

## Aristophanes' Lost *Banqueters* and Plato *Republic* I

Many have observed that the *Republic* of Plato answers the charges of Aristophanes against Socratic philosophy in *Clouds* (such as Nichols 1987). Leo Strauss argues that the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus in *Rep. I* is answering the *agon* of the *Dikaios Logos* and the *Adikos Logos* in *Clouds* (1964: 74). Howland notes that the first word of *Republic*, *κατέβην*, has an origin not just in *Odyssey* XI and 23.252, but in Socrates' descent in a basket at his entrance in *Clouds* (1993: 28-29). Baracchi notes (2001: 154-55, 161) that the descent of Socrates to 'Piraeus' in the first line of *Republic* (*cf. πέρας* 'the end', *πέρα* 'beyond', *ἄπειρος* of the 'boundless' sea in Homer) recalls Strepsiades' complaint about the 'endless' nights (*apeiranton*, *Nub.* 2). To these observations one could add the use of a cloak as a structural device in both *Clouds* and *Republic*.

In the parabasis of *Clouds* (528-36), Aristophanes says that he designed it as a 'child' of his earlier *Banqueters* (*Δαιταλεῖς*, 427 BC), which featured two sons, one prudent and the other buggered (*ὁ σώφρων τε χὼ καταπύγων*). Henderson describes how the fragments suggest a play about two educations, a just one in the traditional virtues of country life, the other a sophistical rejection of convention that characterizes life in the city:

'The former has had the traditional athletic and musical education, while the latter has dropped out of school to learn the new techniques, promising success in the Assembly and courts, that were being taught by sophists like Thrasymachus and used by ambitious young politicians like Alcibiades (fr. 205). As a result, the Bugged Boy has abandoned traditional rural virtues for an urbane life of self-indulgence and troublemaking.'

We may discern several possible debts of *Republic* I to this play. 1. Socrates' argument that Thrasymachus defines a shepherd not as looking to what is best for sheep but fattening them as if about to 'feast' like a 'guest at a banquet' (345c, 354a) suggests that *Rep. I* as a 'feast at the Bendideia' is meant to recall Aristophanes' play. 2. The competition of Socrates and Thrasymachus over which view of justice should be taken to heart by Polemarchus (*Rep.* 1.336a ff) are likely intended to suggest the two educations in *Banqueters*. The choice of Thrasymachus as an interlocutor is best explained by this comedy that mentions him by name. 3. This theme of competing educations, one traditional and the other sophistic and buggered, i.e., just and unjust, becomes an important organizing theme in *Republic*. The two challenges of Glaucon and Adeimantus in *Rep. II*, in which justice is made to switch reputations with injustice (*Rep.* 2.359a-367e), are portrayed as two statues in competition for the fate of the city (361d), whether it will be ruled by justice or injustice. Glaucon rejects the pastoral community proposed by Socrates because it envisions simple food, rather than the gourmet food at Athenians feasts (372b-c). The description of the second son as 'buggered' as a result of a sophistic education, in turn, may explain the sexualized portrayal of the unjust man in *Republic* – from Cephalus' obsession with sex and feasting, to Gyges adultery with the king's wife in *Rep. II*, to the sexual appetites of the guardians in *Rep. V*. *Republic* is a referendum on not only the city, but on philosophy as a rival to poetry for the right to instruct and shape the character of the city. In this context we should probably view Thrasymachus 'breaking out in a sweat' while trying to defend himself against the dialectical assaults of Socrates as sexual imagery (*Rep.* 1.350c-d). I.e., the answer of *Republic* to Aristophanes' *Banqueters* is that the sophist deserves a punishment befitting his crime of educating the young in injustice; and thus the 'feast of the Bendideia' depicts the bugging of the sophist, Thrasymachus, by Socrates, the philosopher.

## Bibliography

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