

# Plato, Aristophanes, and the *Speeches of Pythagoras*

*Nancy Demand*

PARALLELS BETWEEN the *Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes and the *Republic* of Plato have long been the subject of discussion;<sup>1</sup> similarly, parallels between passages in *Ecclesiazusae* and the work called the *Speeches of Pythagoras*<sup>2</sup> have been recognized and considered by more than one scholar.<sup>3</sup> Strangely enough, however, the question of the interrelationship between all three works has failed to attract scholarly attention. In this paper I should like to consider this three-way interrelationship, and to suggest a possible reconstruction which would account for their puzzling parallels.

The *Speeches of Pythagoras* purports to be a series of four speeches or sermons delivered by Pythagoras to the people of Croton shortly after his arrival there (thus in the second half of the sixth century): addresses to the young men, to the men in the council, to the children, and to the women. The work in its present form is generally accepted as dating from around the turn of the fifth cen-

<sup>1</sup> For a full review of the discussion over the relationship, or lack of relationship, between the two works, see J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato*<sup>2</sup> I (Cambridge 1963) 345–55, who holds that Aristophanes satirized a climate of political and social opinion. More recently R. G. Ussher, *Aristophanes, Ecclesiazusae* (Oxford 1973) xvi–xx, briefly reviews the question, with bibliography, and takes the position that both authors relied on an earlier, unknown philosopher.

<sup>2</sup> Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 39–57. Text with brief commentary in H. Thesleff, *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period* (Åbo 1965) 177–83; texts, translation, and full discussion in C. J. de Vogel, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Assen 1966). Discussions in A. ROSTAGNI, “Un nuovo capitolo nella storia della retorica e della sofistica,” *StItal* n.s. 2 (1922) 148–201 (= *Scritti Minori* I [Turin 1955] 1–59; hereafter ‘Rostagni’); B. L. van der Waerden, *RE* Suppl. 10 (1965) 855–56 s.v. “Pythagoras,” and *Die Pythagoreer* (Zurich 1979) 186–201.

<sup>3</sup> C. G. Cobet, *Collectanea critica* (Leyden 1878) 333–34, suggested that Dicaearchus borrowed from Aristophanes and added the story of the three Graiai; W. Burkert, in a letter to van der Waerden, cited in *Die Pythagoreer* (*supra* n.2) 200, suggested that Apollonius was responsible for putting the words into the mouth of Pythagoras, and van der Waerden agrees. On the other hand, those who give *Speeches* priority and believe that Aristophanes refers to it include Rostagni 55–56 and de Vogel (*supra* n.2) 143. A good argument for the priority of *Speeches* lies in the practice of satirizing philosophers, especially Pythagoreans, in Attic comedy, as in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, and especially in the works of Middle Comedy (*cf.* Diels/Kranz 58E).

ture.<sup>4</sup> While some of its injunctions may be generally applicable in the wider Greek world (respect for parents, the value of *sophrosyne*), on a number of points it advocates or appeals to specifically Pythagorean values and ideas (the prohibition of oaths in the second speech, the age range for a *pais* in the third, references to the traditions of Croton throughout, and, possibly, the use of the terms *philosophia* and *philosophos* in the first speech). In particular, the speeches differ from what we know of received Athenian tradition about women on certain points: a new and more liberal view of ritual purity is expressed, fidelity is urged for husbands as well as wives, and women are the objects of praise.<sup>5</sup> *Speeches* on the whole, however, expresses an essentially conservative viewpoint on the subject of women: wives are to defer to their husbands and to consider defeat by them as true victory for themselves, to speak little and modestly, and to give no cause for criticism. An interesting point in connection with marriage and family life is the emphasis laid upon preserving the nuclear family: the taking of children away from their parents is said to be the greatest crime (*Vit.Pyth.* 49).

To whom was *Speeches* addressed? Clearly to Pythagoreans, but also to those who, while not members of the society, had some interest in the ideas of Pythagoras and who therefore could be expected to be influenced by the attribution of the work to Pythagoras and by the specifically Pythagorean or Crotonian references (that it was intended to appeal to a very general audience, as were later pseudo-Pythagorean writings, is not likely in such an early work). That it was directed against or aimed at a group that espoused radical views on the place of women in society and/or the nature of the family is suggested by the condemnation of a practice or proposal of removing children from their parents. One cannot help thinking of Plato's proposals for the removal of children from their parents in the *Republic* (460B-E),<sup>6</sup> and of the passages in both the *Ecclesiazusae*

<sup>4</sup> A late fifth or early fourth century date is upheld by A. Delatte, *Essai sur la politique pythagoricienne* (Paris 1922) 39–40; Rostagni 54–56; R. Joly, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique* (Brussels 1956) 32; de Vogel (*supra* n.2) 83, 93–102, 140–47; and W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1972) 115 n.38.

<sup>5</sup> On the traditional Athenian view of women see Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York 1975) 93ff.

<sup>6</sup> That the meaning of *διασπᾶν* in *Vit.Pyth.* 49 is indeed the physical separation of children from parents, and not a metaphorical separation, or alienation (as the usage in *Pl. Resp.* 462A) is shown by the use of the term at *Vit.Pyth.* 262, where the principle is invoked to justify banishing the families of those condemned to exile, and the sense is clearly that of physical separation.

