights the need for Kleon's political influence to subside if a proper democratic culture is to be restored.

Philokleon's induction into elite society (1009-473), and it ends with a peculiar dance scene (1474-537). Despite the criticisms that imputed a loose structure, recurrent motifs have provided bases for unitarian readings of the play.⁹ On the other hand, several scholars have argued that the seemingly disjointed parts of *Wasps* are brought together under the theme of education, with Bdelykleon's futile attempt to change Philokleon's "waspish" nature tackling the age-old debate on whether social convention (νόμος) can successfully modify human nature (φύσις).¹⁰ In keeping with this approach, as will be argued below, an awareness of how incentives influence the motivation of individuals allows for a better understanding of both the play's *ēthopoieia* and its thematic unity, which in turn enhances our overall appreciation of its politics.

The present chapter is devoted to an analysis of *Wasps* through an examination that focuses on the motivation of its protagonists. The point of departure is the arguments Philokleon and Bdelykleon advance during the *agōn* with respect to the significance of court-service for the life of an Athenian citizen. Through the arguments of both protagonists Aristophanes paints a picture of Athens's political reality that reveals how self-interest factors into a lack of civic mindedness. Philokleon's advocacy for court-service is informed primarily by a desire for monetary profit and secondarily by a lust for power with hints of class-envy—in other words, anything but a sense of civic duty. The moral disengagement characterizing Philokleon is further stressed by the arguments Bdelykleon advances in order to sway him into abandoning court-service. Meanwhile, Bdelykleon's arguments map onto the psychological processes to which behavioral scientists attribute the attenuation of intrinsic motivation by the implementation of monetary incentives.

⁹ Vaio (1971) first proposed a unitarian reading based on the play's consistent treatment of the topics of costume, drinking, *Aesopica*, disease, and *agōn*. For a summary of older criticisms on the structure of *Wasps*, see ib. 335 n. 2.

¹⁰ See Whitman (1964), 143-166; Strauss (1966), 131-133; Banks (1980); Lenz (1980) 32-43; Bowie (1987); (1993), 78-101. From this perspective, the dance-off of the ending scene has been analyzed as the positive result of the education Philokleon undergoes during the play as a whole, moving from a position of passive spectatorship to a position of active, Dionysiac participation; see Slater (1996); Purves (1997).

Therefore, the part of *Wasps* that focuses on lawcourts presents the citizens manning them as motivated solely by a desire to maximize their subjective utility, while Bdelykleon's case against court-service reveals the heuristic value of behavioral science for the effects that incentives had on Athenian citizens.

Taking the above into account, civic motivation appears to be a key theme of the play. Despite the favorable scholarly assessments of his character, my claim with regard to Bdelykleon is that he was not meant to be sympathetic. Considering his political inactivity and aversion to civic life, the young protagonist hardly stands for an exemplary or even representative Athenian citizen. Moreover, given his attachment to elite circles, his actions cannot be read as motivated solely by filial piety, since he also desires to save face. In this regard, the generational gap between father and son in the play is bridged in one crucial respect.¹¹ Specifically, despite their conflicting attitudes in terms of civic engagement, both Philokleon and Bdelykleon are self-interested maximizers of their subjective utility.

In the end, reading the final scenes of *Wasps* through the lens of behavioral science reveals how the theme of education is central not only in assessing the play's unity but also its political advice. As noted in the introduction, when economic motivation becomes a norm, then it can perpetuate itself through cultural transmission to the detriment of the endogenous social preferences of a society's members. On that account, *Wasps* scrutinizes the way Athenians become more and more self-interested with every generation, since the re-education of Philokleon and its catastrophic outcome rest on a mechanism that perpetuates motivational attitudes founded on self-interest. Education, then, is indeed a major thematic axis for the plot, but not only in the sense of

¹¹ For the generational conflict between fathers and sons as a theme of Aristophanic comedy, see Whitman (1964), 119-166; Forrest (1975); Handley (1993); Strauss (1993), 153-166; Sutton (1993); Telò (2010); Morosi (2020).

ontological questions regarding the mutability of human nature. Philokleon's indifference to civic ideals has been passed on to his son, so when parent and child swap roles civic degeneration continues, and eventually, as evinced by Philokleon's behavior during and after the symposium, unbridled self-interest brings about a world of chaos where social (and dramatic) harmony disintegrates. As a result, the devastating outcome of Philokleon's crash course on elite lifestyle appears to be part of Aristophanes' scrutiny of the adverse social effects that stem from an intragenerational dissemination of self-interest with regard to civic behavior.

2.1 Studying the *Vespa Atheniensis*

Before looking at the *agōn*, the play's namesake demands some closer attention, since the "wasps" are not only citizens manning the Athenian courts but also citizens of a narrow social group that entertains a specific civic attitude.¹² As revealed by their delight in singing songs of Phrynikhos and their reminiscing about their youthful martial exploits at home and abroad, Philokleon and his peers belong to the generation of the Persian Wars.¹³ Their present condition, however, is not representative of their glorious past. Poverty-stricken and cantankerous in their old age, the Chorus no longer expend their energies in battles but in the courts.

From the moment they appear on stage, accompanied by their children for assistance, the Chorus are presented as scraping by on the three obols of court-pay. The coryphaeus chides his young son for wasting lamp-oil (251-3), decries the boy's request for dry figs as extravagant since court-pay must be spent on necessities (297-302), and worries lest the court does not sit for the

¹² On Aristophanes' choice of the wasp for his Chorus, Corbel-Morana (2012, 136-170) argued that it is informed by the symbolic value of autochthony (cf. *Vesp* 1076 Ἀττικοὶ μόνοι δικαίως ἐγγενεῖς αὐτόχθονες) with which this specific insect is vested in the Athenian popular imaginary already during the archaic period.

¹³ cf. *Vesp*. 218-21, 236-7, 266-70, 1076-101. For Phrynikhos, see Suda φ 762.

day thus depriving them of dinner (303-311).¹⁴ Within such dire financial straits, the old judges are said to have developed a special relationship with Kleon, who is not only their avowed patron (242 Κλέων ὁ κηδεμών) but also the one to coordinate them. Specifically, we are told that Kleon has ordered them to be on time for the impending trial of Lakhes on the charge of embezzlement, and have “three days’ worth of *wicked* anger” (242-3 ἡμῖν ἐφεῖτ’ ἐν ὄρῳ ἢ κειν ἔχοντας ἡμερῶν ὀργὴν τριῶν πονηράν).¹⁵ The adjective “wicked” (πονηράν) is revealing for the nature of the judges’ anger, given that with respect to meter “δικαίαν [“rightful”] would have fit the verse just as well.”¹⁶ In other words, the old judges are well aware of their unseemly civic behavior—something also indicated by Philokleon’s own characterization of his actions as evildoing.¹⁷ With defendants, then, being as good as convicted before even reaching the courts, the play straightforwardly portrays Kleon as a manipulator of the judicial system, and the judges as Kleon’s willing collaborators, invested in court-service only for the sake of making a living.¹⁸

The way Aristophanes scrutinizes the implications of the old judges’ relationship with Kleon for the Athenian judicial system is readily recognizable. The situation echoes the one in

¹⁴ Beyond the *parodos*, the poverty of the Chorus is emphasized time and again. For example, when Philokleon calls to his aid some fellow judges by name, those names are evocative of their activities and dependence on the legal system; cf. *Vesp.* 401 ὦ Σμικυθίων [“Small-ie”] καὶ Τεισιάδῃ [“Punish-ie”] καὶ Χρήμων [“Cash-ie”] καὶ Φερέδειπνε [“Dinner-fetch-ie”] with Kanavou (2011, 94-95) and Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. In addition, when accusing Bdelykleon of tyrannical aspirations, the Chorus identify themselves as the poor of Athens; cf. *Vesp.* 463-4 ἄρα δῆτ’ οὐκ αὐτὰ δῆλα ἰ τοῖς πένησιν.

¹⁵ The details of the prosecution of Lakhes by Kleon (if there was one) are unknown; cf. MacDowell (1971), Sommerstein (1983), and Biles and Olson (2015) ad 240.

¹⁶ Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. Bdelykleon also characterizes his father as πονηρός with reference to his threats of suing for being kept in home confinement; cf. *Vesp.* 192-3 πονηρός εἶ πόρρω τέχνης καὶ παράβολος (“you are wicked, deceitful, and out of control”) with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

¹⁷ cf. *Vesp.* 320-2 βούλομαι γε πάλαι μεθ’ ὑ- ἰ μῶν ἐλθῶν ἐπὶ τοὺς καδίς- ἰ κους κακόν τι ποιῆσαι (“I want a long time now to do some evil, coming with you at the voting-urns”), 340 οὐκ ἐὰ μ’, ὦνδρες, δικάζειν οὐδὲ δρᾶν οὐδὲν κακόν (“he does not let me judge, men, nor do anything evil”).

¹⁸ cf. *Vesp.* 1112-3 εἷς τε τὴν ἄλλην δίαϊτάν ἐσμεν εὐπορώτατοι ἰ πάντα γὰρ κεντοῦμεν ἄνδρα κάκπορίζομεν βίον (“as regards the rest of our life, we are most resourceful; we sting every man and make a living”) with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. For the notional team formed by judges and Kleon, cf. *Vesp.* 197, 242-4, 408-10, 596-7.

Knights, where old Demos—in full knowledge of his slaves’ depravity—ostensibly danced to Paphlagon’s tune with an acquiescence premised on a calculated pursuit of self-interest. *Wasps* paints a similar portrait for old judges, who are aware of their transgressive civic behavior as well as the insidiousness of their patron. The latter becomes clear when Philokleon, eventually weaned off court-service, indignantly exclaims: “by Herakles, while I am among the judges, may I not catch Kleon guilty of theft hereafter” (757-9 μὰ τὸν Ἡρακλέα | μὴ νυν ἔτ’ ἐγὼ ἴν τοῖσι δικασταῖς | κλέπτοντα Κλέωνα λάβοιμι).¹⁹ This straightforward avowal of knowledge regarding Kleon’s allegedly habitual embezzlement has been read by Sommerstein as a slip for the play’s pro-Kleon character, but Biles and Olson challenged this reading of inconsequentiality, arguing for poetic intentionality instead.²⁰ In fact, as we shall see, neither the portrayal of the Chorus nor that of Philokleon provide any reason to assume that their relationship with Kleon is premised on any sort of ethical considerations. On the contrary, Philokleon, as a representative of the old judges, advances during the *agōn* a case for court-service in a crescendo of self-interest, which climaxes with the three obols of court-pay.²¹

The *agōn* is sparked by Bdelykleon, who equates court-service to slavery and challenges his father to expound on the benefits accrued from it (512-20). Taking up the challenge, Philokleon insists that the judges’ power is equal to that of a king (546-9). When in courts as defendants, he explains, men of the upper socio-economic strata, who would otherwise be indifferent to non-peers, grovel and plead for the judges’ mercy (550-8); thus, given the elites’ wheedling and self-pitiful rhetoric as well as their parading of their children (560-74), judges are said to wield an

¹⁹ Philokleon’s prior knowledge of Kleon’s alleged malfeasance is reaffirmed during the following scene, where Bdelykleon assumes the role of Kleon and starts the Harmodios *skolion* saying “there never was yet born in Athens,” and his father takes it up saying “such a knave or such a thief” (1226-7 ΒΔ. οὐδεὶς πώποτ’ ἀνὴρ ἔγεντ’ Ἀθήνας— | ΦΙΛ. —οὐχ οὕτω γε πανούργος <οὐδὲ> κλέπτῃς).

²⁰ cf. Sommerstein (1983) ad loc.; Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

²¹ For Philokleon as a spokesman for the judges collectively, cf. *Vesp.* 526-47, 631-49.

authority that allows them to make a mockery of wealth (575 ἄρ' οὐ μεγάλη τοῦτ' ἔστ' ἀρχὴ καὶ τοῦ πλούτου καταχρήνη);²² Philokleon then enumerates the blessings he enjoys through his authority, which include the voyeuristic pleasure of inspecting young boys about to register as citizens, the theatrical and musical performances by artist-defendants, the tampering of wills regarding heiresses, and the utter lack of oversight as regards judicial verdicts (578-87).²³ The list continues with the importance of the cases referred to the courts by the Assembly or the Council, the overall necessity to coddle the judges so as to pass a motion in the Assembly, and the profuse pampering they receive from powerful men like Kleon and Theoros (590-602). Yet, before reaffirming the judges' authority and equating it to that of Zeus (619-30), Philokleon concludes with the “sweetest of benefits” (605 ἡδίστον τούτων ἐστὶν πάντων): court-pay.

The predominance of monetary profit among the factors contributing to the utility Philokleon accrues from court-service is not at all surprising. Prior to the *agōn*, when it is agreed to let the Chorus arbitrate whether judging is equal to slaving, Philokleon pledges to abide by the verdict or may he never judge again, but the phrasing of his pledge is telling: “may I never again drink neat *court-pay* in honor of the Good Spirit” (525 μηδέποτε πίοιμ' ἄκρατον μισθὸν Ἀγαθοῦ Δαίμονος).²⁴ This paraprosoikian substitution of court-pay for wine implies that monetary compensation is the gateway to the pleasure of court-service, much as a drink of unmixed wine was the ritual that instigated the sympotic merrymaking after a dinner.²⁵ Similarly, Bdelykleon later on claims that public prosecutors effectively exhort judges by pointing out that latecomers

²² For the practice of defendants bringing their children to the courts to plead for mercy, cf. Pl. *Ap.* 34c; Dem. 21.99.

²³ Based on the reforms proposed in the *Laws* (12.945e-948b), it appears that for Plato the lack of accountability for those involved in the administration of justice was a problem of the Athenian legal system in need of correction; see Harris (2021a).

²⁴ On the sympotic function and ritual significance of the so-called cup of the *agathos daimōn*, see Tolles (1943), 77-90.

²⁵ See MacDowell (1971) ad loc.; Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

“shall not receive the three obols” (689-90 ὅστις ἂν ὑμῶν ἢ ὕστερος ἔλθῃ τοῦ σημείου, τὸ τριώβολον οὐ κομιεῖται).²⁶ On that remark, Biles and Olson noted that the prosecutors appeal to court-pay “as if it were all that mattered,” and Philokleon has made it adequately clear that—for the most part—it is.²⁷ Furthermore, the old man draws a direct line of causality between court-pay and his wife and daughter’s affection (605-12) as well as his sense of autonomy, since the three obols alleviate his material dependence on his son (612-8). Finally, when Bdelykleon cajoles him into abandoning the real lawcourts for a mock-lawcourt set at home, Philokleon’s most persistent concern is whence court-pay will come (784-5, 813). Therefore, the monetary reward ensuing from court-service is the key factor of utility motivating the voluntary service of the old protagonist.

At this point, a juxtaposition of the *parodos* with Philokleon’s declamation raises a serious issue, since the juridical behavior of Philokleon and his peers is shown to directly contradict the oath sworn by Athenian judges. The four main pledges of the judicial oath stipulated that judges must 1) vote in accordance with the laws, 2) listen to both the accusers and defendants equally, 3) vote with their most just judgment and impartially about matters for which there are no laws, and 4) consider only matters pertaining to the charge.²⁸ As seen above, the Chorus are on their way to the court already in rage against the defendant (243), and the coryphaeus explicitly says that “Lakhes will get it today” (240 ὡς ἔσται Λάχητι νυνί); thus, the judges have made up their minds before even sitting in the court.²⁹ This lack of impartiality is further documented when Philokleon

²⁶ The term *συνήγορος* is applicable to multiple offices, but in this case the reference is to the ten citizens who acted as prosecutors on behalf of the *polis* at the accounts (*εὔθυνα*) after the end of magistrates’ terms; see MacDowell (1971) ad 482.

²⁷ Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

²⁸ See Harris (2013a), 101-137, and 353-356 for the available evidence from oratory.

²⁹ Despite its peculiar syntax, the sense of ὡς ἔσται Λάχητι νυνί is clear, see Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. When we witness Philokleon’s behavior in “court” during the dog-trial scene, his attitude is equally biased. After hearing the prosecution, he looks at “Lakhes” and exclaims: “What a scum! He has the looks of a thief. He is all grinning and think he will fool me” (900-1 ὦ μιὰρὸς οὐτός. ὡς δὲ καὶ κλέπτον βλέπει. ἢ οἶον σεσηρὸς ἐξαπατήσειν μ’ οὔεται).

claims that, although he hears what defendants have to say (562 ἀκροῶμαι πάσας φωνὰς ἰέντων εἰς ἀπόφυξιν), the intensity of the judges' wrath can be only *slightly* relaxed (574 τῆς ὀργῆς ὀλίγον τὸν κόλλοπ' ἀνειμῆεν) after excessive entreaties (560-74). In other words, besides being biased, the judges' disposition towards defendants is also contingent on extralegal factors. The latter is also indicated by the fact that an actor-defendant is “not acquitted unless he chooses and recites the best speech from *Niobe*” (579-80 οὐκ ἀποφεύγει πρὶν ἂν ἡμῖν | ἐκ τῆς Νιόβης εἴπη ῥῆσιν τὴν καλλίστην ἀπολέξας).³⁰ Moreover, arguing that judges offer heiresses to the person “most successful in their supplications” (586 ἔδομεν ταύτην ὅστις ἂν ἡμᾶς ἀντιβολήσας ἀναπαίση) in utter disregard for wills, Philokleon in effect admits that they take no account of their pledge to use their most just judgment.

Other than revealing his flagrant misconduct in the performance of civic duty, Philokleon's declamation also sketches a motivational profile that raises an equally serious issue on the level of civic ideology. Among the various aspects of the administration of justice conducive to the gratification of those engaged, the satisfaction of contributing to a public good is conspicuously absent. As noted by Niall Slater, the ease with which Philokleon later transitions from the real courts to the farce of domestic judging orchestrated by his son plainly indicates that “[there has never been] any belief on his part that his jury duty served any real social purpose.”³¹ Furthermore, it should be noted that Bdelykleon's father is not exceptional among his peers. The elders of the Chorus express their wholehearted agreement with every point he makes during the *agōn*, claiming

³⁰ The Oiairos mentioned by Philokleon as the defendant (579 καὶν Οἰαίρος εἰσέλθη φεύγων) is not a real person, but a metonymy for an old-fashioned performer that reveals the age of the judges and their aesthetic preferences; see Cowan (2021). As regards *Niobe*, whether Philokleon refers to the play by Aeschylus or the one by Sophocles is unknown; see Biles and Olson (2015), ad loc.

³¹ Slater (1996), 33. Moreover, as noted by Whitman (1964, 150), every blessing Philokleon claims for a judge “amounts to nothing more than a gratification of the ego or the libido, or both, and the total adds up to a tremendously satisfied self.”

that they have never heard someone speak “so clearly and sensibly” (631-3 οὐπόποθ’ οὔτω καθαρώς | οὐδενὸς ἠκούσαμεν οὐδὲ | ξυνετώς λέγοντος).³² Equally, following the foundation of Bdelykleon’s home-court, the Chorus pray to Apollo for its success in order for them to be “saved from their wanderings” (873 παυσσάμενοις πλάνων). In other words, their nightly treks to the courts, like the one that brought them on stage, so as to guarantee a judge’s seat and pay for the next day. As a result, the civic motivation of the “wasps” as a group is predicated solely on a self-interested satisfaction of utility, which in turn translates primarily into monetary profit.

2.2 Money Talks

The utility-maximizing motivation of judges in the world of *Wasps* becomes most painfully apparent in Bdelykleon’s successful case against court-service, which is as devoid of civic ideals as his father’s case in defense of it. In order to debunk Philokleon’s claims through and through, Bdelykleon has made a point of taking detailed notes.³³ Accordingly, he makes individual notes on the supplications of elites (559), the mockery of wealth (576), the lack of oversight of the judges’ actions (588), and seemingly several more on the blessings listed by his father (603-4).³⁴ Nonetheless, not all points raised by Philokleon are met with a counter, as his son focuses largely on the prospect of profit-maximization, criticizing court-pay as something financially infinitesimal in the grand scale of Athens’s public finance.

³² As noted by Biles and Olson (2015 ad loc.), the response illustrates “the chorus’ gushing enthusiasm, but without pointing to any specific feature of Philokleon’s performance or any particular strong points in his argument.”

³³ *Vesp.* 538 καὶ μὴν ὅσ’ ἂν λέξῃ γ’ ἀπλῶς μνημόσυνα γράψομαι ἑγώ (“Look here! I will write down for myself notes of absolutely everything he says”).

³⁴ Although not explicitly mentioned in the text, Bdelykleon must have kept on taking notes even after Philokleon is done speaking; cf. *Vesp.* 631-47 with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

Bdelykleon prompts his father to do the math for himself: if one adds the tribute from the empire to the state's tax-revenue, the yearly total comes close to 2,000 talents (656-60); thus, given that court-pay for all 6,000 judges does not exceed 150 talents a year, the judges get the short end of the stick (661-3).³⁵ Although in part exaggerated, the accuracy of Bdelykleon's calculations is inconsequential next to the idea driving his argument, namely that civic engagement is only as desirable as its prospect for monetary profit.³⁶ Of course, such an argument would appeal to someone acting in the civic sphere of activity as a *homo oeconomicus*, and indeed, upon realizing that court-pay does not even amount to 10% of the state's annual revenue, Philokleon's response is one of distress (664). When asked where the rest of the money goes, Bdelykleon responds that it is pocketed by *rhētores* in the form of bribes from the allies (665-77). Although this assertion establishes the lack of serious political or economic analysis on Bdelykleon's part, the point that those who toiled to establish the empire make no profit (672, 678-9) is met with comic acknowledgment. Hearing that he has never gotten so much as "a head of garlic to spice boiled fish," Philokleon admits that only yesterday he sent for three cloves of garlic from the grocer (679-80 ΒΔ. οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ σκορόδου κεφαλὴν τοῖς ἐψητοῖσι δίδωσιν. | ΦΙΛ. μὰ Δί' ἀλλὰ παρ' Εὐχαρίδου καὐτὸς τρεῖς ἄγλιθας μετέπεμψα).³⁷ Knowing all too well that Athenian politics is not an arena of economic peers, however, Philokleon does not seem to have an interest in public finance or distribution policy.³⁸ Consequently, obviously annoyed, he calls his son back to the

³⁵ For the listed sources of tax revenue, see Olson (2017).

³⁶ As regards Athens's projected annual revenue, although Bdelykleon seems to be giving a ballpark figure, the estimate of 2,000 talents per year has been shown to be reliable; see Stockton (1990), 11; Spielvogel (2001), 86-129; Biles and Olson (2015) ad 656-60. On the other hand, the projected annual expenses on court-pay are exaggerated. Not all 6,000 judges were required for every day the courts met, and even if that were the case, the sum of 150 talents would require 300 business-days in a given year—at least 75 days more than normal; see Hansen (1979).

³⁷ The ignorance of public finance the play here imputes to Philokleon is remarkable, especially given the collection and public display of the imperial tribute at the City Dionysia each year; cf. Isoc. 8.82. For the ideological implications of this event, see Goldhill (1990). For the knowledge of Athenian citizens on matters of public finance, see the discussion in 2.4 below.

³⁸ cf. *Vesp.* 552-5, 564-5, where Philokleon relates the joy of having elites involved in politics at his mercy.

original subject of their debate: the slavery of the judges (681 ἀλλ' αὐτήν μοι τὴν δουλείαν οὐκ ἀποφαίνων ἀποκναίεις).

Bdelykleon initially offers three arguments in support of his position. First, he claims that *rhētores* and their lackeys occupy highly salaried public offices, while judges themselves, whose past military feats created the imperial stream of revenue, are content with just three obols (682-5). Second, even scurrilous young men, who serve as public prosecutors, boss old judges around by warning them that they will not get their pay if they are late to court, while prosecutors themselves get their one-drachma pay regardless of punctuality (686-91). Finally, it is alleged that whenever a defendant bribes those serving as public prosecutors, those who serve as co-prosecutors in a case share the bribe between them and then pull the wool over the judges' eyes during the trial (692-5). Out of those three arguments, the first two fall between the cracks, and the persuasion or lack thereof characterizing each one is telling. As regards the salaries for offices (ἀρχαί), while others might be making more money, Philokleon previously highlighted that judges occupy the only office lacking accountability (587 καὶ ταῦτ' ἀνυπεύθυνοι δρῶμεν· τῶν δ' ἄλλων οὐδεμί' ἀρχή). In the same vein, exposing the inequality in terms of compensation and effort between judges and public prosecutors seems to be of no avail. It is only the point about the profiteering of public prosecutors that induces an indignant reaction on Philokleon's part, which suggests that for a citizen whose civic engagement is informed by profit-maximization, political corruption is a problem only as long as the opportunities for profiteering are exclusionary.³⁹

³⁹ *Vesp.* 696-7 ταυτί με ποιοῦσ'; οἴμοι τί λέγεις; ὡς μου τὸν θίνα ταραττεῖς, ἰ καὶ τὸν νοῦν μου προσάγει μάλλον, κοῦκ οἶδ' ὅ τι χρῆμά με ποιεῖς ("they really do this to me? Oh, what are you saying? You stir me to my depths and increasingly bring my mind over to your viewpoint, and I do not know what you are doing to me"). For ταυτί introducing an indignant question in response to what has just been said, see Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

Seeing that he has hit on a fulcrum point and that his father has started to budge, Bdelykleon presses on with another profit-oriented argumentative sequence. He insists that everyone could be rich, but the prospect is circumscribed by *rhētores* who pander to the people while robbing them blind (698-9). Stressing, then, the expanse of the Athenian empire, he contends that out of the grand profit to be had his father only enjoys the three obols of court-pay—a pittance, Philokleon is told, that “they constantly drip into you with a piece of wool little by little, like oil, for the sake of keeping you alive” (701-2 καὶ τοῦτ’ ἐρίῳ σοι | ἐνστάζουσιν κατὰ μικρὸν ἀεὶ τοῦ ζῆν ἔνεχ’ ὥσπερ ἔλαιον). Bdelykleon proceeds to explain to his father that (703-5):

βούλονται γάρ σε πένητ’ εἶναι, καὶ τοῦθ’ ὦν οὔνεκ’ ἐρῶ σοι· | ἵνα γινώσκῃς τὸν
τιθασευτήν, κᾶθ’ ὅταν οὐτός σ’ ἐπισίξῃ | ἐπὶ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τιν’, ἐπιρρύξας ἀγρίως αὐτοῖς
ἐπιπηδᾶς.

They want you to be poor, and I will tell you why this is; so that you know your tamer, and whenever he sics you on an enemy, you should savagely jump on them growling.

If *rhētores* wanted to provide people with a living, Bdelykleon continues, it would be easy: each of the one thousand *poleis* paying tribute to Athens could undertake the sustenance of twenty men, providing thus 20,000 ordinary Athenians (τῶν δημοτικῶν) with a luxurious lifestyle (706-10).⁴⁰

This way, Philokleon and the Chorus would enjoy things worthy of Athens and the trophy of Marathon, instead of laboring for those holding their wages like menial farmhands (711-2).

