

Dionysus' Journey of Self-Discovery in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes

Paul Epstein

In the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, the god-man Dionysus learns what his being patron of Tragedy entails. At the end of the play, having adjudged Aeschylus the best tragedian, he brings the poet back from Hades, in order that the Athenians, in imitation of the heroes he presents in his dramas, might dedicate themselves to the service of their City. The god thereby causes actual individuals to participate in the rule of the Olympian gods over those of Hades. Dionysus achieves this for the spectators of Tragedy, the poet Aeschylus, and himself. Those who see the plays of Aeschylus will subordinate that private life which shares in the lower world to the public life which embodies the powers of Olympus. The poet will use that excellence as a *technites* which Hades has recognized in him as a means whereby he might serve the State. Dionysus attains the dominion of the Olympian gods most thoroughly for himself. By so ordering Tragedy that it communicates this dominion to men, Dionysus subordinates the particular humanity which Hades has given him to his Olympian divinity as patron of Tragedy.¹

Dionysus comes to possess the true patronage of Tragedy only after he has unsuccessfully sought to obtain it through his human choice alone. At the beginning of the play, he imitates Heracles, in order that having despoiled Hades of Euripides, he might

1. Critics have tended to overlook that connection amongst the gods, drama, and the civic life of Athenian citizens which *Frogs* presents. Gilbert Murray in his *Aristophanes* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933, pp. 118-134) presents his view of the play in a chapter entitled "Literature: Euripides;" he thinks the play is primarily concerned with how Euripides ranks as a poet. Murray wrongly treats poetry as something that can exist independently of religion and political life.

Charles Segal in "The Character and Cults of Dionysus and the Unity of the *Frogs*" (*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* LXV, pp. 207-242) thinks that the central theme of the play lies in "the development of Dionysus into a god of communal solidarity" (p. 217). Segal ascribes to political life a centrality which *Frogs* does not see it as having; the play sees Dionysus as transcending the political realm.

Leo Strauss (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, New York: Basic Books, 1966) says (p. 262) that "The *Frogs* presents the education of Aristophanes' educator from an unqualified admiration for Euripides to a preference for Aeschylus." He realizes, moreover, that this is related to religion (p. 261), "Dionysus justly punishes Euripides for his denial of the gods by awarding the prize to Aeschylus." Strauss does not see, however, the positive role that the poets' relation to the gods plays in Dionysus' education, that he chooses Aeschylus because he shows men's dependence on the gods.

thereafter enjoy his plays at the tragic festival. By dictating the content of the tragic festival according to his whimsies and arrogating to himself the heroism of Heracles, he seeks to enjoy both an institution belonging to the rule of the Olympian gods and their dominion over Hades for his entirely private benefit. When he fails at imitating Heracles, he becomes subject to the powers of Hades and learns a new relation to Tragedy. First, he presides there over a contest to determine the best tragedian; he thus acknowledges excellence in poetry as existing independently of his immediate desires. Then Dionysus learns that this excellence has as its goal the well-being of citizens and the State; he can thereby attain to that patronage of Tragedy indicated above.

Like every other extant Aristophanic comedy of the 5th century, then, *Frogs* shows an actual individual attempting, first, to appropriate a political or religious institution for himself and then accepting its objective authority. In *Clouds*, for example, Strepsiades re-affirms the Olympian gods after his earlier deviation into cloud worship in order that he might defraud his creditors had proven catastrophic. In *Birds*, Peisthetairos leaves Athens, to find in the city and religion of the birds, his true happiness; he comes to discover in *Basileia*, the reality of Zeus' sovereignty, the true and universal foundation of civic life.

Frogs does not differ, then, from other comedies in showing the union of the gods that belong to the Olympian religion with actual human nature; all Aristophanic comedies of the 5th century differ from Tragedy by their treating in one dramatic action not only the poetic world of gods and heroes but also the realm of the quotidian.² *Frogs*, however, by considering the nature of Dionysus' patronage of Tragedy, treats the nature of Comedy itself far more directly than any other comedy. In the course of the play, Dionysus discovers his relation to that festival which communicates the substance of the poetic world to men. Thus, the particular question out of which the action of *Frogs* arises describes the general form of Aristophanic comedy. *Frogs* treats Tragedy and Comedy simultaneously.

The play falls into two main divisions. The action before the parabasis shows Dionysus as a man imitating Heracles in order that he might bring Euripides back from Hades; it ends with his failure to appropriate the substance of Olympian divinity to himself as a man. Then the parabasis and the subsequent action show how

2. *Knights* might appear to be an exception, presenting only the realm of civic life. However, the overthrow of Cleon is in accord with the divine government of the world. Oracles predict it, and the chorus, who are the devotees of Poseidon, help to bring it about.

