

“WE ATE IT ALL TOGETHER!”  
(IM)MORAL DUTY IN ARISTOPHANIC COMEDY



ABSTRACT: In this paper I discuss the motif of ‘eating together’ in *Knights*, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Wealth*, as an allegory of political corruption which is nevertheless presented as an act of moral duty. This motif, it will be argued, is a core element in the first play, which promotes an ironic reading; a less evidently political symbol in the second play, which strengthens the case for an ironic interpretation; and only a peripheral point in the third play, which does not undermine the comic utopia. In all cases, the dramatist underlines the complicity of both official representatives and private individuals in corruption.

THE CONCEPT of moral duty permeates Aristophanes’ comedies. It appears mainly in connection with politics, poetry (drama in particular), and social relations. Political moral duty comprises the citizens’ commitment towards their city-state, for example in *Lysistrata* where the women have to refrain from sex for a common good purpose (κᾶν χρῆ... δεῖ, 133–44). Conversely, the city-state too must be committed to its citizens: the state ought to pay its rowers (*Eq.* 1366–7), honour the mothers of brave men (*Thesm.* 832–3), protect the elderly from prosecutions (*Ach.* 676–96), and give second chances to those who have been misled — the latter is a call for Athens to grant amnesty to the supporters of the oligarchic coup (*Ran.* 686–702: δίκαιόν ἐστι... χρῆναι... εἰκός). There is also the political moral duty of a city towards another, for instance in requesting Athens to reciprocate the fair treatment she received from Corinth (εἰσὶ χρηστοί... χρηστός γενοῦ, *Eccl.* 199–200), as well as the duty of all Greek cities towards panhellenism, most notably in *Peace* where all Greeks are invited to rescue the

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trapped goddess together, as they should (*εἰ τι χρῆ δροῶν*, 302–5). Poetic moral duty, which is manifested in the parabases of the chorus and is closely associated with political duty, comprises the obligation of the comic dramatist (*a*) to speak of the public affairs with bravery and prudence (*b*) for the common good, (*c*) to fight the enemies of the people and (*d*) trust the spectators, (*e*) to avoid banal comic devices and (*f*) persist in developing his craft, yet (*g*) without bragging; finally, (*h*) not to denounce his city in front of a panhellenic audience but also not to be soft.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Aristophanes underlines the corresponding moral duty of the spectators to applaud, and of the judges to give the victory to, such committed poets, that is, to Aristophanes himself.<sup>2</sup> Moral duty also regulates social relations, above all family relations. Thus, for example, Bdelycleon in *Wasps* decides to distance his father from the lawcourts, first by restricting him inside the house (719–24) and then by turning him into a party animal (737–40, 1003–6), out of genuine love for his father, that is, much beyond his legal duty, by Solonian law, to *gêrotrophein* his father, i.e. to provide him with food, house, and a burial.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, it was not written in the law that a master should trust his slave, as Chremylus does with Carion (*Plut.* 26–7), nor that the young should offer their seat to the elderly, as Better Argument advocates (*Nub.* 991–9), nor that women should not speak ill of one another (*Thesm.* 539) — these are all moral expectations. The latter example falls under what we may call a ‘gendered moral duty’, that is, the urge of men and women to defend their pride when threatened by the opposite sex, as characteristically happens in *Lysistrata*: “But men must never, ever be worsted by women!” (450–1; cf. 559, 614–15).<sup>4</sup> Judging from the examples cited and quoted above, as well as from the passages to be discussed below, the vocabulary used by Aristophanes to signify moral duty comprises the frequent use of *χρῆ* and *δεῖ*, impersonal expressions with *ἔστι* (*δίκαιόν ἐστι*, *εἰκός ἐστι* etc.), adjectives in

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1. (a) *Ach.* 630–2, 645, *Vesp.* 1036, *Ran.* 686–7; (b) *Ach.* 662–3, *Eq.* 515–17; (c) *Eq.* 510–11, *Vesp.* 1029–37, *Pax* 754–60; (d) *Nub.* 524, 527, 533; (e) *Nub.* 537–50, *Pax* 739–48; (f) *Eq.* 542–5, *Pax* 749–50; (g) *Ach.* 628–9, *Vesp.* 1024–8, *Pax* 735; (h) *Ach.* 501–5.
  2. *Ach.* 655, *Eq.* 544–50, *Nub.* 577–9, *Vesp.* 1049–57, *Pax* 764–6, *Eccl.* 1154–5.
  3. On that law, as well as the concept of filial duty in Greek thought in general, see van Berkel (2020) 124–200. One could argue that restricting Philocleon into the house and then forcing him towards debauchery is nothing but a *comically exaggerated* way of Bdelycleon applying the law. Even so, Bdelycleon’s motivation is explicitly emotional, not formal: he wants to see his father happy (1006).
  4. I use Wilson’s *OCT* throughout, and Henderson’s Loeb translations with occasional deviations.

-τέος and -τός, hortatory subjunctive (“I should”), imperative (“I must”) and future (“I will”).

So far, one would gain the impression, had they never read or watched Aristophanes, that the comic dramatist wrote moralist handbooks for the stage. Not at all. To avoid straightforward didacticism, the poet often prefers to defend moral duty by *reductio ad absurdum*: he lampoons individuals and institutions who violate moral rules, presenting them as custodians of an immoral duty. In *Birds* and *Wealth*, for instance, there appear two Informers (‘sycophants’) who advertise their activity not only as non-reprehensible, but also as morally imperative. The former considers slander his ancestral duty (“I’ll not disgrace my family: informing has been our livelihood since my grandfather’s day”, *Av.* 1451–2) and the latter, his patriotic one (“Is it not appropriate to benefit my own city with all my might?”, *Plut.* 911–12). The pinnacle of immorality, of course, is the claim that beating one’s own father is *δίκαιον* (*Nub.* 1405, 1411) and *καλόν* (*Av.* 758), a claim which momentarily allows for comic business but undermines the comic eutopia.<sup>5</sup> The present paper delves on this very category: immoral duty, whose defenders try to pass it off as moral. More precisely, I shall focus on the theme of excusing, or rather justifying, one’s own complicity in political corruption, whether this is perpetrated by an official or a private individual. Inspired by a Greek politician’s notoriously cynical apology “We ate it all together!” (“*Μαζί τα φάγαμε!*”),<sup>6</sup> I will discuss three Aristophanic plays in which corruption is presented in culinary terms and is professed to be a moral, albeit an immoral, obligation. It should go without saying that ‘eating together’ was a well established allegory of moral and political corruption already since Homer, best exemplified by the rapacious suitors of the *Odyssey* (14.86–106). Aristophanes regularly uses

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5. This immoral claim is attributed to the sophists in both plays, insofar as it exemplifies the victory of *physis* over *nomos* (*Av.* 755, *Nub.* 1400). Georgousi (2016) 257 maintains that “Only a very vague and confused understanding of the sophists’ works would make us accept such an incorrect conclusion [i.e. that] the elements of amoral behaviour that can be traced in the comedies are to be considered the result of sophistic influence” (my translation). But the question is not whether Aristophanes did justice to the sophists’ ethics — why would he? What matters is that he made his audience *take for granted* that such behaviours are of sophistic inspiration.