(635–43) and the *Republic* (461CD) which deal similarly with the question of how children will recognize their parents under a system of communal sex.

As scholars have noted before, the parallels between *Speeches* and *Ecclesiazusae* include passages that bear a striking resemblance to each other. Both works refer to the practice that women have of lending clothes and adornments to one another without witnesses, and to the surprising fact that this trusting behavior does not result in quarrels or lawsuits:

*Vit. Pyth.* 55:

ἐκ τοῦ προῖεσθαι μὲν ἀμάρτυρον τὸν ἱματισμὸν καὶ τὸν  
κόσμον, ὅταν τινὶ ἄλλῳ δέῃ χρῆσαι, μὴ γίγνεσθαι δὲ ἐκ  
τῆς πίστεως δίκας μηδ' ἀντιλογίας.

*Ecclesiazusae* 446–50:

ἔπειτα συμβάλλειν πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἔφη  
ἱμάτια χρυσί' ἀργύριον ἐκπώματα  
μόνας μόναις, οὐ μαρτύρων ἐναντίον,  
καὶ ταῦτ' ἀποφέρειν πάντα κοῦκ ἀποστερεῖν,  
ἡμῶν δὲ τοὺς πολλοὺς ἔφασκε τοῦτο δρᾶν.

Another point of connection between the two works lies in the Graiai. The author of *Speeches* says that the justice of women, attested by these lending practices, has caused poets to create the myth of the three Graiai who amicably shared one eye among themselves (*Vit. Pyth.* 55). It seems reasonable to see the three Graiai in *Ecclesiazusae* as a parody of this story of the Graiai; the comic Graiai, however, in good Aristophanic fashion, do not share an eye amicably, but rather fight tooth and nail for the possession of a young male sex object. (Although *Speeches* says that poets created this story, it is unlikely that the reference is to Aristophanes: his version certainly does not illustrate the justice of women.)

Turning to the parallels between the *Republic* and *Ecclesiazusae*, we find not only the specific method of identifying parent-child relationships by age groups (*Resp.* 461C–465A; *Eccl.* 635–43), but also the idea of a community of sex partners and children (423E, 457E–466D; 613–43), a community of property (416D–417B; 590–610), the absence of lawsuits (464DE; 657–72), and the establishment of common tables (416D–E, 458C, 464B; 673–86). Many proposals have been made in an effort to explain these parallels. The simplest solution—that Aristophanes was parodying the *Republic*, or an early form or edition of part of that dialogue—is generally rejected, since none of

the orthodox dates suggested for the *Republic* would allow it to have been written before 393, the date usually accepted for *Ecclesiastusae*.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it is also unlikely that Plato would have turned to a work such as *Ecclesiastusae* as a source for his utopian state, no matter how much he may have admired comedy as an art form. The currently accepted solution is that new ideas about the rôle of women, the structure of the family, and the ownership of property were being proposed (anonymously, it would seem) in Athens around the turn of the century, and that both Plato and Aristophanes reacted to these proposals, each in his own way and to his own purpose.<sup>8</sup> If we could accept Plato's Socrates as historical, there would be no difficulty in identifying the ideas of the *Republic* as actually his, but in view of some apparently obvious exceptions to his claim of historicity, no such overall thesis can be accepted. Each case of a suspected Socratic origin for a Platonic idea must be dealt with on its own, and thus we must look for independent evidence in this particular case which might give us some grounds for attributing the utopian ideas in the *Republic* to Socrates. What I should like to suggest is that the parallels between *Speeches* and *Ecclesiastusae* offer such evidence. *Speeches* must have been directed at a person or persons who could have been expected to have been influenced by the authority of Pythagoras which *Speeches* claims—at a Pythagorean, or at least at someone within the Pythagorean sphere of influence. De Vogel has suggested that *Speeches* was composed in Magna Graecia and brought to Greece by immigrant Pythagoreans in the 390's; to me it seems more likely that the work was composed in Greece itself, by a member of this newly arrived group, as a reaction against the strange ideas which he found certain 'Pythagoreans' in Greece espousing.

<sup>7</sup> See Ussher (*supra* n.1) xx–xxv on the date of *Ecclesiastusae* and xvii n.1 on dates for the *Republic*. The most convincing form of the argument would involve a 'separatist' theory of the composition of the *Republic*; see Adam (*supra* n.1) for discussion.

<sup>8</sup> This is the view taken by Adam (*supra* n.1). New views about the rôle of women in fifth-century Athens are suggested by a number of sources. For instance, Euripides in *Medea* gives expression to a radical (in comparison with *Speeches*) questioning of the rôle of women and the relationship between the sexes (230–51 and 410–20). The *Pedetai* of Callias (431/0 B.C.) depicts Aspasia instructing Pericles in rhetoric (15 Kock); compare Plato's *Menexenus*, and the *Aspasia* of Aeschines (ca 386 B.C.). Antisthenes also wrote an *Aspasia* (34–35 Caizzi). In *Melanippe the Wise* Euripides depicted a female philosopher (480ff Nauck), while *γυναικοκρατία* was the theme not only of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, but also of the *Tyrannis* of Pherecrates (141ff Nauck). This 'feminist' atmosphere was noted and discussed in 1900 by Ivo Bruns, *Frauenemanzipation in Athen* (Kiel 1900) 3–22; cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Lese-früchte," *Hermes* 35 (1900) 548–53 (= *Kl.Schr.* V 126–30).

