

## THE PURPOSE OF ARISTOPHANES' *ACHARNIANS*

Until recently it was accepted without question that Aristophanes' purpose in *Acharnians* was to advance a serious plea for peace in a humorous form. This view has been rejected by several writers in the last few decades<sup>1</sup>). However, a detailed case against taking the play seriously has yet to be made. In contrast, the traditional view has been defended at some length by de Ste Croix and MacDowell<sup>2</sup>). The present paper seeks to demonstrate, by a careful examination of the evidence, that *Acharnians* was not intended to influence Athenian public opinion or Athenian policy.

Since the waters in question have been much muddied by previous discussions, we must begin by limiting the examination to evidence which does not depend on subjective selection or *a priori* assumption. My discussion of Aristophanes' attitude to the Archidamian War in *Acharnians* will therefore be limited in three respects.

(I) We must omit purely external arguments based on an assessment of the contemporary military situation. Attempts have been made to establish Aristophanes' attitude on the basis of the progress of the war prior to the production of the play in 425. Thus Forrest argues that the war was in its early stages "almost totally unsuccessful" for Athens, and that "to campaign for peace in 425 when things were going badly would be treachery"<sup>3</sup>). The last word at least we may ignore. It was not treachery in legal terms to campaign for peace, for there was no law to prevent it; anyone committed to the war might well argue that it was disloyal to the city's interests to campaign for peace, but Aristophanes was under no obligation to accept this assessment. De Ste Croix takes

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1) See W. G. Forrest, *Phoenix* 17 (1963) 1–12, K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic comedy* (London 1972) 87–8, A. M. Bowie, *CQ N. S.* 32 (1982) 27–40, M. Heath, *Political comedy in Aristophanes* (*Hypomnemata* 87, Göttingen 1987) 16–18.

2) G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 363–7, 369–70, D. M. MacDowell, *Greece and Rome* 30 (1983) 143–62. It must of course be stressed that the issue is one of hostility to the Peloponnesian War, not pacifism in the modern sense; cf. Dover 84, H.-J. Newiger, *YCS* 26 (1980) 236 f.

3) Forrest 2, 10.

the opposite view of the progress of the war. The war was going well for Athens. The recall of Pleistoanax from exile in 427/6 offered favourable circumstances for a peace initiative from Athens<sup>4</sup>). The latter point is probably over-optimistic. As de Ste Croix himself notes, peace overtures in Greek wars usually reflect weakness; in the Peloponnesian War they usually followed disasters, such as the plague in Athens or the Pylos episode. At the time when *Acharnians* was produced, neither side had experienced a recent setback of sufficient magnitude to make peace an urgent requirement. And Pleistoanax probably had good reason to avoid any hasty and dramatic pro-Athenian gestures, since his exile had resulted from failure to take vigorous action against Athens<sup>5</sup>). On the question of the progress of the war to date, both writers oversimplify. Sparta had been expected to dispose of Athens quickly<sup>6</sup>), but she failed to achieve anything by her unimaginative reliance on annual invasions and destruction of the countryside against a state which did not depend on its own territory for food. But Athens was as powerless to inflict any serious damage on her enemies; and one part of the community, the countryfolk, had suffered severely from the invasions. The war so far was a stalemate. But in fact the whole question of the progress of the war merely determines whether or not peace would be in Athens' interest. Unless we suppose that Aristophanes had to be *right* if he argued for peace, any decision about the military and diplomatic situation will not affect the question of whether Aristophanes could or could not campaign for peace at this juncture.

(II) We must confine ourselves to *Acharnians* and resist the temptation to use other Aristophanic plays as evidence of Aristophanes' attitude to the Peloponnesian War. Aristophanes wrote four plays (including the lost second *Peace*) on the subject of peace. Of the other peace plays, we must rule out *Peace*, since this play was produced shortly before the conclusion of the Peace of Nikias, at a time when majority opinion in Athens favoured peace. The play celebrates the imminent achievement of peace and need be no more than an expression of the popular mood of the moment; the delight expressed in the play tells us nothing about Aristophanes' general attitude to the war. I would also exclude *Lysistrata* for the simple reason that when a war (or anything else)

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4) de Ste Croix 370, 366–7.

5) Thuc. 2.21.1.

6) Thuc. 7.28.3.

lasts for decades it is likely to generate different attitudes at different times, with the passage of time and the impact of individual events. A decision on the seriousness of *Lysistrata*<sup>7</sup>) will not settle the question of *Acharnians*.

(III) Within *Acharnians* itself, we must ignore that part of the play which follows the parabasis. Attempts have been made to argue for or against the traditional view of *Acharnians* from the encounters which take place after the parabasis. But the evidence of this section of the play is contradictory, and a consistent position can be established only by a purely subjective choice from this evidence. Thus A. M. Bowie in his brief treatment of the issue<sup>8</sup>) uses Dikaiopolis' behaviour in the latter half of the play as evidence that *Acharnians* is not a simple sermon. He stresses the negative aspects of Dikaiopolis' conduct. He observes that the Megarian and the Boiotian get a bad bargain; the Megarian exchanges his daughter for some salt and garlic, while the Boiotian trades Boiotian delicacies for an Athenian sycophant. Bowie finds that Dikaiopolis is "gratuitously cruel" to the farmer who asks for