6. Made by Greece’s former Deputy Prime Minister Theodore Pangalos in 2010, who attributed the country’s debt crisis to politicians squandering public money upon request of the citizens, the statement ‘went viral’, reaching *The Times* (16/04/2012) and *New York Times* (16/07/2011).

some forms of *τρῶγειν* as synonyms for *κλέπτειν*.<sup>7</sup> In the narrower sense of misappropriating public funds, verbs meaning ‘to eat’ predominantly apply to the populist Athenian politician Cleon. This man was such a professional predator, according to the dramatist, that the width of metaphorical language had to adapt to the width of his mouth — a mouth ‘licking’, ‘biting’, ‘chewing’, ‘gulping down’, even ‘vomiting’ public money.<sup>8</sup>

In the parodos of *Knights*, the chorus attacks Paphlagon the tax-farmer, a caricature of Cleon.<sup>9</sup> They call him *φάραγγα καὶ Χάρυβδιν ἀρπαγῆς*, “the chasm and Charybdis of rapacity” (248). The word *φάραγξ* can be used metaphorically for the anus,<sup>10</sup> which would be an attractive reading here, given that Paphlagon is considered a passive homosexual elsewhere in the play.<sup>11</sup> But what follows clearly indicates that the hole under discussion is his oral cavity, and therefore, *φάραγξ* is a *para prosdokian* for *φάρυγξ*, the oesophagus.<sup>12</sup> To defend himself against the knights, Paphlagon seeks aid

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7. *Ach.* 258: *μή τις λαθὼν σου περιτράγη τὰ χρυσία* (“take special care that no one pinches your bangles”); *Pax* 414–5: *τῶν ἡμερῶν παρεκλέπτετον καὶ τοῦ κύκλον παρέτρωγον ὑφ’ ἀμαρτωλίας* (“[the Sun and the Moon] have been clipping days and taking bites out of the year: pure chicanery”); *Ran.* 367: *τοὺς μισθοὺς τῶν ποιητῶν ῥήτωρ ὦν εἶτ’ ἀποτρώγει* (“a politician who nibbles away the poets’ honoraria”). Cf. Taillardat (1962) 310–11, 413–6.
8. *Ach.* 5–6: *τὸ κέαρ εὐφράνθην ἰδὼν, τοῖς πέντε τάλαντοις οἷς Κλέων ἐξήμεσεν* (“my heart rejoiced to see those five talents Cleon had to disgorge”); *Vesp.* 596: *Κλέων ὁ κεκραξιδάμας μόνον ἡμᾶς οὐ περιτρώγει* (“Cleon, the scream champion, does not take bites out [i.e. cuts funding] of us [sc. the jurors] alone!”); *Eq.* 103: *ἐπίπαστα λείξας δημιόπραθ’ ὁ βάσκανος* (“That devil’s been licking the sauce off confiscated goodies”); *Eq.* 717–8: *μασώμενος γὰρ τῷ μὲν ὀλίγον ἐντίθης, αὐτὸς δ’ ἐκεῖνον τριπλάσιον κατέσπακας* (“you chew some food and feed him [sc. Demos] a morsel, after you’ve bolted down three times as much yourself”); *Eq.* 824–7: *καὶ τοὺς κανλοὺς τῶν ἐθνονῶν ἐκκαυλίζων καταβροχθίζει, κάμφοῖν χειροῖν μυστιλᾶται τῶν δημοσίων* (“he breaks the choicest stalks off the audits of outgoing officials and gulps them down, and with both hands sops the gravy from the people’s treasury”); *Eq.* 258: *τὰ κοινὰ πρὶν λαχεῖν κατεσθίεις*, discussed below.
9. A recent attempt by Osborne (2020) to challenge this identification against the *opinio communis* — see *op cit.* 27 n.7 for a brief list of scholars who find the identification unambiguous — is heavily problematic. For instance, the claim that “Paphlagon does some things that Cleon is known to have done [...] and many things that it is implausible or even close to impossible [...] that he did” (29) insinuates that a parodic persona ought to represent accurately a real person, and not combine elements from other sources, if the audience is expected to perceive its identity.
10. Cf. Sotades iamb., fr. 2.2 *Coll. Alex.*
11. Cf. 78–9, 375–81, 875–80; Hubbard (1998) 56–7.
12. After all, the very name Paphlagon marks the mouth as his main organ: he is a ‘bubbling’ orator, screaming and slandering on the one hand, flattering and sensually whispering on the other; Fileni (2012) 93–109. “Our opportunist’s big gun was his infinitely able and flexible tongue, [...] a tongue clearly capable of the full range from insinuating whispers to bellowing domination”; Tylawsky (2002) 20.

from the old jurymen — he appeals to the elderly among the audience —<sup>13</sup> suggesting that it is their duty to help him because they ‘ate it all together’ (255–7):

ὦ γέροντες ἡλιασταί, φράττερες τριωβόλου,  
 οὐδὲς ἐγὼ βόσκω κεκραγῶς καὶ δίκαια κ’ ἄδικα,  
 παραβοηθεῖθ’, ὡς ὑπ’ ἀνδρῶν τύπτομαι ξυνομοτῶν.

Elders of the jury courts, brethren of the three obols, whom I feed by my loud denunciations, true or false, reinforce me: I’m being roughed up by enemy conspirators!