Dionysus, obedient to the powers of Hades and Olympus, discovers what defines his patronage of Tragedy and thereby his true divinity; this completes the universal Comedy of which Dionysus has been the main figure.

The first scene shows Dionysus' relation to Comedy and his appropriation of Olympian divinity as separate from each other, juxtaposed only because they both involve Dionysus.³ The play begins with him dressed like his half-brother Heracles, carrying a club; his slave Xanthias rides on a donkey and carries his master's baggage. Dionysus' imitation of Heracles plays no part in the opening dialogue. This centres entirely on two disputes between Dionysus and his slave in which the former, relying first on his status as a spectator of Comedy, and then on his being its patron, seeks to exercise his will over the latter.

The first dispute begins when Xanthias imagines that his carrying baggage and his reaction to that task should define the present comedy. Thinking that he carries baggage only so that his complaints about doing so might raise the laughter of the audience, he asks permission of his master to utter them. Dionysus forbids Xanthias to say his vulgar jokes, declaring that as a spectator he always found such attempts at humour intolerable. Dionysus thereby makes his arbitrary will the measure of his slave's participation in the comic action. Since Xanthias' vulgarity had arisen as a protest against his slavish burden, Dionysus has a more thoroughly vulgar relation to the comic than his slave.

Dionysus wishes to dictate not only what his slave says but also what he does. Considering that he walks while his slave rides, he grows angry; he imagines that he labours so that his slave need not work. Dionysus thinks it belongs to his dignity as 'Son of Wine Jar', that is, as patron of the comic festival, that he should do no labour and that his slave should labour in his place. Xanthias feels insulted by the statement that he does no work; he laments that he has not gained his freedom by fighting in the naval battle at Arginusae. Neither Dionysus nor Xanthias understands the dominion of the former over the latter. Dionysus would so exalt the master that the slave would become a beast of burden, while Xanthias would recognize the humanity of the slave so thoroughly that he would no longer be a slave.

His thorough-going and vulgar self-centredness does not stop Dionysus from seeking to appropriate the being of the hero whose costume he wears. By the utmost obedience to the Olympian gods, Heracles had imitated their triumph over the nature powers and attained full divinity; in his person and career he has united humanity

3. *Frogs* 1-34. All references to *Frogs* follow Stanford's edition.

with both orders of gods.⁴ By imitating Heracles, Dionysus seeks to make the whole of the Olympian religion his own.

An extreme human individuality animates both Dionysus and Xanthias; this appears primarily in the former and derivatively in the latter. Dionysus asserts himself as both a spectator of Comedy and its patron; he wishes to make himself master both of his slave and of Heracles, that is, of those who define the extremes within the Olympian religion. Xanthias asserts himself through his revolt against his master and his desire for independence.

The first scene then sees Dionysus seeking to enjoy both a dominion over Comedy and the appropriation of the entire Olympian religion; his slave seeks a less extreme subjective freedom. The next scene⁵ shows Dionysus uniting these elements more profoundly. He here declares his desire to steal Euripides from the dead, in imitation of Heracles, in order that he might again enjoy his tragedies; he wants his slave to carry his baggage on his journey into Hades. Dionysus wishes to appropriate for his private enjoyment not only that public festival which presents the world of gods and heroes to the contemplative enjoyment of men but also the practical activity of that hero who epitomizes the Olympian religion. His aiming at a subjective dominion over both the theoretical and practical expressions of that religion defines the comedy of the present play.

The scene begins as Xanthias and Dionysus arrive at Heracles' house; the latter cannot contain his laughter upon seeing Dionysus dressed like himself. Dionysus then explains why he is imitating his brother. Since the poets who remain after Euripides' death have proven thoroughly unsatisfactory, he has decided to take the management of the tragic festival directly into his own hands. In imitation of Heracles' theft of Cerberus, he will journey to Hades in order to bring Euripides back from the dead.

By thus attempting to dominate both Tragedy and Heracles, Dionysus also proposes to modify these manifestations of the Olympian religion in a subjective direction. The tragic festival under the immediate supervision of Dionysus will not simply present the Olympian religion in its gods and heroes; the plays of Euripides which he wishes to see have themselves modified the Olympian religion in a natural and subjective manner. Three Euripidean verses which Dionysus tells Heracles have excited his highest admiration indicate this tendency: "aether, hamlet of Zeus," "the foot of Time," and "a spirit not willing to swear by holy things, but a tongue

4. *Birds* thus presents Heracles when he appears as one of the Olympian ambassadors to Cloudcuckooland.