In the end, Philokleon’s abject response suggests that he sees no other option but to concede defeat, at which point his son restates his desire to save him from humiliation as well as offer him

⁴⁰ The names of all tributary *poleis* and the one sixtieth of their quota given as offering to Athena (ἀπαρχαί) were duly inscribed on large marble stelae, which were on display at the Acropolis since 453 BCE. The bibliography on these so-called “Athenian tribute lists” is vast, but the *ATL* remains the standard reference work. As regards the “one thousand cities paying tribute” (*Vesp.* 707 εἰσὶν γε πόλεις χίλιαι αἰ νῦν τὸν φόρον ἡμῖν ἀπάγουσι), Biles and Olson (2015 ad loc.) characterize this claim “an over-optimistic assessment of the city’s revenue streams,” given that the tribute assessment of 425 BCE lists no more than 400 *poleis*; see Meritt and West (1934), 64-90. Nevertheless, in a study focusing on the absences and concealed entries in the Athenian tribute lists, Constantakopoulou (2013, 39) concluded that “Bdelycleon’s empire of a thousand cities in Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, which should be understood as a comic hyperbole, may be closer to reality than we think.”

a luxurious lifestyle (713-24); hence, the Chorus declare Bdelykleon the winner of the *agōn* and urge their peer to yield (715-49). Still, one cannot help but wonder: what contributes to the persuasiveness of Bdelykleon's second series of arguments? Despite his earlier surprise at the ratio of revenue allotted to court-pay, Philokleon, as a war veteran, could easily dismiss as bogus the proposed diversion of imperial revenue from the maintenance of Athens's war machine to a distribution policy. Consequently, what carries the day seems to be the exposé of the incentive-based manipulation of judges by profiteering *rhētores*, as Philokleon realizes that he has been taken for a ride, and at a paltry price for that matter.

2.3 Incentives and Aristophanic *ēthopoieia*

The *agōn* between Philokleon and Bdelykleon sheds fascinating light on the behavioral similarities between humans in pre-modern and modern societies vis-à-vis incentives. Earlier we explored the crowding-out effect of the information incentives convey about the frame of a decision-situation ("moral disengagement"), the motives of the administering principal ("bad news"), or the targets' own sense of self-determination ("control aversion").⁴¹ Interestingly, those three mechanisms are exactly what Bdelykleon touches upon in his attempt to keep Philokleon away from court-service. Therefore, an analysis of Bdelykleon's arguments against this background illuminates not only the reason for his victory in the *agōn*, but also the historical value of the Aristophanic *ēthopoieia* in its description of Athenians as political actors.

As noted above, Bdelykleon's first argument, regarding the amount of court-pay in proportion to the total revenue of the *polis* (656-63), brings to the fore his father's profit-maximizing mentality. Philokleon is shaken by the argument (664) exactly because his civic

⁴¹ See Introduction, pp. 13-14.

volunteerism stems from considerations of financial rather than civic utility. In reality, such a behavioral disposition could be explained by the fact that “economic incentives may diminish ethical or other reasons for complying with social norms and contributing to the common good.”⁴² In Athens’s voluntaristic judicial system, where the citizens’ contribution to the public good of the rule of law was rewarded financially, motivation to participate could be curtailed on account of financial considerations. Indeed, in his disparagement of the three obols of court-pay, Bdelykleon appeals to exactly this kind of consideration, insisting that court-service is an activity of limited profitability. Therefore, with court-service framed by court-pay as a labor relationship within a money market, Philokleon’s distress at the realization that court-service is not as profitable as he thought reveals his character’s profound moral disengagement.⁴³

As Philokleon brings the debate back to the issue of slavery (681), his son attempts to demonstrate the exploitation of old judges by *rhētores*. From that point on, Bdelykleon’s arguments highlight the function of the crowding-out mechanism that depends on the negative message an incentive may convey about the administering principal. The “bad news” effect, “commonly occurs in relationships between a principal, who designs incentives... and an agent, who is being induced to behave more in the principal’s interest than the agent otherwise would.”⁴⁴ For Bdelykleon, those who wish to exploit Athens’s legal system allegedly devise fiscal policy that would help them muster the unwitting support of poor citizens (698-705); hence, the claim

⁴² Bowles (2008), 1605.

⁴³ As argued by Hayman and Ariely (2004), labor relationships can be divided into two categories: those where people expend effort in anticipation of a monetary payment, and those where no payment is anticipated—termed “money markets” and “social markets” respectively. Assessing the relation of effort to payments within the two markets in a series of experiments, they observed that an offer of monetary payments in exchange for labor can shift an individual’s perception from acting in a social to acting in a money market, which invokes the frames and norms related to the latter as well. For the way extrinsic motivation in the form of monetary rewards can negatively affect intrinsic motivation and performance, either due to the size of the reward or the agents’ perception of the activity, see also Gneezy and Rustichini (2000).

⁴⁴ Bowles (2016), 87.

that the bare subsistence guaranteed by court-pay is a means of manipulation is an attempt to expose the benefit self-serving *rhētores* stand to gain from the current state of affairs. Philokleon and the Chorus should have inferred such a negative message themselves, but this lack of “bad news” is not so surprising. The motivational profile of the old judges has been shown to be that of unrelenting utility-maximizers, and “crowding out affects individuals who are intrinsically motivated or fair-minded; for own payoff maximizers, it appears there is nothing to crowd out.”⁴⁵ In this regard, the old judges are presented as so engrossed in a morally disengaged civic engagement that the benefits others might derive at their expense have no effect on their motivation to serve in the lawcourts.

In the end, after breaking the “bad news” to his father and the Chorus, Bdelykleon goes on to assert that in their current situation the judges “trail behind the man holding their salary like olive-pickers” (712 νῦν δ’ ὥσπερ ἐλαολόγοι χωρεῖθ’ ἅμα τῷ τὸν μισθὸν ἔχοντι). Although the alleged slavery of the judges could be dismissed as a gross exaggeration, this last remark before Philokleon’s abject response and the Chorus’ verdict of victory for Bdelykleon is apparently driving the point home. According to social psychologists, the sense of self-determination is of particular importance for our intrinsic motivation in performing an activity.⁴⁶ Studies have shown that incentives can prompt a shift in an agent’s perceived locus of causality for an activity from internal to external, which crowds out agents’ intrinsic motivation to perform it when they sense their autonomy being compromised.⁴⁷ In this regard, given the unenviable status of unskilled wage-laborers in classical Athens (see Appendix II), the characterization of the judges as “salaried olive-

⁴⁵ Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 390.

⁴⁶ See Deci and Ryan (1985), 29-32.

⁴⁷ *ib.* 43-54. As clarified by Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012, 374), the crowding-out mechanism based on “control aversion” is different from the ones associated with “bad news” and “moral disengagement,” since “it arises from the target’s desire for autonomy and does not depend on the target inferring negative information about a principal or clues about appropriate behavior.”

pickers” is more than just a provocation. By establishing an equation between court-service and unspecialized wage-labor, Bdelykleon convinces his father and the Chorus that they lend themselves to an activity compromising both the decency and autonomy of a free citizen.

Taking the above into account, if we were to put Bdelykleon’s arguments in ascending order in terms of persuasiveness, the least persuasive seem to be the ones conveying “bad news.” Apparently, the old judges are not so much aggrieved by the supposedly prodigious profits of *rhētores* through bribes (667-79), or the higher wages enjoyed by public prosecutors (691 αὐτὸς δὲ φέρει τὸ συνηγορικόν, δραχμὴν, κἂν ὕστερος ἔλθῃ), as by the realization that due to their poverty court-pay has turned them into willing victims of exploitation. The appeal to the judges’ “control aversion” would claim the second place as it culminates Bdelykleon’s argumentative thread. Still, the persuasiveness of this last appeal depends on Philokleon and the Chorus buying into the financial argument regarding their exclusion from much larger and readily available public funds. As a result, Bdelykleon’s argument about the negligible amount of court-pay seems to be the foundation for his entire case against court-service as well as the source of his success.

In retrospect, for almost two thirds of its plot, *Wasps* focuses on drawing a specific behavioral profile for those citizens who most frequently serve as judges. They are old and poor, so court-service provides them with a way to feel potent and make a living.⁴⁸ As regards their civic motivation, the elderly judges never speak of their service as something performed out of a sense of duty, and the fact that court-service for them is only as worthy as its compensation is clearly seen in the ease with which Bdelykleon’s financial argument swings them against it. Within this context, the *agōn* has a dual significance. On the one hand, it boldly underlines the incentive-based

⁴⁸ The subjective utility elder Athenians derived from court-service could involve more than feelings of social relevance and profit. Allen (2000, 160-163; 2003) read the anger associated with the Athenian judicial system as a means of affirmation for one’s virility, but cf. Harris (2001), 52 n.11.

moral disengagement that characterizes the civic behavior of Philokleon and his peers. On the other hand, it showcases that the psychological mechanisms identified by behavior scientists as conducive to the crowding-out effect of incentives are equally applicable in Athens's pre-modern society. Even if one were to see Bdelykleon's arguments as simply an argumentative strategy to win over his father, the fact that he touches on issues directly related to the negative information incentives can convey is telling. Bdelykleon is himself a citizen whose social preferences have been crowded out and, as will be argued below, his behavioral profile is key to understanding why his victory in the *agōn* is turned into a disaster.

2.4 Tale of the Wasp and the *apragmōn*

Throughout the *agōn*, Bdelykleon's arguments are couched on the premise that policymaking is exclusive to a group of individuals underhandedly serving their own interests.⁴⁹ For example, when he tells Philokleon "they want you to be poor" (703 βούλονται γάρ σε πένητ' εἶναι), one cannot help but wonder as to whom "they" refers in terms of deliberation within the context of Athens's radical democracy. Bdelykleon asserts that financial policy is implemented by certain *rhētores* so as to set up an extermination-via-courts racket against their political rivals (703-5), the implication being that a small group of individuals dominated Athenian politics. At this point, then, it is worth pondering whether the projected state of affairs speaks to Athens's political reality or Bdelykleon as a character who typifies a specific kind of political consciousness.

The existence of a distinct political class in classical Athens and its relationship with the masses are issues that have been debated among historians for decades.⁵⁰ The question pertaining

⁴⁹ For the corruption of *rhētores* as a topos in fifth-century comedy and fourth-century oratory, and the way the former might have informed the latter, see Carey (2016).

⁵⁰ In a study of fifth-century politics, Connor (1971) argued that after Perikles' death there was a transition from an "old style" (i.e. friendship groups of landholding elites competing amongst themselves for prominence) to a "new

to our present inquiry is whether proposals of financial policymaking were restricted to “experts” and then merely went through rubber-stamping during an Assembly-meeting. In Plato’s *Protagoras*, Socrates famously claims that when debating matters requiring technical expertise Athenians tolerate advice only from experts, but in matters of administration they welcome any man’s advice, regardless of occupation or socio-economic standing.⁵¹ But were there experts in public finance? A positive answer to this question has been given by scholars who have assumed a profound information asymmetry to have existed between elite citizens involved in politics and the masses.⁵² Nonetheless, others have persuasively demonstrated that social networks along with democratic institutions—whose function was premised on wide participation—allowed for information to be aggregated and widely disseminated within Athenian society, which in turn prompted a production and diffusion of expertise among citizens.⁵³

style” of politics (i.e. not exclusively landholding elites competing in their display of loyalty to Athenian citizens collectively). On that basis, the picture of Athenian politics was that of an arena of elite competition, in which the favor displayed by the masses served as a gauge of political sway. In similar vein, Ober (1989) argued that intra-elite competition in fact opened the path to democratization, as elites kept on making political concessions to the masses so as to garner support, eventually leading to a solidification of the democratic regime. This process of democratization was pushed further back chronologically by Mann (2007), who argued—*pace* Connor—that political leaders who did not belong to the traditional landholding elite started appearing already in the generation of the Persian Wars. More recently, Cammack (2019) argued that the establishment of democracy, in terms of a regime in which the people (δῆμος) are the ones to hold power (κράτος), meant that the elites who were in ruling positions in the past were subsequently reduced to roles of leadership.

⁵¹ Pl. *Prt.* 319b-d ἐπειδὴν δέ τι περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως διοικήσεως δέη βουλευσασθαι, συμβουλεύει αὐτοῖς ἀνιστάμενος περὶ τούτων ὁμοίως μὲν τέκτων, ὁμοίως δὲ χαλκεύς, σκυτοτόμος, ἔμπορος, ναύκληρος, πλούσιος, πένης, γενναῖος, ἀγεννής (“whenever something about the administration of the city must be considered, a builder standing up offers his advice all the same, and so does a smith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a sea-captain, a rich man, a poor man, a man of high birth, or one of low birth”).

⁵² Kallet (1994) maintained that the complexity of Athenian public finance would have eluded detailed comprehension by the average Athenian and that *rhētores* understood the need of a specialized knowledge in finance for a successful career. Similarly, Moreno (2007, 211-308) argued that those engaged with the grain trade amassed political capital by virtue of their indispensable knowledge over the grain supply of Athens.

⁵³ See Pébarthe (2006); Ober (2008), 118-167; Rhodes (2013); Sobak (2015); Pritchard (2019). In fact, as shown by Ruzé (1997, 455-470, 523-538), fifth-century decrees bear testimony to a diffused political expertise in Athenian democracy, as a significant number of proposers does not belong to the group of *rhētores* immortalized through multiple references in our sources. For a comparative survey between the fifth and fourth centuries bearing the same results, see Taylor (2007). For the large number of the citizens active in the Assembly during the fourth century, see Hansen (1984).

Without doubt, elite status afforded good education and adequate leisure for an Athenian citizen to be involved in politics full-time, and many elites indeed devoted themselves to politics.⁵⁴ Still, this does not mean that such men monopolized policy-making nor that their proposals were ratified without challenge. As demonstrated by Peter Rhodes, Athenian *rhētores*, irrespective of socio-economic standing or posterior reputation, were nothing more than habitual speakers at Assembly meetings, sometimes successful in winning their fellow citizens over to their policies and other times not.⁵⁵ In view of that, Bdelykleon's assertion that a specific group insidiously dominates policymaking appears to be as jejune as his estimate of the enormous amount of public revenue lost to political corruption (665-77) and his proposal for the distribution of the allies' tribute (706-12). What is of import, however, is not the quality of the argument but its significance for dramatic characterization.

Despite presenting himself as a son trying to save his father from exploitation and as a citizen disaffected with a corrupt political class, Bdelykleon also stands for an Athenian abstaining from political life, namely an *apragmōn*. In his landmark study of political inactivity (*apragmosynē*) in Athens, L. B. Carter divided Athenian *apragmones* into three broad categories: elites, who either felt deprived of their traditional privileges or abhorred radical democracy and its imperialist enterprise; peasant farmers, who lived away from the city as well as its raucous politics; and contemplative philosophers, who opted for an apolitical withdrawal from civic life.⁵⁶ For Carter, Bdelykleon embodies the inactive elite who dislikes lawcourts for the same reasons he dislikes democracy, and that is because:

it is concentrated in the demagogues, who, he claims, are cheating people out of what is rightfully theirs. Although he does not say so, the implication is that the better sort, such

⁵⁴ A perusal of the *APF* puts this point across neatly; cf. also Rhodes (1986).

⁵⁵ See Rhodes (2000); (2016). On Assembly audiences being the sovereign element of deliberation in Athens, see Cammack (2020). For the pluralistic nature of the outcome of democratic deliberation, see Canevaro (2018a).

⁵⁶ See Carter (1986). On the elite *apragmōn*, see also Lateiner (1982).

as himself, have been ejected from their rightful and traditional place in the public scene, usurped by upstarts.⁵⁷

Overall, while accurate in terms of tracing Bdelykleon's negative attitude towards democracy (more on that below), such an assessment of his character falls flat. The play makes it perfectly clear that although Bdelykleon is rich and carries himself with elitist affectation, his father is of humble origins; thus, the claim that Philokleon's son is an elite disaffected with democratic politics due to loss of privilege is unwarranted.⁵⁸

As noted by multiple scholars, the class difference between father and son in *Wasps* becomes pronounced in the scene where the former is introduced to the world of the elite symposium (1122-264).⁵⁹ This ostensible incongruity between Philokleon's poverty and Bdelykleon's elevated socio-economic standing has been attributed by some to inconsistent characterization on Aristophanes' part.⁶⁰ In a more nuanced approach, however, Nick Fisher suggested that this incongruity "may be partially explained (in addition to comic need, and some carelessness about psychological realism) by an assumption of social mobility in a time of considerable change and generational conflict."⁶¹ For classical Athens, there seems to be no reason for an explanation based on social mobility to be treated with such apprehension, given its

⁵⁷ ib. 63-75, quotation from 72.

⁵⁸ Bdelykleon contends that *rhētores* want his father to be poor (703 πένητ' εἶναι). At the same time, Philokleon punctuates his poverty when he relates how some rich defendants try to get on his good side in court by claiming to be as poor and unfortunate as himself (564-5 οἱ μὲν γ' ἀποκλάονται πενίαν αὐτῶν, καὶ προστιθέασι | κακὰ πρὸς τοῖς οὐσίην, ἕως ἂν ἰσώσῃ ἁπανίων τοῖσιν ἐμοῖσιν). Finally, Philokleon's costume is also indicative of his low economic standing since he is wearing a threadbare cloak (*tribōn*); cf. *Vesp.* 116, 1122, 1122-32. For the *tribōn* as a signifier of poverty in Aristophanic comedy, see Stone (1984), 162-163.

⁵⁹ See Pritchard (2012), 22 n. 51 with bibliography. For Philokleon's affinity for fables as an indication of his low-class status, see Rothwell (1995). On the subject of economic disparity, it is worth noting that Philokleon highlights the fear he instills as a judge in rich snobs, including his own son; cf. *Vesp.* 626-8 πομπύζουσιν κάγκεχόδασίν μ' | οἱ πλουτοῦντες καὶ πάνυ σεμνοί | καὶ σὺ δέδοικάς με μάλιστ' αὐτός.

⁶⁰ Carter (1986, 72 n. 44), noting in bewilderment the disproportion between the lives of Philokleon and Bdelykleon, concludes that "to Aristophanes such things are no problem at all." Similarly, Pütz (2003, 111-126), comparing Philokleon's ignorance to Bdelykleon's insight into the elite world, assumes that such incongruities are "possible with the shifting characters in comedy" (125).

⁶¹ Fisher (2000), 357.

documentation in our sources.⁶² As a result, it appears that the overall political attitude of Bdelykleon is better understood as that of an apolitical *nouveau riche*.

Regarding Bdelykleon's outlook on democracy, although he renounces the accusations of the Chorus, who impute tyrannical aspirations to his anti-court sentiments (463-507), his disdain for a staple democratic institution like the courts reveals that he not only abstains from but also feels averse to democratic civic life. As he proclaims way before hearing anything in favor of court-service, he is determined to educate Philokleon through instruction on his mistaken ways (514 ἀναδιδάξεν οἷομαί σ' ὡς πάντα ταῦθ' ἀμαρτάνεις); hence, for Bdelykleon it is not his father alone who errs, but everyone who undertakes court-service. Moreover, Bdelykleon's political outlook can be inferred by his reluctance to fulfill the civic role that undergirds democracy itself: the willingly active political actor known as *ho boulomenos*. As the most important component of democratic Athens's voluntaristic political system, *ho boulomenos* was, as Hansen put it, "the real protagonist of the Athenian democracy."⁶³ It was up to any adult citizen to put himself forward and assume civic responsibility in terms of administration and deliberation, and it has been argued that this voluntarism was a prime safeguard for the political equality and individual freedom of Athenian citizens.⁶⁴ In view of that, the allegation Bdelykleon makes about the existence of a political class already speaks volumes about the kind of political consciousness his character represents for a citizen of Athens's direct democracy. Although Bdelykleon is

⁶² According to the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* (7.4), on the Acropolis of Athens stood an ancient dedication (τὰ ἀναθήματα τῶν ἀρχαίων) by the son of a certain Diphilos, which read: Διφίλου Ἀνθεμίω τῆνδ' ἀνέθηκε θεοῖς ... θητικοῦ ἀντὶ τέλους ἱππᾶδ' ἀμειψάμενος ("Anthemion the son of Diphilos dedicated this [sc. statue] to the gods... having exchanged the rank of *thēs* for that of *hippeus*"). For a discussion of the epigram and its peculiarities in terms of language, see Rhodes (1992) ad loc. On another dedication from the first quarter of the fifth century, commemorating the upwards mobility of a *thēs* to the rank of a *zeugitēs*, see Raubitschek (1949), no. 372.

⁶³ Hansen (1991), 72.

⁶⁴ See Farrar (2010); Campa (2018). In certain cases, *ho boulomenos* could be a non-citizen; see Canevaro and Harris (2019), 98-100.

presented as having all the skills necessary for a citizen to contribute to the public good, there is no hint in the play that he partakes in democratic civic life in any capacity.⁶⁵ Therefore, Philokleon’s son does not seem to be disaffected with politics because he sees in it a dead-end, but rather because he sees no profit in being civically engaged.

A transparent manifestation of the kind of political apathy characterizing Bdelykleon is his attempt to console his father, after the old man suffers severe shock from the realization that he voted for acquittal during the dog-trial scene. Specifically, he tells Philokleon (1003-7):

καὶ μηδὲν ἀγανάκτει γ’· ἐγὼ γάρ σ’, ὦ πάτερ, | θρέψω καλῶς, ἄγων μετ’ ἐμαυτοῦ
πανταχοῦ, | ἐπὶ δεῖπνον, εἰς ξυμπόσιον, ἐπὶ θεωρίαν, | ὥσθ’ ἠδέως διάγειν σε τὸν λοιπὸν
χρόνον· | κοῦκ ἐγχανεῖταιί σ’ ἐξαπατῶν Ὑπέρβολος.

Do not vex yourself. I will tend you well, father, taking you everywhere with me—dinners, symposia, festivals—so that you lead the rest of your life in pleasure, and Hyperbolos will no longer deceive you and have you for a tool.

As observed by Konstan, the issue of “who will replace the old jurors once Bdelycleon persuades them to retire is no concern of his,” and it should be added that so is civic life in general.⁶⁶ Lines 1003-7 illustrate that when Bdelykleon earlier proclaimed his wish for his father to abandon the drudgery of the judge’s life and live like a rich man, the life envisioned is one where civic engagement of any sort is blatantly absent.⁶⁷ In fact, the preparation scene for the off-stage symposium plainly suggests (1122-331) that his primary concern is how to fit into elite society in

⁶⁵ In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (3.7), based on Socrates’ advice to young Glaukon, who wants to become successful in politics (προστατεύειν τῆς πόλεως), knowledge over the state’s revenue (ἐκ τίνων νῦν αἱ πρόσοδοι τῇ πόλει καὶ πόσαι τινές εἰσι;) and expenditure (τάς γε δαπάνας τῆς πόλεως ἡμῖν εἰπέ) is presented as the first and foremost skill for someone who wants to benefit the city of Athens. Bdelykleon not only has knowledge over Athens’s public finance but also brags about it through presumptuous claims about the ease with which better fiscal policy could be devised; see *Vesp.* 706 εἰ γὰρ ἐβούλοντο βίον πορίσαι τῷ δήμῳ, ῥάδιον ἦν ἄν (“for if they wanted to provide a living to the people, it would be easy”).

⁶⁶ Konstan (1985), 31.

⁶⁷ cf. *Vesp.* 504-6 τὸν πατέρ’ ὅτι βούλομαι τούτων ἀπαλλαχθέντα τῶν | ὀρθροφοιτοσυκοφαντοδικοταλαιπώρων
τρόπων | ζῆν βίον γενναῖον ὥσπερ Μόρυχος (“because I want my father to be delivered from his crack-of-dawn-coming-and-going-trumped-up-case-judging-troublesome ways and live a noble life like Morykhos”). For a breakdown of the macaronic adjective, see Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

spite of his originally underprivileged background.⁶⁸ Accordingly, it appears that for Bdelykleon, a man of “high-spirited-horse-snobbish ways” (135 ἔχων τρόπους φρυαγμοσεμνάκουσ τινάς), a key factor that urges his meddling with his father’s affairs is his desire to maintain a façade of belonging to the Athenian upper crust.⁶⁹

In consideration of the above, Bdelykleon’s actions in the play are motivated not by a desire to ameliorate—even in a conservative manner—the state of political affairs in Athens, but rather by self-interest. Setting, then, the portraits of Philokleon and Bdelykleon side by side reveals a motivational consonance between father and son. Philokleon is civically active but only for the sake of his subjective utility, while his son is civically inactive because there is no material utility for him in being active; hence, their civic attitude is different in terms of engagement but similar in terms of self-interested motivation. On that account, it appears that Philokleon and Bdelykleon were not meant to be politically sympathetic characters, since the former’s civic activity is detrimental for Athenian society and the latter’s civic inactivity would incur opprobrium.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Prime indication of Bdelykleon’s endeavor to fit in with the elite is his instruction to Philokleon to narrate stories during the symposium about when he was on a religious delegation on behalf of the *polis* with other prominent men (1187 ὡς ξυνεθεώρεισ Ἀνδροκλεῖ καὶ Κλεισθένει). Philokleon retorts in bafflement that he has only ever partaken in such a mission once, and that as a rower to the transport ship (1188-9 ἐγὼ δὲ τεθεώρηκα πόποτ’ οὐδαμοῖ | πλὴν εἰσ Πάρον, καὶ ταῦτα δὺ’ ὀβολῶ φέρων). Perhaps, it is worth noting that a certain Androkles, who could be the same as the one Bdelykleon mentions in admiration, is satirized elsewhere as a *nouveau riche*; cf. Kratin. fr. 223 ἔξ τε πόλιν δούλων, ἀνδρῶν νεοπλουτοπονήρων, αἰσχρῶν, Ἀνδροκλέων with Biles and Olson (2015) ad 1186-7.

⁶⁹ During the off-stage symposium, Philokleon is likened due to his uncouth behavior to “a *nouveau riche* Phrygian;” cf. 1309-10 ἔοικας, ὦ πρεσβῦτα, νεοπλούτῳ Φρυγί with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. If anything, this simile suggests that Bdelykleon’s attempts to rein his father in are understandable vis-à-vis the scrutiny of *nouveaux riches* within old-money circles.