The use of *βόσκω*, appropriate to beasts, in contrast to *τρέφω* which mostly applies to children, betrays Paphlagon’s snobbish attitude towards his allies.<sup>14</sup> He clearly sees them as *φράττερες*, ‘of the same phratry’ or ‘kin’, only insofar as the three obols are concerned: rather than a genitive objective/of sharing (“brethren *in* three obols”), *τριωβόλου* is a genitive of value (“brethren *worth* three obols”). The money under discussion is the daily compensation for jurors, a policy introduced by Pericles to allow the poorest citizens to serve in the lawcourts. Cleon increased this two-obol fee to three obols, i.e. half a drachma, to boost his popularity among the lower classes, where most jurors came from.<sup>15</sup> In exchange he expected their support, when dragging his political enemies through the courts by slandering.<sup>16</sup> By calling the jurymen *φράττερες*, Paphlagon insinuates that their (im)moral duty to support him is a quasi-religious one, since a phratry was based on common ancestors and common worship.

Clearly, Aristophanes’ stance is on the side of the knights, whose insults are unleashed on his behalf, against this immoral feasting.<sup>17</sup> The knights respond that they righteously want to beat up Paphlagon, because he ‘gobbles’

13. Mitchell (1836) *ad loc.*; Merry (1895) *ad loc.*; Neil (1901) *ad loc.*

14. Schol. *ad loc.*; Neil (1901) *ad loc.*

15. Cf. schol. *Vesp.* 88 and 300. The daily wage for a skilled worker was one drachma, hence even a three-obol payment would only appeal to the poorest and the elderly (cf. *Vesp.* 300–2, 664, 701–3).

16. For Cleon as sycophant, cf. 64, 259, 300, 437, 773–6, 977–85. For such prosecutions, his first appeal had to be to the Boule; cf. 485–7, 626–7.

17. “In this most partisan of plays, the chorus is unambiguously on one side, that is, opposed to Paphlagon-Cleon, and as such is especially easily aligned with an ‘authorial’ presence. It is easy for a choral voice to start to shift towards a ‘poet’s voice’ even outside explicitly parabolic passages”; Rawles (2013) 193.

public [sc. funds] before he is even sworn in office (*τὰ κοινὰ πρὶν λαχεῖν κατεσθίεις*, 258). Whether that would sound as a comic hyperbole or a valid accusation to the audience is hard to tell.<sup>18</sup> What *is* certain is that Cleon was powerful enough to know that he would soon become a *stratēgos* and smart enough to prepare his alliances in time. When *Knights* was staged in February 424 BC, Cleon, not a general yet, enjoyed great popularity for Athens’ victory at Pylos, since the actual *stratēgos* of 425/4, Nicias, had passed over the command in Pylos to him (Thuc. 4.27.5–29.1). It was during that time, in 425 BC, that Cleon proposed the raising of the jury payment and he was only elected a general in spring 424, that is, ironically, a few weeks after *Knights* had won the first prize.<sup>19</sup> As for the ‘gobbling’ metaphor employed by the chorus to describe Paphlagon’s corruption, the scholiast notes that it comes from those who go to dinners for a scrounge before the food is served (*ἢ μεταφορὰ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τοῖς δείπνοις ἀρπαζόντων πρὸ διανομῆς*). But ‘gobbling’ here might not be a metaphor at all, with *τὰ κοινὰ* possibly referring to state banquets, rather than state funds. After the victory at Pylos, Cleon became the first politician to receive the honour of *sitēsis*, free meals at the Prytaneion, a privilege reserved for victorious athletes, senior priests and foreign ambassadors, which not even Pericles had been awarded (280–3, 709).<sup>20</sup> Paphlagon indeed feels entitled to eat at the Prytaneion, having achieved... nothing (*μηδὲν δράσας*, 766). This invites us to connect this character to the comic tradition of the parasite, the type of the usually uninvited guest who employs flattery, wit and trickery to ‘eat beside’ at a dinner: a social outsider who intrudes and mirrors, as a pseudo-friend, his elite host.<sup>21</sup> Whereas Paphlagon meets all these criteria, he lacks a key characteristic of the parasite, that is, the asymmetrical reciprocity, or else, the inability to host in his turn.<sup>22</sup>

18. Whitman (1964) 89 suggests the former: “not even Thucydides, writing presumably well after Cleon’s death, makes any such charge [...] Had Cleon ever been convicted, or even generally suspected, of bribery, it is hard to see how he could have maintained his prominence”.

19. Dover (1972) 100. Connor (1992) 146, 150: “Cleon [...] became a general only after, and because, he had already become a well-known and daring politician. [...] He showed how to separate a political career from a military one. There was no need to wait. The leadership of the city could be won before or without the generalship”. For a chronology of the *stratēgoi*, see Hamel (1998) 32–3, and on Cleon in particular, 15 n.30, 36 n.7.

20. Sommerstein (1981) *ad loc.*; Wilkins (2000) 178, 182.

21. For the type of the parasite, its history and attributes, see Corner (2013), with 63 on Cleon; Wilkins (2000) 71–87, with 7/8 on Cleon. For Tylawsky (2002) 18–23, Cleon was a milestone in the development of the parasite, adding *kolakeia* to the clever-salesman figure inherited from *Acharnians*.

22. Roman/Tomiche (2001) 64–5.

Paphlagon has been ‘feeding’ the jurymen with obols and therefore he feels justified to ‘gobble’ back, either metaphorically or literally.

Above all, Paphlagon has been feeding his master Demos, the Athenian people personified: a literal kind of feeding, within the dramatic fiction, which serves as an allegory of corruption throughout the play.<sup>23</sup> Paphlagon is a useless *mageiros* who cannot cook anything edible (715–18), steals the dishes which others have prepared for Demos (52–7), and withholds the biggest proportion of the collected food for himself (1217–25). This awful man is contested and overthrown by a Sausage-Seller. The contest culminates into a ‘battle of the chefs’, with the two fawners presenting delicacies in turns to better satisfy Demos’ appetite (1164–93), and the Sausage-Seller proving a more skilful cook — as skilful as to rejuvenate Demos by... boiling him (1321).<sup>24</sup> We are thus invited to envision a fresh start for Athenian politics, or rather a reversion to the ‘good old days’ without Cleon being around,<sup>25</sup> but the fact that the Sausage-Seller explicitly and repeatedly appears to be a worse character (e.g. 684–5, 413, 889) does not bode well for the future.