5. *Frogs* 39-164.

perjuring itself independently of the spirit".⁶ Thus, Zeus' dwelling is not only spoken of familiarly but associated with the natural world, not the poetical splendour of Mount Olympus. Time no longer reigns as a sovereign abstraction but has been familiarized by being made similar to an animal. In the last verse the individual no longer exists in relation to any objective order but has retreated into the innermost adytum of an abstracted spirit.

Just as Dionysus seeks a personal modification of tragedy, so he desires a private modification of Heracles' being and character. He disregards Heracles' dislike of Euripides; he imagines that he can use his virtue for a scheme contrary to his will. Dionysus has also no idea of the heroic labour involved in Heracles' journey to Hades. He thinks of it as a leisurely stroll, and thus, treating Heracles as a kind of travel agent, he asks him where the best inns and brothels are on the road there.

While Heracles tells Dionysus what in general he can expect on the way to Hades, Xanthias from time to time objects that he has heard nothing about the discomfort his burden causes him. Dionysus has felt no concern about his dominion over a member of the servile class; he has so easily made himself master of the heroic world as Heracles and the tragic festival embody it. When they begin to leave Heracles, however, the god must attend to his slave's complaints; Xanthias does not wish to carry Dionysus' baggage, and only after his master has failed in his attempt to hire a corpse for the task does he again carry it. When he does so, Dionysus praises him as noble and useful.

The attitude of the slave reflects that of the master. Just as Dionysus seeks to make himself the measure of the whole Olympian order, Xanthias wishes to appropriate his own servile world for himself. Without realizing it, Dionysus has undermined the stability of the Olympian order not only for himself but generally. By praising Xanthias, moreover, for carrying his baggage, Dionysus acquiesces in the weakening of the master-slave bond; he sees their journey to Hades almost as a partnership.

By appropriating the Olympian order, each in his own way, both Dionysus and Xanthias share in a common subjectivity. Each discovers this in relation to his station in the City, the one by seeking to make his patronage of Tragedy personal, the other by lessening his complete dependence on his master's will. Though one begins from the highest station and has initiated this movement, and the other, beginning from the lowest station, has perforce followed his lead, they are equal in this spirit which stands prior to social distinctions and hierarchy.

6. *Frogs* 100-102.

As Dionysus and Xanthias reach the river Styx, they find their individuality not in appropriating the dominion of the Olympian gods but in relation to Charon, who unites the upper with the lower world. The subjectivity of both had arisen from Dionysus' wish to dominate a public festival and that god who has a character analogous to the content of the festival. Here through their obedience to Charon, both Dionysus and Xanthias experience a stage intermediate between public and private life.⁷

Both Dionysus and Xanthias begin to enter Charon's boat so that they might cross the Styx, but Charon will not admit a slave; Xanthias must walk around the lake. Both will experience that rule over nature which belongs to labour. The free man, however, will enjoy the aid of *technē* while the slave must rely on his own unadorned capacity.

Thus Charon respects that division between slave and free essential to City life. Yet Dionysus and Xanthias do not experience the master-slave relation as such. Rather their separation expresses their independent individuality; one will labour as a free man, the other as a slave.

Obedient to the command of Charon, Dionysus and Xanthias separate. When Dionysus complains that he is unable to row, Charon says that the singing of frogs will help him to keep the time. The frogs begin their celebrated croaking, singing the same song which they sang for the festival of Dionysus in the Marshes. This festival included the tasting of new wine; it therefore joined together the intelligent labour of men with the bounties of Nature, acknowledging both equally.

At first Dionysus feels only the division between his labour and the frogs' festal celebration of nature; he therefore thinks of their unceasing croaking not as part of a festival but as callous indifference to the vexations he suffers while rowing. He takes thought therefore only to see how he can rid himself of the frogs and their seeming cacophony. But he can drown them out only by taking upon himself their activity and entering into a croaking contest with them. Thus he regards his labour as more important than the union of labour and the life of Nature which the frogs celebrate.

Earlier Dionysus had asserted his individuality by imitating Heracles in order to enjoy the drama according to his own tastes. Here he finds his individuality in an obedience to the powers of Nature as well as in a dominion over them. Through labour he both acknowledges the power of nature and uses her for his own end. His ambivalence toward the frogs shows the ambiguity in this.

7. *Frogs* 180-270.

The action indicates that Dionysus cannot attain his desire to appropriate both orders of gods in his private individuality. Rather he has started becoming subject to those nature powers he had hoped, in imitation of the Olympians, to dominate. Oblivious of his own divinity as a nature power, he experiences the rites of the frogs in his honour as an alien reality to which he must nevertheless conform.