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7) Newiger 234 describes the peace in *Lysistrata* as a "utopian conception"; cf. J. J. Henderson, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford 1987) xxxii, Heath 14. De Ste Croix 368 however says that "there can be no doubt at all that *Lysistrata* is a plea for peace". The play itself offers little evidence to support a confident conclusion. Aristophanes is of course addressing the wrong audience if he seriously advocates peace, for, as Heath 14 rightly stresses, Sparta would not at this stage have accepted peace except on terms which would leave Athens intolerably vulnerable; in particular, the panhellenic sentiment of 1128 ff. should have been addressed to Sparta, which had just sold the Greek cities of Asia to the Persians. But this proves only that it would be *naïve* to advocate peace, not that it would be impossible. However, at no stage in the play does the question of the practicality of peace arise. *Lysistrata*'s noble and nostalgic appeals to a united past (1128 ff.) look like wishful thinking rather than practical politics; Aristophanes signals as much when he has the Athenian and Spartan representatives capitulate solely as a result of the sex strike, though it would have been easy enough to have them accept the validity of her arguments (cf. Ach. 560 f., 626 f.). In the *agon* *Lysistrata* offers a formula for peace (567 ff.) which is self-evidently nonsensical. Aristophanes gives her an argument which is effective in context as an application of female practicality to an issue which the males have failed to solve but which avoids all the real issues (for Aristophanes' practice in this respect cf. Henderson xxx). In this way he keeps the issue of peace in the realm of theatrical fantasy rather than political reality.

8) Bowie 39. H. P. Foley, *JHS* 108 (1988) 38, 44, 45 f. likewise stresses the selfish and unpatriotic aspects of Dikaiopolis' conduct. Again the mistake is to judge Dikaiopolis by the canons of real life rather than comic theatre. Adverse comment on Dikaiopolis (once the chorus is convinced that he is right) comes only from the unsympathetic Lamachos. The impression is thus created that Dikaiopolis is behaving as any sensible person would behave in his position. That Dikaiopolis' conduct would be reprehensible (if it were possible) in real life is irrelevant.

a share of his peace (1018 ff.). As to the Megarian and the Boiotian, Bowie fails to take account of the dramatic context. The trading would be unfair in real life. But the Megarian sets his own price for his daughters (813 f.), and neither he nor the Boiotian is dissatisfied with his bargain; indeed the Boiotian anticipates a profit from the sycophant when he returns home (905 ff.). That neither could possibly be satisfied with such a deal in real life is as irrelevant as it is incontrovertible. As to the farmer, Derketes of Phyle, it may be, as MacDowell<sup>9)</sup> suggests, that he was a real person, and his treatment at the hands of Dikaiopolis may have had more point for the original audience. But in any case Dikaiopolis is not “gratuitously cruel”. Dikaiopolis was the only man in Athens who wanted peace (this is made abundantly clear in the early scenes of the play) and the only man with the courage and ingenuity to obtain it. The farmer is now attempting to claim a share in a benefit he has not earned, and Dikaiopolis is right to refuse him<sup>10)</sup>.

MacDowell<sup>11)</sup> uses the latter half of the play to argue for the view that Aristophanes is offering a serious message. He observes that since Megara was on the opposing side “we might expect a Megarian to be treated in a thoroughly hostile manner”. Instead “the audience is encouraged to sympathize with the Megarian and regard him as a friend”. The audience is not expected to laugh at the hunger of the Megarian but at “the comic dressing-up of the little girls as pigs, and later at the notorious pun on *χοίρος*”. MacDowell finds in all this a suggestion that “the Athenians ought not to be so hard” on the Megarians. There are however several flaws in this argument. Firstly, the distinction between the Megarians’ hunger and the dressing up of the girls is subjective and artificial. The disguising of the girls is the direct result of the Megarian’s hunger. If a man is so hungry that he must sell his daughters as piglets to ensure that he and they will eat, and if we are encouraged to laugh at the sale and its attendant circumstances, it is difficult not to laugh at the cause of the sale. The whole situation is comic<sup>12)</sup>. Secondly, if Aristophanes wants us to sympathize with the Megarian, we might expect the hero Dikaiopolis to express sympathy. But in fact the Megarians’ predicament prompts only jokes.

9) MacDowell 159f.

10) Dikaiopolis’ question in v. 1024 may indicate further that the man is a fraud rather than merely expressing Dikaiopolis’ *Schadenfreude*; though his livelihood has supposedly been ruined he shows no sign of genuine sorrow.

11) MacDowell 157f.

12) Cf. Pax 481–3, Av. 186 for this type of humour.

Thus in answer to Dikaiopolis' question (751) πῶς ἔχετε the Megarian replies διαπεινᾶμεν ἀεὶ ποττὸ πῦρ ("we are holding shrinking contests by the fire"). διαπεινᾶμεν here is of course a surprise for διαπίνομεν ("we hold drinking contests"). Dikaiopolis responds (752): ἀλλ' ἠδύ τοι νῆ τὸν Δί', ἣν αὐλὸς παρῆι ("That's pleasant, by Zeus, if ther's a flute handy" – a reference to the presence of fluteplayers at *symposia*). The Megarians are starving, and through Dikaiopolis' misunderstanding (he replies as if the Megarian had actually spoken of drinking) Aristophanes makes a joke of the matter. In 754 ff. the Megarian states that when he left Megara the *probouloi* were striving to ensure that the city would be destroyed most miserably. This is a joke in itself, in that the content of the plans of the *probouloi* comes παρὰ προσδοκίαν in v. 756. But it also prompts a lighthearted reply from Dikaiopolis (757): "Well then, your troubles will soon be over". When Dikaiopolis asks if he brings garlic, the Megarian replies: "What garlic? Whenever you invade, you dig up the roots with a spud, like field mice" (761 ff.). This is a humorous account of the damage done by the Athenian invasions of the Megarid, which we know from Thucydides as severe<sup>13</sup>). Aristophanes makes no attempt to elicit sympathy for the Megarian. There is no sign of the Panhellenism which we find four years later in *Peace* (though even there the hunger of the Megarians is the subject of a joke). In *Acharnians* the issue of peace is considered solely from an Athenian point of view. Thirdly, if Aristophanes were encouraging the Athenians to deal more generously with Megara, we might expect him to offer a positive example in his hero. Instead Dikaiopolis gives only salt and garlic, nothing for the Megarian to live on. If we insist on taking this scene seriously, this becomes a problem.