The Sausage-Seller has been variously interpreted as a historical/social, religious, ritual, metadramatic and sexual figure,<sup>26</sup> but the sausage is above all food, and given that *Knights* is “conceived from beginning to end around a very limited number of images, the chief of which [...] is eating”,<sup>27</sup> the Sausage-Seller’s political characterisation is also rooted in that quality. Worse than Paphlagon, he is a man *professionally* destined to continue

23. See Whitman (1964) 88–96; Hubbard (1991) 68–9; Wilkins (2000) 188–99. For Demos as an allegorical figure *and* an individual, see Newiger (1957) 33–49; Reinders (2001) 178–89.

24. Edwards (2010) explores the paradoxical hierarchical dynamics of that servile relationship. Acknowledging that “Aristophanes presents cooking throughout the play as a form of *kolakeia*” (324), he argues that “the fawning of the *kolax* [sc. Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller] brings power as much as it signals dependency, and to be the object of *kolakeia* [sc. Demos] implies subjugation to conniving fawners just as much as it implies a position of preeminence and authority” (322). For the latter idea, in particular, see n. 31, below.

25. MacDowell (1995) 104.

26. E.g. as an extreme example/parodic representative of those low-class men of the day who nevertheless made it into politics: MacDowell (1995) 91; a spokesman for Aristophanes himself, fierce in assaulting Cleon but also an altruist: Hubbard (1991) 67, 70–71; an ephebic hero who from an outsider becomes a *prostatês*: Bowie (1993) 52–5; an alter ego of Athena who wins the patronship of Athens from Poseidon/Paphlagon: Bowie (1993) 69–71; a caricature of Alcibiades: Vickers (1997) 100–13; an *erastês* of Demos — of course, both Paphlagon and the Sausage-Seller are also keen on passive sex: Scholtz (2004); Robson (2018). For the sausage as a phallic symbol in the play, cf. 364, 1242.

27. Whitman (1964) 88, 92–3.

‘feeding’ the masses to his own benefit.<sup>28</sup> If the former fed the jurymen with three obols and Demos with stolen food to be excused to gobble state resources, the latter, as a more competent *mageiros*, can only be expected to eat back even more; under his governance, immoral feasting is unlikely to turn into moral fasting. This is not an arbitrary assumption to force an ironic/pessimistic reading, but an expectation that becomes a certainty within the play: in a sort of ring composition, the Sausage-Seller is lured by an invitation to the Prytaneion in the prologue (164–7) and *is* granted that place, by Demos himself, in the finale (1404). Both parties seem happy with the meal deal(ings), which only perpetuate the course of immorality. Indeed, the very moment Paphlagon is ousted and the Sausage-Seller is announced a ‘master chef’, the chorus, i.e. the knights who had blamed Paphlagon for *his* dealings, rush to confirm the Sausage-Seller’s own (im)moral duty to return the favour *to them* (1254–6):

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

Hail, fair victor, and bear in mind that you became a big shot thanks to me.  
 And I’ll ask only a small favour, that you make me your Phanus, your no-  
 tary for indictments.

Apparently, Phanus was Cleon’s front-man in prosecuting his political enemies (cf. *Vesp.* 1220). So what the knights found shameful before, they now crave for themselves: an alliance based on mutual dependence and a career in slandering. If the lines indeed belong to the chorus,<sup>29</sup> we have a good rea-

28. Hubbard (1991) 69.

29. These lines are attributed to Demosthenes by two manuscripts only, R and A (followed by Van Leeuwen, Mitchell, Coulon, Sommerstein, Henderson and Wilson). The other manuscripts and the Venetus scholia attribute them to the chorus-leader (followed by Ribbeck, Von Velsen, Merry, Hall/Geldart and Neil). The first option is based on the assumption that “a well-to-do cavalryman of the chorus would not want a job as a secretary writing out indictments; and it was Demosthenes who earlier in the play persuaded the Sausage-Seller to challenge Paphlagon and told him that he would become a man (177–8)”: MacDowell (1994) 329. The second option is based on the fact that there are already three actors on stage, impersonating the Sausage Seller, Paphlagon and Demos, and “a fourth actor is never introduced to play the part of a character already taken by one of the first three actors” — the actor who played Demosthenes earlier in the play now plays Demos; Russo (1994) 86–7. My argument stands in either case, because both

son not to accept —what is usually taken for granted— Aristophanes’ full alliance with the rich and young cavalry men of Athens.<sup>30</sup> The poet seems to state that *everyone* is corruptible, regardless of class; after all, Cleon himself was a horseman once, according to a scholium on 226. With a gluttonous Demos, there will always be a *mageiros* (who proves to be a parasite) around, and therefore, the play is perhaps an attack on Cleon on the surface only, but essentially a bitter acknowledgement that in democracies the fish rots from... the tail.<sup>31</sup> To those spectators not convinced by the forced ‘happy ending’ with the rejuvenated Demos, the political conclusion is mere despair: we are fed (up) with corruption.

We move on to *Wealth*. The eponymous god cannot distinguish the righteous men, because he is blind, and thus the unjust become rich. Farmer Chremylus, who claims to be a decent man (28, 105), promises to restore Wealth’s sight and the god, in return, is expected to fill up his benefactor’s house (230–3):

σὸν δ’, ὦ κράτιστε Πλοῦτε πάντων δαιμόνων,  
 εἶσω μετ’ ἐμοῦ δεῦρ’ εἴσιθ’ ἢ γὰρ οἰκία  
 αὐτὴ ᾧ στὴν ἦν δεῖ χρημάτων σε τήμερον  
 μεστὴν ποιῆσαι καὶ δικαίως κἀδίκως.

Now, Wealth, most puissant of all divinities, please come inside here with me, because this is the house you’ve got to fill up with riches this very day, by fair means or unfair.

The way in which Chremylus articulates his vision allows for some second thoughts on his professed decency.<sup>32</sup> Not only does he consider it an obliga-

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the chorus and Demosthenes had initially condemned Paphlagon’s practices, so their/his present plea reveals their/his hypocrisy.