Dionysus' experience of the nature powers lessens the distance between him and his slave, whom Charon compelled to confront nature more directly when he went around the lake. They experience a deeper dependence on the powers of nature and thus a deeper equality through their natural individuality when they encounter Empusa.⁸ This monster has no definite shape or being but alternates amongst various human and animal forms; she unites, if confusedly, the several forms of sentient life. His technical dominion over nature utterly gives way here, and Dionysus through fear loses control of his bowels. Xanthias, although afraid, behaves less hysterically than his master. Already less dependent on the negation of nature, Xanthias finds Empusa less strange than Dionysus; in rowing himself across the lake, the latter had still experienced a certain power over the natural. Now both god and slave have allowed the human-natural Empusa to overpower their reason.

The equality which they have here experienced prepares them to participate in that Eleusinian rite through which individuals celebrate those powers of nature through which they can enjoy their individuality.⁹ Their participation begins as they observe the entrance of the chorus of Initiates and hear the songs which they sing in honour of Demeter, Persephone, and Iacchus, who is no one other than Dionysus himself. Those who sing had been initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries while alive and now enjoy the benefits of what they had then begun. By seeing a representation of the universal cycle of nature, the Initiates had come to participate in the life of Demeter and her daughter. They had in so doing looked not to themselves but to these nature powers for their well-being. In finding their individuality in this, they transcend the particularities of Athenian life that belong to the divisions and hierarchies of political life. Men and women, slaves and free, can all find a common humanity through their initiation.

Their comments show that neither Dionysus nor Xanthias has much understanding of the rite they see enacted before them. They find, however, one of the young girls in the procession attractive, and the procession interests them in general. Their earlier experience

8. *Frogs* 285-311.

9. *Frogs* 316-459.

of Empusa and their present curiosity move them to join the procession and to participate in this festival of universal natural individuality.

By joining the celebration of the Initiates, Dionysus and Xanthias discover the foundation of the individuality which they have been moving toward from the beginning of the play. They had experienced this first in their relation to political institutions, then in the realm of private labour, and now through the universal nature powers. They began by knowing themselves through institutions dependent on the Olympian gods, and now they have joined themselves to the gods of the world below.

The action from this point to the parabasis sees both Dionysus and Xanthias assert this newly discovered individuality as the measure of their place in the upper world.¹⁰ First, they both become indifferent to the particularities which they have brought with them from the upper world. Dionysus gradually stops imitating only Heracles; he alternates between this and imitating his slave. Xanthias no longer experiences a complete submission to Dionysus and thereby an indirect imitation of Heracles; he alternates between his original slavery and a direct imitation of the hero. Second, each lays complete claim to Olympian divinity, Dionysus to his own divinity, and Xanthias to the divinity of Heracles.

Xanthias and Dionysus assert their natural individuality as they encounter four inhabitants of Hades who are variously moved to action by the arrival of a seeming Heracles. First, servants from Pluto's household, then two lady shopkeepers, and finally the Hades-police compel Xanthias and Dionysus to assume new identities. These inhabitants of Hades represent respectively the realms of family, *technē*, and political life; the Commonwealth of Hades includes within itself all the elements that belong to the city of Athens above. With each new inhabitant of Hades whom they encounter, Xanthias and Dionysus grow progressively more radical in their natural individuality. Their process of change begins when a member of Pluto's family appears; it reaches its extreme point, their laying claim to Olympian divinity, when his police appear. The more completely does Hades include the upper world within it, the more do Xanthias and Dionysus seek to appropriate the highest stations within that world.

These developments begin when Dionysus knocks on the doors of Hades proper. A servant who mistakes him for Heracles threatens him with violent and picturesque punishment for the theft of his master's dog Cerberus. Dionysus' costume has moved the servant to inappropriate action.

10. *Frogs* 460-673.

Thus threatened, Dionysus experiences the difference between himself and Heracles. He again loses control of his bowels, and when his slave mocks him for cowardice, he hits on a scheme which can save him from the wrath of the servant. He suggests to Xanthias that they exchange places; Dionysus will imitate Xanthias and the slave, Heracles. Xanthias, proud of his courage, gladly acquiesces in what his master wishes.

Dionysus has given up his scheme of bringing Euripides back from Hades through his imitation of Heracles. He has rather arrogated to himself the whole realm of imitation; the roles he has assigned himself and his slave define the extremes of the Olympian religion, from slavery to heroism. He does this entirely to save himself, without regard to the wrong which might be done his slave, or the deception he practices on Hades. To make himself acceptable to the powers of Hades, he seeks to dominate both Hades and the upper world.