MacDowell also understates Dikaiopolis' palpable (if dramatically justified) selfishness when dealing with Athenians. Although he is correct, as against scholars such as Dover and A. M. Bowie, who see Dikaiopolis as a thoroughly selfish character, to stress Dikaiopolis' selflessness in the early scenes of the play (he makes a private peace only because it is impossible to make peace for the whole city)<sup>14</sup>), it is difficult to make Dikaiopolis into a public benefactor in the second half of the play. MacDowell states<sup>15</sup>): "Towards the end of the play the impression is increasingly given

13) Thuc. 4.66.1.

14) MacDowell 147f.; contrast Dover 88, A. M. Bowie 38f.

15) MacDowell 158. Foley 45 n. 49 is sceptical.



that nearly everyone is joining in the peace". Certainly there are moments when the peace seems to extend beyond Dikaiopolis. Thus the chorus in the second parabasis (971–99)<sup>16</sup> declare that they will no longer allow war into their house and express a desire for Reconciliation (Διαλλαγῆ). Dikaiopolis later wins a drinking competition which appears to be open to the whole population (v. 1000); certainly it must include other Athenians. But the situation is more complicated than MacDowell allows. The only traders who appear in Dikaiopolis' market are foreigners. He does not trade with Athenians. He does not act as middleman for trade between Athens and her enemies. He trades solely for his own individual gain. So in those scenes at least the peace remains a purely private blessing. Furthermore, at vv. 1037–9 it is emphatically stated that Dikaiopolis will share the benefits of peace with nobody: ἀνήρ ἀνηύρηκέν τι ταῖς σπονδαῖσιν ἡδύ, κοῦκ ἔοικεν οὐδένι μεταδώσειν. MacDowell<sup>17</sup> argues that what is referred to here is the food which Dikaiopolis is cooking; the chorus will have to do their own shopping and cooking. However, these verses follow, and are most naturally taken as commenting upon, Dikaiopolis' refusal to share his peace with the farmer. τι ἡδύ is not simply food, therefore; it is the sum total of the advantages of peace. The simple fact is that Aristophanes is deliberately vague about the scope of the peace. According to his immediate needs, the peace is restricted to Dikaiopolis or extended to others. When Aristophanes needs competitors to be defeated by Dikaiopolis in a drinking match, he allows the peace to embrace others. To stress the joys of peace in 971 ff., he has the chorus express an intention to make peace (as indeed they *should*, logically, since they have accepted Dikaiopolis' arguments against war). But when he wishes to emphasize the singular felicity of the hero, he

16) This passage is often taken as a stasimon; so most recently A. M. Bowie 34 n. 38, and apparently M. L. West, *Greek metre* (Oxford 1982) 107. But vv. 978–87 and 990–9 are clearly stichic tetrameters, to be recited, not sung; the same metre is used in the epirrhema and antepirrhema of the second parabasis of *Wasps* (1265 ff.). The absence of anapaests is of no significance, since the second parabasis regularly shows a reduced form. More significant is the point made by G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and animal choruses* (London 1971) 35, that the content of ode and antode is quite unlike that of the typical parabasis but normal for stasima at this point in the play. This is unusual, but it does not justify our terming what are obviously spoken verses a stasimon or inventing a new term for this departure from the norm. A. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes' Acharnians* (Warminster 1980) 204 takes the passage as a second parabasis.

17) MacDowell 161 n. 35.

makes it explicit that Dikaiopolis alone has won the pleasures of peace.

In sum, it is difficult to establish on the basis of the latter half of the play a convincing case for or against the seriousness of the play as a whole. This section merely illustrates in a humorous way the advantages of the peace which Dikaiopolis has won. Whether it does so in order to underline a serious message must be determined by our analysis of the first half.

In the first half of the play there are two passages which can be used to decide the question of seriousness. The first of these is the series of scenes in the assembly where Dikaiopolis proves to the theatre audience, but not to the Athenian assembly, that the military basis of the war is inadequate (65 ff.). The second is Dikaiopolis' speech in defence of his peace, in which he proves that the motives for war were insufficient (496 ff.). I shall deal first with Dikaiopolis' defence speech; this speech mounts a direct assault on the morality of the war, and for that reason it is of fundamental importance to any discussion of Aristophanes' purpose.

Self-evidently the speech is meant to be factually correct and persuasive in its dramatic context<sup>18</sup>). Its veracity is evident from the absence of any adequate reply either from the chorus or from Lamachos who enters soon afterward, its persuasiveness from the fact that half of a chorus implacably committed to war is won over. It is however not an accurate reflection of the world outside the play. In assigning the principle role at Athens to Perikles, here and at Peace 605 ff., Aristophanes is clearly correct<sup>19</sup>). However, in claiming (535) that the Megarians were 'starving by degrees' he overstates the effect on Megara of the decree excluding Megarians from the Athenian *agora* and the harbours of the empire. Whatever the effect of exclusion from the Athenian *agora*, the exclusion from the harbours of the subject states effectively prevented Megarian merchants from trading within the Athenian empire; it seems

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18) Foley 42, 44, 45 sees the chorus as duped by Dikaiopolis, and more specifically by "the mesmerizing persuasiveness of tragic dramaturgy and rhetoric". However the chorus specifically accept the justice of his *arguments*, without reference to their form (557-63). The fact that even the hostile semi-chorus accepts the truth of his statements indicates their validity (within the drama), and the fact that this semi-chorus is finally won over by Dikaiopolis' defeat of Lamachos, which is not paratragic, indicates that Dikaiopolis' success is not merely the result of a tragic veneer. In assessing the validity of Dikaiopolis' arguments within the comic fiction it is important to bear in mind that the opening scenes of the play have established the futility of the war and the corrupt motives of those in authority in Athens.