30. Edmunds (1987) too argues that, progressively in the play, Aristophanes disassociates himself from the knights —“he even seems to betray his friends” (48). His explanation, however, is much different from mine: to him, this disassociation aims at making the attack on Cleon attractive to all social and economic classes, not only the rich (32–3); to me, it aims at satirising the populace, not only Cleon.
31. On Demos’ accountability, see Reinders (2001) 192–9: “the poet makes it clear that an effective reform is only possible under two conditions, the removal of Cleon on the one hand, and a radical change in Demos’ character and behaviour on the other [...] If the latter critical idea did not exist, Cleon’s elimination would also lose its meaning” (198), insofar as “individual symptoms are treated but the real causes remain untouched” (197; my translation).
32. After all, even the Informer claims to be a good man (900).

tion (δεῖ) of Wealth, but he also expects it by all means. *δικαίως καὶ ἀδίκως* was a proverbial phrase but this does not automatically make it “a polar expression used loosely” which should, by default, not be taken literally as to imply Chremylus’ indifference to justice.<sup>33</sup> Today we use similar expressions (‘for better or worse’, ‘like it or not’, ‘καλοῦ κακοῦ’ etc.) to almost invariably lay emphasis on the second/negative part. Indeed, Aristophanes always uses the proverb in negative scenarios: we have already seen Cleon who slanders *δίκαια κ’ ἄδικα* (*Eq.* 256) and slander can only be unfair; the sophists teach people how to win arguments by speaking *δίκαια καὶ ἀδίκα* (*Nub.* 99) and chicanery can only be unfair; demagogues talk *δίκαια καὶ ἀδίκα* to flatter the masses (*Ach.* 371) and sycophancy can only be unfair. Moreover, Chremylus had been thinking to train his son on immorality, as it seems to be the most profitable route in life (36–8). Therefore, he is far from a saint and here *καὶ ἀδίκως* is to be taken literally, even though it does not have to denote “by all means, fair and unfair”. Given that *dikē* means *inter alia* the order of the gods, the phrase may be understood as “by all means, whether in agreement or against Zeus’ will”. It was Zeus who blinded Wealth, and therefore, to restore his sight is something *ἄδικον*.

Just after Chremylus declares Wealth’s profane, if not immoral, duty to make him rich, his servant Carion invites his master’s friends, all poor farmers, to aid him. The argument is that they must help (δεῖ, 255) because they have been sharing food with Chremylus (*ταῦτόν θύμον φαγόντες*, 253). Of course, in sharp contrast to the lavish banquets of *Knights*, “eating thyme together” is a metaphor for the chorus’ solidarity in poverty,<sup>34</sup> not in corruption, and by employing such a metaphor Carion turns the audience into a community of sympathy and compassion. Such instances of unreserved kindness must have been something rare in Aristophanic comedy,<sup>35</sup> for Blepsidemus, one of the men who arrive upon Carion’s call, indeed appears suspicious of Chremylus’ intentions: “I’m really surprised that, achieving some prosperity, he’s calling for his friends; that’s not normal practice in this country” (340–2). If Chremylus envisions sharing Wealth with his

33. Pace Sommerstein (2001) *ad loc.* and Olson (1990) 228, and in agreement with Flashar (1967) 159–90, who nevertheless stretches that point too far in condemning Chremylus.

34. Suda s.v. *θύμος* (θ 572): ‘ταῦτόν θύμον φαγόντες’ ἀντὶ τοῦ ‘τῆς αὐτῆς πενίας μετασχόντες’. Cf. Antiph. fr. 225.7 K-A: οὐδεὶς κρέως παρόντος ἐσθίει θύμον, “no one eats thyme when meat’s available”.

35. Contrast e.g. the murderous intentions of the choruses towards the pacifist protagonists in *Acharnians* and *Birds*, the chorus’ savage revenge on naïve (but not malicious) Strepsiadēs in *Clouds*, or Agathon’s cynical refusal to help Euripides escape lynching in *Thesm.*

fellows, then something wicked must be going on, because “there’s no trace of goodness in anyone; the lust for profit rules the world” (362–3).<sup>36</sup> Chremylus’ repeated assurances that he will only distribute Wealth to decent men because that is the right thing to do (386–8, 490–1) refute Blepsidemus’, and the audience’s, reservations. After all, it will become evident in the course of the play that Zeus’ opposition to curing Wealth is not motivated by any moral standards, but by his own greed (“Being thrifty, and unwilling to squander any of his wealth, he adorns the winners with baubles and keeps the wealth for himself”, 588–9) and, more pertinent to our discussion, by gluttony: the righteous people will no longer sacrifice pies and animals to the gods, if virtue alone can make one rich (1107–17). Therefore, for most of the play, the motif of excessive/immoral feasting is reversed (in Chremylus’ vision of solidarity) or cancelled (in Zeus’ envious plan) and our initial thoughts on the protagonist’s potential corruption are erased.

However, Aristophanes does not miss the opportunity to momentarily bring forward the well established metaphor of ‘eating together’ for satirical purposes. (*Wealth* may be more romantic than most other comedies and with fewer topical references, but far from “almost apolitical in tone”).<sup>37</sup> Chremylus, Blepsidemus and Carion guide Wealth to the sanctuary of Asclepius to seek treatment, after the agon with Poverty, and on their return home Carion narrates all the weird incidents that happened there.<sup>38</sup> Among

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36. That observation is verified later on in the play, when a Just Man confesses that his friends, whom he had supported financially, did not help him back when needed, as the right thing would be (839–45).

37. Pace Zelnick-Abramovitz (2002) 28. Cf. Dillon (1987) 156: “the here and now faded from the comic stage”; Sommerstein (1984) 314 connects “the shift of interest away from the immediacies of current politics towards broader social themes” with “the decline in freshness, in verbal agility, in sparkle of wit, in theatrical inventiveness, which is [...] very marked in [*Wealth* and] may be put down to advancing years and diminishing inspiration”. I have argued elsewhere that, as far as verbal agility is concerned at least, *Wealth* demonstrates Aristophanes’ everlasting experimentation, not a decline; Kanellakis (2020) 85. The same may be argued for the “shift towards social themes” — but is there such a shift at all? How is the unfair distribution of wealth *not* a political theme? Or why is *Birds*, when read as a fantasy play, not considered a shift *away* from politics but a *politically timely* escapist fantasy (e.g. Green 1879: 10–12; Konstantakos 2021: 127–9), but *Wealth* cannot be the same? I side with Flashar (1967) 156 in considering both *Ecclesiazusae* and *Wealth* political comedies. Cf. David (1984) 1–2.