⁷⁰ In his funeral oration, Perikles famously denounces political apathy; cf. Thuc. 2.40.2 μόνοι γὰρ τόν τε μηδὲν τῶνδε μετέχοντα οὐκ ἀπράγμονα, ἀλλ’ ἀχρεῖον νομίζομεν (“we alone regard the one who does not partake in those [sc. public affairs] not as an inactive but as a useless man”). Based on a study by Ehrenberg (1947), commentators have assumed that Perikles implicitly commends πολυπραγμοσύνη (“meddlesomeness”); cf. Gomme (1956) and Hornblower (1991) ad loc. However, as shown by Allison (1979), ἀπραγμοσύνη and πολυπραγμοσύνη are not two sides of a spectrum but rather two wholly different and equally negative concepts. For πολυπραγμοσύνη, see Adkins (1976); Harding (1981); Leigh (2013). The accuracy with which Perikles’ claim reflects democratic mores is indicated by the fact that funeral orations were meant to project the dominant democratic ideology; see Loraux (1986), 172-220, especially at 182. Moreover, beyond public oratory, Plato’s Socrates relates the disdain of Athenians for the man avoiding all sort of civic activity (*Resp.* 549c φεύγοντος... πᾶσαν φιλοπραγμοσύνην) and those only minding their

2.5 Like Father, Like Son, and Vice Versa

An examination of the play's final scenes in keeping with the above analysis of its *ēthopoieia* further illuminates its thematic unity, as the last third of *Wasps* stresses the disastrous results of an intragenerational dissemination of self-interested motivation on the civic level. In between the first (1009-121) and second (1265-91) *parabasis*, Bdelykleon teaches Philokleon how to present himself and behave appropriately in the company of cultured and prominent men—simply put, the Athenian elite.⁷¹ The old man is dressed in imported fineries (1126-67) and given a flash tutorial on how to strut (1168-73), schmooze (1174-207), recline (1208-13), dine (1214-18), and sing sympotic *skolia* (1219-49) during an upscale dinner party. Although teachable, Philokleon is amusingly recalcitrant at every turn; yet moments before departing for an “actual” dinner party, he voices an interesting objection. After his son announces that their dinner plans involve inebriation (μεθυσθῶμεν), Philokleon exclaims (1252-5):

μηδαμῶς. | κακὸν τὸ πίνειν· ἀπὸ γὰρ οἴνου γίγνεται | καὶ θυροκοπήσαι καὶ πατάξαι
καὶ βαλεῖν, | κ᾿ἀπειτ' ἀποτίνειν ἀργύριον ἐκ κραιπάλης.

No way! Drinking is a bad thing. Wine is the reason behind door-breaking, battery, pelting, and then compensation for damages while hung over.

Bdelykleon insists that there is no need to worry about such things. The injured party shall be appeased by the eminent company, or Philokleon himself shall turn the whole matter into a pleasantry by recounting a witty story, either one by Aesop or a Sybaritic tale he will learn during

own business (*Resp.* 550a τοὺς μὲν τὰ αὐτῶν πράττοντας). In the same vein, despite the lack of context, a fragment from Eupolis' *Poleis*, where a character proclaims that “a man lacking any zeal for public office is worse than an over-zealous one” (fr. 248 K.-A. ἄσπουδος δ' ἀνήρ σπουδαρχίδου κακίων), resonates with the same idea around political participation; cf. Storey (2003), 224; Olson (2016b), 300-301. In short, the dominant ideology of the time, as Brown (2009, 486) put it, attached “honor to the busy, political life and dishonor to the unbusy, quiet life.” At the same time, civic engagement was conceived as the bulwark of democratic freedom (ἐλευθερία); see Raaflaub (1983).

⁷¹ cf. *Vesp.* 1170-1 σκέψαι μ' ὅτῳ | μάλιστ' ἔοικα τὴν βᾶδισιν τῶν πλουσίων, 1175 ἀνδρῶν παρόντων πολυμαθῶν καὶ δεξιῶν, 1185 λέγειν ἐν ἀνδράσιν, 1196 οὕτω διηγείσθαι νομίζουσ' οἱ σοφοί, 1256 ἦν ζυνῆς γ' ἀνδράσι καλοῖς τε κάγαθοῖς.

the symposium (1256-61). Nevertheless, as soon as the Chorus finish their second *parabasis*, we learn that Bdelykleon sowed the seeds of disaster.

Fleeing from the symposium's bedlam, the slave Xanthias recounts how Philokleon got drunk, made a fool of himself, insulted the other guests, and then, at the peak of inebriation, made his way home assaulting every person he chanced upon on the street (1292-1325). In this account, we are given a crucial detail for Philokleon's reformed self when Xanthias says that the old man, although amidst members of the Athenian *crème de la crème*, was "the greatest quaffer" and "by far the greatest *hubristēs* of them all."⁷² This remark, meaning that all of the guests exhibited *hubris* but none so much as Philokleon, has received minimal attention despite its implications.⁷³ The term *hubris* expresses an individual's excessive self-assertion, the manifestation of which, either in action or just in disposition, encroaches on the honor (τιμή) of others, potentially posing a threat to social harmony.⁷⁴ Especially with regard to the social repercussions of *hubris*, it was thought that the Athenian law against it stemmed from the belief that "whoever is a *hubristēs* towards anyone whatsoever was unfit for citizenship in a democracy."⁷⁵ Certainly, Athenians held that

⁷² *Vesp.* 1300-3 τῶν ξυνόντων πολὺν παροινικώτατος | καίτοι παρῆν Ἴππυλλος, Ἀντιφῶν, Λύκων, | Λυσίστρατος, Θούφραστος, οἱ περὶ Φρύνιχον. | τούτων ἀπάντων ἦν ὑβριστότατος μακροῦ. The identities of the guests as well as the political significance—if any—behind them as a group have been a matter of debate. The lack of concrete evidence for every individual necessitates caution for any claim, but it is certain that the group represents elite society; cf. Storey (1985); Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. For excessive drinking as a characteristic of high society, cf. *Vesp.* 78-80 with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

⁷³ MacDowell (1971, ad loc.) comments on the snobbery of the people attending the party and Philokleon's rudeness; Sommerstein (1983, ad loc.) offers no comment; Biles and Olson (2015, ad loc.) comment on the dual aspect of *hubris* as both insult and injury.

⁷⁴ In democratic Athens, according to Fisher (1992, 148), "the core of the concept [i.e. *hubris*] is beyond any doubt the committing of acts of intentional insult, of acts which deliberately inflict shame and dishonour on others." Although Fisher's analysis of *hubris* in terms of honor gained support, his approach from the perspective of the victim undermined his thesis. As shown by Cairns (1996), to commit *hubris* is not to dishonor someone intentionally but to engage in self-aggrandizing behavior in disregard for other members of one's community. Similarly, in an analysis of the spirit of the Athenian law, Canevaro (2018b) argued that *hubris* was legally conceptualized as excessive self-assertion expressed in an arrogation of prerogatives not recognized by the community; hence, the public action against *hubris* (γραφὴ ὑβρεως) served as a policing mechanism against antisocial behavior.

⁷⁵ Aeschin. 1.17 ὅλως δὲ ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ τὸν εἰς ὄντινον ὑβριστήν, τοῦτον οὐκ ἐπιτήδειον ἡγήσατο [sc. ὁ νομοθέτης] εἶναι συμπολιτεύεσθαι. This is Aeschines' interpretation of the law in consideration of its provision on committing *hubris* against slaves. For a discussion of the passage, see Canevaro (2018b), 117-118. The Athenian law

instances of such behavior could be the result of inebriation, as in the case of symposiastic revelry.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, hubristic behavior was most strongly associated with wealth, and in Athens’s democratic culture the Solonian aphorism “surfeit breeds *hubris*” never lost currency.⁷⁷ The off-stage symposium in *Wasps* thus involves people whose snobbery is their least troubling quality, given that a *hubristēs* is a potentially destabilizing agent for society. On that account, Bdelykleon has introduced his father into a world where one may develop mentalities with implications that far exceed one’s embarrassment within the confines of a rich host’s dinner-hall. In fact, although within the bounds of polite society Philokleon is simply uncouth (1309-25), his behavior within the broader social sphere of the *polis* is disconcerting.⁷⁸

Before Xanthias finishes his account, Philokleon returns staggering on the stage, followed by the symposium’s *aulos*-girl. A group of the people he attacked on the street is breathing down his neck, and an unnamed man warns him (1332-4):

ἦ μὴν σὺ δώσεις αὐριον τούτων δίκην ἢ ἡμῖν ἅπασι, κεί σφόδρ’ εἶ νεανίας. ἰ ἀθρόοι γὰρ ἤξομέν σε προσκαλούμενοι.

So help me gods, tomorrow you will get your just desserts, even if you are quite the young man. We will come all together and serve summonses upon you.

Philokleon’s vigorous recklessness confuses his victims, as only a delinquent youth would act this way, and indeed the old man’s address to the *aulos*-girl as if he were a youth waiting to become

against *hubris* is preserved in Aeschin. 1.16 and Dem. 21.47, but both documents have been shown to be forgeries; cf. Fisher (2001), 139-140; Canevaro and Harris (2019), 91-107.

⁷⁶ For drinking and *hubris*, cf. Antiph. 4.1.6-7; Ar. *Eccl.* 663-4; Pl. *Phdr.* 238a-b; Arist. *Probl.* 953a-b; MacDowell (1976), 16; Fisher (1992), 99-102. Murray (1990, 144-145) argued that the initial goal of the Athenian law against *hubris* was to rein in the unbridled revelry (κῶμος) concomitant to elite symposia, but see MacDowell (1995), 174.

⁷⁷ cf. Solon fr. 6.3 West = 8.3 G.-P. τίκτει γὰρ κόρος ὕβριν with Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) ad loc. For the notion of κόρος as “surfeit” associated with wealth in Solon, see Helm (1993), 8-10. For the topos of *hubris* stemming from wealth in Athenian literature, cf. Thuc. 1.38.5, 3.45.4; Eur. *Supp.* 741-4, fr. 437-8; Ar. *Plut.* 564-5; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.4.14; Lys. 24.15-18; Dem. 21.98, 123, 183. For further discussion, see Dover (1974), 110-111; MacDowell (1976), 16-17.

⁷⁸ *Vesp.* 1319 τοιαῦτα περιύβριζεν αὐτοὺς ἐν μέρει (“thus he insulted them, one after the other”). For a discussion of the following scene in terms of the way the institutional framework of Athenian democracy informed everyday transactions between citizens, see Halliwell (2020), 124-128.

financially independent after his “father’s” death (1341-63) confirms that the world has turned topsy-turvy.⁷⁹ Bdelykleon’s old father has been reinvigorated; thus, the son “is now the repressive ‘father,’ while Philocleon adopts the role of the young rakish ‘son’ longing to gain his economic independence so that he can indulge his sensual appetites.”⁸⁰ Nonetheless, given that Philocleon responds to his victims by expressing contempt for all things legal, it appears that his revitalization has altered not just his libido but his civic attitude as well.⁸¹

The negative qualities of Philocleon’s metamorphosis become explicit as soon as his son returns on stage and accosts him. After a sequence of raunchy humor around the naked body of the *aulos*-girl (1364-87), Bdelykleon tries to take the girl away, but Philocleon, cheekily reworking one of his lessons before the symposium, sucker-punches him. By implication, the old man turns into a “father-beater,” a person so reviled that he would be debarred from addressing the Athenian Assembly, but this is just the tip of the iceberg.⁸² Soon, the bread-seller Myrtia arrives with a witness in order to serve a summons, accusing Philocleon of hitting her with a torch and spoiling more than ten obols’ worth of merchandise.⁸³ In keeping with his son’s instructions, Philocleon resorts to a story by Aesop to purportedly resolve the issue but only adds insult to injury; hence, realizing that she is being mocked, Myrtia hurries off the stage, resolved to prosecute (1392-1414). Subsequently, another man approaches with a witness, summoning Philocleon on a charge of

⁷⁹ See MacDowell (1971) ad 1341-87; Biles and Olson (2015) ad 1332-4.

⁸⁰ Crichton (1991-3), 68.

⁸¹ *Vesp.* 1335-9 ἰηὺ ἰηὺ, «καλούμενοι». Ἰ ἀρχαῖά γ’ ὑμῶν. ἀρά γ’ ἴσθ’ ἵ ὡς οὐδ’ ἀκούων ἀνέχομαι ἰ δικῶν; ἰαιβοῖ, αἰβοῖ ... βάλλε κημούς (“Ho, ho! ‘Serve summonses.’ So *passé* of you. Do you not know that I cannot even stand hearing about trials? Yucky yuck! ... To hell with the voting-urns”).

⁸² cf. *Vesp.* 1190-4, 1382-5 with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. The law pertaining to beating one’s parents is quoted in Aeschin. 1.28. For the parallel between Philocleon beating his son and Pheidippides beating his father in the *Clouds*, see Hubbard (1991), 135. For father-beating as a motif in Aristophanic comedy, see Strauss (1966), 37-44, 181-182.

⁸³ *Vesp.* 1389-91 ὁδὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν ὅς μ’ ἀπόλεσεν ἰ τῆ δαδὶ παίων, κάξέβαλεν ἐντευθενὶ ἰ ἄρτους δέκ’ ὀβολῶν κάπιθήκηνη τέτταρας (“This is the man who ruined me by hitting me with a torch and thus knocked ten obols’ worth of loaves on the ground, plus another four”). As calculated by MacDowell (1971 ad loc.), Myrtia’s loaves cost 1/5 of an obol each.

hubris. Upon hearing the seriousness of the charge, Bdelykleon cuts in, pleading to pay any amount of compensation the man would deem adequate (1415-20). Once again, Philokleon, admitting that he battered and pelted the man, feigns willingness to resolve the issue extrajudicially and then rubs salt in the wound by sarcastically recounting Sybaritic tales, which his victim considers an aggravation of the initial *hubris* (1421-41).⁸⁴ Evidently, after the symposium, Philokleon “shamelessly regards himself as immune to effective reprisals” and so exhibits “outright and aggressive contempt for supposed norms of democratic reasonableness.”⁸⁵ Therefore, it is no wonder that Bdelykleon sees no other course of action available but to drag his irrepressibly irresponsible father kicking and screaming back into the house (1442-9).

2.6 Comedy and Civics II

The scenes separated by the second *parabasis* have a close connection, and the play makes a point of emphasizing how Bdelykleon’s curriculum is essentially turned on its head. Philokleon pushes the goal of his son’s lessons to a logical extreme, but this does not change the fact that the curriculum itself befits people espousing attitudes unfit for a democratic society. At this point, then, it appears that the theme of education in *Wasps*, recognized as a hinge of unity for the plot, can be construed as more than just Aristophanes’ take on ontological questions about the mutability of human nature. As variously argued by scholars, the metamorphosis of Philokleon can be read as an example of education failing to alter one’s nature, but it can be read equally as an example of education perpetuating and exacerbating negative behavioral norms. If in the final

⁸⁴ cf. *Vesp.* 1433 ὁμοιά σου καὶ ταῦτα τοῖς ἄλλοις τρόποις (“this is the all the same with the rest of your behavior”), 1441 ὑβριζ’ ἕως ἂν τὴν δίκην ἄρχων καλῆ (“go on with your hubris, until the magistrate calls upon your case”). For the assignment of line 1433, see Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

⁸⁵ Halliwell (2020), 127. For the democratic institutional framework and its stabilizing function in cases of violence, see Harris (2013a), 21-59; Simonton (2017).

scenes Philokleon, as his son's "son," is to be seen as the product of Bdelykleon's "parenting," then one cannot lose sight of the natural manifestation of such a relationship in the play, namely Bdelykleon as the product of Philokleon's parenting. The play time and again draws attention to the way children can be a source of happiness for their fathers by taking after them—from the tongue-in-cheek *makarismos* of Automenes, whose sons excel in the arts and one of them also in cunnilingus (1275-83), to the unadulterated *makarismos* of Karkinos for fathering three equally adept artists (1501-13).⁸⁶

In keeping with the above, the fact that incentives contribute to a long-term, cultural crowding-out of social preferences provides an interesting background on which to examine the ramifications of the education theme during the final scenes of *Wasps*. Markets and economic institutions have profound effects on the behavioral development of a society's members.⁸⁷ The grand-scale promotion of specific behaviors (self-regarding, cooperative etc.) sets in motion mechanisms of cultural evolution, as people tend to adopt behaviors that they perceive as common amongst members of their society. On that account, considering that incentives can crowd-out prosocial preferences, it has been argued that citizens whose preferences are affected could turn into parents who place "a lesser weight on inculcating civic preferences in their offspring."⁸⁸ For example, assuming that the *parodos* represents a real-life situation in Athenian society, what civic lesson is the son of the coryphaeus getting from his father's presentation of court-service as nothing more than a source of subsistence (300-15)? In the same vein, if Philokleon's civic attitude as a

⁸⁶ Automenes is otherwise unknown; cf. Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc. Nevertheless, the fact that his first son is a *kitharodos* (1277-8 *πρῶτα μὲν ... ἰ τὸν κιθαραιοδότητον*), the second one an actor (1279 *τὸν δ' ὑποκριτὴν*), and the third one, Aripbrates, probably a comic playwright, seems to suggest that the entire family was involved in the arts. For Aripbrates and the reason for his ridicule by Aristophanes being professional competition, see Sommerstein (1983) ad loc. For the tragic playwright Karkinos and his family, see Sutton (1987), 17-18.

⁸⁷ See Bowles (1998); Bowles (2008); Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 383-388.

⁸⁸ See Bowles and Hwang (2011), quotation from 1-2.

father is indicative of the attitude inculcated in his son, then the motivational profiles of our protagonists illuminate an important aspect of the “intelligent little story” (64 ἀλλ’ ἔστιν ἡμῶν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον) Aristophanes set before his audience. In the course of the present analysis, we saw that Philokleon’s civic engagement represents nothing more than his self-interested pursuit of utility-maximization, as his case for court-service is devoid of any sort of civic ideals. On the other hand, Bdelykleon tries to paint court-service as an activity lacking in material utility, which is once again defined in subjective terms; thus, he never invokes any civic ideals either. Considering, then, the cultural aspect of the crowding-out effect, the ideas expressed by Bdelykleon during the *agōn* seem to function on two levels. On the one hand, they are part of a shrewd argumentative strategy, employed so as to convince his *homo oeconomicus* of a father, but on the other hand they also seem to represent Bdelykleon’s own preferences, as those were formulated through Philokleon’s parenting. Thus, when Bdelykleon assumes a paternal role for his father, the insistence that he should care only about having a good time (1003-7) prompts the adoption of an even more self-interested attitude, which turns Philokleon into a civically worse utility-maximizer who seeks personal gratification in utter disregard of social norms.⁸⁹

At this point, the final scene deserves some special mention. Much analytical effort has been expended in understanding the dance ending of *Wasps*, both in terms of choreography and in terms of symbolic value.⁹⁰ As regards the latter, Philokleon’s dance with the sons of Karkinos has been interpreted as an Aristophanic protest against the decline of tragic dancing, a reaffirmation of Philokleon’s sexual prowess, a celebration of his becoming an active citizen once again, or a

⁸⁹ For the direct parallel between Philokleon’s destructive behavior as a symposiast and his behavior as a judge, see Hobden (2013), 140-144.

⁹⁰ Roos (1951) provides an exhaustive analysis of the dancing moves, arguing that Philokleon danced in the manner of *hetairai* and *kōmastai*. For further details on the choreography, see Borthwick (1968).

dramatization of the limits of Aristophanes' artistic medium.⁹¹ More recently, however, in an analysis of the closing scene vis-à-vis the problematics of solo dancing, Sarah Olsen argued that by abandoning the choral context of a communal *kōmos* Philokleon becomes an antisocial figure.⁹² According to Olsen, “[b]y relocating dance from the chorus to an unruly individual body, Aristophanes transforms it from a force of social cohesion and aesthetic complexity into a source of dissonance and disruption.”⁹³ Therefore, in the aftermath of Bdelykleon’s transformative education, Philokleon becomes so obsessed with his own self and gratification that he turns into a destabilizing agent for social as well as dramatic harmony.

Interestingly, in his discussion of the democratic values projected by *Wasps*, Mirhady noted that “[a]nother, less positive, comic version of democratic values is the comedy’s embrace of self-interest as the primary human motivation... Democrats are motivated only by a sense of ‘what’s in it for me?’”⁹⁴ Nonetheless, if we are to read *Wasps* as thematically parallel with *Knights*, as Mirhady rightfully suggests, self-interest should not be understood as a comic “democratic value” but as an issue at the heart of what Aristophanic comedy depicts as malfunctioning within Athenian democracy. Like *Knights*, *Wasps* scrutinizes self-interest both as something exploited by *rhētores* like Kleon and as a motivational factor that has taken over the behavioral makeup of Athenian citizens. This time, however, Aristophanes equally exposes the problematics of the way a generation’s obsession with subjective utility seeps through society. Incentives would be instrumental in crowding out the prosocial preferences of Athenians like Philokleon and his peers, and it is no wonder that the sons of such citizens would espouse equal attitudes, especially in the civic sphere of activity. *Wasps* thus closes on an implicit yet ominous warning. Unless Athenians

⁹¹ See respectively Roos (1951); MacCary (1979); Slater (1996); Purves (1997); Crane (1997).

⁹² See Olsen (2020), 100-128.

⁹³ *ib.* 128.

⁹⁴ Mirhady (2009), 374.

forgo a narrow, self-interested understanding of utility and remember their civic duties, their society is threatened with a loss of cohesion, just like the play itself.

Chapter 3: Assemblywomen

The previous two chapters explored the way *Knights* and *Wasps* form a thematic continuum, based not so much on their treatment of Kleon as on their problematization of civic motivation. In the former, Kleon serves as the focal point for a critique against a manipulative administration of public finance enabled by selfishly profit-driven citizens. In the latter, the play's Kleon-lover belongs to a group of irresponsibly active citizens who cash in on their performance of civic duty, while the political apathy promulgated by the Kleon-loather wreaks social havoc in the end. After *Wasps* (422 BCE) and until the turn of the century, half of Aristophanes' extant plays focus on the ongoing Peloponnesian War, either entertaining the benefits of peace (*Peace*, 421 BCE; *Lysistrata*, 411 BCE) or addressing issues related to Athens's imperial enterprise (*Birds*, 414 BCE).¹ In the other half, the fuel for Aristophanes' comic inspiration comes from Athens's intellectual milieu, and especially the tragic stage (*Clouds* II, early 410s BCE; *Women at the Thesmophoria*, 411 BCE; *Frogs*, 405 BCE). In *Assemblywomen* (late 390s BCE), however, civic motivation is once again a central theme, and so are the problematics of profit-maximizing civic behavior.²

The play presents a *coup d'état* by Athenian women, who infiltrate an Assembly-meeting dressed as men, vote themselves to absolute power, and turn Athens into a communist society. The stage opens with Praxagora, the female protagonist, anticipating her accomplices, the women of the Chorus, who arrive one after another, each relating her regimen so as to disguise herself as a man (1-78). During a final practice in public speaking before leaving for the Assembly, the women

¹ Given its lengthy and extravagant plot, *Birds* has been subject to a variety of interpretations. For an overview, along with a new reading of the play as a satire against Athenian elites who sought new sources of wealth and political power in Thrace, see Hall (2020b).

² Based on vague internal historical references and equally vague scholia, the performance of *Assemblywomen* can be assigned to any year between 394 and 389 BCE, with most scholars favoring 392 or 391 BCE. For early scholarship on the matter, see Seager (1967), 107 n. 110. For the latest state of the debate, see Sommerstein (1998), 5-7. For the period between *Wasps* and *Assemblywomen*, we have testimonia and/or fragments for several of Aristophanes' plays; cf. Henderson (2008); Bagordo (2020); Torchio (2021). Although some titles are suggestive of these plays' general content, nothing survives in the fragments suggestive of a commentary on civic motivation.

cannot help making gendered faux pas (79-168), so Praxagora steps up to lead by example. In a mock-speech (169-310), stressing the men's fixation on making a profit out of the public coffers (186-8, 197-8, 206-8), she deplors the state of political affairs and proposes handing the *polis* over to women, who do everything as in the good old days (214-40). In the same vein, before their exit, the women rehash the civic decline of Athens caused by the men's obsessively profit-driven civic behavior (289-310).

In a hurry to relieve himself at the crack of dawn, Praxagora's husband, Blepyros, appears on stage dressed in his wife's gown and soon chances upon his friend Khremes, who is returning from the Assembly (311-72). Khremes informs Blepyros that the meeting was packed and already over, so both men are distressed that they missed out on their Assembly-pay (372-95). Khremes relates part of the debate and, to Blepyros' surprise, the motion to entrust the city to the women (395-477). After the women return, Praxagora lays out the plan for the new *status quo* in a conversation with her husband and a neighbor (478-570). Private property is to be abolished, sex to be liberalized under the condition that the old and the ugly will have priority over the young and the beautiful, lawcourts to cease operations, and everyone to dwell and dine communally (571-729). In the following two scenes, the plan is put to the test. First, in the "Dissident scene," the neighbor and an unnamed man debate whether one should or should not follow the latest statutes and surrender his property (730-876). Then, in the "old women scene," a young couple in pursuit of sexual gratification is harassed by three elderly women, each claiming they have the right of first access to the young man (877-1111). In the end, a female herald leads Blepyros, garlanded

and accompanied by two young girls, to the communal feast prepared by the women, and the singing Chorus follows suit (1112-83).³

Although the sequence of actions is typical of Aristophanic plots, *Assemblywomen* exhibits several peculiarities in structure and characterization.⁴ The play lacks an array of formal features, especially with regard to the function of the Chorus: dialogic parts in iambic trimeters dominate the action, lyric parts are drastically curtailed, and there is no *parabasis*.⁵ In terms of characterization, prominent public figures, type-characters, and foreigners are conspicuously absent, while equally striking is the absence of any aspect of the divine. Especially with regard to the latter, Praxagora stands apart as a protagonist, given that “Aristophanic hero(in)es who are working for the general good... almost always have divine assistance or signs of divine approval.”⁶ In fact, the whole cast of *Assemblywomen* is notably ordinary, and it has been observed that its characters pose as individuals rather than types.⁷ Some scholars attribute these peculiarities, which result in a more prosaic and realistic comic drama, to a shift in aesthetic preferences that anticipated the move from Old to New Comedy.⁸ Next to their implications with regard to the history of Greek

³ The male character in the final scene is only called δεσπότης (1125, 1129) so his identity has been debated; cf. Olson (1987); (1991a); Sommerstein (2016). Based on the unidentified woman’s address to her mistress as μακαριωτάτη (1113), however, I concur with Ussher (1973, xxxii-xxxiv) and Sommerstein (1998, ad 1113) that the δεσπότης of the closing scene is Blepyros.

⁴ For the narrative structure underlying Aristophanic comedy, see Sifakis (1992).

⁵ See Sommerstein (1998), 22-25. For the significance of the *parabasis* in Old Comedy, see Sifakis (1971); Bowie (1982); Hamilton (1991); Hubbard (1991).

⁶ Sommerstein (1998), 27.

⁷ See Silk (2000, 219-233), where he discusses the realism of characterization in Aristophanes’ late plays and its affinities with that of New Comedy.

⁸ See Flashar (1967), who, however, argues that the Aristophanes’ last two plays employ irony in a manner that renders them unique among plays of both Old and New Comedy. Dover (1972, 194-195) considers the disparities between early and late plays as a possible result of Aristophanes following aesthetic trends set by others, but—interestingly enough—he does not preclude the possibility of Aristophanes suffering a stroke. On the other hand, for some critics *Assemblywomen* clearly marks the transition to Aristophanes’ years of decline, due either to senility or the tense historical context of production; see Wilamowitz (1927), 203-221; Murray (1933), 181-198. Still, as noted by Ussher (1973, xiii) it is beyond doubt that “in spirit and in content the play stands well within Old Comedy’s traditions.” For a similar assessment, see Nesselrath (1990), 249. For the way Aristophanes’ late work, both surviving and fragmentary, fits within the category of Middle Comedy, see Arnott (2010). On the difficulties inherent in the periodization of Comedy, see Sidwell (2000).

drama, however, these peculiarities also render *Assemblywomen* an intriguing lens through which to examine the behavior of ordinary Athenian citizens.