19) See de Ste Croix 226 f.

most unlikely that merchants could legally unload goods outside the harbour area, since this would lead to evasion of harbour dues<sup>20</sup>). The extent of the damage of Megarian trade cannot be calculated, since we do not know what proportion of Megarian trade was in the hands of Megarian citizens<sup>21</sup>); presumably any vacuum created by the ban was filled at least in part by increased activity from citizens of other states living as metics at Megara and by traders from the subject allies of Athens. But the likely result was an increase in the prices of goods from the Athenian empire and a reduction in the movement of Megarian goods to the empire. However, since Megara could still trade with the Peloponnese, with the Greeks of Italy and Sicily, and with Boiotia, the Megarians would not starve. Aristophanes presumably knew this, as did his audience.

On the questions of the reasons for the exclusion decree and the importance of the decree for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes is refuted by Thucydides. Thucydides makes clear (1.67.3–4, 139.1) that the exclusion decree was a minor matter until the Spartans chose to make an issue of it during the negotiations which preceded the beginning of hostilities. The real reason for the war, according to Thucydides (1.23.6), was Spartan fear of Athenian power. He is also quite clear that the decree arose from Athenian accusations that the Megarians were cultivating sacred land on the border between the two territories and harbouring runaway slaves. However, this issue requires fuller treatment, since MacDowell has argued that Aristophanes' account is substantially correct<sup>22</sup>). In Thucydides' account of the meeting of the Peloponnesian League in 432 at which the Spartans invited complaints from their allies against the Athenians, the Megarians refer to 'a considerable number of disagreements', οὐκ ὀλίγα διάφορα, in particular the exclusion decree. MacDowell would identify these 'disagreements' with what Aristophanes describes in vv. 515–27 (seizure of Megarian goods, theft of prostitutes). He would identify the theft of the slave girls in 526–7 with the Athenian complaint (Thuc. 1.139.2) that the Megarians harboured runaway slaves. He also finds that Aristophanes and Thucydides agree that the Megarian decree was a pretext and not a cause. He argues from 541 ff. that Aristophanes sees the Spartan grievance as amounting

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20) De Ste Croix 286.

21) The issue is discussed by de Ste Croix 261 ff.

22) MacDowell 151–4. He is followed by Foley 42 n. 46.



to resentment at Athenian encroachment on their sphere of influence, and that this agrees with Thucydides' statement (1.23) that the 'truest cause' of the war was Spartan fear of Athenian power. None of this is convincing. (I) Aristophanes unlike Thucydides represents the Megarians as complaining to Sparta *only* about the exclusion decree (535 f.). (II) More significantly, Aristophanes represents the exclusion decree as due to the personal interests of Perikles, Thucydides as due to public differences between Athens and Megara. This difference is fundamental. Of the two, we are bound to believe the historian, who has researched his material. But even if we ignore Thucydides, Aristophanes' account of Perikles' motives is implausible in itself. To pass the exclusion decree, and then to prevent its repeal in 432 on the face of a threat of war, Perikles needed popular support. This he would not have if the only justification for the decree was the grievances of Perikles' mistress. Aristophanes (in common with other comic poets) represents Perikles as Zeus, passing laws at whim. Perikles' influence was enormous (Thuc. 2.65.9), but it never approached autocracy. Perikles needed the support of the assembly, and the assembly was sufficiently independent to depose Perikles from office in 430 and fine him when the war was going badly. Aristophanes' account does not square with the structure of Athenian democracy or with the character of the Athenian demos. (III) In his account of the causes of the war, Aristophanes says nothing about Athenian power or Spartan fear. Nor does he contrast the real cause with the pretexts offered by the participants, as Thucydides does. Unlike Thucydides, Aristophanes represents the exclusion decree as the reason for the war. On this the text is quite clear.

On the question of the importance of the Megarian decree Aristophanes may simply be in error. It is clear from Thucydides 1.140 that a substantial minority believed (during the Archidamian War) that the Spartans desired only the repeal of the exclusion decree, and that its repeal would have averted war. Aristophanes may have belonged to this minority. However, the other inaccuracies cannot be ascribed to ignorance. At Peace 605 ff. he gives an account of the origins of the war in which Perikles' motives differ and the Spartan leaders play a decidedly more aggressive and less altruistic role. That account, like the version in *Acharnians*, is wildly inaccurate. That Aristophanes can create two such absurd accounts of the same events suggests that neither was intended to be taken seriously as an explanation of the origin of the war.

However, in demonstrating the speech's inaccuracy we have

not disproved serious intent. Aristophanes would be attempting to trivialize the causes of the war and thereby argue that the war is wrong in principle, even if his account is quite inaccurate. In favour of taking the speech seriously we might cite (i) the nervous opening (looking back to the prosecution brought by Kleon after the production of *Babylonians* in 426) insisting that no foreigners are present and the emphatic statement in 515–6 that the criticism is directed at individuals, ‘not the city’ (again looking back to Kleon’s change, v. 503), which suggest that there is considerable risk in raising the issue dealt with in the speech, and therefore that Dikaiopolis has something serious to say; (ii) the solemn insistence in 500–501 that comedy is concerned with right<sup>23</sup>); (iii) the explicit identification of the speaker with the author in 499 and 502–3 (cf. vv. 377 ff.), which suggests that Dikaiopolis speaks for Aristophanes<sup>24</sup>).

Against this position two arguments may be advanced. The first is the extent of parody in the speech. Not of course the *fact* of parody, for parody need not exclude serious intent. There is in fact considerable uncertainty concerning the precise degree of borrowing from Euripides’ *Telephos* in this speech. To avoid doing violence to the evidence, we shall ignore quotations or adaptations from *Telephos* which are merely possible or probable (504, 509, 514, 528 ff., 541)<sup>25</sup>) and confine ourselves to quotations attested by

23) MacDowell 149.