38. On Carion, see Dover (1972) 204–8, Olson (1989), Fernández (2000), Hall (2020). On that particular monologue, see Roos (1960) and Barrenechea (2018) 81–92 for the narrative similarities with, and comic deviations from, the actual healing stories from Epidaurus; Sineux (2006) for the metatheatrical implications of witnessing and reporting the treatment; Tordoff (2012) for the paratragic elements.

those incidents, he tells the story of an old woman who was also visiting the sanctuary and had brought a pot of soup as an offering to Asclepius. Unable to tame his gluttony, which we are already familiar with (190–3, 318–21), the slave attacked the woman and devoured the soup. To justify the unjustifiable, he says that earlier, when the lights were low and everyone was sleeping, he had witnessed the priest of the sanctuary circling around the altar and snatching off (*ἀφαρπάζοντα*, 677) the offerings brought by the patients (681–7):

ἔπειτα ταῦθ' ἤγιζεν ἐς σάκταν τινά.  
 καὶ γὰρ νομίσας πολλὴν δόσιαν τοῦ πράγματος  
 ἐπὶ τὴν χύτραν τῆς ἀθάρατος ἀνίσταμαι. [...]  
 ὁ γὰρ ἱερεὺς αὐτοῦ με προῦδιδάξατο.

He consecrated those leftover cakes right into a sack. I appreciated the holiness of this procedure, so I left my bed for that pot of porridge. [...] The priest himself had taught me that one.

Scholars have pointed out that it was a conventional practice, often prescribed by law, that the priests would consume the offerings on the sacred tables, and therefore, “Carion’s assumption that the priest is *stealing* the offerings would be perceived as either disingenuous or, more likely, comically naïve”,<sup>39</sup> in the sense that “the slave cannot understand that the god [and his priests] have other motivations than himself”.<sup>40</sup> However, we should not take for granted that the general public were aware of the sanctuaries’ internal regulations and procedural customs, or, had they been aware, that they would discuss those practices openly and in rational terms. Thus Carion’s interpretation may well reflect many spectators’ assumptions. At any rate, priests’ gluttony was a common motif in comedy,<sup>41</sup> just like slaves’, and therefore Carion’s interpretation is the expected one. Collecting the edible offerings would be perceived as an innocent mischief, as is the case with thievish slaves, rather than an allegory of corruption, if Aristophanes did not accuse priests for several other frauds, such as stealing vestments (*Pax* 1122–3) and faking oracles to gain material benefits (*Av.* 970–9). Of course, here Carion does not admit his *immoral* deed by putting the blame

39. Sommerstein (2001) 181; cf. Roos (1960) 80–1.

40. Sineux (2006) 200.

41. Cf. *Ach.* 1085–8, *Pax* 1048 ff., *Av.* 975, *Ran.* 297.

on a *corrupt* priest —even though he probably pronounced *ἡγιζεν* and *δοσίαν* in a wholly ironical tone— but cynically presents it as an act of *religious duty*, in the image and likeness of an *excellent* priest. In contrast to the previous example from *Knights*, here it is the private individual, not the state official,<sup>42</sup> who employs ‘we ate it all together’ as a justification of immorality. It could be argued, of course, that Carion is a slave who does not represent the Athenians’ civic behaviour —Chremylus himself did not steal any food— but Aristophanes does employ slaves for such purposes elsewhere (most obviously in *Knights*). Apparently, his satirical target here is the materialism of religious institutions: the over-attachment of common people to it and the priests’ profiteering from it. In the latter sense, food again becomes a monetary symbol: the priest and the treasurer of a sanctuary were entitled to utilise the collected cult-taxes of citizens,<sup>43</sup> and this in itself makes them suspicious in the eyes of a comic dramatist and, even more, on the eyes of a cunning slave. However, it is important to highlight that Carion never questions Asclepius himself, whom he carefully distinguishes from the priest (696), so as not to undermine the holiness of his miraculous treatment of Wealth.

Does this parenthetical reference to priests’ and laymen’s corruption have any implications for the rest of the play? The ironists, who read the play as a satire on the utopian ideal of fiscal redistribution, would probably add Carion’s narrative to their arguments. According to their view, Chremylus’ difficulty in defeating Poverty’s logic about the immorality of riches (571, 600), the establishment of Wealth in *his* house only,<sup>44</sup> the welcoming of a gigolo in the household (1087–96) and the end of sacrificing to the gods (1113–6, 1172–5) suggest that the protagonist has been corrupted by money.<sup>45</sup> In this scenario, Carion can be seen as an *alter ego* of his master,

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42. The clergy in ancient Greece was not an organised and self-administered professional cast, as it is today, but consisted of individual officers appointed by the state to serve as priests in a specific sanctuary, hence I include this passage into my discussion of *political* corruption. The introduction of Asclepius’ cult in Athens from Epidaurus in 421 BC “was surely done with the agreement, and quite possibly at the invitation, of the Athenian state”; Sommerstein (2001) 11.

43. Garland (1984) 76; he mentions an inscription which stipulates that the collected money should be utilised exclusively for the care and upkeep of the sanctuary — a stipulation which suggests that there had been occasions of unfair use. For Asclepius’ cult in particular, it is not clear on whom the one-drachma tax fell; Fawcett (2016) 170.

44. See Bowie (1993) 290–1.

45. See Konstan/Dillon (1981) 378 n.10 with further bibliography. Even Olson, who does not question Chremylus’ morality (1990: 228; 1989:197), considers *Wealth* a deeply conservative play: revolutionary only in the surface, “on a practical level it proposes only

foreshadowing his corruption: the former snatched off the pot of soup in the name of Asclepius, the latter will gather all riches in his house, which again translates into food (806–22), in the name of Wealth — both slave and master claim to have a moral duty to redistribute the present resources according to their appetite. However sympathetic towards ironic readings,<sup>46</sup> with this play I find the arguments against that line of interpretation more obvious than those in favour: the gigolo is not *rewarded* by being admitted to the house, but rather condemned to continue servicing the old hag against his will;<sup>47</sup> people cease to sacrifice to the gods not out of impiety, but because Zeus was using extortion-by-poverty to gain sacrifices; and “the reason why [Chremylus] has not bothered to refute [Poverty’s] case in every detail is that the conclusion is already obvious. No one in the Athenian audience could possibly think seriously that poverty was a good thing”.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, I am rather inclined towards the view that “the fantastically enriched Chremylus remains the decent, honest citizen he has been from the start”<sup>49</sup> and that Carion’s narration is a strong satirical moment — but only a moment.