While Dionysus has done this only for himself, he has communicated a similar power to Xanthias. Although he has done so at the behest of his master, Xanthias has also experienced the range of personalities from slave to hero. Moreover, Xanthias shows that he too will use his new personality for his own benefit; no one arrives to inflict the punishments earlier threatened, but a servant of Persephone's wishes to invite Xanthias-Heracles to dinner. Xanthias has no more scruples than his master about benefiting from his masquerade. He is on the point of accepting the invitation when Dionysus commands him to change costumes again.

Xanthias does not respond to commands directly now that he has had a taste of being Heracles. Since, however, he had undertaken the role of Heracles at his master's behest, he acquiesces in the necessity of surrendering it. Feeling the injustice done him, however, he calls the gods to witness. Since he has experienced an equality with Dionysus in his roles as both a slave and Heracles, he can imagine that the gods transcend them both. Just as he imagines these roles as contributing to his well-being, so he knows divinity as that which can advance his interests.

Dionysus replies that no god could possibly interest himself in Xanthias' case, since a slave and a mortal cannot appropriately imitate Heracles. Like Xanthias, Dionysus invokes the Olympian order to justify his actions. His self-interest depends on asserting himself as both a god and a free man. Distinctions which his career had heretofore denied he now finds it useful to maintain.

Events soon show that Dionysus has been imprudent in changing his outward appearance to meet each new circumstance; the outraged owners of a bake-shop appear instead of the expected

servants of Persephone. In the course of his visit to Hades, the real Heracles had invaded their store, eating vast quantities and then leaving without the least hint of payment. The lady-merchants threaten him with violence and the law.

Dionysus asserts what remains of his authority as master and asks Xanthias to change roles. In order to persuade his slave, however, he must almost beseech him and swear an oath that he will never again ask Xanthias to change roles. Xanthias agrees to Dionysus' request on these terms and again assumes the role of Heracles. This exchange has begun with Dionysus' authority; it has ended with a real equality between the two. Having determined by themselves who will assume which role, they ask the gods to guarantee their decision. The Olympian gods rule over that range of spiritual possibilities which Heracles and a slave define; in their capacity for arrogating to themselves the distribution of these roles the two have proven themselves equal.

At the end of this exchange, Aiacus and his police arrive to arrest Xanthias, whom they assume to be Heracles. Dionysus maliciously helps to identify Xanthias as Heracles for the police. Xanthias declares that he has never been in Hades before, and that to prove this, he will allow his slave to be tortured, in accord with Athenian practice.

Xanthias completes his liberation from Dionysus by using the role assigned him for his own advantage and his erstwhile master's disadvantage. He confounds his own personal being with the heroic being of Heracles. He tells the truth by saying of himself that he has never before been in Hades. He relies upon the deceptive potential of imitation to appear as Heracles and to give his 'slave' to be tortured. He uses imitation as a means to confound the divine and the human, and that this will result in violence being offered to his master does not in the least deter him.

Aiacus accepts what he calls Xanthias' handsome offer and orders the torturing of Dionysus. Dionysus has no other means of escaping the powers of Hades than by declaring himself a god and the son of Zeus. Not by any virtue or devices inherent in him as a man can Dionysus gain his safety but only by laying claim to his privileged place in an objective cosmic order. Here Dionysus joins together in the most thorough-going way his natural individuality and the Olympian order. This order does not interest him in its objective dominion but only insofar as it might serve him.

Xanthias, ever resourceful, responds that Dionysus' being a god is no reason for him not to be beaten. If he is a god, he will not feel it, whereas if he is not, the beating will reveal him for what he is. The slave assumes that a true god cannot experience the negativity inherent in having an animal or human nature. Dionysus

acquiesces in this measure of divinity, since, imagining that what belongs to him as a god belongs directly and immediately to him as a man, he thinks that he will pass the test. He insists that Xanthias, who also claims to be a god, should also therefore be beaten.

Both Dionysus and Xanthias hope to make their natural individuality the measure of their alleged Olympian divinity. Each claims for himself a divinity that he is capable of attaining. Although Dionysus more evidently imitates his own divinity, Xanthias also does so. As the type of human virtue, Heracles embodies that which Xanthias should aim at.

Aiacus proceeds to beat the claimants to divinity, but without achieving any result. Although both in fact feel pain, they are equally good at pretending they do not. Each has so confused his humanity with his masquerade as a god that Aiacus can make no decision between them. He announces that Persephone and Pluto, being gods themselves, will have to decide.

In the whipping contest both Dionysus and Xanthias have consciously sought to confuse the human with the divine, and the actual with mimetic reality. Although they have both suffered pain, they have pretended not to. Through mimesis then they wish to subordinate even the realm of the Olympian gods to their natural individuality.

By referring a decision about Dionysus and Xanthias to the gods of Hades, Aiacus relies on there existing a sharp distinction between gods and men, and that in both the upper and lower worlds. He wishes to see whichever of his two claimants to divinity is in fact a god proved so. He assumes, moreover, that as gods Pluto and Persephone have the insight to decide what he as a man cannot.