24) De Ste Croix 363–4. E. L. Bowie, JHS 108 (1988) 183–5 argues that Dikaiopolis represents Eupolis. But, apart from the improbability that Aristophanes would make a sympathetic hero of a rival poet, the suggestion compels Bowie to conjecture (i) that Eupolis competed in 427/6, (ii) that he was prosecuted by Kleon. This is both unprovable and, given the similarity of Dikaiopolis’ experience (377 ff.) to that of Aristophanes (630 f., 659 ff.), patently unnecessary.

25) MacDowell 150 rejects the alleged echoes of *Telephos* commonly detected in 504, 509 and 514 and Thesm. 470, 472, 473, since the verbal similarity between the two Aristophanic passages may simply result from “the similarity of the situations and arguments in the two speeches” rather than quotation from *Telephos* in both passages. Clearly the most we can safely say is that these elements would suit the situation in *Telephos*. MacDowell does not pass judgement on 541; he notes merely that *σκάφος* is poetic, and that the phrase *ἐκπλεύσας σκάφει* “seems out of place in the logic of Dikaiopolis’ argument”. The phrase may come from *Telephos*, but the silence of the scholia again recommends caution. MacDowell 151 gives good reason to doubt the common view that vv. 524–9 are a parody of the beginning of Herodotos’ history. He does not however discuss another possibility, raised by E. W. Handley and J. Rea, *The Telephus* of Euripides (BICS suppl. 5, 1957) 35, C. W. Fornara, JHS 91 (1971) 28, that in criticizing the decision to wage war over the theft of prostitutes Aristophanes reflects a criticism of Menelaos by the disguised Telephos for taking the whole of Greece to War for

the scholia. The *captatio benevolentiae* (497–8) comes from *Telephos*, with such modifications as are necessary to fit it to its new context (the original runs μή μοι φθονήσητ', ἄνδρες Ἑλλήνων ἄκροί, εἰ πτωχὸς ὢν τέτληκ' ἐν ἐσλοῖσιν λέγειν, fr. 703 N<sup>2</sup>). The anticipated objection in v. 540, εἰρεῖ τις, οὐ χρεῖν (= fr. 708 N<sup>2</sup>) also comes from *Telephos*, as do the rhetorical questions in vv. 543 καθήσθ' ἂν ἐν δόμοισιν; ἢ πολλοῦ γε δεῖ, and 555–6 τὸν δὲ Τήλεφον οὐκ οἰόμεσθα; νοῦς ἄρ' ὑμῖν οὐκ ἔνι. MacDowell concludes: "These quotations do not amount to a great deal"<sup>26</sup>). However, we have here not merely a few words but a significant similarity of situation underlined by quotation. Dikaiopolis, like Telephos in Euripides, is anxious as he faces a hostile audience (497–8). Like Telephos he argues that the enemy had to do what he did (540). From vv. 543 and 555–6 it is clear that Telephos like Dikaiopolis argued that his audience would have done the same if the position were reversed; this can only mean that Telephos like Dikaiopolis argued that the enemy (Telephos) had simply defended himself, that is, that the enemy was a victim and not aggressor. Even if we confine ourselves to quotations of *Telephos* identified by the scholiasts, it is clear that there was a close resemblance in outline between the rights and wrongs of the Greek dealings with Telephos and the rights and wrongs of the Peloponnesian War as represented by Dikaiopolis. This suggests that Dikaiopolis' attack on the morality of the war has been modelled on the situation in Euripides' *Telephos*. It is possible that Euripides' *Telephos* just happened to provide a useful parallel for Aristophanes' firmly held views on the Peloponnesian War. But such coincidence is improbable in itself; it is rendered still less probable by the fact, noted above, that Aristophanes in *Peace*, only four years later, gives a completely different picture of the morality of the Spartans' actions. Moreover, the similarity with *Telephos* is underlined not only by quotation but also visually for the audience<sup>27</sup>) by the fact that Dikaiopolis is dressed as Telephos and speaks with his head on a block, in itself a visual enactment of

the abduction of an unfaithful wife. The same criticism is directed at Menelaos in Eur. Andr. 605 ff. The suggestion receives some support from the refusal of someone, probably Agamemnon, to risk his life for Helen, fr. 722N<sup>2</sup>: ἴθ' ὅποι χρεῖζεις· οὐκ ἀπολοῦμαι / τῆς σῆς Ἑλένης εἴνεκα.

26) MacDowell 150. Similarly Foley 41 f. So already H. M. Harriott, *Greece and Rome* 29 (1982) 38. Foley 42 states that "Dikaiopolis' ὄησις does not in fact transpose political questions into another realm in the tragic manner". This is mistaken. In reshaping the Peloponnesian War to match Euripides' *Telephos* Aristophanes gives us not only tragic parody but also mythopoiia.

27) Cf. Heath 17.

a striking metaphor used by Telephos (fr. 706 N<sup>2</sup>) in a manner typical of the concrete imagination of the comic poets. The borrowing of props, situation and language is clearly meant to amuse. But it also has the effect of reminding the audience that this account of the war is fantasy rather than fact.