With *Ecclesiazusae*, on the other hand, the utopia-or-irony dilemma is more challenging — hence the play has been reserved for the end of my discussion, even though it predates *Wealth* — largely because ‘eating together’ is more than a passing reference as it is in *Wealth*, but not as obviously allegorical as it is in *Knights*. This comedy stages the implementation of a radical system of sexual and financial communism; the citizens owe to donate their property to the state and are invited to participate in a communal feast. An argument ensues between two men in this context: the first (‘Neighbour’) disposes all of his personal goods in the agora and prepares to depart for the feast, the second (‘Selfish Man’) refuses to hand over his property but he too claims a place in the free meal. The first man reminds him of his legal obligation (758–9) but the debate soon shifts to moral duty, that is, whether it is ethically right to comply to the laws:

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a [...] withdrawal from common affairs”, while money remains “the basic criterion that defines the character of human social life” (1990: 230, 232).

46. For plays even like *Peace*; see Kanellakis (2022).

47. Indeed, his conviction is articulated in terms of moral duty: “OLD WOMAN: It’s only right to force the man I treated well to treat me well in return. Or is it fair that I get no benefit at all?” (1028–30); “CHREMYLUS [to the gigolo]: you did see fit to drink the wine, so you’ve got to drink up the dregs too.” (1084–5).

48. MacDowell (1995) 335.

49. Olson (1989) 197.

ΓΕΙΤΩΝ.	<i>τί δ' ὀὐχὶ πειθαρχεῖν με τοῖς νόμοισι δεῖ;</i>	762
ΑΝΗΡ.	<i>ποίοισιν ᾧ δύστηνε;</i> ΓΕΙΤΩΝ. <i>τοῖς δεδογμένοις.</i>	
ΑΝΗΡ.	<i>δεδογμένοισιν; ὡς ἀνόητος ἦσθ' ἄρα. [...]</i>	
	<i>τὸ ταπτόμενον γὰρ δεῖ ποιεῖν τὸν σὺφρονα;</i>	767
ΓΕΙΤΩΝ.	<i>μάλιστα πάντων. ΑΝΗΡ. τὸν μὲν ὄν ἀβέλτερον. [...]</i>	
	<i>οὐ γὰρ πάτριον τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ λαμβάνειν</i>	778
	<i>ἡμᾶς μόνον δεῖ νῆ Δία· καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεοί· [...]</i>	
ΓΕΙΤΩΝ.	<i>βαδιεῖ δὲ δειπνήσων δμῶς; ΑΝΗΡ. τί γὰρ πάθω;</i>	860
	<i>τὰ δυνατὰ γὰρ δεῖ τῇ πόλει ξυλλαμβάνειν</i>	
	<i>τοὺς εἶ φρονοῦντας. [...]</i>	
	<i>νῆ τὸν Δία δεῖ γοῦν μηχανήματός τινος,</i>	872
	<i>ὅπως τὰ μὲν ὄντα χρήμαθ' ἔξω, τοῖσδέ τε</i>	
	<i>τῶν ματτομένων κοινῇ μεθέξω πως ἐγώ.</i>	
	<i>ὀρθῶς, ἔμοιγε φαίνεται βαδιστέον</i>	
	<i>ὁμόσ' ἐστὶ δειπνήσοντα κοῦ μελλητέον.</i>	

NEIGHBOUR	Really? I'm not supposed to obey the laws?
SELFISH MAN	What laws, you sadsack?
NEIGHBOUR	The laws that have been duly enacted.
SELFISH MAN	Duly enacted! How stupid can you get? [...]
	So you think the man of sense ought to do what he's told?
NEIGHBOUR	Above everything else.
SELFISH MAN	No, that's what the imbecile does. [...]
	That's not in our national character.
NEIGHBOUR	You mean we should only take?
SELFISH MAN	Absolutely. That's what the gods do too. [...]
NEIGHBOUR	So you mean to go to dinner anyway?
SELFISH MAN	Sure, how can I help but go? All right-minded people should assist the state to the best of their ability. [...] I definitely need some kind of scheme to save the property I've got and also share in the treats being whipped up for these people. I think I've got it; I must commence Operation Dinner, and on the double!

The second man invokes his religious conscience, just like Carion in *Wealth*, and his patriotic conscience to pass off his immoral duty as moral. He argues that the Athenians, like the gods who only know how to accept offerings, are experts in receiving but not in sharing, and therefore, as a true Athenian and a believer, he must follow that example. Key to his (sophistic kind

of)<sup>50</sup> argument is the ambiguity of *συλλαμβάνω* (861), which he pretends to use in the sense ‘to assist’ (LSJ, VI) but he actually means in the sense ‘to seize’ (LSJ, II);<sup>51</sup> thus the phrase *δεῖ τῆ πόλει ξυλλαμβάνειν* is the epitome of (im)moral duty. Stephen Halliwell has recently suggested that the attitude of that man is neither inexcusable nor would it necessarily be received negatively by the audience, because Praxagora’s reformation overturns the right to private property, which was —and is— considered intrinsic to personal freedom. Many in the impoverished post-war Athens, Halliwell continues, would have actually sympathised with that man’s reference to the “sweat and thrift” he has devoted to his property (750), and therefore we should rather speak of a self-interested yet realist, cautious, and critically thinking man, who waits to see if others obey to the rules and avoids rash action (769–70).<sup>52</sup> But this reading ignores the most important feature of the story: if that man’s reservations about the new law were honest, we would expect him to be dignified enough not to sneak in the communal feast.<sup>53</sup> As Kenneth Rothwell highlights, that man’s professed hesitation is “a means to an immoral end; it is a pretext for selfishness. [...After all, he] never argues for a return to male rule; he never claims the new laws were illegally enacted. [...] He is an opportunist who is guided by self-interest, and [...] therefore, it] is unlikely that the audience would have sympathized with [him]”.<sup>54</sup> Aristophanes’ purpose in bringing such a character on stage cannot be to simply emphasise (by contrast) the loyalty of the Neighbour,<sup>55</sup> as if the latter’s personality in itself mattered for the plot, but rather to invest their antithesis with ideological significance, same as with Better and Worse Argument in *Clouds*. Indeed,

50. See Rothwell (1990) 62.

51. Cf. in English ‘to give somebody a hand on something’ and ‘to put hands on something’; in Modern Greek, ‘*βάζω ένα χεράκι*’ and ‘*βάζω χέρι*’.