In about 450 B.C. an earlier group of Pythagorean refugees from persecution had arrived in mainland Greece;<sup>9</sup> at least one of these, Lysis, settled in Thebes. According to Plato, the Pythagorean Philolaus visited this city, and some of his Theban 'hearers' were to be found among the friends of Socrates: Simmias and Cebes, who play a major rôle in the *Phaedo* and make minor appearances in other dialogues (*Cri.* 45B, *Phdr.* 242B). While never strictly identified by Plato as Pythagoreans, the pair is portrayed as close associates of Socrates who have a strong Pythagorean background, and their sharing of the final hours of Socrates certainly suggests that Pythagorean tendencies existed in the Socratic circle. A similar picture is presented in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes: the Aristophanic Socrates, while not really Pythagorean, could certainly be called 'Pythagoreanizing'.

It has, of course, been maintained that the Pythagoreanizing Socrates of *Clouds* is a creation of Aristophanes, who indiscriminately mingled together Sophistic, Pythagorean, and Socratic characteristics to form a comic 'Socrates', a stock character of a Philosopher, far removed from the real Socrates.<sup>10</sup> In a somewhat parallel fashion, the Platonic Socrates is taken to reflect, at least in part, the ideas of Plato rather than those of the real Socrates. Nevertheless, *someone* in Athens was expressing Pythagorean ideas around 424, or Aristophanes would not have had them to mingle into his portrait of Socrates—can we reasonably assume that Socrates stayed entirely aloof from them, that he was unfairly portrayed as contaminated by these Pythagorean ideas by Aristophanes, and that Plato much later invented another Pythagoreanizing Socrates for his own purposes, knowing full well that the real Socrates had scrupulously avoided these ideas? Such a reconstruction of events seems tendentious, and therefore I suggest that we should accept the Pythagoreanizing Socrates of our sources as genuine. The circle of philosophers around him, cut off from contact with other Pythagoreans and under his powerful influence, would surely have developed ideas which would have seemed heretical to a Pythagorean newly arrived from Magna Graecia, where the Pythagorean tradition

<sup>9</sup> Delatte argues that this tradition goes back to Aristoxenus, whose source may have been one of the "last of the Pythagoreans" who were living in Phlius at the turn of the fifth century (Diog.Laert. 8.46); he offers a collection of various versions of this tradition (*supra* n.4) 218–37. The tradition is accepted by Kurt von Fritz, *Pythagorean Politics in Southern Italy* (New York 1940) 28–32; Burkert (*supra* n.4) 115–16; J. A. Philip, *Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism* (Toronto 1966) 25–26; and E. L. Minar, *Early Pythagorean Politics* (Baltimore 1942) 92. Erich Frank, *Plato und die so-gennanten Pythagoreer* (Halle 1923) 294 n.1, rejects it, but see Burkert 116 n.43.

<sup>10</sup> K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes Clouds* (Oxford 1968) xxxii–lvii.

had survived more nearly intact. The reaction of this anonymous Pythagorean is, I would argue, the work we know as the *Speeches of Pythagoras*.<sup>11</sup>

If *Speeches* is directed against the Socratic circle, viewed as heretical by its author, what then of *Ecclesiazusae*, which appears to be directed indiscriminately against both heretical 'Pythagoreanizers' (the friends of Socrates) and 'real' Pythagoreans (the author of *Speeches* and his followers)? Here, it seems to me, is the place to apply the principle of indiscriminate comic mingling, and to argue that Aristophanes, overlooking the subtle distinctions made by insiders, satirized with an even hand both the communistic schemes of the radicals and the—to a comic writer—equally odd and untraditional ideas about the *dikaiosyne* of women which the more orthodox group illustrated by their use of the story of the Graiai. The result was *Ecclesiazusae*, with its peculiar echoes of both *Speeches* and the *Republic*.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
March, 1982

<sup>11</sup> That the work was in fact read by the Socratic circle is suggested by a comment on *Od.* 1.1 by Antisthenes (cited in the *Homeric Questions* of Porphyry). Although the comment has been rejected as an insertion by Porphyry by L. Radermacher, *Artium scriptores* (*SitzWien* 227.3 [1951]) 121–22, and H. Schrader, *Porphyrii Quaestionum Homericarum ad Odysseam* (Leipzig 1890) 175, it is accepted by Rostagni 3; de Vogel (*supra* n.2) 140–41; F. D. Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milan 1966) 105–07; and Burkert (*supra* n.4) 115 n.38, where he reverses the position which he took in the earlier German edition, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft* (Nürnberg 1962) 181 n.42; van der Waerden, *Die Pythagoreer* (*supra* n.2) 188, apparently refers only to the German edition in attributing rejection to Burkert.