The second argument concerns a discrepancy between this speech and the parabasis. In the anapaests of the parabasis the chorus speaks for the author. Since Dikaiopolis is closely identified with the author, it is reasonable to use what Aristophanes says of himself in the parabasis to assess the seriousness of Dikaiopolis' speech. Aristophanes does in fact refer to the war in the parabasis (646 ff.). He claims there that the Persian King set the author's contribution to the war effort on a par with that of the Athenian fleet. Clearly this is a joke. But Aristophanes still claims (651) that Athens can and will win the war<sup>28</sup>). Aristophanes goes on to discuss the Spartan demand before the war that Athens set Aigina free (652 ff.). He claims that the real reason for the demand was a desire to get hold of the poet (654); he therefore urges the Athenians not to let him/it go. None of this preposterous braggadoccio is to be taken seriously; but we should note that here Aristophanes does raise the issue of peace, and it is simply the occasion for a joke. The argument that Aigina should not be relinquished, though clearly a joke rather than a piece of serious advice, does not suggest a desire for peace. It can of course be argued that the parabasis is merely a sop to public opinion. However, Aristophanes was not obliged to mention the war here. Unlike Dikaiopolis' arguments, the remarks on the war in the anapaests are not required by the plot. We are therefore entitled to take the confident tone adopted there, if not as the sum total of the poet's views on the war, at least as representing an attitude he found broadly acceptable. At the very least, Aristophanes must have been aware that an author who adopts two diametrically opposite postures within the same work will mystify rather than persuade his audience. I conclude that Aristophanes is not trying to put his 'views' across, and that the discrepancy is due not to ineptitude but to the fact that Aristophanes approached the Peloponnesian War not as a

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28) The contradiction is noted by A. M. Bowie 40. Foley 37 says: "although it is difficult to reconcile Aristophanes' insistence on his military value to the city... with the powerful case made for peace in the play, I think that we must assume that the victory in war Aristophanes promises as Athens' adviser is an advantageous peace treaty". E. L. Bowie 184 rightly replies that "victory rather than peace is what the poet claims to be bringing to Athens".



politically committed propagandist but simply as a playwright in search of a topical theme.

What then of the solemn opening to Dikaiopolis' speech? What of his evident nervousness? The position of the solemn claim to truth is perhaps significant. What we may have is a mock-solemn preparation for a humorous speech to give a typically Aristophanic βᾶθος<sup>29</sup>). One's suspicion that the seriousness is specious receives some support from the fact that the nervousness at least is assumed for comic purposes. This is made clear by the *pnigos* which closes the *anapaests* of the *parabasis* (659–64), where Kleon is challenged to do his worst. In the same spirit, Aristophanes opens the *parabasis* (628 ff.) as though he were about to defend himself; his defence turns out to be the most patent bombast (633–58). The prosecution evidently did not trouble Aristophanes greatly (hence his savage attack on Kleon a year later); probably it was good publicity.

In sum, what Aristophanes has done is to give Dikaiopolis a speech which is wildly and self-evidently inaccurate but convincing in context<sup>30</sup>). This speech ignores the real issues of the Peloponnesian war and directs itself against a fantasy war. To give

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29) So rightly Heath 17. This observation raises an important question of method. MacDowell 144 proposes a series of questions to be asked in order to ascertain whether or not a statement in Aristophanes is to be taken as a serious expression of the poet's own views, starting from the principle that "every moment of the performance must have had some point". The questions envisage three possible dramatic functions, (i) that a passage may fill up time, (ii) that its purpose may be "to carry forward the story of the play", (iii) that it may be a joke; the absence of any of these functions offers "a prima-facie case for saying that Aristophanes has some further purpose". MacDowell applies this test to the opening of Dikaiopolis' defence speech on p. 149. In both places he ignores another obvious dramatic function, preparation. Many passages in comedy of all periods are not amusing in themselves but serve to prepare for a joke which follows. In another context such passages might well be taken seriously. However, they are an integral part of the writer's comic purpose. The most obvious example in Aristophanes is the exchange in which one figure acts as the 'straight man', providing a comic figure with opportunities for jokes, as Lamachos at Ach. 583 ff., the arms dealers at Pax 1210–64, Euripides at Ra. 1206–45. In continuous speech the obvious example of such preparation is in the case of jokes made *παρὰ προσδοκίαν*, more specifically the use of βᾶθος. For instance, at Pax 734–5 the chorus voices strong objections to the practice of self-praise in the *anapaests* of the *parabasis*; but as the following verses show the objection is merely a preparation for grandiose self-praise by the poet.

30) In the same way, in the *agon* of *Wasps* (654–79) Bdelykleon is able to prove that the politicians are pocketing the profits of the empire, which could be used to make the ordinary Athenian rich. He does this by presenting Athenian finances solely in terms of income and ignoring the vast expenditure required



Dikaiopolis an argument which is both inherently plausible and at the same time humorous, Aristophanes draws on the situation in Euripides' *Telephos*.

We turn now to the scenes in the assembly. Alone these scenes are not very valuable for the purpose of this discussion. They do however offer useful corroborative evidence for the view that Aristophanes is not offering a serious argument against the war. They also give us some insight into the relationship between historical events and situations and Aristophanes' treatment of them.

At the start of the play, Dikaiopolis has come to the assembly to argue for one thing, peace. He arrives early. Everyone else is late, including the presiding members of the Boule, whose only aim, as Dikaiopolis predicts and events confirm, is to get the best seats. When the assembly begins, Amphitheos enters and offers to negotiate peace at the cost solely of his travelling expenses to Sparta, but he is forcibly removed. Only Dikaiopolis protests. This example of what does not interest Athenian officials is followed by two examples of what does interest them. Athenian ambassadors newly arrived from Persia are admitted to report. Their report is a tissue of lies and exaggerations. The King's Eye is introduced, and Dikaiopolis by interrogating him is able to show that the gold from the Great King promised by the Athenian ambassadors will not be forthcoming. The Persian King is of no use as an ally in the war. Dikaiopolis goes on to expose the supposed eunuchs accompanying the King's Eye as notorious Athenian effeminates. Yet at the end of the scene the King's Eye is taken to dine in the Prytaneion. Next Theoros, back from the court of Sitalkes in Thrace, makes exaggerated claims about Sitalkes' loyalty to Athens and about the military aid he has to offer. The military aid turns out to be a shabby band of mercenaries who have to be paid by Athens (not a gift at all) at an exorbitant rate of pay (two drachmas per day, about twice the going rate). Instead of overrunning Boiotia, as promised, they pillage Dikaiopolis' lunch. So they are not merely expensive, they are useless, and worse still they are a danger to their friends. Dikaiopolis manages to bring about the dissolution of the assembly with a trick, but he has only postponed the problem of the Thracian mercenaries. In these scenes we see the corruption of internal politics and the folly of the

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(especially on the fleet) to maintain the empire. The reasoning is preposterous, but in its context it is convincing. Cf. n. 7 above.

war. The two problems go hand in hand. The war is being waged on the basis of false promises and lies, in reliance on resources which do not exist. And it is being prolonged because the politicians are profiting from it and therefore have no desire for peace. Hence after Dikaiopolis has proved that the war was started for inadequate reasons in his defence speech, he must face Lamachos and expose him as cowardly and corrupt.