52. Halliwell (2020) 129–32.

53. We are never told whether he eventually manages to sneak in or not, but what matters is his intention to do so. Rothwell (1990) 65 speculates that “his fate will be similar to that of the young man in the following scene: disobedience is punished appropriately”. Ussher (1973) *ad* 867–76 appears certain: “he does not reveal (or implement) his plan”. On the other hand, “the unique feature [...] that he is allowed to have the last word in the scene”, unlike the typical bad guy of the intruder scenes, suggests that his threat will be implemented; Sommerstein (1998) *ad* 875. I would add that, as a general rule in reading Greek drama, when a character says “I am going there to do that!” we are to assume that the announced action does happen, unless there is an obvious reason to think otherwise (if we know, for example, that a tragic/comic incident of which the character is unaware has happened and will cancel his/her plans). We do not have such information here.

54. Rothwell (1990) 63–4.

55. Pace Ussher (1973) *ad* 746–876.

the foundation of the ironic interpretation of the play since Wilamowitz is the very contrast between the two men: it undermines the feasibility and success of communism, which is doomed to fail because of egoism.<sup>56</sup>

But the individual's corruption aside, where is the corruption of institutions to be found here, given that we are discussing 'eating together' as a political metaphor? Our text is cryptic as far as Aristophanes' stance towards Praxagora's regime is concerned,<sup>57</sup> but it suffices to consider that her bill was introduced into an all-female, hijacked Assembly, and that would be enough for the male audience of the time to be at least somewhat suspicious of the reformation. Such suspicions prove correct after Praxagora departs in the second half of the play: first, the level of public discourse deteriorates and persuasion progressively gives way to violence;<sup>58</sup> second, it becomes evident that the new government has failed to establish control mechanisms,<sup>59</sup> if anyone can abuse public resources — unlike in *Acharnians*, *Birds* or *Wealth*, where there is some form of 'border check'. It thus ends up being a state which does not redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, but from the responsible to the irresponsible. Under such circumstances, it comes as no surprise why in the exodus Praxagora's husband Blepyrus invites everyone — probably addressing the audience too— to attend the feast... each at their home (1148)! This *para prosdokian* conclusion sounds like a cynical confession that the promised dinner was mere propaganda and never actually existed,<sup>60</sup> or that the dinner only exists for those few around Praxagora — Blepyrus himself knows where the food is being served (1149). To continue this train of thought, the dinner, of which we have been hearing so much and will see nothing, can be taken as an apt metaphor for a state which rips off its taxpayers without returning public services, and for an opaque tax system which benefits the few rather than the many. The lavishness of the dinner, exemplified by the 79-syllable-long main dish, the longest word surviving in Greek (1169–74), reflects the extremeness of greed and suggests

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56. Wilamowitz (1927) 205, 215.

57. Sommerstein (1984) 314–5, 330–3 saw him as an advocator of radical socio-economic reformation, while those following Wilamowitz, e.g. David (1984) 32 and Rothfield (1999) 223–4, as a critic of such unattainable fantasies.

58. Rothwell (1990) 73–5. For Zeitlin (1999) 82, on the other hand, Praxagora's absence "is certainly not a fatal flaw. On the contrary, once she has dictated the terms of the new regime, she is no longer needed on stage".

59. For Fletcher (2012), Praxagora's absence is justified by the fact that she had abolished law courts (657, 676), so that now there is no official agency left in the city to enforce the decree or deal with any violation.

60. Süß (1954) 292–4.

the exclusion of the lower class. In such corrupt institutions, it would be a half-truth to see the Selfish Man as an immoral individual; he only performs his (im)moral duty to eat together with the inspirers of this “bestial Hell of gourmand and libidinous parasites”.<sup>61</sup>

To return to the context of Modern Greek politics, with which my paper began, the ironic reading of *Ecclesiazusae* and ‘eating together’ was brought on stage by Spyros Evangelatos in his 1998 production of the play at Epidaurus as a commentary on the fiscal corruption of the day. The director presented the feast of the exodus in explicitly political terms: the participants are sitting around a big table, plunging into the food and fighting about who will have the lion’s share. They exclaim “everything public, except for what is mine” and praise property, capitalism, investments, and money. Praxagora stands away, speechless and repulsed by the situation,<sup>62</sup> while a green light in the shape of a rising sun, a clear hint at PASOK, is shed upon this table of corruption.<sup>63</sup> Praxagora’s utopian plan has been turned into a dystopia, in the same way that the political system of the Metapolitefsi failed to establish a fair democratic state in Greece. It is my firm belief that modern performances of ancient drama—at least those which retain a close relationship with the original text—are as valid interpretative attempts as academic readings: both are based on their creators’ personal taste and societal biases; both draw inspiration from, and shed light on, selected aspects of the original scripts; both are evidence of reception, rather than the ancient dramatists’ own intentions. With this principle in mind, I believe that Evangelatos’ production stands exemplarily alongside those academic readings which argue for the ironic potential of the play.

In conclusion, taking into account the three plays together affords us a wider grasp of how Aristophanes stood, as a dramatist, against political corruption and the complicity of both citizens and officials in it. If seen individually, the references to/scenes of allegorical eating—if one is willing to admit any allegory at all—might give the impression that Aristophanes was

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61. David (1984) 32.

62. In the original text, Praxagora is absent in the later scenes of the play but she might have been present (and mute) at the finale; cf. Henderson (1987) 214–5 for *Lysistrata*.

63. Watch the scene at <https://youtu.be/nTNfLrPnf10?t=6165> (accessed on 11/01/2022). Evangelatos’ translation has been published in Vivilakis (1998). PASOK is the Greek ‘socialist’ party which dominated from the Metapolitefsi until the burst of the 2010s debt crisis, and has been accused of populism, abuse of public money and corrupt public administration. The emblem of the party is a green rising sun. The parallel with the festive table is a successful choice, given that PASOK’s days are commonly characterised as *‘το μεγάλο φαγοπότη’*.

either a populist, who only blamed the politicians and fawned the audience to win their sympathy (and votes), or a cynical elitist, who believed that the corrupt mob deserves corrupt representatives. But by employing the metaphor of eating *together*, from a different perspective each time, the message to the committed spectator and reader becomes clear: the food chain of corruption is not vertical, but horizontal. Whether used as a play's main theme (*Knights*) or allusively (*Ecclesiazusae*) and in passing (*Wealth*), the motif of immoral feasting was dear to Aristophanes and harmonised with the specific performative context, i.e. addressed to both the anonymous crowd and the state officials who came together in the same theatre.

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