This chapter explores the play's scrutiny of the civic behavior of Athenians, arguing that a critique of material self-interest is central to the political commentary of *Assemblywomen*, just as it was for *Knights* and *Wasps*. Thus far, critical readings of the play have focused on interpreting Aristophanes' intentions in producing a play about an egalitarian transformation of Athens. For example, the fact that Spartan society is mirrored in many of the ideas expressed by Praxagora has prompted analyses of her plan as a mockery of Athens's arch-rival.⁹ Alternatively, considering the permanent subversion of normality by the end of the play, a number of scholars have read *Assemblywomen* as an escapist fantasy—strictly grounded, as some argue, in its festive context per Bakhtin's carnivalesque.¹⁰ For others, the scenes following Praxagora's exit are meant to showcase through irony that her plan is a failure; thus, the second half of the play has provided ground for various negative interpretations.¹¹ Despite their valuable insights, however, these readings neglect the intimate connection between Praxagora's program and the problem that prompted its conception, namely the moral disengagement plaguing Athens's civic culture.

As regards the educational aspect of the play, a number of scholars have argued that next to its critique of contemporary socio-political problems *Assemblywomen* also offers advice on how

⁹ Dettenhofer (1999) reads *Assemblywomen* as a ridiculing treatise on the Spartan way of life, through which Aristophanes sought to swerve public opinion against the Spartans' suit for peace in 392/1 BCE—for the doubtful historicity of these negotiations, however, see Harris (2021), 38-46. Similarly, Auffarth (2004) argues that the play relates the defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War to the defeat of the Argives at Sepeia in 494 BCE, where a gynaeocracy foiled the Spartan plan to obliterate Argos.

¹⁰ See Carrière (1979), 85-110; Zimmermann (1983); MacDowell (1995), 323; McGlew (2002), 191-211; Sonnino (2017); Orfanos (2018).

¹¹ According to Wilamowitz (1927), Strauss (1966, 263-282), and Kremer (1994), *Assemblywomen* criticizes egalitarianism, or—per Flashar (1967)—keeps an ironic distance from the idea. For Auger (1979), Saïd (1979), and Tsoumpra (2020), the implementation of Praxagora's plan, which conforms to Greek gendered biases and produces a society of animalistic hedonism and sterility. Similarly, based on the mythical exempla interwoven in its plot, Zeitlin (1999a; 1999b) claimed that *Assemblywomen* follows a tradition of gender-reversal narratives, where gynaeocracy results in misrule.

to mend them.¹² Moreover, the scenes following the implementation of Praxagora's program have not been read exclusively in a negative light. Exposing the inconsistencies in ironic readings, Isabel Ruffell argued that Aristophanes' fourth-century plays scrutinize selfishness and altruism, "not with a concrete program for revolutionary change but as progressive thought-experiments."¹³ In keeping with a reading of the play as a thought experiment, I suggest that *Assemblywomen* exposes the problems surrounding self-interest by imaginatively making it the impetus for the creation of a society where personal and communal interests are merged. In this regard, the final scenes present the results of adjusting the entire *polis*' apparatus to the way Athenians treat civic life in the play, namely as a means to cover their basic needs. *Assemblywomen* thus calls the members of the audience to reflect on the essence of civic behavior while alerting them to their ever-increasing self-interest and the resultant corrosion of Athens's democracy.

3.1 Athenian Society and the Evolution of Preferences

Before delving into the action, we should first put the play into historical context, and in so doing appreciate why civic motivation and incentives claimed the spotlight. For more than half of its plot, *Assemblywomen* presents citizens treating participation in the Assembly as a source of income, dissociated from any notion of civic duty or social utility (183-88, 205-8, 280-4, 292, 300-10, 376-93, 547-8, 562-3). Multiple scholars have identified selfishness as a key theme of the

¹² For Rothwell (1990), Praxagora's plan appeals to civic loyalty, attacks self-interest, and demonstrates how persuasive, public-spirited leadership is essential for democracy. According to Ober and Strauss (1990, 264-270), Aristophanes presents the extremes of political equality and confronts his audience with the limits of their own public-spiritedness. For similar readings, see Ober (1998), 122-155; Zumbrennen (2006). From a metatheatrical perspective, Moodie (2012) argued that the play builds rapport between the audience and its female characters, perhaps with the aim to make the women and their actions more acceptable. Analyzing the role of Praxagora as a new Solon-figure reorganizing the state, Sheppard (2016) maintained that the final scenes showcase the need for strong leadership by demonstrating to the audience how a reorganization process can be impeded by critical bystanders and over-zealous enforcers alike.

¹³ See Ruffell (2006), quotation from 104.

play.¹⁴ Yet, no adequate attention has been paid to the causal link Aristophanes draws between the citizens' selfishness and Assembly-pay—the latest incentive to be introduced in Athens's civic sphere of activity.

At this point, considering that *Assemblywomen* is our major source on fourth-century Assembly proceedings, a brief historical excursus is necessary. According to the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, in order to combat absenteeism after 403 BCE, Assembly-pay was introduced first at one obol, and gradually increased to two and then three obols.¹⁵ In the play, the rate is said to be three obols; hence, Assembly-pay could have been introduced at any point between 403 BCE and the staging of *Assemblywomen*.¹⁶ As regards the logistics of payment, the play suggests that the number of recipients was limited to early-comers, and indeed those who came early enough to receive a ticket (σύμβολον).¹⁷ The number of tickets handed out is contestable, but Herman Hansen has made an appealing case for 6,000—a number that corresponds to the Assembly's quorum requirements as well as the auditorium's size on the Pnyx in the early fourth century.¹⁸ Finally, with regard to the reason for the introduction of the subsidy, scholars

¹⁴ For selfishness as a theme in *Assemblywomen*, see Saïd (1979); Foley (1982); Rothwell (1990), 10-19; Sommerstein (1998), 19-22; Sheppard (2016).

¹⁵ Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 41.3 οὐ συλλεγομένων δ' εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ σοφισζομένων τῶν πρυτάνεων, ὅπως προσιστῆται τὸ πλῆθος πρὸς τὴν ἐπικύρωσιν τῆς χειροτονίας, πρῶτον μὲν Ἀγύρριος ὀβολὸν ἐπόρισεν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτον Ἡρακλείδης ὁ Κλαζομένιος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπικαλούμενος διώβολον, πάλιν δ' Ἀγύρριος τριώβολον (“As people were not gathering for meetings, with the presiding Councilors contriving various devices to assemble a multitude for the ratification of the voting, first Agyrrhios introduced a payment of one obol, and after him Herakleides of Klazomenai—the so-called king—two obols, and then again Agyrrhios three obols”).

¹⁶ cf. *Eccl.* 292, 380; Hansen (1991), 150.

¹⁷ cf. *Eccl.* 282-4, 289-298, 376-95, 739-41. During the fourth century, each judge received two σύμβολα: one when entering the court, which appears to have assigned him to a particular seating section, and one after casting his vote, which was then exchanged for court-pay; cf. Ar. *Plut.* 278 with Sommerstein (2001) ad loc.; Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 65.2, 68.2 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc. By analogy to the ticket-system of the courts, the σύμβολα handed out to Assembly-goers were most probably also exchanged for pay by the end of meetings; see Hansen (1986), 95; Ussher (1973) and Sommerstein (1998) ad 296.

¹⁸ For the original argument for the 6,000 σύμβολα, see Hansen (1986), 93-97. Challenging Hansen, Gauthier (1990, 439-441) argued that there was no fixed sum allotted for each Assembly-meeting, and later noted (1993, 240 n. 19) that “[e]n fait, nous ne savons rien du montant global du *misthos* et, partant, du nombre de symbola distribués à telle ou telle séance.” Despite the lack of positive evidence, Hansen (1996, 29-33) plausibly argued that the ever-increasing rate of Assembly-pay during the fourth century suggests that it was not easy to achieve quorums; hence, the

generally concur that it aimed at bolstering participation in the Assembly, which in the late fifth and early fourth centuries, according to Aristophanes and the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, was erratic.¹⁹

In the play, the women time and again claim that men are bad citizens, because their profit-maximizing civic behavior renders Athens's democracy dysfunctional (183-88, 205-8, 300-10). Meanwhile, the women's point is driven home by Blepyros and Khremes, who exemplify during their dialogue how incentives motivate civic engagement that is centered on maximizing material gain (376-93, 547-8, 562-3). In the terminology of behavioral science, Athenians are said (and shown) to be morally disengaged in their civic behavior to the detriment of public life, and incentives are presented as the root cause. *Assemblywomen* thus scrutinizes the behavior of Athenians in similar terms as *Knights* and *Wasps*, where the focus was on the courts. This time, however, Aristophanes' critique seems uncompromising. Following the implementation of Assembly-pay, civic engagement is said to be premised on profit-maximization in its entirety, since Athenians "now expect a three-obol compensation whenever they do *anything* for the public good" (309-10 νυνὶ δὲ τριώβολον ζητοῦσι λαβεῖν, ὅταν | πράττωσί τι κοινόν).

On closer inspection, the critique of public life in *Assemblywomen* makes the play an important document not only for the civic but also the cultural effects of incentives on the society of classical Athens. Interestingly, the introduction of Assembly-pay is the only political subsidy in

ekklesiastikon appears to have aimed at attracting the 6,000 citizens necessary for quorate Assembly-meetings. For the constant increase of the rate of Assembly-pay as part of an attempt to turn Assembly-meetings into a mass spectacle that monumentalized democratic power, see Sing (2021), 128-134.

¹⁹ cf. *Eccl.* 183-8 (discussed below); Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 41.3 οὐ συλλεγομένων δ' εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν etc. In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, reduced participation at Assembly-meetings has been linked to a decline in civic-mindedness resulting from Athens's constitutional vicissitudes, the severe impoverishment of the body politic, or both. For a bibliographical survey, see Gauthier (1993), 233 n. 6. Challenging the established view, Gauthier (1990, 439-441; 1993) argued that the aim of Assembly-pay was the punctuality of Assembly-goers. Nonetheless, as noted by Hansen (1996, 30), "the two objectives, to get more citizens to attend and to make them arrive earlier, are in no way mutually exclusive."

Athens for the introduction of which we have evidence of controversy. In the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, we are told that Athenians “initially rejected the proposal to introduce payment for the Assembly” (41.3 μισθοφόρον δ’ ἐκκλησίαν τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀπέγνωσαν ποιεῖν)—the implied time being from the 450s BCE onwards, when payment was introduced for service in the courts, the Council, and various magistracies.²⁰ Equally, *Assemblywomen* records an intriguing detail about the attitude of Athenians with regard to compensation for participating in Assembly-meetings. When Praxagora relates the different reaction of the recipient and the non-recipient of Assembly-pay, we are told that the former praises the man who introduced it while the latter grumbles that “those seeking to earn wages in Assembly-meetings should be put to death” (187-8 ὁ δ’ οὐ λαβὼν εἶναι θανάτου φήσ’ ἀξίους | τοὺς μισθοφορεῖν ζητοῦντας ἐν τῆκκλησίᾳ). The implication is that both parties are engrossed in getting paid, but the pseudo-moralistic reaction of the empty-handed Assembly-goer suggests that compensation for participation in the Assembly was deemed reprehensible. Considering the wide-ranging implementation of incentives in Athens, however, why would the deliberative function of the *polis* stand apart from the judicial and executive with respect to subsidized participation?

The initial objection to the introduction of Assembly-pay must have rested on ideological grounds, which apparently persisted even after its implementation. Surveying the changes in Athens’s political machinery after 403 BCE, Peter Rhodes noted that in the second half of the fifth century, despite the introduction of payment for various public services, “citizens had been expected to attend the assembly without pay;” yet, due to absenteeism, payment was eventually introduced “for performing the most basic civilian duty of a citizen.”²¹ Indeed, to attend the

²⁰ See Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

²¹ Rhodes (1980), 307. On the importance of participation in decision-making within Athenian civic ideology, see also id. (2009), 64-66.

Assembly was a fundamental civic duty, and the expectation to perform it appears to have been premised on the duty's importance for a citizen's claim to membership in the *polis*. As succinctly put by Josine Blok, it was the base line of one's participation in a community, "and for this reason the *polis* assembly could be regarded with justification as the cornerstone of Greek political citizenship."²² Furthermore, as demonstrated by Matthew Christ, Athenians valued persuasion over coercion, and in the ideological discourse of their democracy the willingness of the individual to embrace duty in relation to the community was the mark of good citizenship.²³ The attested pushback on Assembly-pay, then, seems to be the result of some Athenians' resolution to keep the most fundamental of civic contributions in their democracy untainted by non-civically-oriented ulterior motives. In this case, although Assembly-pay can be—and has been—explained as a response to absenteeism, the ideological *volte-face* involved in its introduction poses a mystery.

In two studies on Athenian society and economy, Edmund Burke argued that the extensive subsidization introduced by Perikles fundamentally altered the socio-political ethos of Athenians, bringing about the onset of a commercialism that lasted until the end of the democracy.²⁴ The growth of markets during the fifth century provides a more plausible explanation for the commercialist behavior of Athenians in the economic sphere of activity, but behavioral science corroborates Burke's argument for the civic sphere of activity, thus shedding light on the mystery surrounding the introduction of Assembly-pay. As noted by Samuel Bowles, our knowledge of how we humans come to acquire our preferences is limited, but all evidence suggests that economic

²² Blok (2013), 170. For further discussion on participation in decision-making within the Aristotelian "to rule and to be ruled" conception of citizenship, see Blok (2017), 200-209.

²³ See Christ (2007), 35-44. For the way Athenian oratory frames the otherwise voluntaristic participation in administration as political obligation, see Liddel (2007), 228-256.

²⁴ See Burke (1992); (2005). Contrary to the general scholarly consensus, Burke (2005, 37) sees the introduction of Assembly-pay not as a response to absenteeism but as an attempt on behalf of *thētes* to make up for lost income from military pay after the end of the Peloponnesian War.

institutions affect our preference-learning process based on cultural transmission.²⁵ When it comes to incentives, their effect on state-dependent preferences (i.e. specific to a decision-situation) can be assumed to be equally applicable to endogenous preferences (i.e. behavioral constants), since “the extent to which a society relies on economic incentives—as opposed to other kinds of motivations and controls—may affect how people learn new preferences.”²⁶ This phenomenon is based on two overlapping reasons: conformism in cultural transmission (i.e. people adopt what they perceive to be the behavior of the majority) and the framing effect of incentives (i.e. an incentive can shift one’s motivation towards self-interest as well as prompt observers to ascribe such a motivation to one’s actions).²⁷ Bowles cautiously warned that while it is empirically plausible for conformism and framing to account for the evolution of endogenous preferences, we cannot hope for experimental evidence for such a long-term phenomenon. Besides, the adverse effects of incentives on endogenous preferences are hard to test in a practical way with historical data, “since doing so would require finding something that almost certainly does not exist: a sample of otherwise similar societies with measurably different incentive structures, combined with data over a period of generations on social norms.”²⁸ Certainly, the kind of extensive and comparative historical survey envisioned by Bowles does not exist, but our historical knowledge of classical Athens and its civic culture makes for a compelling case study.

The timespan covered by Aristophanes’ commentary on the civic behavior of Athenians renders his comedy an invaluable resource on the evolution of social preferences in the *longue*

²⁵ See Bowles (1998).

²⁶ Bowles and Polanía-Reyes (2012), 375.

²⁷ See Bowles (2016), 116-131. A striking example of behavioral conformism is found in the “Dissident scene” of *Assemblywomen*. Specifically, the Dissident says that he shall hold on to his property until he sees “how the multitude is going to act” (769-70 φυλάξομαι, ἢ πρὶν ἂν γ’ ἴδω τὸ πλῆθος ὅ τι βουλεύεται), as he considers acting before witnessing majority action to be foolish (787-9 τῆς μωρίας, ἢ τὸ μηδὲ περιμείναντα τοὺς ἄλλους ὅ τι ἢ δράσουσιν εἶτα τῆνικαὶ ἤδη—).

²⁸ ib. 122.

durée. By the time *Assemblywomen* was staged, the preferences of two generations of Athenians had already been shaped by a civic culture in which incentives played an ever-increasing role. For those born around the beginning of the fifth century, their adulthood coincided with the consolidation of Athens's democracy and their old age with the introduction of incentives. This was the generation that, according to the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, objected to Assembly-pay, but also the one in which Aristophanes' *Knights* traced the onset of the adverse behavioral effects of incentives. Subsequently, for Athenians born around the middle of the fifth century, their civic education was bound to reflect aspects of the crowding-out phenomenon. If anything, the conversation between the Chorus leader and his young son in *Wasps* (230-315), where court-service is nothing more than a source of income, attests to a cultural transmission of preferences informed by a narrow notion of individual utility-maximization. Considering thus the heavy reliance of Athens's civic culture on monetary incentives, the eventual introduction of Assembly-pay—in the face of prior and seemingly ongoing opposition—can be plausibly explained as a cultural consequence of the extensive implementation of incentives. In other words, by progressively crowding out pro-social preferences within the civic sphere of activity, incentives gradually led to a new norm of civic behavior: one characterized, per Burke, by commercialism. Accordingly, the introduction of Assembly-pay can be construed as a further degradation of Athenian civic-mindedness, and this appears to be what Aristophanes presents us with in his *Assemblywomen*.

As a final remark in the historical contextualization of *Assemblywomen*, it should be noted that the sensitivity Aristophanes exhibits as a playwright to the complexities of the behavioral phenomena he dramatized is remarkable. Poverty is always the background against which his comedy examines civic behavior, presenting an Athenian body politic whose economic status

instigates the dependence of Athens's civic culture on incentives. As seen in *Knights* and *Wasps*, the comic profile of the judge is typically that of a poor old man, for whom court-pay covers basic needs (see Appendix I). Moreover, both plays present proposals for sustenance handouts as a tool for gaining political capital.²⁹ In Aristophanes' fourth-century plays poverty becomes a more central concern, and this is hardly surprising.³⁰ Following the defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War, the loss of their once-formidable navy went hand in hand with the loss of the empire and its revenues.³¹ Certainly, after the deposition of the Thirty Tyrants, the restored democracy did not take long to rebound economically and constitutionally.³² Still, for some years after the war, poverty must have been a serious problem, and *Assemblywomen* speaks to the situation.³³ As we learn from Khremes' report, before Praxagora's proposal, the ones for free clothing and accommodation were the "most popular" (411 δημοτικωτάτους λόγους), presumably catering to a widespread demand for basic necessities. Additionally, Blepyros and Khremes make clear that their civic engagement directly translates into the daily sustenance of their households (380-2, 459-61, 547-8, 560-3). Therefore, poverty was a key factor that, alongside incentives, contributed to the ever-intensifying moral disengagement of Athenians, especially as documented in Aristophanic comedy.

²⁹ cf. *Eq.* 1100-6, *Vesp.* 715-8.

³⁰ See David (1984), 3-20; Sommerstein (2001), 4-5.

³¹ For an overview of the events during the late-fifth and early-fourth centuries, see *CAH*² 6, 24-44.

³² Strauss (1986) provides a study of Athens in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War. For a general overview of Athens's economic recovery, see French (1991). The recovery of the Athenian agricultural production after the war is discussed in detail by Hanson (1998, 131-173) and Chandezon (1999). For issues of continuity and change in the political, constitutional, and economic history of Athens between the fifth and fourth centuries, see the contributions in Eder (1995) and Tiersch (2016).

³³ For the economic transformations effected by the Peloponnesian War, especially with regard to poverty, see Cecchet (2015), 115-139; Taylor (2017), 69-114.

3.2 Incentives and Democratic Deliberation

During the women’s preparation for the Assembly, Praxagora draws attention to the issues that prompted the orchestration of her plan. The men are said to always choose leaders who are scoundrels: “even if someone is good for one day, he turns into a miscreant for ten.”³⁴ Praxagora has a paradigmatic case in mind (183-8):

ἐκκλησίαισιν ἦν ὅτ’ οὐκ ἐχρώμεθα | οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν· ἀλλὰ τόν γ’ Ἀγύρριον | πονηρὸν
ἠγούμεσθα. νῦν δὲ χρωμένων | ὁ μὲν λαβὼν ἀργύριον ὑπερεπῆνεσεν, | ὁ δ’ οὐ λαβὼν
εἶναι θανάτου φήσ’ ἀξίους | τοὺς μισθοφορεῖν ζητοῦντας ἐν τῆκκλησίᾳ.

There were times when we did not hold Assembly-meetings at all, but we all still thought of Agyrrhios as a scoundrel. Now that we hold Assembly-meetings, the one paid praises him to the skies, and the one not paid says that those seeking to earn wages from the Assembly should be put to death.

Based on our ancient sources, Agyrrhios had a political career centered on matters of public finance; most notably, the introduction of Assembly-pay at a rate of one obol and later its increase from two to three obols.³⁵ Evidently, he was prominent enough to make it into Aristophanes’ cast of *komodoumenoi* and be satirized in the manner typically reserved for political figures.³⁶ For our present purposes, however, what is important is not the veracity of the comic allegations against

³⁴ *Eccl.* 176-8 ὀρῶ γὰρ αὐτήν προστάταισι χρωμένην | ἀεὶ πονηροῖς: κᾶν τις ἡμέραν μίαν | χρηστὸς γένηται, δέκα πονηρὸς γίγνεται.

³⁵ In a study on the grain-tax law of 374/3 BCE proposed by Agyrrhios, Stroud (1998, 16-25) provides a meticulous discussion of our records on his career, the first traces of which appear already in the 410s. For Agyrrhios’ family, see *APF* 8157.I-III. Besides the introduction of Assembly-pay (for which, see Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 41.3), Agyrrhios is also credited with the creation of the Theoric Fund; see Harp. s.v. θεωρικά, but cf. Roselli (2009) for the dubious accuracy of the lemma.

³⁶ Besides being corrupt, Agyrrhios is said to be sexually perverse and venal; cf. *Eccl.* 102-4 Ἀγύρριος γοῦν τὸν Προνόμου πάγων ἔχων | λέλθηε. καίτοι πρότερον ἦν οὔτος γυνή | νυνὶ δ’ ὀρᾶς, πράττει τὰ μέγιστ’ ἐν τῇ πόλει (“Indeed, Agyrrhios has gone unnoticed sporting Pronomos’ beard—although himself formerly a woman, now, you see, he is the fat-cat of Athens.”); *Plut.* 176 Ἀγύρριος δ’ οὐχὶ διὰ τοῦτον πέρδεται; (“Does not Agyrrhios fart for him [sc. Wealth]?”). For Agyrrhios’ flatulence in *Wealth* as an allusion to his venality, see Major (2002). For a representative example of Aristophanes’ stock jabs at *rhētores*, cf. *Eq.* 425-8 ἄλλ. ὥστ’ εἶπ’ ἀνὴρ τῶν ῥητόρων ἰδὼν με τοῦτο δρῶντα: | “οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅπως ὁ παῖς ὄδ’ οὐ τὸν δῆμον ἐπιτροπέυσει.” | ΧΟΡ. εὐ γὰρ ξυνέβαλεν αὐτ’· ἀτὰρ δῆλόν γ’ ἀφ’ οὗ ξυνέγνω· | ὅτι πῖωρκεῖς θ’ ἠρπακῶς καὶ κρέας ὁ πρωκτὸς εἶχεν. (“S-S: So, one of the *rhētores* who saw me doing this [sc. stealing meat, hiding it in his crotch, and lying about the theft under oath] said: ‘no doubt, this boy will one day govern the people.’ CH: He was sagacious indeed, although it is obvious where he made the deduction from, given that you perjured, stole, and your ass was full of meat.”).

Agyrrhios (which resemble those levelled against Kleon) but the behavioral phenomena linked to the introduction of Assembly-pay.³⁷

Commentators agree that what Praxagora refers to in lines 183-4 as the times when Athenians “did not hold Assembly-meetings at all” is when the rate of the Assembly-pay was not enough to incentivize participation effectively.³⁸ The obvious implication of these lines is that political absenteeism was a pressing issue during the early fourth century.³⁹ Such an inference is also corroborated by the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, where Assembly-pay is said to have been introduced after various other devices failed to attract quorums.⁴⁰ Thus, looking back at Praxagora’s remark, the participation effected via Assembly-pay is presented as conducive to a degeneration of civic-mindedness. On the one hand, citizens are so profit-driven that an adequate monetary incentive is necessary if democratic deliberation is even to take place.⁴¹ On the other hand, pandering to the self-interest of such citizens is what it takes for someone unfit for political leadership to garner support.⁴²

³⁷ For Kleon’s corruption, sexual perversion, and venality, see *Knights passim*. Perhaps it should be noted that all allegations against Kleon in our sources were just that: allegations, but Agyrrhios was at some point prosecuted for embezzlement and incarcerated for several years; see Dem. 24.134-5.

³⁸ See ad loc. Ussher (1973); Vetta (1989); Sommerstein (1998).

³⁹ Already in 411 BCE, the oligarchs working on the *coup d’état* claimed that “due to warfare and business abroad, no more than five thousand Athenians ever attended the Assembly, regardless of importance for the issue under deliberation” (Thuc. 8.72.1 οὐ πάποτε Ἀθηναίους διὰ τὰς στρατείας καὶ τὴν ὑπερόριον ἀσχολίαν ἐς οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα οὕτω μέγα ἐλθεῖν βουλευέσοντας ἐν ᾧ πεντακισχιλίους ξυνελθεῖν). As noted by Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1981, ad loc.), the “argument need not be quite honest, but this must be the right order of magnitude.”

⁴⁰ Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 41.3 (n. 15 above) with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

⁴¹ The profit-maximizing mentality informing attendance at the Assembly is also a theme in *Wealth*; cf. *Plut.* 171 ἐκκλησία δ’ οὐχὶ διὰ τοῦτον γίγνεται; (“Does not the Assembly take place because of him [sc. Wealth]?”), 329-30 τριωβόλου μὲν οὐνεκα ἢ ὥστιζόμεσθ’ ἐκάστωτ’ ἐν τῆκκλησίᾳ (“for the sake of the three obols we are jostling each time in the Assembly”).

⁴² As regards Agyrrhios’ motivation for proposing the introduction of Assembly-pay one can only speculate. According to Buchanan (1962, 25-26), he did so with an aim at political aggrandizement, but such a result can be said to be the expected outcome for someone consistently proposing effective policies. Still, Aristophanes attributes to Agyrrhios’ introduction of Assembly-pay the same result that the increase of court-pay afforded Kleon in *Knights* and *Wasps*, namely a drastic increase in political capital. On that note, satire against the way Agyrrhios’ policies affected his career vis-à-vis a self-interested body politic might not be exclusive to Aristophanes. In a passage arguing that democracies have a penchant for choosing depraved leaders whom they despise (*Prae. ger. reip.* 801a), Plutarch quotes a play by Plato *comicus* where a personified Demos is imploring someone to hold his hand lest he act on his

Another problem of a civic motivation rooted in profit-maximization, besides allowing alleged miscreants to carry clout, is that it bogs down democratic deliberation. According to Praxagora, to enter an anti-Spartan alliance with other *poleis* was initially thought to be salutary and then turned into a source of vexation (193-6), Athens's attitude towards Corinth and Argos constantly oscillates (199-200), and *rhētores* jeopardize the outcome of the war out of personal ambition (202-3).⁴³ Among the deliberative issues brought to the fore, the one indicative of the motivational problem underlying them is the decision to wage war. Praxagora's example is straightforward: "we must launch a fleet—the poor man agrees, the rich, and especially the rich farmers, disagree."⁴⁴ For the former, war gave the prospect of proceeds from military service and employment opportunities.⁴⁵ For the latter, war meant trierarchies, levies (εἰσφοραί), and property damage in the case of enemy incursions.⁴⁶ Yet, despite any specifics that would justify conflicting opinions, Praxagora's explanation is crushingly comprehensive (205-8):

compulsion to vote for Agyrrhios (fr. 201 K.-A. λαβοῦ, λαβοῦ τῆς χειρὸς ὡς τάχιστα μου, ἢ μέλλω στρατηγὸν χειροτονεῖν Ἀγύρριον). The lack of further context inhibits any certainty, but Demos' compulsive desire could be part of a broader satire against the effects of the pandering of *rhētores* to the self-interest of Athenian citizens.