This section of the play casts light on the relationship between Aristophanic fantasy and the real world. On the one hand, there is usually a kernel of truth at the heart of the fantasy. Here the Thracian incident shows some resemblance to the campaign of Sitalkes against Perdikkas in 429. Part of Sitalkes' aim (according to Thuc. 2.95.2) was to put an end to the revolt of the Athenian allies in Chalkidike. The Athenians were supposed to offer naval support (Thuc. 2.101.1) but they failed to do so because they did not believe that Sitalkes would come. But the Greeks as far south as Thermopylai were panicked by the vast horde in the north, and the enemies of Athens thought that the barbarian army would be used against them (Thuc. 2.101.4). The vast army achieved nothing of significance, and it probably did Athens' reputation no good to be suspected of bringing barbarian hordes against Greeks<sup>31</sup>). Aristophanes thus has a good idea of what Sitalkes was worth in military terms.

As to the Persians, we know from the first book of Thucydides that even before the decision to go to war was taken, one body of opinion in Sparta contemplated seeking aid from Persia (Thuc. 1.82.1), and before hostilities commenced both sides prepared to send ambassadors to Persia (Thuc. 2.7.1). In 430, thanks to the much-maligned Sitalkes the Athenians were able to seize and execute some Spartan envoys who were on their way to Persia to seek the King's aid (Thuc. 2.67.1–2). In 425 (after the production of *Acharnians*) the Athenians captured a Persian envoy, whose despatches testified to numerous Spartan embassies to the King (Thuc. 4.50.2). At this stage the Athenians sent their own ambassadors, though these turned back when informed of the death of Artaxerxes. It may be that they sent an embassy in 430 to pre-empt the Spartans; it would certainly be sensible. It is likely that Athens renewed the peace of Kallias in 423 with Dareios the

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31) For the rhetorical use which could be made of the Greek/barbarian divide cf. Thuc. 6.9.1, 11.7, and for the sensitivity of Greek opinion on the issue of alliances with barbarians against other Greeks see Thuc. 1.82.1.

bastard<sup>32</sup>). It seems likely enough therefore that negotiation with Persia was in the air in 425 even if no actual steps had been taken.

Thus these scenes in *Acharnians* are not pure invention. However, the kernel of truth in Aristophanes is usually surrounded by a great deal of fantasy, exaggeration and distortion. Thus *Acharnians* would suggest that the Athenians expected great things of their ally Sitalkes. But in 429 the reason that the Athenians failed to provide Sitalkes with naval support was that they did not trust him to come (ἀπιστοῦντες αὐτὸν μὴ ἤξειν Thuc. 2.101.1). Nobody in Athens expected anything of Sitalkes and his irregulars, any more than Aristophanes did. Aristophanes is not an investigative journalist exposing the truth behind appearance; he is a comic writer expressing a truth (where he does speak the truth) which everybody knows.

What then of the Great King? In the early books of Thucydides, much is made of the Spartan reliance on Persia as a possible ally. This is not surprising. If Sparta was to build up a naval force, money was needed, and the most obvious source, as the Peloponnesians saw from the start, was Persia. Athens did not need any active support from Persia. What she needed (and what she probably obtained in 423)<sup>33</sup> was neutrality. Nor could Athens expect more. Sparta could barter the freedom of the Asiatic Greeks (and was perhaps contemplating doing so as early as the mid-420s)<sup>34</sup>. Athens could not, for this would involve dismantling the Athenian empire. It is therefore unlikely that anyone in Athens expected money from Persia in 425.

Thus in these scenes Aristophanes creates windmills for his hero to tilt at, recognizable as such to the audience. Most importantly, Aristophanes ignores completely the main source of Athenian strength, the empire, and through the empire the fleet. This is what Athens really relied on, and Aristophanes chooses to ignore it, but for a passing description of the sailors as 'saviours of the city' by Dikaiopolis (163), a remark which may have called forth a

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32) See H. T. Wade-Gery, *Essays in Greek history* (Oxford 1958) 207 ff., A. Andrewes, *Historia* 10 (1961) 2–5, R. Meiggs, *The Athenian empire* (Oxford 1972) 134 f.

33) Cf. D. Kagan, *The Archidamian War* (Cornell 1974) 306 n. 8.

34) A. W. Gomme, *A historical commentary on Thucydides III* (Oxford 1956) 499 reasonably concludes from the complaint of the Persian king Artaxerxes at Thuc. 4.50.2 that the Spartan messages are ambiguous that the Spartans already intended to surrender the Ionian cities to Persia but could not afford to commit themselves unambiguously until they were sure of Persian aid.

cheer from the majority of the audience, but which hardly corrects the inaccurate picture of Athens' military resources. This remark does however indicate that Aristophanes' suppression of the main source of Athenian strength is conscious; his awareness of the importance of the fleet is also indicated by his choice of the ships in v. 648 as the armament with which to compare his own importance to the war effort. Thus these scenes cannot have been considered, either by Aristophanes or by his audience, as an accurate criticism of the war. Though war clearly emerges as a confidence trick perpetrated by unscrupulous politicians on a gullible population, not a single detail in the indictment corresponds with reality. What Aristophanes has done in fact, here as in Dikaiopolis' defence speech, is create a fantasy war, not *the* Peloponnesian War but *a* Peloponnesian War. This is a war started for no good reason and fought without resources, a war which any sane man will attempt to stop, or, failing that, escape. And in the world of comedy, unlike the real world, the individual *can* opt out of a national war to create a private peace. In attacking a mythical war of his own invention, Aristophanes avoids the issues we might expect the serious opponent of a war to raise (why the war is immoral, imprudent or unnecessary). The evasion is clearly deliberate. Its effect is to prevent the morality and logistics of the actual Peloponnesian War from becoming issues in the play at all.