The referral of the decision to the gods of Hades concerning who is a god marks both the reversal and fulfillment of Dionysus' original scheme. He had hoped by the imitation of Heracles to secure an Olympian dominion over Hades so that he might enjoy Tragedy according to his whimsies. This desire has clearly been unfulfilled, and Dionysus has fallen un-Heracles-like into the hands of the Hades-police; his slave has seemed to them no less a god than he. Nevertheless, he and his slave have united in their persons the same general elements which Dionysus had hoped to. By conquering the underworld through his imitation of Heracles, Dionysus had hoped to enjoy in his own way that human imitation of the heroic which defines Tragedy. Now both Dionysus and Xanthias have sought to unite the human individuality which they have discovered in Hades with Olympian divinity through the power of imitation.

The argument has shown that the gods have insight into this union of actual human beings and Olympian divinity which Dionysus and his slave have confusedly achieved. The remainder

of the play will show Dionysus, under the aegis of these gods, attaining both for himself and for others an ordered unity of man with the gods of the upper world. He will educate men to imitate the gods and thus to participate in their lives.

This imitation will manifest itself not as a direct appropriation of Olympian divinity but rather as a participation in civic life; the more men find their true individuality through their devotion to the State, the more they will experience the rule of the Olympian gods over there of Hades. The development of this human participation in Olympian life will occur in three stages, through which the power of Dionysus and the participation of men in civic life will progressively reveal themselves. First, the chorus of Initiates, one of whose patrons is Dionysus, will suggest to the audience that their civic life depends on recognizing the rights of all individuals and the special characteristics of those capable of ruling. Second, Xanthias' experience of his slavish dependence on Dionysus will show the necessity for the subordination of the individual to an objective government. Finally, by bringing Aeschylus back to Athens with him, Dionysus acknowledges the power of Tragedy to communicate a freely chosen heroism to all the citizens.

The parabasis shows the participation of men in civic life in its least complete form.¹¹ The chorus of Initiates praises the citizens for having freed the slaves who fought at Arginusae and advises that they restore to civic rights those who through the commission of certain crimes had suffered the deprivation of them; it also suggests that the city be ruled by its best citizens. The chorus thus hope that the City will govern itself in accordance with the principles both of democracy and aristocracy.

The chorus simply declare both of these principles. They make no attempt to relate them, and this follows from their peculiar experience. Having lived first in the upper world and now in the lower, they give equal weight to the principle that belongs to each world. They acknowledge the rights that belong to all individuals; they treat the excellence of some as belonging to their special genius.

The first scene after the parabasis shows Xanthias experiencing the subordination of his individuality to a government over it.¹² He comes to a certain knowledge of this during a conversation with one who holds in the lower world a position similar to his own in the upper, a slave of Pluto's. They discuss what aspect of a slave's life each especially enjoys; both rate very high overhearing their master's conversation when it is not intended for their ears. When they have discovered this mutuality in slavery,

11. *Frogs* 674-737.

12. *Frogs* 738-755.

Xanthias speaks to his companion of that Zeus who is the patron of the whipped slaves' fraternity.

As a slave, Xanthias does not *ex animo* accept the authority of his master as an objective good; he finds his enjoyment and individuality rather through his disobedience to his master. The Zeus of Xanthias presides over those educated by force. Masters belong to his government of the world only by implication, as those who whip the slaves. Therefore, Xanthias unites his individuality with civic life very imperfectly; he asserts himself against an authority which rules him by compulsion.

The two slaves then start discussing a contest which will show that Dionysus as patron of Tragedy causes the citizens of Athens to participate more fully in civic life. The parabasis had simply proposed the recognition of individuals; the scene with Xanthias had shown Dionysus' limited capacity to educate his slave. In the next scene, the god will be seen as educating all the citizens in heroic virtue.

This scene begins when Xanthias, hearing a great din, asks his companion why it has arisen. His fellow slave explains that in Hades the best practitioners in the several *technai* are entitled to public support and a position of honour. Aeschylus has long held the throne of tragedy, but Euripides upon his arrival had challenged him. The mob thereupon declared Euripides to be the wisest practitioner of the tragic art; it has demanded moreover an official judgment about who was the superior. Pluto has decided therefore to hold a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides, of which Dionysus will be judge; his experience in the craft has won him this role.¹³

The proposed contest will reveal a deeper participation of the contestants in civic life than the conversation of Xanthias with a slave of Pluto's. The two playwrights are indeed subordinate to Dionysus in the tragic festival, but as *technitai*, not as slaves. They will experience their governance by Dionysus since he will decide the contest; they will know their independence, since the contest will determine primarily the more excellent poet and the nature of tragic poetry only as a means to this end.