⁴³ Soon after losing the Peloponnesian War, Athens was once again embroiled in war against Sparta—this time as an ally of Thebes, Corinth, and Argos in the so-called Corinthian War (395-386 BCE). For a historical overview, see *CAH*² 6, 97-119; Hornblower (2011), 217-233. Strauss (1986, 121-169) provides an account of the Corinthian War from the Athenian perspective, while Hamilton (1979) offers a detailed study of the relations between the warring *poleis*. Interestingly, Athens's latest military efforts are only addressed in lines 193-203, but Praxagora's remark is as short as it is vague. For the possible historical referents, see Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

⁴⁴ *Eccl.* 197-8 νᾶδες δεῖ καθέλκειν· τῷ πένητι μὲν δοκεῖ, ἢ τοῖς πλουσίοις δὲ καὶ γεωργοῖς οὐ δοκεῖ. As shown by Strauss (1986, 59-63), this remark does not showcase the split of opinion between Attica's urban and rural populations, but rather that between poor and rich Athenians.

⁴⁵ After the death of Alexander the Great, for example, Athenians were bent on reclaiming their independence, but in the Assembly "those of property were advising that no action be taken ... but far superior in number were the ones who preferred war and were in the habit of making a living from paid military service" (Diod. Sic. 18.10 τῶν μὲν κτηματικῶν συμβουλευόντων τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν ... πολὺ τοῖς πλήθεσιν ὑπερεῖχον οἱ τὸν πόλεμον αἰρούμενοι καὶ τὰς τροφὰς εἰωθότες ἔχειν ἐκ τοῦ μισθοφορεῖν). In the same vein, cf. Ar. *Plut.* 172 τὰς τριήρεις οὐ σὺ πληροῖς; ("Are you not the one [sc. Wealth] manning the warships?"). For the extensive employment opportunities afforded by the building and maintenance of Athens's fleet, see McArthur (2021), 493-508.

⁴⁶ According to the "Old Oligarch," "the farmers and the rich in Athens yield to the enemy, whereas the people, knowing all too well that the enemy will not burn or destroy anything of theirs, are of a fearless and unyielding disposition" (Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 2.14 νῦν δὲ οἱ γεωργοῦντες καὶ οἱ πλούσιοι Ἀθηναίων ὑπέρχονται τοὺς πολεμίους μάλλον, ὁ δὲ δῆμος, ἅτε εὖ εἰδὼς ὅτι οὐδὲν τῶν σφῶν ἐμπρήσουσιν οὐδὲ τεμοῦσιν, ἀδεῶς ζῆ καὶ οὐχ ὑπερχόμενος αὐτούς).

ὕμεις γὰρ ἐστ', ὧ δῆμε, τούτων αἴτιοι. | τὰ δημόσια γὰρ μισθοφοροῦντες χρήματα | ἰδίᾳ σκοπεῖσθ' ἕκαστος ὅ τι τις κερδανεῖ, | τὸ δὲ κοινὸν ὥσπερ Αἴσιμος κυλίνδεται.

You, the people, are the ones responsible for all these. Taking public money in wages, each one of you cares for his own profit, while the common weal wallows like Aisimos.⁴⁷

In these lines, the causal link drawn between incentives and a civically degenerative profit-maximizing behavior is unmistakable. Therefore, with a portrayal of citizens as lacking any motivational factor beyond their narrow economic self-interest, Praxagora presents a democratic *status quo* in jeopardy.

The causal link between incentives and selfish behavior is further explored in the *parodos*, where the Chorus take a moralist stand against it. Disguised as countryfolk, the women claim that they need to rush if they are to forestall the crowding of the Assembly by townsfolk, “who are now a nuisance but previously, when attendance was remunerated by a single obol, used to dawdle at the garland-shops.”⁴⁸ Loitering in the Agora on a designated day for an Assembly-meeting was not a phenomenon unique to the fourth century.⁴⁹ This time, however, things are said to have taken a decisive turn to the worse in terms of civic motivation. According to the Chorus (304-10):

Μυρωνίδης ὅτ' ἦρχεν ὁ γεννάδας, | οὐδεὶς ἂν ἐτόλμα τὰ τῆς πόλεως διοικεῖν | ἀργύριον φέρων ... νυνὶ δὲ τριώβολον ζητοῦσι λαβεῖν, ὅταν | πράττωσί τι κοινὸν ὥσπερ πηλοφοροῦντες.

When the noble Myronides was general, no one would have the audacity to draw pay for managing the affairs of the *polis* ... but now they demand three obols whenever they do anything for the common good, as if they were hod carriers.

⁴⁷ As noted by Sommerstein (1998, ad loc.), the career of Aisimos, an otherwise prominent individual in Athenian politics, might have been in eclipse during the Corinthian War; hence, the implication of line 208 is that the public good, like Aisimos, is neglected.

⁴⁸ *Eccl.* 300-3 ὅρα δ' ὅπως ὠθήσομεν τούσδε τοὺς ἐξ ἄστεως | ἤκοντας, ὅσοι πρὸ τοῦ μέν, ἠνίκ' ἔδει λαβεῖν | ἐλθόντ' ὀβολὸν μόνον, καθῆντο λαλοῦντες | ἐν τοῖς στεφανώμασιν, νυνὶ δ' ἐνοχλοῦσ' ἄγαν.

⁴⁹ See Introduction, pp. 19-20, and Appendix III.

The reference to Myronides, a celebrated fifth-century general, is meant to evoke the generation of the Persian Wars, which in Aristophanic comedy served as the paradigm of civic-mindedness.⁵⁰ As in *Knights*, where old Demos, contrary to the practice of the Themistoklean era, prioritized personal over communal utility, Aristophanes once again portrays Athenians as failing to emulate their public-spirited ancestors. At the same time, their transactional civic attitude is juxtaposed to that of unskilled laborers, suggesting that Athenians demean their identity as free citizens of a democracy—like the profit-driven judges who were likened to salaried olive-pickers in *Wasps*.

3.3 Civic Motivation under an Ever-Expanding Price System

When Khremes appears on stage on his way back home, we get one of the very few vignettes in Aristophanic comedy of interactions between non-elite Athenians in a prosaically quotidian setting.⁵¹ This veneer of realism seems to be of some significance, as the dialogue between Blepyros and his friend highlights the incentive-related problems the women brought to the fore.

The opening part deserves to be quoted in full (376-97):

ΒΛ: ἀτὰρ πόθεν ἤκεις ἐτεόν; ΧΡ: ἐξ ἐκκλησίας.
 ΒΛ: ἤδη λέλυται γάρ; ΧΡ: νῆ Δί' ὄρθριον μὲν οὔν.
 καὶ δῆτα πολὺν ἠ μίλτος, ὦ Ζεῦ φίλτατε,
 γέλων παρέσχεν, ἦν προσέρραινον κύκλω.
 ΒΛ: τὸ τριώβολον δῆτ' ἔλαβες; ΧΡ: εἰ γὰρ ὄφελον.
 ἀλλ' ὕστερος νῦν ἦλθον, ὥστ' αἰσχύνομαι.
 ΒΛ: μὰ τὸν Δί' οὐδέν' ἄλλον ἢ τὸν θύλακον.
 τὸ δ' αἴτιον τί; ΧΡ: πλεῖστος ἀνθρώπων ὄχλος,

⁵⁰ See Ussher (1973) ad loc. According to Plutarch (*Vit. Arist.* 20.1), Myronides was a general during the battle of Plataiai in 479 BCE. The last record we have for his career is his victory at Oinophyta in 457 BCE, which led to the occupation of Boiotia and Phokis; cf. Thuc. 1.108.2-3 and the discussion by de Ste. Croix (1972), 188-190. As an older contemporary of Perikles, whose birthdate Lehmann (2008, 30 and 273) tentatively places at 494/3 BCE, Myronides, in the height of his military career, must have predated the introduction of political subsidies. For the various public payments, their date of introduction, and their rates, see Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 24.3 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.

⁵¹ In a study of such vignettes and the way they spotlight paradoxes within democratic social ideology, Halliwell (2020) peculiarly excludes the conversation between Blepyros and Khremes, claiming that it has “the realistic narrative function of one citizen sharing information with another, but combined with the fantastic content of the information itself” (128 n. 43).

ὅσος οὐδεπόποτ', ἦλθ' ἀθρόος ἐς τὴν Πύκνα ... (384)
 ὥστ' οὐκ ἔλαβον οὔτ' αὐτὸς οὔτ' ἄλλοι συχνοί. (388)
 ΒΛ: οὐδ' ἄρ' ἂν ἐγὼ λάβοιμι νῦν ἐλθών; ΧΡ: πόθεν;
 οὐδ' ἂν μὰ Δία τὸτ' ἦλθες, ὅτε τὸ δεύτερον
 ἀλεκτρυὼν ἐφθέγγετ'. ΒΛ: οἴμοι δείλαιος.
 Ἀντίλοχ' ἀποιμῶζόν με τοῦ τριωβόλου
 τὸν ζῶντα μᾶλλον. τὰμὰ γὰρ διοίχεται.
 ἀτὰρ τί τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἦν, ὅτι τοσοῦτον χρῆμ' ὄχλου
 οὔτως ἐν ὥρᾳ ξυνελέγη; ΧΡ: τί δ' ἄλλο γ' ἢ
 ἔδοξε τοῖς πρυτάνεσι περὶ σωτηρίας
 γνώμας καθεῖναι τῆς πόλεως;

BL: But, hey, where are you coming from?

CHR: From the Assembly.

BL: Has it been dissolved already?

CHR: By Zeus, at daybreak! And the vermillion dye with which they were sprinkling people all around—oh, dear Zeus—provided a good laugh.

BL: You got the three obols then?

CHR: I wish, but this time I came too late, so I feel shame before—

BL: —no one else, by Zeus, but the shopping-bag. What was the reason?

CHR: A massive crowd of people, more than ever before, came together in the Pnyx ... thus we did not get anything, neither I nor many others.

BL: So, if I went now, I would still get nothing?

CHR: What are you driveling about? By Zeus, you would not have even if you had come at the cock's second crow!

BL: Alas, wretched me! “Antilokhos, rather than the three obols, mourn me, the one who is alive. All I have is gone!”⁵² But why was it that such a whopping crowd assembled at such an early time?

CHR: What else but the presiding Councilors deciding that opinions be offered regarding the salvation of the city?

During this exchange, the fact that Blepyros and Khremes have a vested interest in Assembly-pay cannot be in any way overstated. Besides Khremes' shame and Blepyros' paratragic lament, however, the obsession of both characters with Assembly-pay manifests itself most clearly in the dialogue's context.

In Khremes' account, the brief remark about the vermillion dye being “sprinkled all around” suggests that Assembly-pay was not motivational for every Athenian citizen, as the

⁵² Quoted from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (fr. 138 Radt) with a substitution of τοῦ τεθνηκότος (“the deceased”) with τοῦ τριωβόλου (“the three obols”); see Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

negative incentive of the vermillion-dyed rope was still necessary (see Appendix III). Still, for those motivated by Assembly-pay, the dialogue highlights the problematics of incentives with regard to contemporary civic-mindedness. Blepyros' first question after hearing about the bedlam at the Assembly is whether Khremes managed to get his pay (380). Khremes responds that he is empty-handed and chagrined, only to get a tongue-in-cheek retort that he is just ashamed of having an empty shopping-bag (380-2).⁵³ When Khremes reveals that the overcrowding at the Assembly was the reason that his attendance was fruitless, Blepyros' interest in Assembly-pay remains unabated (389-91). Nevertheless, when Blepyros is bereft of any hope for getting his Assembly-pay for the day (391-3), the dialogue turns to the most crucial piece of information pertaining to the motivation Aristophanes ascribes to his fellow citizens. Specifically, although Khremes emphasized the unprecedented attendance at the Assembly almost immediately (383-4), Blepyros inquires into the reason for such an astonishing event only after the lack of prospect for pay is established (394-5). In other words, for Blepyros, the decision-making aspect of the Assembly comes second in priority to the profit-making one.

Another indication of Blepyros' priorities is his utter ignorance of important civic matters. When he asks why such a crowd would gather so early, Khremes is surprised at the question since an item on the agenda for the day was to debate proposals for the salvation of Athens (394-7).⁵⁴

⁵³ The text for lines 381-2 is problematic, but still gives good sense. The MSS give line 382 ("no one else, by Zeus, but the shopping-bag") to Khremes, but Ussher (1973)—followed by Vetta (1989) and Sommerstein (1998)—gives it to Blepyros instead. In his discussion of the different editorial options, Sommerstein (ad loc.) argues that if the line is given to Khremes then it "gives feeble sense ('I came too late, which makes me ashamed to face—no one, by Zeus, other than my bag')." Both Ussher and Sommerstein follow Jackson (1955, 48), who found it "difficult to believe that a man can peruse the whole dialogue from 372 to 477 without being aware in the marrow of his bones that 382 was never spoken by the solid Khremes but by the more airy Blepyros." Despite Jackson's assessment of the two characters, there is nothing to suggest that the interest of Blepyros in Assembly-pay is any different from that of Khremes in degree or quality. To my mind, although I keep Sommerstein's text, whichever of the two characters is the one delivering the line—either an incensed Khremes, or a brazen Blepyros—the meaning is one and the same: their interest in the Assembly lies first and foremost in getting paid.

⁵⁴ For the surprise expressed by the set phrase τί δ' ἄλλο γ' ἦ, see Ussher (1973) ad 395. As suggested by his dialogue with Praxagora later, Blepyros clearly keeps an eye out for Assembly-meetings; cf. *Ecc1.* 551-2 IIP. ἀτὰρ

The agenda for an Assembly meeting was set by the Council and displayed publicly four days in advance; hence, for a citizen interested in effecting social change through the official organ of democratic decision-making, a day with such an agenda would be singled out.⁵⁵ By implication, this is exactly the reason why Praxagora and her accomplices chose this specific day to put their plan into action. As a result, the first part of the dialogue between Blepyros and Khremes corroborates Praxagora’s remarks about the decline of democratic deliberation. On the one hand, there are citizens with no interest in the Assembly, who loiter in the Agora even on days of crucial debates. On the other hand, there are citizens interested in the Assembly, but whose interest is primarily—if not exclusively—pecuniary.

The scene following Praxagora’s return (504-729) puts the finishing touch on the portrait *Assemblywomen* paints for the motivation of everyday Athenians. After inquiring into where she went and why she took away his clothes and shoes (520-46), Blepyros scolds Praxagora for making him miss the Assembly-meeting. One would expect that a citizen would first and foremost be annoyed at missing out on the opportunity to partake in decision-making, yet this is not the case. “Do you know that you have cost me a *hekteus* of wheat,” he asks, “which I would have gained from the Assembly?” (547-8 οἶσθ’ οὖν ἀπολωλεκυῖα πυρῶν ἐκτέα, ἢ ὄν χρῆν ἔμ’ ἐξ ἐκκλησίας εἰληφέναι;).⁵⁶ Obviously, Blepyros is annoyed that his shopping-bag is empty—as Khremes was earlier—and not at all that his wife has impeded the exercise of his rights as a citizen.

γεγένηται; ΒΛ. ναὶ μὲν Δί’. οὐκ ᾔδησθὰ με ἢ φράσαντά σοι χθές; Apparently, his attentiveness seems to be only for the sake of pay.

⁵⁵ For the public display of the Assembly’s agenda, see Rhodes (1972), 20; Hansen (1991), 133, 138-142.

⁵⁶ Given that a *hekteus* is 1/6 of a *medimnos*, the implied price of wheat is 3 drachmas per *medimnos*. In our evidence from inscriptions and oratory for fifth- and fourth-century wheat prices, however, the lowest recorded price is 5 drachmas per *medimnos*; cf. Rathbone and von Reden (2015), 160-161 and table A8.2. In view of that, Blepyros seems to be exaggerating his damages from missing out on his Assembly-pay.

As the conversation continues, it becomes clear that Blepyros' profit-maximizing civic attitude extends well beyond the Assembly. When Praxagora declares that under the new regime the *polis* will be truly blessed, because there will be no litigation and thus no place for *sykophantai*, her husband abjectly interjects: "No, by the gods, do not do that, do not deprive me of my livelihood!"⁵⁷ Although Blepyros brings attention back to the prospective lack of litigation a hundred lines later (655-71), his initial reaction to the future abolition of Athens's legal system shows that he is primarily concerned with his own sustenance rather than with institutional changes.⁵⁸ In fact, this is the only kind of concern informing the civic engagement of Athenians in the play. Earlier, upon hearing about the Assembly passing all civic duties on to women, Blepyros asked: "so I will not be the one going to the court, but my wife?" to which Khremes responded: "you are no longer the one to *feed* your folk, but your wife."⁵⁹ Like Demos in *Knights* and the judges in *Wasps*, Blepyros and Khremes seek sustenance through court-pay, so Assembly-pay represents just an opportunity for extra cash to the same end. Aristophanes thus sketches a motivational profile of the everyday citizen that accentuates how incentives within Athens's civic sphere of activity are a means to anything but a civic-oriented end.

3.4 Self-Interest and Praxagora's Reforms

After exposing the selfishness and ever-declining civic-mindedness of Athenian men, the play turns to the formal announcement of Praxagora's program (558-729). So far, scholars have

⁵⁷ *Eccl.* 560-3 ΠΠ. οὐ γὰρ ἔτι τοῖς τολμῶσιν αὐτήν αἰσχρὰ δρᾶν < lac. ind. Sommerstein > | ἔσται τὸ λοιπὸν ἰσοδομοῦ δὲ μαρτυρεῖν, | οὐ συκοφαντεῖν— ΒΛ. —μηδαμῶς πρὸς τῶν θεῶν | τουτὶ ποιήσης μηδ' ἀφέλη μου τὸν βίον. The text in lines 560-1 is problematic, but the sense is clear: Praxagora stresses the problems of excessive litigation in Athens; see Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

⁵⁸ See Ussher (1973) and Sommerstein (1998) ad 563.

⁵⁹ *Eccl.* 458-61 ΒΛ. ἅπαντά ἄρ' αὐταῖς ἐστὶ προστεταγμένα, | ἃ τοῖσιν ἀστοῖς ἔμελεν; ΧΡ. οὕτω ταῦτ' ἔχει. | ΒΛ. οὐδ' εἰς δικαστήριον ἄρ' εἴμ', ἀλλ' ἢ γυνή; | ΧΡ. οὐδ' ἔτι σὺ θρέψεις οὕς ἔχεις, ἀλλ' ἢ γυνή.

analyzed this part of *Assemblywomen* with a focus on Aristophanes' influences, exploring the relationship of the play with contemporary philosophy and historical examples of egalitarian practices.⁶⁰ These analyses shed light on the intellectual milieu out of which egalitarian ideas could spring. Nevertheless, no adequate emphasis has been laid on the close alignment of Praxagora's program with the narrowly utilitarian ideas entertained by Athenian citizens regarding public life.

During the report of the speeches delivered in the Assembly, we are told that a certain Euaion proposed that fullers distribute free cloaks and that tanners provide free accommodation in their workshops during wintertime (408-21).⁶¹ According to Khremes, Euaion made some "most popular proposals" (411 ἔλεξε δημοτικωτάτους λόγους), and Blepyros adds (422-5):

νῆ τὸν Διόνυσον χρηστά γ'· εἰ δ' ἐκεῖνά γε | προσέθηκεν, οὐδεὶς ἀντεχειροτόνησεν ἄν,
| τοὺς ἀλφιταμοιβοὺς τοῖς ἀπόροις τρεῖς χοίνικας | δεῖπνον παρέχειν ἅπασιν ἢ κλάειν
μακρά.

Good stuff, by Dionysus! Nobody would raise his hand in opposition should he have added that corn-dealers must supply the poor with three *khoinikes* for dinner, or else suffer severely.

Evidently, the adjective "popular" (δημοτικός) here is to be taken in its political sense as well, and that is "of democratic spirit."⁶² Proposals for a sponsorship of basic needs by the *polis* are not only crowd-pleasing but also considered to represent the spirit of Athens's democracy, and one cannot

⁶⁰ The socially engineered world envisioned by Praxagora has striking similarities with the Kallipolis of Plato's *Republic* (457c-468d), but who influenced whose work, or whether playwright and philosopher used a commonly circulating idea for their own respective ends, has been a long-debated issue; see Adam (1902), 345-355; Dover (1972), 200-201; Ussher (1973), xv-xx; David (1984), 20-29; Vetta (1989), xvi-xvii; Halliwell (1993), 224-225; MacDowell (1995), 314-315; Sommerstein (1998), 13-18; Tordoff (2007). Recent scholarship argues for Plato's work adapting that of Aristophanes; cf. Cinnella (2013); Nichols (2014). At the same time, many of the egalitarian ideas propounded by Praxagora can be linked to historical precedents. In Sparta, the constitutional reform of Lykourgos allegedly turned food, property, slaves, and child-rearing into communal matters, which according to our sources diminished the value of personal wealth and obliterated concomitant legal issues; cf. Xen. *Lac.* 5.2, 6.1-4, 7.2-5; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 8-12, 14-15, 24-25.3. Our evidence for land tenure in Sparta is highly problematic; see Hodkinson (1986). For the similarities between Lykourgos' reforms and Praxagora's program, see Carrière (1979), 97-98. In terms of public meals, next to the Spartan συσσίτια, our sources also record the ἀνδρεῖα taking place on the island of Crete; cf. Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 149; Arist. *Pol.* 1271a26-37, 1272a12-21; Ath. 4.143a-f. Finally, in Herodotus one finds brief accounts of the sexually liberal societies of the Agathyrsi in Thrace (4.104) and the Auses in Libya (4.180.5).

⁶¹ Euaion's identity is unknown; see Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

⁶² See *LSJ* s.v. δημοτικός.

help but notice that poverty is a major factor in shaping such a view. Therefore, it is no wonder that in devising a plan so as to combat the moral failings of men, and especially those related to their civic behavior, the issue of poverty is at the forefront.

Before going into the details regarding the new *status quo*, Praxagora sets its general framework as follows (590-4):

κοινωνεῖν γὰρ πάντα φήσω χρῆναι πάντων μετέχοντας | κακὰ ταύτοῦ ζῆν, καὶ μὴ τὸν
μὲν πλουτεῖν, τὸν δ' ἄθλιον εἶναι, | μηδὲ γεωργεῖν τὸν μὲν πολλήν, τῷ δ' εἶναι μηδὲ
ταφῆναι, | μηδ' ἀνδραπόδοις τὸν μὲν χρῆσθαι πολλοῖς, τὸν δ' οὐδ' ἀκολούθῳ | ἀλλ'
ἕνα ποιῶ κοινὸν πᾶσιν βίον καὶ τοῦτον ὅμοιον.

I am going to propose that everyone should own everything jointly and live out of common property, and that no man should be rich while another is wretched, nor one man to farm vast fields while another has not enough land to be buried in, nor one man to have hordes of slaves while another does not even have an attendant. Rather, I will make it so that there is one shared livelihood, equal for everyone.

Obviously, the envisioned egalitarian regime goes well beyond the alleviation of economic hardship. According to Ober, the goal of Praxagora's reforms "is to eliminate the motive for narrow-minded concentration on private or class interests" as typified by male characters in the previous scenes.⁶³ In effect, however, Praxagora gears the *polis* to what Athenians treat it as throughout the play, namely a mechanism through which one can maximize individual utility. Consequently, as Sommerstein correctly pointed out, "Praxagora never claimed that her revolution would of itself abolish selfishness ... [but] that she would create a situation in which it was in everyone's selfish interest to be altruistic and cooperative."⁶⁴

The fact that self-interest is the basis upon which Praxagora reforms Athenian society manifests itself in the conversation with her husband and a Neighbor-character, who confront her with questions regarding the upcoming reforms. The first question is how every person's

⁶³ Ober (1998), 133.

⁶⁴ Sommerstein (1998), 20.

livelihood will be a shared one. Praxagora answers that land, money, and all other possessions will be deposited into a common pool of resources, out of which women will provide men with their livelihood (595-600). The next question is how the cooperation of people whose wealth is in liquid assets can be guaranteed, but Praxagora clarifies that money will have no use anymore (601-6). The men are assured that “everyone will have everything: breads, slices of fish, barley cakes, cloaks, wine, garlands, chickpeas” (605-6 πάντα γὰρ ἔξουσιν ἅπαντες, | ἄρτους τεμάχη μάζας χλαίνας οἶνον στεφάνους ἐρεβίνθους). Subsequently, after addressing questions about the newly established sexual regulations (611-34), parenthood (635-50), and farming (651), Praxagora reaffirms the promise of the new *status quo*: “your only concern will be to go to dinner gleaming with oil, when the shadow is ten feet long” (651-2 σοὶ δὲ μελήσει, | ὅταν ἦ δεκάπουν τὸ στοιχεῖον, λιπαρῶ χωρεῖν ἐπὶ δειπνον). As regards clothing, the men are told that they will keep their current clothes and more will be woven for them (653-4). The next question concerns the administration of justice, but Praxagora explains that the abolition of private property will bring the end of crime and hence the need for any legal mechanism (655-72). Finally, after laying out the arrangements for communal living and dining (673-88), Praxagora promises that all alimentary and sexual needs will be taken care of (689-708). As expected from men who calculate their individual utility in terms of basic needs, the plan is greeted with assent (709-10); thus, Praxagora completes the function of persuasion reserved for Aristophanic protagonists.⁶⁵

The most important aspect of the new *status quo* as regards self-interest is that it merges the categories of communal and individual utility. According to Helene Foley, Praxagora sets a new example of pursuing the public good by rearranging the macrocosm of the *polis* according to

⁶⁵ On the narrative function of persuasion in Aristophanic comedy, see Sifakis (1992), 131.

the cooperative principles of its microcosm, the *oikos*.⁶⁶ In this regard, the accommodation arrangements are telling, as “the city will be turned into a *single household* by tearing down all party walls, so that everyone can walk into everyone else’s house” (673-5 τὸ γὰρ ἄστυ | μίαν οἴκησιν φημι ποιήσιν συρρήξασ’ εἰς ἓν ἅπαντα, | ὥστε βαδίσειν ὡς ἀλλήλους). Line 724 marks Praxagora’s permanent exit, making her the protagonist with the least on-stage presence in all of Aristophanic comedy.⁶⁷ This peculiarity draws further attention to the implementation of her program, as the closing scenes of the play present how the transformation of Athenian society plays out in her absence. By turning Athens into a single *oikos* and eliminating the private *oikos*, the pursuit of the public good is modeled after the pursuit of private interest.⁶⁸ Thus, under the novel concept of the *polis-as-oikos* scheme, the play turns to the results of social change that is based on self-interest, but one premised on cooperative behavior.

3.5 A Brave New World

As the Neighbor starts gathering his property outside his house so as to submit it to the women in the Agora, an unnamed man comes onto the stage grumbling about the new order of things (730-52). The Dissident is unwilling to surrender the products of his own “sweat and thrift” (750 τὸν ἐμὸν ἰδρωῶτα καὶ φειδωλίαν), so he harasses the Neighbor for his willingness to collaborate.⁶⁹

Two arguments are mustered against assent to the new *status quo*. The first argument pertains to legislative reliability. The Dissident twice insists that Athenians habitually renege on decrees

⁶⁶ See Foley (1982).

⁶⁷ See Sommerstein (1998), 26-27 with n. 99.

⁶⁸ As argued by Saïd (1979, 50-58), Praxagora’s gynaecocratic *status quo* represents the absorption of the public realm by the *oikos*. For the cultural significance of the *oikos* in classical Athens as well as the tensions between *polis* and *oikos*, as the expressions of public and private interests respectively, see Humphreys (1993), 1-32.

⁶⁹ For a reading of the Dissident scene within the context of Aristophanes’ scrutiny of cooperative public behavior, see Ober (2009), 72-73.

hastily passed in the Assembly; thus, in his opinion, the best course of action is to delay one's compliance (759-76, 786-829). The repealed decrees adduced by the Dissident (812-29) are for the most part unknown, but Praxagora touched on the issue of legislative reliability earlier as well, and we do have historical records of repealed decrees (193-203).⁷⁰ Even if one assumes that the Dissident exhibits healthy skepticism towards the legislative process, however, it is clear that his intention is not to comply.⁷¹ Despite his insistence on waiting to see what others will do, his plan is “to keep hanging on, and then wait a bit longer” (790 ἐπαναμένειν, ἔπειτα διατρίβειν ἔτι) in hopes of a bad omen bringing an end to the whole affair out of superstition (791-3).

The second argument further illuminates the Dissident's character, since he casts doubt on the compliance of Athenians on the basis that giving “is not customary” (778 οὐ γὰρ πάτριον τοῦτ' ἐστίν). Surprised at such a statement, the Neighbor asks: “but are we only supposed to take?” (778-9 ἀλλὰ λαμβάνειν ἢ ἡμᾶς μόνον δεῖ;).⁷² The Dissident responds affirmatively, offering a pseudo-theological argument (779-83):

νῆ Δία· καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεοί.
 γνώσει δ' ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν γε τῶν ἀγαλμάτων·
 ὅταν γὰρ εὐχόμεσθα διδόναι τὰγαθά,
 ἔστηκεν ἐκτείνοντα τὴν χεῖρ' ὑπτίαν
 οὐχ ὥς τι δώσοντ' ἀλλ' ὅπως τι λήψεται.

⁷⁰ The decrees concerning salt (812-4) and taxation (823-9) are totally unknown; cf. Ussher (1973), Vetta (1989), and Sommerstein (1998) ad loc. The decree concerning copper coinage (815-6) refers to the silver-plated coinage introduced in 406/5 BCE, but the date for the termination of its circulation can be placed anywhere between 403 BCE and the staging of *Assemblywomen*; see Kroll (1976). As regards other repealed decrees of the Athenian Assembly, we know of the ones concerning the death sentence of Mytilenaeans in 427 BCE; see Thuc. 3.35-50, 8.1.

⁷¹ The Dissident's distrust appears to be highlighting contemporary concerns about the decrees passed in the Assembly as well as the tension between ψηφίσματα and νόμοι; cf. Ober (1998), 145-147; Fletcher (2012), 130-131. For the revised legislative procedures that went in effect after 403 BCE, see MacDowell (1975); Hansen (1985); Rhodes (1984); Canevaro (2013). The issue with the way and frequency that Athenians changed their laws is also discussed by Demosthenes (20.91-92). Furthermore, in an amusing counter-example to the Athenian legislative procedure, Demosthenes (24.139) relates how the well-governed community (πόλις εὐνομούμενη) of the Lokrians adheres strongly to ancestral laws, and should anyone want to propose new legislation a noose is tied around his neck and the evaluation of his proposal dictates whether he lives or dies.

⁷² Sommerstein (1998, ad loc.) correctly attributes lines 778-9 to the Neighbor.

Yes, by Zeus! For the gods do so. You will know by observing the hands of statues. Whenever we are praying to them to give us blessings, they stand holding out the hollow of the hand not as to give something but as to take.

Like sophistic subverters of traditional morality, the Dissident excuses human moral failings by pointing out examples of such failings on the part of the gods.⁷³ In fact, his entire logic lies in a sophistic principle regarding human nature, since “the only higher law that he seems to support is that of self-interest.”⁷⁴

The selfishness of the Dissident manifests itself unequivocally after a female herald confirms that Praxagora’s plan is successfully underway. The two men are told to hurry and go enter the lottery that will assign them their dining place, since the feast is ready, and some men are already there (834-52). Upon hearing the proclamation, the Dissident makes a complete turnabout. “What is the point of me standing here” he asks, “since the *polis* has decided?” (853-4 τί γὰρ ἔστηκε ἔχων ἢ ἐνταῦθα, ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα τῇ πόλει δοκεῖ;). The Neighbor is quick to perceive the sudden change of heart, and his questioning soon reveals that the Dissident is planning to have dinner without surrendering his property (855-76). As someone seeking to share in communal benefits without assuming any of the communal costs, the character represents a typical case of a “free rider.” What reveals the Dissident’s utter selfishness, however, is the fact that he knows all too well what the expected standard of civic behavior is. Specifically, when the Neighbor asks whether he is still going for dinner without surrendering his property, the response is one of brazen irony: “it is the duty of all sensible men to assist the *polis* to the best of their ability” (861-2 τὰ δυνατὰ γὰρ δεῖ τῇ πόλει ξυλλαμβάνειν ἢ τοὺς εὖ φρονοῦντας).

⁷³ See Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

⁷⁴ See Rothwell (1990), 60-66, quotation from 63. For selfishness as part of human nature in sophistic thought, see Guthrie (1971), 101-116.

In their assessments of this scene, scholars have claimed that the audience would have found the cynically self-interested Dissident to be unsympathetic and an example of a bad citizen.⁷⁵ Considering the portrait of the everyday Athenian in the first half of the play, Christ counterargued that the Dissident “is not so much an anti-Athenian as a ‘prototypical’ Athenian everyman, challenging the comic utopia the women are seeking to establish.”⁷⁶ In fact, the Dissident is not an everyman but an embodiment of a worst-case scenario—a citizen so self-absorbed that his actions would impede communal welfare, regardless of political *status quo*. On the other hand, opinions regarding the law-abiding Neighbor diverge. Is he an example of a good, public-spirited citizen, or a foolish citizen taken for a ride?⁷⁷ In the context of the new regime, the Neighbor certainly qualifies as a “good citizen.” It should be remembered, however, that Blepyros and the Neighbor did not agree to Praxagora’s reforms out of public-spiritedness but out of self-interest; hence, from the perspective of democratic politics, both characters represent different yet equally problematic types of self-interested citizens. Even though not as excessive as the Dissident’s, the Neighbor’s self-interest has him abandon his rights as a citizen under the promise of a materialist paradise. Therefore, wherever one might stand on the issues of irony or audience sympathies, the “Dissident scene” expands on the play’s overall critique of self-interest in Athens’s civic culture, showing how it not only renders a democracy dysfunctional but also threatens its very existence.

The fact that the scenes following Praxagora’s reforms highlight the problematics of self-interest from a constitutional perspective also manifests itself in the “old women scene.” After

⁷⁵ cf. Rothwell (1990), 64; Sommerstein (1998), 20.

⁷⁶ Christ (2008), 178-182, quotation from 180.

⁷⁷ According to Rothwell (1990, 65), the audience must have viewed those conforming to Praxagora’s plan as foolish, given that “they have been deceived by the disguised wives into forfeiting their property.” Similarly, for Christ (2008, 179), “the cynical Athenian’s skepticism is preferable to the naiveté of his interlocutor, who cannot wait to turn all his property over on the basis of a decree from a hijacked Assembly.” Yet, for Sommerstein (1998, 20) “[t]he Dissident is as self-centered as the Neighbour is public-spirited.”

presenting the Athenians' reception of communism regarding property, the play turns to the results of the newly established sexual communism. Upon hearing that the women were granted absolute power earlier, Blepyros expressed his fear lest the women forcibly compel the men to have sex, and surely enough his fear was well-founded.⁷⁸ An old woman opens the scene anticipating the men leaving the communal dinner, and a young girl waiting for her boyfriend follows suit (877-89). In an attempt to allure men, the two women engage in a singing contest that is practically an exchange of insults (884-937). Soon, the boyfriend of the young girl arrives only to find himself in a predicament. The old woman claims legal priority over having sex with him, but then she is herself antagonized by two older and uglier women, who each rush to claim violently their own legal priority (938-1111).

At first sight, the “old women scene” does not seem to be organically connected with the rest of the play.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, as has been recognized by scholars, it touches on themes explored throughout *Assemblywomen*, like gender bias—especially regarding female sexuality—in Greek culture, gender relations, and contemporary concerns around Athenian law.⁸⁰ Moreover, the scene also reinforces the idea that self-interest is deeply rooted in Athenian society, given that the young man, like the Dissident, “attempts to circumvent the law for his own personal interest.”⁸¹ Finally, next to these themes, the “old women scene” also offers a critical perspective on the new *status*

⁷⁸ *Ecc1.* 466-8 ΒΛ. μὴ παραλαβοῦσαι τῆς πόλεως τὰς ἡνίας | ἔπειτ' ἀναγκάζωσι πρὸς βίαν— ΧΡ. τί δρᾶν; | ΒΛ. κινεῖν ἑαυτάς. (“BL: when the women take over the reins of the city, then they may compel us by force— CHR: — To do what? BL: To fuck them”).

⁷⁹ As noted by Sommerstein (1998, 21), the scene is “entirely self-contained—the only scene in the play (indeed in all surviving Greek comedy) whose entire cast is peculiar to it and includes no character appearing elsewhere—and when it is over the action proceeds as though it had never existed.”

⁸⁰ For the “old women” scene and gender themes in *Assemblywomen*, see Saïd (1979); Taaffe (1991); (1993), 123-129; Tsoumpira (2020). For the law-related issues addressed in the scene, see Ober (1998), 142-145; Fletcher (2012); Sheppard (2016).

⁸¹ Sheppard (2016), 482.

quo in constitutional terms, which underlines the persistence of problems that are associated with self-interest in Praxagora’s socially engineered world.

The first old woman, while insisting that the young man has to have sex with her, exclaims: “it is right in accordance with the law to do these things, if we live in a democracy” (944-5 κατὰ τὸν νόμον ταῦτα ποιεῖν | ἔστι δίκαιον, εἰ δημοκρατούμεθα). Nonetheless, the new regime is anything but a democracy. As noted by Sommerstein, Praxagora exercises absolute power.⁸² More importantly, however, the abolition of Athens’s legal system corresponds with an abolition of the democracy altogether, as there is no way for Praxagora’s decree to be overturned. As analyzed in detail by Judith Fletcher, the decree is illegal, given that it violates established laws, and its enactment “creates a society where there are no longer any legal remedies, and where violence rather than the rule of law prevails.”⁸³ With that in mind, one cannot help but notice that never in the entirety of the play do the men raise any concerns about the constitutional changes enacted. Even the young man, who gets the short end of the stick, is not concerned with his helplessness vis-à-vis the law but with enforced sex being “intolerable for a free man” (941 οὐ γὰρ ἀνασχετὸν τοῦτό γ’ ἐλευθέρῳ). Yet, as the first old woman reminds the young man when he tries to circumvent her demand by appealing to rules of dice-games: “you did not have dinner according to the rules of dice-games” (988 ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ δειπνεῖς κατὰ τὸν ἐν πεττοῖς νόμον).⁸⁴ Evidently, self-interest keeps rendering the men myopic to the consequences of their actions, as when they did not realize the political cost of their fixation with Assembly-pay. In this regard, next to being

⁸² See Sommerstein (2005), 84-85.

⁸³ See Fletcher (2012), quotation from 128. As claimed by the author of [Dem.] 25, the root cause for the preservation of Athens’s democratic constitution is no other but its laws, the abolition of which would “not only bring the ruin of the polity but also render human life indistinguishable from the one of beasts” (25.20 τοὺς νόμους εὐρήσει τούτων αἰτίους ... ἐπεὶ λυθέντων γε τούτων ... οὐ μόνον ἡ πολιτεία οἴχεται, ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ὁ βίος ἡμῶν τοῦ τῶν θηρίων οὐδὲν ἄν διενέγκαι).

⁸⁴ For the game of *pessoi*, see Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

raucously humorous in all its subversiveness, the “old women scene” aptly culminates a play devoted to the deleterious effects of self-interest. In seeking to circumvent Praxagora’s sexual law, the young man has miscalculated how self-interested old women can be in their grotesque sex-craze, but the most serious miscalculation is the amount of compensation the satisfaction of basic needs could offer for the loss of rights and liberties.

Despite the ominous undertones of the “old women scene,” *Assemblywomen* comes to a seemingly blissful ending. In the closing scene, a female herald comes to fetch Blepyros, who dances his way to the extravagant feast accompanied by two young girls and the Chorus (1112-83). Apparently, whatever the problems of the new *status quo*, Praxagora stayed true to her promise: everyone’s material needs are satisfied. Blepyros appears to be the big winner of the new *status quo*, and this is hardly surprising. Like Peisetairos in *Birds*, according to Sommerstein, Praxagora creates a whole new world where “one person (the comic hero) rules for the benefit of the average male citizen.”⁸⁵ At this point, then, it is worth pondering: what kind of reception would Blepyros’ good fortune have by the audience of the play? Even for spectators unperturbed by the nonchalance of the play’s male characters towards the abolition of the democracy, *Assemblywomen* still brings about a materialist paradise that is anything but free of problems. In view of that, there seems to be something to be learned as one looks back at the play in its entirety.

3.6 Comedy and Civics III

In a rebuttal of irony-based readings, Sommerstein claimed that the women’s egalitarian cosmos represents a serious attempt on Aristophanes’ behalf to address the plights of the common people,

⁸⁵ Sommerstein (2005), 88.

especially poverty.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, with respect to the play’s political commentary, the major plight identified is not so much poverty as the way Athenians go about dealing with it. Aristophanes presents a body politic that treats civic engagement as a means to subsistence, and in so doing tolerates base political leadership, ineffective policy-making, and a dysfunctional democracy at the edge of its existence. In view of that, it appears that the core of the play’s message is the paradox surrounding Praxagora: an exemplar of civic-mindedness who orchestrates a salvation plan of dubiously positive results.

Based on Praxagora’s effective use of persuasion for achieving public-spirited goals, it has been argued that the message of *Assemblywomen* is about political leadership. Specifically, considering the potential of oratorical persuasion (πειθώ) in motivating citizens, Rothwell argued that “the play is about the potential advantages of leadership in building a community.”⁸⁷ In the same vein, reading Praxagora’s plan as an exhortation to political action with a focus on public rather than private interests, Sheppard maintained that the play demonstrates how “an effective leader is needed to guide the Athenians away from short-sighted self-interest.”⁸⁸ Besides being a good leader, Praxagora also embodies the Aristophanic prototype of a good citizen. After her mock-speech for the Assembly, a woman of the Chorus asks: “my dear, where did you learn all these things so well?” and Praxagora responds that she just used to listen to the habitual speakers when she and her husband resided on the Pnyx.⁸⁹ Consequently, like the Sausage-seller in *Knights*,

⁸⁶ See Sommerstein (1984), where he argues that this kind of outlook is a “left-wing” turn in the politics of a playwright who, in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, found himself impoverished and disillusioned with Athens’s elites.

⁸⁷ Rothwell (1990), 103.

⁸⁸ Sheppard (2016), 482.

⁸⁹ *Eccl.* 242-4 XOP. πόθεν, ὦ τάλαινα, ταῦτ’ ἔμαθες οὕτω καλῶς; | ΠΡΑΞ. ἐν ταῖς φυγαῖς μετὰ τάνδρὸς ᾤκησ’ ἐν Πυκνί· | ἔπειτ’ ἀκούουσ’ ἐξέμαθον τῶν ῥητόρων. Praxagora’s reference to the “refugee times” (ἐν ταῖς φυγαῖς) is not precise enough, but it certainly means some time close to the end of the Peloponnesian War; cf. Sommerstein (1998) ad loc.

Praxagora not only demonstrates the value of civic-mindedness but also proves the layman's potential in politics.

Contrary to Praxagora's positive portrayal as a leader, the "Dissident scene" and "old women scene" cast shadows on the results of her leadership. As seen above, in Athens's transformed society the citizens' self-interest, which provided the basis for Praxagora's plan, proves to be an unabating social peril. At the same time, her sexual reforms plunge Athens into an animalistic nightmare, where "the inversion of the men's and women's gender roles and the overturn of the normal social order bring about the infertility and the (figurative) death of the young and vital forces of the city."⁹⁰ In this regard, although Blepyros (and presumably the rest of Athenian seniors as well) gets the best out of the situation, it seems doubtful that the audience would be satisfied with the prospects of the new *status quo*. Certainly, Praxagora does not bring a perfect solution to Athens's problems, but the abolition of the democracy precludes the possibility of improvement.

In view of the above, one is unavoidably faced with a question: if Praxagora is so admirable a protagonist, why is her plan not more successful? Comparing the unambiguously successful plan orchestrated by *Lysistrata*, Praxagora's counterpart in the homonymous comedy of 411 BCE, Natalia Tsoumpra recently argued that the shortcomings of the latter's plan can be understood if contextualized historically. Specifically, given the cultural stereotype of the threat posed by an unchecked female sexuality, women in *Lysistrata* go on a sex-strike but they do so within a marital framework and just for the sake of stopping the war; thus, they function as symbols of peace and fertility. In *Assemblywomen*, however, women radically transform Athenian society in a way that leaves their sexuality unbridled, so the helplessly lustful old women turn sex into a sterile activity

⁹⁰ Tsoumpra (2020), 543.

that threatens the society's survival. According to Tsoumpira, then, Aristophanes indulges in the comic potential of Greek gender biases in *Assemblywomen* because the "sterility scenario was simply not appropriate for the dark times of the Peloponnesian War and could not have been enacted: it was too close to home to be funny."⁹¹ Without doubt, the threat of femininity constantly runs in the background of *Assemblywomen*—from Blepyros' appearance in his wife's gown to the men's domestication—but, as was seen above, Praxagora's failure to devise a better plan for the salvation of Athens is not premised solely on her plan's sex-related flaws.

Praxagora's unexpected disappearance midway through the play inhibits an assessment of the extent to which her own civic-mindedness is tainted by the problems addressed in the final scenes. Still, the second half of the play expands on the political commentary of the first half. In the latter, Athenians are shown to indulge in the implementation of a price system on all aspects of civic behavior that in turn prompts an incessant pursuit of individual utility. In keeping with this behavioral portrait, the final scenes reveal a society in which incentives have corrupted civic motivation and inflated self-interest to the degree that even a civic-minded leader cannot devise productive solutions to its problems. Therefore, in terms of civic behavior, *Assemblywomen* draws the audience's attention to two factors Aristophanes consistently presents as necessary for effecting positive social change: an altruistic civic-mindedness and a democratic regime that affords the institutional context in which to act on it.

⁹¹ ib. 544.

Conclusions

In a study on altruism in classical Athens, Matthew Christ explored how Athenians conceived of helping in different contexts. After a detailed analysis of our sources on the services Athenians would provide as soldiers, liturgists, *eisphora*-payers, and *rhētores*, his conclusion was that altruism in the civic context was a behavioral ideal more projected than expected. Specifically, Christ noted that “although Athenians are drawn to the ideal that citizens place the city’s needs above their own and come to its assistance solely out of patriotic zeal, they pragmatically accept the reality that citizen helping of the city can have a more selfish side to it.”¹ This pragmatism, however, did not mitigate the criticism against the selfishness and lack of altruism everyday Athenians would exhibit through a civic behavior oriented towards profit-maximization. As this study has demonstrated, Aristophanic comedy makes the case that, when motivated solely by pay, judges and Assembly-goers impede the proper function of the democracy and harm the *polis*.

Aristophanes was not the only one to find the lack of civic altruism problematic. Notably, the “Old Oligarch” ascribed to the masses willingness to take up only magistracies that were financially beneficial (1.3 ὁπόσαι δ’ εἰσὶν ἀρχαὶ μισθοφορίας ἔνεκα καὶ ὠφελείας εἰς τὸν οἶκον, ταύτας ζητεῖ ὁ δῆμος ἄρχειν), and asserted that in the courts Athenians care not about what is right but about what is advantageous (1.13 ἔν τε τοῖς δικαστηρίοις οὐ τοῦ δικαίου αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον μέλει ἢ τοῦ αὐτοῖς συμφόρου). Similarly, Plato’s Socrates rehashed accusations against Perikles for making Athenians greedy by introducing political payments (*Grg.* 515e ταυτὶ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἀκούω, Περικλέα πεποιημέναι Ἀθηναίους ... φιλαργύρους, εἰς μισθοφορίαν πρῶτον καταστήσαντα). Apparently, then, Aristophanes was one among many who criticized the

¹ See Christ (2012), 68-90, quotation from 89.

behavior of everyday citizens in Athens's democracy, and the most important aspect of their criticism is the link drawn between monetary incentives and the proliferation of an individualistic and profit-maximizing mindset.

Although the present study focuses on political activities, the widespread implementation of incentives in classical Athens affected the motivation of Athenians in other areas of civic engagement as well. As in the case of court-service, the military pay introduced sometime in the 460's BCE eventually came to cast a long shadow over the sense of civic duty.² Indicative of this situation is the reason the proposals of the exiled Alkibiades resonated with the Athenian crews, when the fleet was stationed at Samos in 412 BCE. According to Thucydides, upon hearing the proposal for abolishing their democracy so as to win over the king of Persia, the multitude was irritated by Alkibiades' intrigues, but "the advantageous prospect of pay from the king kept them quiet" (8.48.3 καὶ ὁ μὲν ὄχλος, εἰ καὶ τι παραυτίκα ἤχθετο τοῖς πρασσομένοις, διὰ τὸ εὖπορον τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ παρὰ βασιλέως μισθοῦ ἡσύχαζεν). In its description of the turbulent situation at Samos, Thucydides' narrative is, of course, impressionistic, but its implication is as unambiguous as it is shocking: Athenian citizens serving in the fleet were prepared to concede their franchise as long as pay was guaranteed.³ Perhaps, given Athens's financial straits and militarily disadvantageous position at the time, "the sailors' response was essentially a rational one."⁴ Still, when a delegation from Samos brought Alkibiades' proposals before the Assembly in Athens, "a great many speakers opposed them on the question of the democracy" (8.53.2 ἀντιλεγόντων δὲ πολλῶν καὶ ἄλλων περὶ τῆς δημοκρατίας). Eventually, much to their chagrin,

² For military pay in classical Athens, see Loomis (1998), 32-61.

³ For the decision of the Athenian sailors as a result of unabashedly materialist considerations, cf. Kagan (1987), 121; Taylor (2010), 240.

⁴ O'Halloran (2018), 256.

Athenians acceded to Alkibiades' proposals, but they did so, Thucydides tells us, out of fear that there was no other viable alternative as well as out of hope "that the situation would be changed later" (8.54.1 δείσας καὶ ἄμα ἐπελπίζων ὡς καὶ μεταβαλεῖται). Therefore, even if temporarily resigned, some Athenians were resolute in defending their democracy, but the civic devotion of others seems to have fluctuated based on profit-maximizing calculations.⁵

The elite status of the Athenians who left to posterity information about the civic behavior of their non-elite fellow citizens raises issues of reliability. As has already been discussed, some scholars have considered Aristophanes' portrayal of judges and Assembly-goers to be a comic exaggeration with no historical value beyond evincing the playwright's contempt for the masses and direct democracy. If that were the case with Aristophanes (more on that below), then any information on the subject from avowed opponents of direct democracy, such as the "Old Oligarch" and Plato, should be dismissed out of hand. Nonetheless, behavioral scientists have demonstrated that the implementation of monetary incentives in the civic sphere of activity can have adverse behavioral effects, and their insights suggest that—regardless of bias—the criticisms of Athenian elites against the self-interested civic behavior of the masses had a kernel of truth. Accordingly, Aristophanes' extensive commentary on Athenian civic behavior targeted existing and observable shortcomings in Athens's civic culture.

As has been documented by behavioral scientists, the preferences informing our behavior in a decision-situation are dependent on the nature of the situation; hence, by being carriers of information and situational cues, incentives can directly affect our motivation by crowding out social preferences. One of the reasons for this crowding-out phenomenon is the "moral disengagement" that results from the framing effect of incentives. Specifically, monetary

⁵ For the importance of pay in the Athenians' military behavior, cf. Dem. 3.20.

incentives can shift the frame of a decision-situation from social to monetary, so an activity that would otherwise call for an engagement based on social preferences is instead undertaken in a profit-maximizing mentality. Social preferences were supposed to inform civic action in democratic Athens, and Athenians were well-aware of that. Paradoxically, an illustrative example of this awareness is the *sykophantēs* of *Wealth* (911-58), who claims that he embraces the role of *ho boulomenos* for the sake of the public good, thus invoking a sense of civic duty for his “profession.” Nonetheless, *Knights* (255-7, 1121-30), *Wasps* (297-311, 605-6, 656-64, 712), and *Assemblywomen* (304-10, 376-97, 458-61, 560-3) plainly suggest that the citizens engaging with the judicial and deliberative functions of the *polis* are motivated primarily by profit-maximization. As a result, considering that social preferences are hardly—if ever—invoked by male citizens for undertaking civic duties in these three plays, Aristophanic comedy can be read as a document of the moral disengagement that ensued from the implementation of incentives.

On the basis that exaggeration is a means to comic effect, the reliability of Aristophanes’ commentary for the identification of behavioral phenomena in the civic sphere of activity might seem dubious. As shown by the historical contextualization of the plays in the course of this study, however, Aristophanes scrutinized actual political phenomena, which in turn can only be explained through a crowding out of social preferences in the Athenian body politic. In *Knights* and *Wasps*, the novel practice of using the courts to eliminate political opposition during the Peloponnesian War is associated with court-pay and its effect on Athenian civic-mindedness. In particular, the success of Paphlagon-Kleon’s political tactics is shown to be based on Demos’ profit-maximizing attitude, which leads to a favorable disposition towards *rhētores* promoting public spending as well as to juridical misconduct. Equally, in *Wasps* (242-4, 686-705), self-serving public prosecutors are said to use court-pay as the carrot to their stick for having judges—who know that

they behave irresponsibly (320-2, 340)—at their beck and call. Even if one is tempted to dismiss as merely comic exaggeration the economic self-interest of the judges, especially as brazenly expressed by Demos (1121-30), the fear of defendants in extant court speeches (Lys. 27.1, 30.22) lest they be condemned out of profit-maximizing calculations suggests otherwise. Therefore, as Aristophanes scrutinized how everyday citizens became accessories to political tactics that vitiated the rule of law, the way judges behave in *Knights* and *Wasps* points to an incentive-fueled moral disengagement ensuing from the conception of court-service in monetary terms.