Whatever Aristophanes thought of the Peloponnesian War, I see no reason at all to suppose that he wrote *Acharnians* to persuade the Athenians to make peace. In arguing that the play does not offer a serious plea for peace I am not arguing that the play has no serious purpose at all. I believe that the play fulfilled an important role in Athenian society in 425. It is often forgotten by those who would make Aristophanes the spokesman for a silent majority that most of those who attended the assembly, not only rustics forced into Athens by Peloponnesian invasions but also citizens resident primarily in Athens, had probably suffered some financial damage as a result of the war or at least had something to fear from enemy invasions. The vast majority of Athenian citizens of all classes owned land<sup>35</sup>), even if it was only a small patch. In addition, all adult males in Aristophanes' audience knew that they risked their lives in the war. That the war persisted indicates that

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35) We know from Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *Lys.* 32 that a proposal to limit franchise in 403 to owners of land would have disfranchised only five thousand.



the majority of those affected by it thought the war necessary. However this does not of course mean that they *enjoyed* the war. For the citizen-soldier war is both dangerous and inconvenient, taking him away from his family and his normal employment. The comic theatre gave voice to one facet of the complex attitude of the ordinary Athenian to the war, the assembly to another. In the same way the comic theatre gave voice to one facet of the complex attitude of the average Athenian to the politicians. The complicated problems of the administration of the Athenian empire called for the services of men like Kleon. But though as a member of a crowd the average man was probably swayed by Kleon's oratory, as an individual in a society which prized *sophrosyne* (a virtue which includes restraint) he no doubt disapproved of Kleon's coarse behaviour and violent language. In addition, in a society which for all its democratic institutions retained its respect for birth and inherited wealth<sup>36</sup>), the ordinary man probably did feel that the new politicians from the manufacturing class were inferior to aristocrats like Thukydides and Kimon; it is often more disagreeable to have one's life governed by an obvious equal than by a real or reputed superior<sup>37</sup>). The attitude of the average Athenian to his politicians was complicated further by another feature of the Athenian political system. Though any citizen would address the assembly, political influence in Athens remained the preserve of those with an income which left them with time on their hands. There was no way for the poor man to break into this magic circle. And through gifts from interested parties politicians could amass large fortunes<sup>38</sup>). The ordinary man could only watch and envy. Comedy gives voice to the negative aspect of the Athenian's relationship with his politicians. But this was not the sum total of the relationship. Hence there is no inconsistency in the fact that many citizens who enjoyed Aristophanes' prize-winning attack on Kleon in *Knights* in 424 proceeded shortly afterwards to vote him to the generalship. In the same way, the same audience which enjoyed *Acharnians* could still support the continuation of the war. The serious function of *Acharnians* in an Athens six years into a seemingly interminable war has nothing to do with the avowed aims of its hero. As Forrest rightly maintains, despite the weakness of his supporting arguments, the play is an escapist fan-

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36) See K. J. Dover, *Greek popular morality* (Oxford 1974) 30–37.

37) Cf. Thuc. 1.141.1, 5.111.4.

38) See Lys. 19.48 ff., Dem. 59.43 and esp. Hyp. Dem. 24–5.



tasy. The war is one of those immense problems, inescapable in real life, which yield to the daring and imagination of the comic hero<sup>39</sup>).

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39) This article was delivered as a paper at a meeting of the Classics Research Seminars at St Andrews in May 1986.

## THE CONCLUSION OF AESCHINES' *ALCIBIADES*

A good deal of scholarly attention has been paid to the fragments of the dialogue *Alcibiades* of Aeschines Socraticus, with the result that its general character, and certain features of Aeschines' methods of composition, have emerged quite clearly<sup>1</sup>). A brief reconsideration of fr. 11a-c (D[ittmar]) and their ordering may yet advance our understanding of the final portion of this interesting and important remnant of *Socratica*.

α) “Ἐγὼ δ' εἰ μὲν τινι τέχνῃ ᾧμην δύνασθαι ὠφελῆσαι πάνυ ἂν πολλὴν ἑμαυτοῦ μωρίαν κατεγίνωσκον· νῦν δὲ θεῖα μοῖρα ᾧμην μοι τοῦτο δεδόσθαι ἐπ' Ἀλκιβιάδην καὶ οὐδέν γε τούτων ἄξιον θαυμάσαι.”

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1) See especially H. Krauss, *Aeschinis Socratici reliquiae* (Lipsiae 1911); H. Dittmar, *Aischines von Sphettos* (Berlin 1912) 97-159 (hereafter 'Dittmar'); B. P. Grenfell-A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 13 (London 1919) 88-94; A. E. Taylor, *Philosophical Studies* (London 1934) 1-27; R. A. Applegate, *The Alcibiades of Aeschines of Sphettus* (Diss. Princeton 1949); E. G. Berry, *TAPA* 81 (1950) 1-8; K. Gaiser, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon* (Stuttgart 1959) 71-95; B. Effe, *Hermes* 99 (1971) 198-208; C. W. Müller, *Die Kurzdialoge der Appendix Platonica* (München 1975) 150-5, 232-4; K. Döring, *Hermes* 112 (1984) 17-22. For a brief résumé of the *Alcibiades* see G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries* (London<sup>3</sup> 1967) 147-50.