The contest opens with Dionysus' directing the competing poets to pray, and their prayers reveal some characteristic differences in how they regard themselves.¹⁴ Aeschylus appeals to Demeter, who has nourished him, that he be worthy of her mysteries. Thus Aeschylus thinks that his excellence as a poet depends on his relation to that union of nature and contemplation which Demeter

13. *Frogs* 755-813.

14. *Frogs* 885-894.

incarnates; he thinks of his capacity as a tragedian as dependent on the powers of the world below.

Euripides for his part asks aether and intelligence to grant him dialectical powers, that he might conquer his opponent. He thus appeals to gods who are demythologized forms of the nature and contemplation which belong to Demeter. Euripides' wish to have dialectical powers is similarly a subjective modification of Aeschylus' desire to be worthy of Demeter's mysteries; he makes himself and his victory the measure of his poetical skills.

The contest then continues with each poet's making a general statement about what realities a tragedy should represent, and what effect this imitation has on those who see it. This part of the contest begins with Euripides criticizing Aeschylus for including the fantastic and the grandiose in his plays.¹⁵ He alleges as his own virtue, that he has rather brought onto the stage matters similar to the everyday life of his audience.¹⁶ Men have thus, he says, a measure of what they see before them. This similarity, moreover, between their own lives and what they see in the theatre enables men to manage their households better.¹⁷

Furious at hearing Euripides praise himself at his expense, Aeschylus cross-examines him about what makes a poet good.¹⁸ When Euripides says that a poet should make men in the cities better, Aeschylus entirely agrees; he will base his case against Euripides on his failure in this. Aeschylus argues that whereas he created heroic citizens through his tragedies, Euripides has proven unworthy of his legacy.¹⁹ By means of *Seven Against Thebes* and *Persians*, Aeschylus says he encouraged the citizens to a war-like defence of their own city. Euripides, however, by presenting immoral women and kings in rags, has sapped the political and moral spirit of the city; women have become immoral, and rich men pretending poverty have failed in their financial contributions to the City.

In the view of Aeschylus, the spectators imitate in their private and civic lives what they see acted on the stage before them. If they see heroic characters who find their individual well-being in serving the city, they will do the same. If, however, they see those who surrender to their passions, they will also imitate that. The radical character of Aeschylus' view shows itself when Euripides defends himself against the charge of bringing immoral women on the stage by urging the accuracy of his representation.²⁰

15. *Frogs* 907-935.

16. *Frogs* 959-961.

17. *Frogs* 971-979.

18. *Frogs* 1008-1010.

19. *Frogs* 1013-1017.

20. *Frogs* 1052.

Aeschylus replies that mere accuracy does not justify presenting something on the stage: poets are rather the teachers of men and must imitate the heroic in order that the spectators who see it might do so also.

Thus both Aeschylus and Euripides find the relation of the spectator to the drama essential to an understanding of its nature. They differ only in their thinking about what form this relation should take. Euripides thinks that the actual life of the spectators should be the measure of the dramatic action, and this for two reasons. First, if the drama imitates daily life, the spectators can judge of its truth. Second, they can live their daily lives better. For Aeschylus, not the actual lives of the spectators but their true lives as imitators of heroes is the measure of the drama; plays must therefore imitate only the heroic actions of heroes.

The three disputes which then arise about prologues, lyric verses, and the weightiness of the tragedians' verses, follow appropriately upon this initial dispute concerning the proper object of imitation.²¹ Through these subsequent disputes the poets discuss the means whereby each poet effects the form of imitation which he thinks appropriate to the dramatic art. In the course of these, Euripides accuses Aeschylus of grandiosity of expression; the poet devoted more to the quotidian would favour a more prosaic mode. For his part, Aeschylus accuses his rival of triviality and monotony; thus Euripides' presentation of daily life appears to the defender of the heroic.

Dionysus cannot choose between Aeschylus and Euripides. Pluto then intervenes, to remind the god that if he makes no choice, he will have come to Hades in vain. His response shows that he no longer thinks of himself as simply judging a contest to determine the best poet. Dionysus explains that he has come to Hades in search of a poet in order that the City, having been preserved, can continue its choruses.²² To this end he wishes to know what advice each poet has for the City. Dionysus has dramatically changed the terms of the contest. He will not choose between *technitai* who debate the effects their portrayal of the heroic world has on spectators. Rather he will make his decision as a political figure and on political grounds. Dionysus himself has determined the *telos* of Tragedy by which practitioners of the art can be judged; each poet must speak as a political man in order to become Dionysus' chosen poet.