A behavioral science reading of Aristophanic comedy also establishes the value of its commentary on civic behavior from a historical perspective. Behavioral scientists have argued that incentives can play a fundamental role in the way members of a society come to acquire or update their preferences. The crowding-out of social preferences has the potential to turn economic motivation into a norm that perpetuates itself through cultural transmission; hence, the longevity of incentives as well as the range of their implementation in a society can be crucial. Unfortunately, the long-term and cross-cultural experimentation that would validate this hypothesis has not yet been undertaken, yet the time span of Aristophanes' documentation of the crowding-out phenomenon in Athens provides grounds for its substantiation. Specifically, the fact that *Knights* was staged some twenty-five years after the introduction of court-pay sheds new light on the sharp diminution of civic mindedness vis-à-vis incentives described in the play. Additionally, the civic attitude of Philokleon in *Wasps* illuminates the adoption of a utility-maximizing attitude by his son, who eschews all sorts of civic engagement on the basis of its limited potential for profit. More importantly, however, Aristophanes emphasized that the public spirit of Athenians had deteriorated even further some three decades later. By the time *Assemblywomen* was staged, the once-sacrosanct civic duty of participation in democratic deliberation had come under a price

system; thus, whatever the extent of its exaggeration, the claim that Athenians demand pay for doing anything for the public good (304-10) rings ominously true. In this regard, Aristophanes' lasting commentary on civic motivation invaluable documents not only the behavioral effects of incentives but also the regressive evolution of social preferences in classical Athens. Consequently, as a source on Athenian civic behavior, Aristophanic comedy elucidates the flagrant lack of civic-mindedness as attested in the manipulation of the courts and the negotiations at Samos in 412 BCE.

Next to its documentation of the civic effects of incentives, this study has claimed that Aristophanes' commentary on civic behavior also brings to the fore the educational function of his criticism of the democratic *status quo*. Despite its negative portrayal of everyday citizens, nowhere in Aristophanic comedy is it ever suggested—either directly or indirectly—that the masses should concede their political power to their socio-economic betters. Equally, despite the voluntarism underlying democratic ideology, nowhere in his plays does Aristophanes ever suggest that Athenians should not be remunerated for the services they offer to their *polis*. On the contrary, the rejuvenated Demos in *Knights* advocates the timely payment of soldiers (1366-8), and the Chorus in *Wasps* are all for each citizen getting the three obols of court-pay, but only as long as he has provided military service for the *polis*.⁶ Perhaps, the fact that Aristophanes never entertains the abolition of incentives—unlike those involved in the anti-democratic coup of 411 BCE—speaks to his approval of the degree to which political subsidies enabled poor citizens to participate in

⁶ *Vesp.* 1117-21 τοῦτο δ' ἔστ' ἀλγιστον ἡμῖν, ἦν τις ἀστράτευτος ὦν | ἐκροφῆ τὸν μισθὸν ἡμῶν, τῆσδε τῆς χώρας ὑπερ | μήτε κόπην μήτε λόγχην μήτε φλύκταιναν λαβών. | ἀλλά μοι δοκεῖ τὸ λοιπὸν τῶν πολιτῶν ἔμβραχυ | ὅστις ἂν μὴ ᾗ τὸ κέντρον μὴ φέρειν τριώβολον (“this [i.e. some young man volunteering as a judge and getting paid] is the worst grievance for us, if someone slurps up our pay without having served in the military, without getting an oar, a spear, or a blister in his hand for the sake of this country”). Apparently, in the context of Athenian public finance, Aristophanes advocated the priority of military-pay, which at times might have been neglected; cf. also *Dem.* 2.29-31, 3.20, 3.33-36.

government. If anything, mass participation guaranteed that Athens was a democracy not in name but in substance. Nevertheless, as a comic poet and thinker, Aristophanes appears to have been acutely aware that mass participation, unless properly motivated, was not enough to guarantee the efficient function of the democratic *status quo*. Accordingly, as argued in the respective chapters, *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Assemblywomen* offer—directly or indirectly—a lesson to their audience with regard to proper civic motivation. In *Knights*, the adjustment of Demos’ political outlook after his rejuvenation makes the lesson explicit: social welfare is best achieved when citizens are politically active, and their attitude geared towards communal utility. In the other two plays the civics lesson is not proclaimed as straightforwardly, but the endings are suggestive of the plays’ overall outlook. Considering Philokleon’s flippant civic behavior and its subsequent disastrous transformation, *Wasps* dramatizes how a civic mindset focused on self-interest and devoid of any sense of duty poses a threat to the stability of the *polis*. Similarly, with its closing scenes zeroing in on the problematics of self-interest as an impetus for social change, *Assemblywomen* underlines the fact that democracy, as an institutional environment with the capacity for communal welfare, demands civic altruism on the citizens’ part so as to function efficiently.

In retrospect, Aristophanic comedy opens a window that allows us to observe closely the civic reality of classical Athens next to the factors that gave it its shape. Through his commentary on the behavior of Athenians within the civic context of their democracy, Aristophanes not only censured their fixation with economic self-interest but also scrutinized it against the bigger picture of Athenian politics. From tolerance of debased political leadership and the vitiation of the rule of law to ineffective deliberation and dysfunctional legislation, self-interest lies at the heart of Athens’s political problems, and civic altruism, like the one exhibited by the Sausage-seller, is extolled as the solution. The civic ideals propagated by Aristophanes can be seen as an attempt at

crystallizing and at the same time alerting Athenians to the fact that, if democracy is to be successful, civic engagement should be informed first and foremost by a sense of duty. On that account, beyond entertaining his audiences, Aristophanes was a true intellectual of Athenian democracy, criticizing its shortcomings while showing ways to overcome them.

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Appendix I: The Social Composition of Athens's Judiciary in the Fifth Century

With explicit references to age and financial status, Aristophanic comedy is our major source for the social composition of Athens's judiciary.¹ Nonetheless, considering that purposeful distortions of reality are a means to comic effect, the accuracy of comic accounts of civic institutions can sometimes be questionable.² Accordingly, although most scholars accept the general veracity of Aristophanes' portrayal of judges as poor old men, some have called this portrayal into question.³ As will be argued below, several complementary facts suggest that late-fifth-century courts were manned primarily by 59+ year-old citizens of the non-leisure class and that this demographic would also have a keen interest in doing so.

Athenian courts met for at least half of the days in a year, so a considerable part of the eligible citizen population would need to sit in court regularly, even when the entire body of 6,000 judges was not required.⁴ On that note, given the high military mobilization during the

¹ cf. *Ar. Ach.* 375-6, *Eq.* 255, 977-9, *Vesp.* 133, 178, 223-4, 300-6, 548-58, 605-6, 689-96, 1075-8, *Pax* 348-52, *Lys.* 380, *Eccl.* 460-1, *Plut.* 277-8.

² As shown by Rhodes (2004; 2010), Aristophanes' account of courts, Council, and Assembly in *Knights* reflects actual procedure with exceptional precision.

³ Aristophanes' one-dimensional portrayal of judges is not in any way exhaustive, but scholars generally agree that it is a reliably approximate description of Athens's judiciary; cf. Sinclair (1988), 127-133; Hansen (1991), 183-186; Rhodes (1992), 691; MacDowell (1995), 156-158. Regarding the age of Athenian judges, Markle (1985, 267) objected that, even though retired citizens certainly found court-service exciting, "there is no reason to believe that they made up more than a small part of the six thousand jurors." Similarly, on the basis of the memory span assumed for judges in court speeches, demographic considerations, and the demands of the Peloponnesian War in manpower, Crichton (1991-3) maintained that Athens's judiciary consisted of varying age-groups. On that note, Crichton (*ib.* 59 with n.7) made a straw man out of Sinclair (1988, 128), who argued that the silence of non-comic sources (e.g. orators) cannot be used "to rule out the possibility that a considerable proportion, perhaps a majority, of the jurors were old men," since his assertions only challenge the notion of lawcourts being manned exclusively—not primarily—by Athenian elders. As regards the economic standing of Athenian judges, the argument of Jones (1957, 35-7, 124) for poor citizens in the fifth and rich citizens in the fourth century as well as that of Markle (1985) for "middle-class" citizens were opposed by Todd (1990), who instead argued for farmers, as a class, irrespective of wealth. In his argument for judges being primarily poor citizens, however, Canevaro (2018, 102 with n. 15) highlighted that Todd's discussion was "dependent on an outdated picture of the social and economic composition of the Athenian population."

⁴ On the number of days that courts operated within a lunar year, Hansen (1979; 1999, 186) has calculated that those amounted to no fewer than 175 and no more than 225. For the high volume of cases judged by Athenian courts, cf. *Ps.-Xen. Ath. Pol.* 3.2-5 with Marr and Rhodes (2008) ad loc.

Peloponnesian War, it follows that the function of the *polis*' juridical apparatus would come to depend largely on those not in arms, especially during high campaign season.⁵ Outside the context of war, the daily necessity to work would have debarred most Athenians from frequent service in courts, and labor-related constraints on one's availability were equally applicable to farmers, who represented the majority of Athenians, and those engaged in other occupations.⁶ As a result, the most active percentage of judges in the late fifth century would pragmatically consist of Athenians not engaged in military service and with leisure from work.⁷

As regards military service, the fact that citizens over the age of 59 were exempt from all military obligations indicates the open availability of their demographic for court-service.⁸ On the other hand, in terms of leisure from work, for “those who had to earn their livelihood with their hands” in Greco-Roman antiquity, “there was no further, non-biological, dividing line between the time when they began to work and the time they ceased, the latter determined either by death or

⁵ As regards Athenian naval campaigns, Rosivach (1985) has demonstrated that there were seasonal (late-May to mid-September) but also yearlong ones, speculating that the former probably were manned by poor Athenian farmers and the latter by foreigners.

⁶ For a discussion on agriculture as the most important wealth-creating sector of the ancient economy, see Bresson (2016), 118-141. As has recently been argued, the non-agricultural sector of the Athenian economy was not insignificant, and the high demand for a broad range of goods produced by limited operations and a short production line (i.e. horizontal specialization) could not have been met by craftsmen working only part time; cf. Harris (2002); Harris and Lewis (2016), 24-25. Full-time, non-agricultural occupations vis-à-vis the demand for products of horizontal specialization in Athens are further discussed by Lewis (2020). For the distinction between occupations and professions in Greek antiquity, see Harris (2020b). The argument that farmers represented the majority on judge-panels is refuted by Sing (2021), 125-127.

⁷ The argument that court-pay was meant to be a compensation for lost wages has been refuted by Rosivach (2014, 179 n. 59), who argued that the income of a farmer or an independent craftsman per day does not lend itself to such a quantification.

⁸ See Hansen (1988), 23-25; Christ (2001), 404 with n. 29. In their fifties, Athenian men of undiminished bodily capabilities would still be liable to garrison duty whenever Attica was invaded during the Peloponnesian War; cf. Thuc. 2.13.7 τσοσούτοι γὰρ ἐφύλασσον τὸ πρῶτον ὅποτε οἱ πολέμιοι ἐσβάλοιεν, ἀπό τε τῶν πρεσβυτάτων καὶ τῶν νεωτάτων, καὶ μετόικων ὅσοι ὀπλιῖται ἦσαν (“for that many were at first on garrison duty whenever the enemy would invade, drafted from the oldest and the youngest and from any metics who were hoplites”) with Akrigg (2019, 72-83) on the meaning of “oldest and youngest” in this passage. Certainly, we do have examples of generals in their sixties, like Perikles, who was still a general at his death at the age of ca. 66. Nonetheless, the average age for political and military responsibilities seems to have been between 40 and 55 and only 10% of the recorded decision makers were over 60 years old; cf. Corvisier (2018).

by physical incapacity.”⁹ Meanwhile, considering that the Athenian leisure-class represented only 5-10% of the total population, leisure that could translate into court-service would statistically depend more on senility (and hence inability to work) rather than prosperity.¹⁰ In Athens, however, men did not retire only when incapacitated. Based on mortality rates and the usual 30-year age gap between fathers and sons, half of the Athenian men would be in control of their patrimony at the age of 18, and when fathers outlived such expectations, they would retire or plan to retire in their sons’ favor.¹¹ Moreover, Athenian elders enjoyed a legal protection that would enhance their options for retirement.¹² Consequently, all the available data for the late fifth century confirm that sexagenarians (and any citizens who survived beyond 70) were the only demographic that faced no external impediments to engage in a time-consuming activity such as court-service.

An assumption underlying the above analysis is that on the whole non-leisure-class Athenians of 59+ years of age would be zealous to volunteer as judges. One might greet such an assumption with skepticism. Yet, two factors suggest that poor Athenian elders had a vested interest in court-service.

First, the civic status of the elderly. Challenging Aristophanes’ portrayal of Athens’s judiciary, Angus Crichton argued that elders would not represent the majority because the *polis* would not entrust the elderly with so much power. According to Crichton, the exclusion of elders from military service circumscribed their value as citizens, and their marginal representation in

⁹ Finley (1981), 160.

¹⁰ On the percentage of Athenians who belonged to the leisure-class, see Chapter 1, n. 41.

¹¹ For family demographics, the management of property, and their interrelation, see Strauss (1993), 66-72. For the familial role of retired elders, see Corvisier (2018).

¹² Athenian citizens were legally bound to feed, house, and take care of their elderly parents, and failure to do so incurred serious legal sanctions; cf. Lys. 13.91; Aeschin. 1.28; Dem. 24.103-7; Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 56.6. The law on the protection of parents apparently predated Solon, who is said to have introduced the provisos that sons were relieved from the necessity to support their fathers in old age if they were not taught any trade or if fathered out of wedlock; cf. Plut. *Sol.* 22.1, 4. For the general legal framework affecting the relationship between fathers and sons in Athens, see Strauss (1993), 62-66.

“vehicles of Athenian civic ideology,” such as Perikles’ funeral oration and the Parthenon frieze, suggests that, although not disenfranchised, the elderly were citizens of an inferior status.¹³ Assuming that this assessment of civic status holds true, then sexagenarians would have all the more reason to ascertain their enduring value as citizens, and what better way to do so than partaking in one of the most essential functions of the *polis*. After all, tragedy—another vehicle of civic ideology—extolled old age and its concomitant wisdom, so the public life of Athens’s democracy afforded the elderly with opportunities to showcase their capacity for valuable civic contributions, which were in fact expected of them.¹⁴

The second factor suggesting that poor elders would have a keen interest in court-service is their financial status as affected by old age. As noted above, Athenian men would retire so that their sons could take over the management of the *oikos*, and their sons in turn would be legally bound to maintain them. Of course, this scenario would work seamlessly only if a family was affluent; otherwise, whenever a poor Athenian retired as too old and feeble to work, he automatically became a burden for the budget of the family housing him.¹⁵ Even within a family that the care for elders would not be an issue, however, an elder might look for a source of income so as to retain a sense of autonomy—like Philokleon in *Wasps*, for whom court-pay alleviates the

¹³ See Crichton (1991-3), 70-74.

¹⁴ cf. Aesch. fr. 400 Radt γῆρας γὰρ ἥβης ἐστὶν ἐνδικώτερον (“old age has a better sense of justice than youth”); Soph. fr. 664 Radt γῆρας διδάσκει πάντα καὶ χρόνου τριβή (“old age and experience teaches everything”); Eur. fr. 619 Kannicht τὸ γῆρας, ὦ παῖ, τῶν νεωτέρων φρενῶν | σοφώτερον πέφυκε κάσφαλέστερον, | ἐμπειρία τε τῆς ἀπειρίας κρατεῖ (“old age, boy, is wiser and more reliable than the young mind, and experience is superior to inexperience”). On the whole, as one would expect, the Greek attitudes towards old age were contradictory, sometimes treating it as a time of maturity and wisdom, sometimes as a time of incapacity and foolishness; cf. Kirk (1971); Finley (1981); van Hooff (1983); Corvisier (2018). In a civic context, however, Athenians held in high esteem the experience that accompanied old age; see Dem. *Proem.* 45.2. Moreover, in *Wasps*, when Philokleon asks the Chorus what they will say should he lose to his son in the *agōn*, the response is: “that old men are no longer useful for anything” (540-1 οὐκέτι πρεσβυτῶν ὄχλος | χρήσιμος ἔστ’ οὐδ’ ἀκαρῆ), which suggests that Athenian elders were attributed civic utility, especially with regard to the administration of justice.

¹⁵ In a recent study, Bernard (2018) demonstrated that, regardless of cultural nuances, the gerontocidal practices ascribed to non-Greeks by ancient ethnographic narratives as well as the Greek tradition of suicide for seniors on the island of Keos stem from a functionality principle that assumed aging population to be a problem.

material dependence on his son (612-8).¹⁶ On the other hand, if an Athenian elder could not afford to retire, given the unavoidable impediment of senility to one's productivity, his family would still come to face financial challenges. In this case, it is important to keep in mind that the Athenian *polis* during the fifth century had no provision for a welfare system, except for the rearing of war orphans, the sustenance of those with disabilities, and perhaps some coverage for healthcare and entertainment.¹⁷ On that account, since the elderly "must have found it more difficult to earn a living from their brawn," George Tridimas seems right in arguing that political payments provided "a useful alternative source of income, even something akin to social security."¹⁸

Undoubtedly, during the last quarter of the fifth century, Athenian seniors would not be the only citizens interested in court-pay. During the first decade of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides informs us that the defensive policy devised by Perikles (and followed well until the temporary Peace of Nikias in 421 BCE) was for Athenians to evacuate rural Attica and gather in the city of Athens.¹⁹ In times of such financial distress, public payments would be as attractive to farmers of

¹⁶ For Markle (1985, 267), given that Bdelykleon implores his father to retire in the luxurious life he can provide him (*Vesp.* 340-1, 503-6), Philokleon's obsession with court-service is a paradoxical caricature. This reading, however, conveniently neglects the striking socio-economic difference between father and son, which is what fuels the dramatized generational conflict; cf. Fisher (2000), 357. As noted by Sinclair (1988, 128), seniors "who had handed over the management of the *oikos* to their sons and who were no longer independent as they had been, may well have been inclined to feel (or liked to express the feeling) that they were poor and were dependent on the three-obol pay."

¹⁷ On Athenian public spending and its organization, see Kallet (1998); Rhodes (2013); Ober (2015); Pritchard (2015), (2016). According to our sources (Thuc. 2.46; Arist. [Ath. pol.] 24.3; Diog. Laert. 1.55), the rearing of war-orphans at the expense of the *polis* had a long history in Athens, and Goldhill (1990) provides an insightful discussion on the implications of the practice for the construction of Athenian civic ideology. Equally, doles for war-disabled Athenians appeared as early as Solon, and in the fifth century such payments were extended to all disabled citizens unable to work, who formed the legal category of ἀδύνατοι; see Dillon (2017), 171-178. Attested in our sources is also the mysterious fund of the δωβελία, the use of which has been tentatively assumed to be the support of indigent Athenians between 410 and 404 BCE; see Blok (2015). Another possible category of publicly sponsored welfare had to do with public physicians. Athens was among a group of Greek *poleis* that paid a retaining fee to itinerant medical professionals, but these professionals may have still charged individual patients for their services; cf. Hdt. 3.131; Ar. *Ach.* 1030 with Olson (2002) ad loc., Av. 584 with Dunbar (1997) ad loc. Finally, Roselli (2009) argued that part of fifth-century Athenian public finance was the occasional distributions of θεωρικά authorized by the Assembly.

¹⁸ Tridimas (2015), 25.

¹⁹ Obviously, the evacuation was complete only for parts of Attica within immediate reach of the invading Peloponnesian forces; see Hornblower (1991) ad 14.1. For the effect of this defensive policy on Athenians who saw their properties being destroyed by the enemy, see Thuc. 2.14-17, 21.

any age group, who were severed from any notion of self-sufficiency, as they were for Athenian elders. Accordingly, given the broad expansion of public payments in the years after 429 BCE, both in terms of new categories (councilors and other magistrates) and increased rates (court-pay), it has been argued that the intention behind such policies “was to provide some relief for Athenian farmers displaced by the war.”²⁰ Nevertheless, there were much more profitable activities to be undertaken by able-bodied men than volunteering as judges.²¹ Therefore, court-service would attract men who had no equal alternatives, namely those whose senility—or disability—rendered them unable to serve in the military or engage in manual labor.²²

At this point, it is worth considering court-service in its financial dimension since the purchasing power of three obols has been used as a basis on which to challenge the veracity of Aristophanes’ representation of Athens’s judiciary. In particular, Minor Markle argued that the three obols of court-pay were equivalent to or even a substitute for labor wages; hence, the pathetic portrayal of the judges in *Wasps* (300-11) is just “aristocratic sneer” on Aristophanes’ behalf with no historical value.²³ The reasoning behind this argument is that the three obols of court-pay was not a meager sum, since “1.65 obols would provide a family of four with the most essential part

²⁰ Rosivach (2011), 180.

²¹ For Athens, military service, both in the infantry and the navy, is identified by our sources as a major means of profit for “those in the full vigor of manhood” (Plut. *Per.* 12.5 τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἡλικίαν ἔχουσι καὶ ῥώμην αἱ στρατεῖαι τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν εὐπορίας παρεῖχον); cf. also Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 24.3 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.; Plut. *Per.* 11.4 with Stadter (1989) ad loc. At the same time, one could engage in a variety of other occupations. For non-specialized occupations available in Athens and their respective wages, see Loomis (1998), 104-120, 186-190.

²² As noted by Samama (2017), the extensive vocabulary on disability corroborates the reasonable assumption of a widespread existence of disabled people in ancient Greek societies. In part because of its ordinariness, then, disability (ἀδυναμία) in the Greek world was not an automatic mark of difference, unless it hindered one from taking part in socio-economic life; see Samama (2010). In terms of political services, as Dillon (1995, 48) argued, “there was no reason why *adyntoi* could not attend the *ekklesia* and *dikasteria*.”

²³ Markle (1985, 267) takes up the position of de Ste. Croix (1972, 355-376, at 362 with n. 8 for court-pay), who maintained that Aristophanes had an elitist outlook on Athenian democracy, hence his references to court-pay were part of his elitist satire, but Pritchard (2012, 14-30) has established the untenability of this perspective. In order to corroborate his argument that the three obols of court-pay were “enough to permit the worker to leave his occupation for jury service,” Markle (ib. 276) depends on an erroneous juxtaposition between military pay and court-pay as he considers them to be tantamount, but the rate of the former was 1 drachma per day; cf. Loomis (1998), 32-61; Pritchard (2007a), 125 with n. 2.

of their diet.”²⁴ Accordingly, under the assumption that the low prices of other kinds of food make them “hardly worth reckoning” among a family’s daily expenses, the conclusion reached is that “a family of four could have been fed on about two-and-a-half obols per day during the fourth century.”²⁵ For Markle, then, the disgruntlement of the old judges with their pay in *Wasps* is just a comic exaggeration.

Crucial premises of the above calculations are questionable.²⁶ More importantly, however, Markle sidesteps several facts that undermine his argument. First, although he admits that prices fluctuated upwards during wartime, Markle does not consider how this affects his calculations for the fifth century, and he remains oblivious to the fact that *Wasps* was staged while the Peloponnesian War was raging.²⁷ Additionally, in the decree of Theozotides about the publicly sponsored rearing of the children whose fathers died during the coup of 411 BCE, the amount allotted for their daily nutrition needs is one obol.²⁸ With regard, then, to the nutrition cost for an

²⁴ ib. 280. Markle (ib 279) calculates 1.2 *khoïnikes* (2784 cal.) as “98% of the daily requirements of a ‘moderately active’ man who was attending assemblies or juries.” Subsequently, assuming that on average 1 *medimnos* (51.84L / 48 *khoïnikes*) of unprocessed barley cost 3 drachmas (18 obols), the daily cost of nutrition is calculated by adding another 0.3 *medimnos* (+5.5 obols) to compensate for processing losses, plus the miller’s profit per *medimnos* (+0.5 obol). Consequently, after dividing 24 obols by 48 *khoïnikes* and adding 0.1 obol for the additional 0.2 *khoïnix*, the cost for the daily grain ratio for an adult Athenian citizen is calculated at 0.6 obol; thus, adding another 3/4 of this amount for his wife (+0.45 obol) and 2/4 for each of his two children (+2 × 0.3 obol = 0.6 obol), the sum total for barley covering the daily nutritional needs of this hypothetical family is calculated at 1.65 obols.

²⁵ ib. 280-281. Ober (1985, 24-25) reaches the same conclusion, calculating the daily food expenses for a family of four at “under two obols,” but he (134-138) does not subscribe to Markle’s opinion regarding public payments as wages.

²⁶ Markle’s assessment of calorific requirements as well as the nutritional value and consumption of cereals is based on a study of Foxhall and Forbes (1982), the premises of which have been recently called into question; see Akrigg (2019), 179-187. Equally, *contra* Pritchett’s (1956, 185-186) 4 drachmas/*medimnos*, Markle (1985, 279, 294) argued that a *medimnos* of barley in the fifth century cost 3 drachmas, but this is a retrojection of the barley prices attested in the Eleusinian accounts of the year 329/8 (*IG II²* 1672, lines 282-3). In fact, the evidence we have for fifth-century barley prices in Athens is dubious, as it is neither contemporary (Plut. *Mor.*470F: 2 drachmas/*medimnos*) nor referring directly to the Athenian market (Arist. [*Oec.*] 1347a33: 4 drachmas/*medimnos* in Lampsakos). For the latest comprehensive survey of grain prices in classical Athens, see Rathbone and von Reden (2015), 160-161 and tables A8.2-3.

²⁷ See ib. 280.

²⁸ cf. *SEG* 28.46 ll. 9-10 τοῖς π[α]ισὶ ἀ[...6...] τ[ό]τ[ω]ν ὁ- | [β]ολῶν [τῆς] ἡμέρας τ[ροφήν] etc. with Stroud (1971), 287-289. In his *editio princeps*, Stroud (ib. 285-287) dated the decree of Theozotides to 403/2 BCE, but Matthaïou (2011, 80) redated it to some year immediately following the coup of 411 BCE, namely “410/9 or a little after.”

adult person in fifth-century Athens, Markle's estimate that 0.6 obol covers the most essential part of a man's diet per day is wildly off the mark.²⁹ Finally, in *Wasps*, when the leader of the Chorus berates his son for asking for figs, he exclaims: "with this paltry pay, I must buy barley meal and firewood and tidbits for myself and two others."³⁰ The two others are probably his wife and son, so the total cost for feeding this family is to some extent lower than the family of four in Markle's working hypothesis, but tidbits and firewood would not be insignificant additions.³¹ Consequently, the leisure Markle ascribed to the purchasing power of three obols for the fifth century is untenable, and hence Aristophanes' representation of court-service in *Wasps* as the way for poor Athenian elders to guarantee bare subsistence is anything but a joke.

In conclusion, despite what its critics adduced as evidence, there is more in our sources to corroborate the portrayal of judges in Aristophanic comedy. Certainly, Athenian elders were not the *only* citizens on judge-panels, and Aristophanes never suggests anything of the sort. On the contrary, when the Chorus in *Wasps* explain how they make their living out of court-service (1113 πάντα γὰρ κεντοῦμεν ἄνδρα κάκπορίζομεν βίον), they also grudgingly refer to "drones" who sit amongst them and devour the fruits of the old judges' past labor.³² Yet, poor Athenians who were old enough to be free from military obligations and work must have predominated judge-panels, and the lack of external impediments to their availability for court-service was not the only reason

²⁹ See n. 24 above.

³⁰ *Vesp.* 300-1 ἀπὸ γὰρ τοῦδέ με τοῦ μισθαρίου ἢ τρίτον αὐτὸν ἔχειν ἄλφιστα δεῖ καὶ ξύλα κῶψον.

³¹ Usually, the tidbits of an Athenian meal would be fish; cf. *LSJ* s.v. ὄψον 3. In terms of fish-prices, as observed by Möller (2011), our only evidence comes from comedy and it is loaded; thus, given our inability to test those prices against hard evidence, their reliability for actual market prices is compromised. As regards firewood, the prices in Athens are unknown. For what it is worth, from the fourth through to the third century, the price for 1 talent (ca. 26 kg) of firewood on Delos would range from 7 to 8 obols in the local market; cf. Olson (1990b), 414-419. Meanwhile, *Wasps* is set in mid-winter (264-5), so the firewood would be used both for cooking and heating, while other necessities, like olive oil and wine, are conspicuously absent from the old judge's list; cf. Biles and Olson (2015) ad 300-2.

³² *Vesp.* 1014-6 ἀλλὰ γὰρ κηφῆνες ἡμῖν εἰσιν ἐγκαθήμενοι ἢ οὐκ ἔχοντες κέντρον, οἱ μένοντες ἡμῶν τοῦ φόρου ἢ τὸν πόνον κατεσθίουσιν, οὐ ταλαιπωρούμενοι with Biles and Olson (2015) ad loc.

for this. Court-service would be especially appealing to the elderly since it could either complement their family's income post-retirement or secure their subsistence, all the while allowing them to maintain dignity within their *oikos* as well as functionality within the *polis*. Therefore, instead of being representatives of a type character, Aristophanes' poor old judges were a *pars pro toto* portrayal of Athens's judiciary, and their standing in for the *pars maxima* condones the playwright's exclusion of other demographics.

Appendix II: Labor and Status in Classical Athens

In *Wasps*, one of the arguments used in Bdelykleon’s attempt to wean Philokleon off court-service is the demeaning nature of the activity. By being at the beck and call of self-serving *rhētores* for the sake of getting three obols, the old judges are said to subject themselves to a state of slavery, (682-95, 698-711). Interestingly, this line of argument culminates with Bdelykleon saying that the judges follow the one who pays them “like salaried olive-pickers” (712 ὡς περ ἐλαολόγοι χωρεῖθ’ ἄμα τῷ τὸν μισθὸν ἔχοντι). The implication is that that poor Athenians, like Philokleon and the Chorus, would consider such a form of wage-labor demeaning. Counter to scholarly assessments, as we shall see below, such a bias against wage-labor was true for both elite and non-elite Athenians. The latter, however, would not look with disdain upon wage-labor in general but non-specialized wage-labor in particular.

Before exploring the perception of labor in classical Athens, it is necessary to focus momentarily on labor-related terminology. In ancient Greece, free people who worked for wages would typically belong to the socio-economic class of the *thētes* (sg. *thēs*). This group was associated with landlessness and seasonal agricultural activities as early as the epics of Homer and Hesiod, but in Athens it also gave its name to one of the four Solonian census classes—the last in descending order after the *pentakosiomedimnoi*, the *hippeis*, and the *zeugitai*.¹ Within an Athenian context, the term *thēs* and its cognates are rarely used in our ancient sources to denote a member of the thetic class; rather, the most common use is in an economic sense, denoting one who works for wages.² Also in Athens, as we are informed by ancient scholia and lexicographers, there was a

¹ cf. *Il.* 21.443-5; *Od.* 4.643-4, 11.488-91, 18.354-9; Hes. *Op.* 600-5. For the Solonian census classes and their economic, military, and political connotations, cf. Arist. [*Ath. pol.*] 7.3-4 with Rhodes (1992) ad loc.; Foxhall (1997); van Wees (2001); (2006); Rosivach (2005); (2012a); (2012b); Valdés Guía and Gallego (2010).

² See Rosivach (2012a), 132-136.

designated space on the hill of the Athenian Agora, close to the Hephaesteion, where the *thētes* available for hire would gather.³ In terms of economic and political status, then, a *thēs* was poor but without doubt a free citizen. Yet, for some Greeks the economic dependence characterizing thetic life was equated to slavery. “A free man,” as Aristotle put it, “does not live for the sake of another.”⁴ On that account, the social status of *thētes* has been a matter of debate.

Aristotle propounded the idea that wage-labor, as practiced by both craftsmen (βάνανσοι) and manual laborers (θηῆτες), debases free men and renders them unable to practice virtue (ἀρετή); hence, the philosopher deemed the thetic class to be unfit for citizenship rights.⁵ In his study of the socio-political standing of Athenian *thētes*, Vincent Rosivach considered Aristotle’s disparagement of the thetic class to be an exception, arguing that the “condition of a *thēs* is certainly unenviable, but the word itself is not normally pejorative.”⁶ Nevertheless, disdain for wage-labor is not exclusive to Aristotle. In his *Oeconomicus* (4.1-3), Xenophon has Socrates voice an idea similar to that of Aristotle regarding the negative effect of wage-labor on people qua citizens, adding that “the crafts called banausic are disgraceful and held in utter disdain.”⁷ Equally, in the *Memorabilia* (2.7), Aristarkhos, a member of the Athenian elite that found himself impoverished by the end of the Peloponnesian War, deplores the dire financial situation of his family, whose members—contrary to the servile family of Keramon—would not take up wage-labor. When Socrates asks why this is so, Aristarkhos responds: “Keramon’s dependents are

³ The gathering place of wage-laborers was called Κολωνός μίσθιος (or ἐργατικός); cf. Σ^{VEFM} Ar. Av. 997; Σ Aeschin. 1.125; Harp. s. v. κολωνέτας; Suda s. v. κολωνέτας; Poll. 7.132.

⁴ Arist. *Rh.* 1367a32 ἐλευθέρου γὰρ τὸ μὴ πρὸς ἄλλον ζῆν. The conflation of the thetic condition with slavery is also prominent in lexicographers, cf. Poll. 3.82; Hsch. s.v. θής, θητεύει.

⁵ cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1278a8-21, 1337b5-22. For the semantic history of βάνανσος and its cognates, see Bourriot (2015).

⁶ Rosivach (2012a), 134 with n. 20.

⁷ Xen. *Oec.* 4.2 καὶ γὰρ αἱ γε βανασικαὶ καλούμεναι [sc. τέχναι] καὶ ἐπίρρητοὶ εἰσι καὶ εἰκότως μέντοι πάνυ ἀδοξοῦνται πρὸς τῶν πόλεων. For the philosophy informing this passage and its parallels in the works of Plato, see Pomeroy (1991) ad loc.

craftsmen, while mine are educated in noble pursuits.”⁸ Finally, when advised to work for someone as a bailiff and help with the gathering of crops before old age deprives him of bodily strength, Eutheros, a propertied Athenian who shares the post-war fate of Aristarkhos, tells Socrates: “I would not stand becoming a slave.”⁹

If anything, the above passages suggest that *comprehensive* disdain for wage-labor was peculiar to people espousing elitist attitudes. In Athens, however, as demonstrated by Edward Harris, wage-labor was not only extensive but also afforded professionals in the performing arts, philosophical education, medicine, and sculpture a remarkably high status.¹⁰ But what about non-specialized *thētes*, who were neither professionals nor craftsmen? On this subject, it is worth pondering the closing remark of David Lewis’ recent analysis of labor specialization in Athens:

As modern scholars come to recognize that much of the scorn directed against labourers in our sources (or, to be more precise, certain sources: Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle above all) represents idiosyncratic rather than popular thinking, the role of skill as a driver of social status will require further exploration, especially among the working population of Attica.¹¹

For our present purposes, then, the important question to ask is how skill affected the perception of wage-labor by poor Athenians.

Before any attempt to investigate popular thinking on wage-earning, it is important to note the social implications underlying the division between types of wage-labor in our sources. In his discussion of money-making (χρηματιστική), Aristotle divides the part of wage-earning (μισθοαρνία) between that of craftsmen (βάνανσοι) and that of unskilled laborers (ἄτεχνοι), who

⁸ Xen. *Mem.* 2.7.4 νῆ Δί’, ἔφη, ὁ μὲν γὰρ τεχνίτας τρέφει, ἐγὼ δ’ ἐλευθερίως πεπαιδευμένους. On the elite character of the education implied in this passage, see Dorion and Bandini (2011), 242.

⁹ Xen. *Mem.* 2.8.3-4 ἔργων τε ἐπιστατοῦντα καὶ συγκομίζοντα τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ συμφυλάττοντα τὴν οὐσίαν ... χαλεπῶς ἄν, ἔφη, ἐγώ, ὦ Σώκρατες, δουλείαν ὑπομείναιμι.

¹⁰ See Harris (2002); Harris (2020b).

¹¹ See Lewis (2020) with bibliography, quotation from 157-158.

“serve exclusively by means of their body.”¹² Subsequently, when discussing the nature of constitutions, the groups constituting a *polis* are occupationally divided into five parts (μέρη): farmers (γεωργικόν), craftsmen (βάνουσον), traders (ἀγοραῖον), *thētes* (θητικόν), and warriors (προπολεμησον).¹³ One cannot help but notice that Aristotle provides a brief commentary on the function and usefulness of every part but one: the *thētes*. Interestingly, although both craftsmen and *thētes* are wage-laborers, the former are said to engage in the “arts without which it is impossible for a *polis* to be inhabited” while the latter receive only nominal mention.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, this distinction of wage-labor in terms of usefulness might seem like an extra layer of elite bias, but this distinction does not seem to be restricted to the philosophical plane.

In Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, when Khremylos restores Ploutos’ eyesight the previously uneven distribution of wealth between honest and dishonest men shifts. This turn of events has an unnamed *sykophantēs* rush to Khremylos’ house to complain, but he is accosted by a formerly poor (also unnamed) Honest Man, who arrived earlier to dedicate the rugs of his poverty days to the god. Given that the wretched state of the incoming *sykophantēs* betrays his moral character, an interesting conversation ensues (900-6).¹⁵ The moment the *sykophantēs* claims to be a “patriotic and good man” (φιλόπολις καὶ χρηστός), the Honest Man asks whether he is a farmer (γεωργός εἶ;), a trader (ἀλλ’ ἔμπορος;), or a craftsman (τέχνην τιν’ ἔμαθες;).¹⁶ After each successive

¹² Arist. *Pol.* 1258b25-8 τρίτον δὲ μισθαρνία: ταύτης δ’ ἡ μὲν τῶν βαναύσων τεχνῶν, ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀτέχνων καὶ τῷ σώματι μόνῳ χρησίμων. For a discussion of the way this passage fits into Aristotle’s political philosophy, see Schütrumpf (1991) ad loc.

¹³ See Arist. *Pol.* 1290b39-1291a10.

¹⁴ Arist. *Pol.* 1291a1-4 ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο [sc. τὸ βάνουσον] τὸ περὶ τὰς τέχνας ὧν ἄνευ πόλιν ἀδύνατον οἰκεῖσθαι: τοῦτων δὲ τῶν τεχνῶν τὰς μὲν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὑπάρχειν δεῖ, τὰς δὲ εἰς τρυφήν ἢ τὸ καλῶς ζῆν. For Aristotle’s commentary on the function of each μέρος, see Schütrumpf and Gehrke (1996) ad loc.

¹⁵ For the negative status of *sykophantai* in Athenian society, see Harvey (1990).

¹⁶ As noted by Sommerstein (2001 ad loc.), a notion of social utility seems to be underlying each question. For χρηστός in Aristophanes denoting a man useful to the *polis* in a civic, military, as well as a political sense, see Casevitz (1997).

question is met with a cynically negative response, the Honest Man ironically inquires of the *sykophantēs*: “how, then, did you make a living or from what, doing nothing?” (πῶς οὖν διέζης ἢ πόθεν, μηδὲν ποιῶν;). Although a product of comic imagination, this dialogue poses as an exchange between non-elite Athenians; thus, on the assumption that its dramatic success depends on an accurate reflection of popular thinking, its implications for the social status of unspecialized labor in Athens are telling. Although the Honest Man offers various options that would substantiate one’s claim to a life of decency in terms of occupation, non-specialized wage-earning is not one of them. Moreover, the feigned *aporia* as to how one not practicing farming, trade, or craftsmanship earns a livelihood suggests that notionally these three are the only occupational options for a free man. Therefore, it seems that non-elite Athenians, like their fellows in higher socio-economic strata, perceived non-specialized labor to be unfit for a free person.

The perception of non-specialized wage-labor described above gains in plausibility when juxtaposed to Perikles’ funeral oration, where he claims that “it is not a shame for one to acknowledge poverty, but the greater shame is for one to not avoid it through work.”¹⁷ When Perikles goes on to emphasize the significant social role of the politically engaged laborer, one would agree with Félix Bourriot that in fifth-century Athens “le travail est érigé en valeur civique.”¹⁸ Nonetheless, such an attachment of civic value to labor enmeshes the non-specialized laborer in a relationship with his employer that has implications extending well beyond the former’s economic survival, as his value as a citizen directly depends on his employer. As argued by Anne Jacquemin in her study of the social standing of the *thetic* class, “le *thète* est accablé d’un *mepris quasi général*, car le mendiant qui ne cherche point à travailler se place en dehors du

¹⁷ Thuc. 2.40.1 τὸ πένεσθαι οὐχ ὁμολογεῖν τινὶ αἰσχρόν, ἀλλὰ μὴ διαφεύγειν ἔργῳ αἴσχιον.

¹⁸ Bourriot (2015), 27

ystème économique-social.”¹⁹ From this perspective, the kind of socio-economic existence typified by the unskilled *thētes* would be not only unenviable but also despised; hence, to liken someone to a “salaried olive-picker” would be strongly evocative for any Athenian citizen, irrespective of socio-economic standing.

¹⁹ Jacquemin (2013), 13.

Appendix III: On the Vermillion-Dyed Rope (Eccl. 377-9)

νῆ Δί' ὄρθριον μὲν οὔν.
καὶ δῆτα πολὺν ἠμίλτος, ὦ Ζεῦ φίλτατε,
γέλων παρέσχεν, ἦν προσέρραινον κύκλω.

By Zeus, at daybreak! And the vermillion dye with
which they were sprinkling people all around—oh,
dear Zeus—provided a good laugh.

Assemblywomen is our major historical source on fourth-century Assembly proceedings, so Khremes' brief remark about the vermillion dye has been instrumental in our understanding of the use of the vermillion-dyed rope (σχοινίον μεμιλωμένον) in the years of the restored democracy. Our sources for the fifth century record that the device was used to round up people in Assembly-meetings. Nevertheless, scholars have read lines 378-9 on the assumption that the use of vermillion-dyed rope changed in the fourth century, and in turn proposed various interpretations. As we shall see below, this assumption is untenable, whereas Khremes' account suggests that the vermillion-dyed rope retained its function across the centuries.

Before any assessment of the scholarship on the passage of *Assemblywomen* under discussion, an examination of our records on the vermillion-dyed rope is necessary, given that its use is sparsely documented. The first reference to the device appears in Aristophanes' *Akharnians*. Frustrated with the emptiness of the Pnyx on a designated Assembly-meeting day, Dikaiopolis bemoans the fact that his fellow-citizens “are chattering in the Agora, jumping and ducking the vermillion-dyed rope” (21-2 οἱ δ' ἐν ἀγορᾷ λαλοῦσι κᾶνω καὶ κάτω | τὸ σχοινίον φεύγουσι τὸ μεμιλωμένον). According to the ancient scholia on *Ach.* 22, Athenians were forcibly driven from the Agora into the Pnyx by public slaves stretching a vermillion-dyed rope while traversing the

area, since any loiterers whose clothes got stained were subject to a fine.¹ Given the obscurity of Dikaiopolis' remark, the accuracy of the information in the scholia has been questioned.² Nevertheless, there is no ground on which to doubt the authority of our ancient sources: hence the scholarly consensus on the use of the vermillion-dyed rope for the fifth century.³ Therefore, according to our sources for the fifth century, the vermillion-dyed rope was a negative incentive used before the beginning of an Assembly-meeting so as to guarantee the attendance of all Athenians in the immediate vicinity of the Pnyx.

¹ cf. Σ^{REF} τὸ σχοινίον φεύγουσι· ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐξ ἀνάγκης αὐτοὺς εἰς τὰς ἐκκλησίας συνιέναι τοῦτο ἐμηχανῶντο καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα ... ἔτι μὴν καὶ μεμιλωμένῳ σχοινίῳ περιβάλλοντες αὐτοὺς συνήλαυον εἰς τὰς ἐκκλησίας. τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίουν ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βραδύναι· ὅσοι γὰρ ἐχρίοντο, ζημίαν ἐξέτινον (“they are avoiding the rope: because of the need to have people attend Assembly-meetings they came up with this and other devices ... above all, they also drove them into Assembly-meetings by surrounding them with a vermillion-dyed rope. They did this for the sake of avoiding delays. Those stained had to pay a fine”); Σ^{Lh} (Triklinios repeats the second scholion in Γ with slight alterations) εἰώθασι δύο ὑπηρέται κεχρισμένον σχοινίον μίλτῳ ἤγουν βάμματι κοκκίνῳ ἐκτείνειν διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς καὶ τὸν ὄχλον διώκειν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ὡς φησι καὶ Πλάτων ὁ κωμικός· ὅσοι δὲ ἐχρίοντο ἐξέτινον ζημίαν. τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίουν ἐπεὶ ὀκνηρῶς εἶχον Ἀθηναῖοι πρὸς τὰς συνόδους. ἀφήρουν δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κείμενα ὄνια, ἵνα περὶ ταῦτα διατρίβοιεν (“two servants used to stretch a rope anointed with *milto*—that is vermillion dye—across the Agora and chase the crowd into the Assembly, as Plato the comic playwright says. Those stained had to pay a fine. They did this due to the Athenians' idling on their way to Assembly-meetings. They also removed from the Agora the market-wares lying near the Assembly-place lest people loitered around them”). The same use for the vermillion-dyed rope is also recorded by Pollux (8.104) as well as the relevant lemmata of later lexicographers; cf. Hesych. s.v. σχοινίον; Photius s.v. σχοινίον μεμιλωμένον; Suda s.v. μεμιλωμένον.

² Wilamowitz (1880, 165 n.7) was the first to cast doubt on the accuracy of the scholia, speculating instead that the vermillion-dyed rope was used as a barrier around the Assembly's auditorium. Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932, 112) cautiously noted that “there seems insufficient evidence for a certain choice between the explanations offered by the ancient scholiast and by Wilamowitz,” adding that “[t]he one explanation has the weight of ancient authority, the other of reason.” Earlier criticism against Wilamowitz, however, was not expressed as cautiously. Valeton (1887, 28 n.8) politely yet bluntly asserted that scholarly speculation cannot supersede the authority of Pollux; thus, in his study on the lexicon of Photius, Wilamowitz (1907, 9) acceded to Valeton and retracted his hypothesis. On the basis that the information in the scholia “may be only late scholarly conjecture,” Olson (2002 ad loc.) similarly speculated that the vermillion-dyed rope in Dikaiopolis' remark might stand via synecdoche for a line demarcating the area purified for the purposes of the Assembly-meeting. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence, there is one crucial aspect in the explanation provided by the scholia that does not allow for skepticism, namely the fact that the author draws information relevant to the situation from Plato *comicus* (Σ^{Lh} ὡς φησι καὶ Πλάτων ὁ κωμικός), which suggests that a now-lost play corroborated (or provided) the adduced details. For the phrase ὡς φησι καὶ Πλάτων ὁ κωμικός in Σ^{Lh} as referring to the preceding information and not the immediately following sentence (ὅσοι δὲ ἐχρίοντο ἐξέτινον ζημίαν), see Stephanis (1977/8), 22-23. The play referred to in the scholia might be Plato's *Metics*, a surviving fragment of which suggests that it dealt with the vermillion-dyed rope at some length; cf. Plato *comicus* fr. 82 K.-A. <ϙ> ὦδ' ἀναίσχυντοῦντε τὸ μιληλιφῆ (“thus acting insolently the two vermillion-smearred men”) with Pirrotta (2009), 188-189.

³ See Jones (1957), 109; Hansen (1983), 10; Sinclair (1988), 116-117. Additionally, in their comments on *Eccl.* 377-8, Leeuwen (1905), Coulon and Daele (1930), Ussher (1973), and Sommerstein (1998a) take the explanation of the ancient scholia on the fifth-century use of the vermillion-dyed rope for granted.

As regards the use of the device in the fourth century, Khremes' remark about the vermillion dye in *Assemblywomen* is our single testimony. As in the case of *Akharnians*, the passage is equally obscure, yet the scholion on line 378 reads: "they drove the people through the Agora into the Assembly by means of a vermillion-dyed rope" (Σ^{ΡΛ} κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐσόβουν εἰς ἐκκλησίαν τοὺς Ἀθηναίους μεμιλωμένῳ σχοινίῳ). Even though the author of the scholion clearly aligns the meaning of the line with the fifth-century use of the vermillion-dyed rope, scholars have assumed that this practice was abandoned after the introduction of Assembly-pay. In particular, considering that the described meeting was over before it was scheduled to begin, Ussher argued that it is "best (with van Leeuwen and Coulon) to suppose that the archers use the paint to exclude those who (though coming early) arrive to discover the 'House' full."⁴ Following Ussher, Hansen claimed that in the fourth century the vermillion-dyed rope was used for the exclusion of late-comers, or "to prevent participants from stealing away during the debate only to return just before the session ended so that they could hand back their *symbola* and receive the three obols."⁵ In a similar vein, Sommerstein argued that in Khremes' account "the dyed rope is being used at the end of meeting, not the beginning, and its purpose must therefore be different." Nonetheless, he objected to Hansen's proposals for the use of the rope as an exclusionary (because Khremes "was present throughout the debate") or a guarding device (because "the rope would no longer be needed once the meeting was over").⁶ According to Sommerstein, then, the vermillion-dyed rope was used at the end of a meeting to drive non-ticketholders away from the Pnyx; hence,

⁴ Ussher (1973) ad loc.

⁵ Hansen (1983), 27 n. 11.

⁶ Certainly, Khremes was present for the debate, but was he—per Sommerstein—present *throughout*? For an Assembly-meeting, as noted by Hansen 1991, 149, there "were probably at least nine items on a day's agenda," but Khremes' narrative only refers to one (396-7 *περὶ σωτηρίας ἢ γνώμας καθεῖναι τῆς πόλεως*). Therefore, even if we attribute Khremes' partial description to dramatic license, the peculiarly early conclusion of the described Assembly-meeting still points at Khremes being present only for the debate (and vote) on the last item of the day's agenda.

Khremes is amused at the fact that “the meeting ended so early that while some non-ticketholders were trying to get away unsmeared, they were impeded by others who were only just arriving for the first time!”⁷

The above explanations meet with objections. First, the argument for an exclusionary use was refuted by Philippe Gauthier, whose close reading of the dialogue between Blepyros and Khremes established that there is nothing in the play to suggest that late-comers could not attend or vote in an Assembly-meeting.⁸ Second, Hansen’s alternative interpretation fails to explain the pandemonium implied by what Khremes describes as the vermillion dye being “sprinkled all around.” In other words, should we assume that ticketholders—the majority of whom, in this case, were the disguised women—would try and make an escape during a meeting that was over before daybreak? Third, there is no clear indication in lines 377-9 that the vermillion dye “provided a laugh” as people were evacuating the Pnyx or as the meeting was drawing to its unexpectedly early close. Finally, given that those who were to receive pay at the end of an Assembly-meeting had a redeemable ticket in hand, the forceful evacuation of the Pnyx postulated by Sommerstein seems unnecessary—especially in a fashion which implies that a fine was imposed on those stained.

A reading of lines 377-9 premised on a continuity in the use of the vermillion-dyed rope not only gives good sense but also dispenses with strained interpretations. Earlier in the play, the Chorus claimed that with the rate of Assembly-pay at three obols, those who used to dawdle at the Agora’s garland-shops when the rate was a single obol now rush to Assembly-meetings.⁹ Still,

⁷ Sommerstein (1998a) ad loc.

⁸ See Gauthier (1990), 440-1; (1993), 240 n.19. In a later publication, considering Gauthier’s criticisms, Hansen (1996, 29-33) retracted his original position, maintaining instead that late-comers could still partake in Assembly-meetings.

⁹ *Eccl.* 300-3 ὄρα δ’ ὅπως ᾠθήσομεν τούσδε τοὺς ἐξ ἄστεως | ἴκοντας, ὅσοι πρὸ τοῦ μέν, ἠνίκ’ ἔδει λαβεῖν | ἐλθόντ’ ὀβολὸν μόνον, καθήντο λαλοῦντες | ἐν τοῖς στεφανώμασιν, νυνὶ δ’ ἐνοχλοῦσ’ ἄγαν (“Make sure we shove out of the way those coming from the city, who are now a nuisance but previously, when attendance was remunerated by a single obol, used to dawdle at the garland-shops”).

there is no reason to assume that this applied to *every* Athenian, or that positive and negative incentives cannot co-exist. To put it another way, if those who did not find the three-obol incentive motivational enough to attend Assembly-meetings still loitered in the agora, the fifth-century use of the vermillion-dyed rope was still applicable. In the present context, however, assuming that the public slaves were sent to clear the Agora before the presiding Councillors (πρυτάνεις) started the Assembly-meeting, the overcrowding of the Pnyx by the disguised women prompted an earlier start. Thus, with the meeting begun and almost over at the time when it would usually begin, as the public slaves unknowingly kept on pushing forward rope-in-hand, loiterers in the Agora were bound to be stuck in place outside the already overcrowded auditorium, smeared, and fined.

Besides providing a plausible scenario, the above reading of lines 377-9 also answers a crucial question: why does Khremes mention the vermillion-dyed rope at all? Considering his amazement at the unusually massive attendance at the meeting, Khremes' reference seems to accentuate exactly that. As multiple men were on the fringes of the auditorium on all sides, by the time people from the Agora were rounded up, the vermillion dye was "sprinkled all around" (κύκλω). On that account, despite their punctuality, several Assembly-goers motivated by the positive incentive, like Khremes, went empty-handed (388 οὐκ ἔλαβον οὔτ' αὐτὸς οὔτ' ἄλλοι συχνοί) and Assembly-goers motivated by the negative incentive were fined; hence, Khremes' amusement was fuelled by Schadenfreude. Consequently, retaining its function across the fifth and fourth centuries, the vermillion-dyed rope was used to drive loiterers out of the Agora and into the Assembly under the threat of a fine.