21. *Frogs* 1119-1410.

22. *Frogs* 1418-1420.

To Dionysus' question the poets give characteristic answers. Euripides proposes as a general policy for Athens, that it discard those rulers it now uses and use those whom it has heretofore neglected.²³ Aeschylus instead repeats the old advice of Pericles and even Themistocles, that the Athenians disregard the well-being of their land, and put their trust in the navy; ²⁴ he suggests to the Athenians a universal heroism of all the citizens. He would have them disregard the material Athens so that they might devote themselves rather to the idea of Athens, in doing which they would make themselves a nation of heroes. Euripides will find the well-being of the City in the excellence of particular individuals. Aeschylus locates it in the complete identity of all the citizens with their city.

Dionysus still cannot decide. He announces that he will choose that poet whom his soul wishes.²⁵ Neither the well-being of individuals nor that of the State will determine which poet Dionysus chooses. The patron of Tragedy rather makes the needs of his own inner being the measure of his choice.

This new criterion marks the appropriate conclusion to the contest between Euripides and Aeschylus. Dionysus has been gradually recovering the rationality which belongs to the Olympian religion. First he judged in accord with *technē* and then with the whole political order. Now he will judge as an Olympian divinity.

Euripides interprets Dionysus' resolve to bring back whom his soul wishes as an adherence to the original private subjectivity which had moved him. Therefore, he urges Dionysus to remember those gods by whom he swore to bring him homeward, and thus to choose him.²⁶ Euripides sees the relation between the soul of an individual and the basis of his will thus: a man first chooses his course of action and then seeks in the gods the stability of that which had its origin in the individual himself. This statement epitomizes that private modification of the Olympian religion which has characterized Euripides' position since the beginning of the dramatic contest.

Euripides has not persuaded Dionysus, who replies, "My tongue has sworn . . . and I choose Aeschylus."²⁷ His first few words quote the celebrated line from *Hippolytus*, 'My tongue has sworn but my spirit has remained unsworn;' he thereby frees himself from any obligation Euripides might have thought him under. Thus at liberty, Dionysus decides to take Aeschylus with him to the upper world.

23. *Frogs* 1446-1450.

24. *Frogs* 1463-1465.

25. *Frogs* 1467-1468.

26. *Frogs* 1469-1470.

27. *Frogs* 1471.

By saying that only his tongue has sworn, Dionysus does not use a rhetorical trick to free himself from a real obligation; he rather describes his state of soul when he wished to steal Euripides from Hades. He wished to subordinate the realm of the gods to his desire for Euripides, and this has proved impossible. His experience since the parabasis has rather involved him in a complete acceptance of the gods' objective authority. Reminded by Euripides of his earlier resolve he can now aptly describe the division of his being through the quotation from *Hippolytus*; acting in accord with his private interest, he did not swear in accord with his soul, which cannot swear to the impossible task of making the gods subject to his whimsy.

In response to the intervention of Euripides, Dionysus has not only rejected him but also chosen Aeschylus. If Euripides has declared the equality of individual will with the gods, Aeschylus has rather shown that the well-being of individuals lies in their accepting the objective authority of the gods and the order over which they preside. At the beginning of the contest, he prayed that he might be worthy of Demeter's mysteries. He defended his poetry's encouraging the imitation of heroic individuals, and he advised the City to educate its citizens in heroism.

Dionysus has himself been gradually accepting the objective authority of the Olympian religion. His soul wishes that poet who acknowledges and teaches its reality. By living the position of Euripides, Dionysus found himself in grave difficulties. The second half of the play has seen him experiencing the position of Aeschylus; he therefore chooses the poet whose excellence he has experienced.

After Dionysus has chosen Aeschylus, Pluto sends them on their way, urging the poet to 'save our city.'²⁸ The god of the underworld thus agrees to the departure of an eminent inhabitant, rejoicing in his mission. He freely accepts the subordination of his own realm to that of the upper world.

Dionysus has thus completed his journey. By choosing Aeschylus, he has found his individuality in his Olympian divinity as patron of Tragedy. He has thereby caused Pluto to affirm the Olympian order by permitting the poet to depart. Aeschylus will again exercise his craft through service to the State, and he will move spectators to a heroic devotion to Athens.

All the characters, then, participate in the universal Comedy which unites actual individuals with the life of the gods. Dionysus, who hoped to concentrate this life in himself and finally attains it when he has affirmed its independence existence, has achieved this most profoundly. Pluto has had the lesser role of presiding over that Kingdom which has provided him the occasion to do so. Dionysus has communicated both to Aeschylus and the spectators of his

tragedies the ability to find their well-being in a heroism that embodies the divinity of the Olympian gods.

Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma