

Philokleon Goes Viral

Re-Reading Aristophanes' *Wasps* Through a COVID-19 Lens

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS brought new scrutiny of ancient plagues. In the past two years, scholars of the ancient world, and others, have produced numerous articles and blogs, in both academic and public venues, about how the current worldwide disease outbreak can give us new perspectives on the writings of the past, and vice versa. These recent assessments have been insightful, personal, clever, cathartic, and enlightening; they examine COVID-19 and its ancient parallels in light of modern ideas of religion, race, politics, and personal relationships. These studies have dealt with past historical and mythical accounts, both medieval and ancient, including the “Big Three” Greek plague narratives: Apollo’s infliction of the plague on the Achaians in *Iliad* 1, Sophocles’ portrayal of the Theban pestilence in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and especially Thucydides’ description of the plague at Athens.¹

This paper differs from the current trend of nosography (“plague writing”), in that it

shows that we may re-tell Aristophanes’s ancient play *Wasps* from a contemporary perspective, thus showing how our experiences during the COVID-19 crisis can use new terms to describe old stories. The significance of ancient literature changes with new experiences, because our perspectives are constantly changing. Experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic as both a professor and a patient has given me the opportunity to see this classic comedy in a new light. In this essay, after a summary of the play’s plot and background, I share some modern connections with the ancient work that have occurred to me—most of which would not have crossed my mind without the COVID-19 experience. These include new perspectives on how Aristophanes’ *Wasps* may relate to the following current issues: Incurable Disease, Demagoguery, Social Security, Stimulus Payments, Supreme Court Appointments, “Make America Great Again,” Social Distancing, Quarantine, Working from Home, Conspiracy Theory, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Second Wave with Dangerous New Variant, Attacks on Airline Flight Attendants, Third Wave, and Vaccination.

¹ See Further Reading for some recent articles on the subject. The bibliography continues to grow.

The Plot

Produced in the Athenian month of Gamelion (January/February) of 422 BCE, *Wasps* was Aristophanes' entry in the comic competition at the Lenaea, a festival celebrating the god Dionysos; it won second prize. The plot is a madcap combination of outrageous slapstick, political satire, and generation-gap humor.

In the prologue, two slaves explain that they have been charged by the young man Bdelykleon ("Kleon-Loather") with keeping his elderly father Philokleon ("Kleon-Lover") inside the house, in order to prevent him from going out with the other old men to serve as jurors in the Athenian courts. Philokleon was addicted to jury service, thrilled at the feeling of power that it gave him, and with the income that he got from the state's payment for jury duty. After his son shows him and his fellow elders (the Wasps of the Chorus) that they are the pawns of rich corrupt politicians, including the manipulative demagogue Kleon,

Bdelykleon convinces Philokleon to indulge his obsession to guilty verdicts by setting up a courtroom in their house, and to pay his father to conduct his juror's work at home. There follows a hilarious trial involving two dogs—prosecutor and defendant—who are thinly veiled caricatures of the public figures Kleon and the general Laches.

After Philokleon is tricked into voting for acquittal, his son instructs him on how to dress to attend dinner parties (*symposia*) and to how act with decorum in polite society. These instructions are lost on the old man, whose outrageous behavior at a party, including stealing a female enslaved person and subsequent violent acts against all in his path show that it was a mistake to let him out of the house at all. Although forced back into the house, the unrepentant Philokleon subsequently re-emerges, wilder than ever. He issues a challenge for a dance contest, and ends the play triumphantly prancing off stage.

Nosos. The Incurable Disease

The play portrays Philokleon's addiction to jury duty as a disease, *nosos*, the word that occurs in *Iliad* I to describe the disease that Apollo sent upon the Achaians, and that Aristophanes' Athenian contemporary Thucydides used to describe the plague at Athens in 429-428 BCE. It is the same word that their fellow citizen Sophocles used in *Oedipus the King* to describe the mythical plague at Thebes. As the enslaved character Xanthias announces in the prologue to *Wasps*:

That man up there is our master [Bdelykleon], sound asleep. The big guy, the one up on the roof tiles. This man gave the two of us

the order to guard his father, wanting to keep him shut up inside, and make sure that he doesn't go outside. Why? Because his father is sick with a strange sickness (noson allokoton nosei) which nobody could ever know or diagnose unless we explain it.

Xanthias then explains the diagnosis and symptoms of his disease. Philokleon is a *philēliastēs*, a jury service addict. His symptoms are related to his experiences as a juror, and include (to use pseudo-scientific jargon based on the text): insomnia (from thinking about jury service), hand dystonia (finger cramps,

from clinging to the ballots), ballot box fetish (graffiti obsession about voting), cock-call agnosia (anger at roosters who had been bribed to wake him up too late to get to court on time), pathological columnar attachment (clinging to the railing at the court), hyperactive penalty obsession (always proposing the maximum penalties), and pebble hoarding syndrome (amassing a massive supply of ballots).

His fellow slave Sosias uses the word *nosos* twice again for the sickness, followed by Xanthias repeating the word twice again, before listing the therapies that Bdelykleon had forced his father to undergo in the hopes of a cure. These attempted cures included in-house counseling, hydrotherapy and purges, divine exorcism, and healing-shrine incubation. But the old man's stubborn disease resisted all standard therapies. Like COVID-19, Philokleon's disease seemed to be incurable. Like the old man himself, it was incorrigible.

The common words for widespread disease (the verb *noseo* and the noun *nosos*) also characterize the mythical plagues in *Iliad* 1 and in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.² We should also point out that the Athenian citizens who attended Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus*, and Aristophanes' comedy *Wasps* were themselves survivors of the plague at Athens. In addition, Aristophanes' contemporary, the Athenian writer Thucydides, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* consistently uses the word *nosos* and the verb *noseo* to describe the plague at Athens, the symptoms of which he describes, while making the point that none of the standard cures were effective. When he first mentions it, he calls

2 *Iliad* 1.10: "plague" *nousos*. Sophocles OT 28: "most hateful pestilence" *loimos ekthistos*, OT 60: "You all also are plague-ridden, and being plague-ridden, / it is not possible that any one of you is equally as plague-ridden as I" *noseite pantes kai nosountes, hōs egō / ouk estin humōn hostis eks isou nosei*. Thucydides 2.31.2.

it "the pestilential plague" (*he loimōdēs nosos*), and describes the plague as *nosos* in six other passages.³ According to Thucydides, the standard treatments for disease were ineffective against this new disease: doctors (*iatroi*), healing sanctuaries (*hiera*), prophecies (*manteia*), and the like. Since all attempts at curing it were useless, people finally gave up trying, since they were overcome by its enormity.⁴

Whereas in *Wasps* the enslaved Xanthias describes the disease's effects in comic fashion, the sober historian Thucydides (who himself had the plague) seriously describes the physical symptoms, including fever, bloody throat and tongue, halitosis, violent coughing, loss of digits and genitalia, blisters, sores, unquenchable thirst, ulcers, diarrhea, and amnesia. But the greatest evil was the universal dejection it induced (*athumia*) because of its uncontrolled spread. Thucydides says that social distancing was impossible, owing to homelessness and the overcrowded conditions inside the city walls, where the entire population of Attica had moved for protection from the annual Spartan invasions.

The point of both the dramatic and historical accounts of these (comic and real) diseases is that they are harmful, troublesome, insusceptible to therapy, and that they pose a danger to society... as does COVID-19.⁵

3 Thucydides 2.31.2 (*nenosēkuias*); see also 2.47.3; 3.3.1; 3.13.3; 3.87.1; 6.26.2.

4 Thucydides 2.47.4: "Everything was useless, and finally, overcome by the evil, they abstained altogether from coming close to them" *panta anōphelē ēn, teleuōntes te autōn apestēsan hupo tou kakou nikōmenoi*. Thucydides later repeats the sad fact that no healing regimen was effective against the disease (2.51.2) "Nor was there any single cure that they could apply to help them" *hen te oude hen katestē iama ōs eipein hoti khrēn prosperontas ōphelēin*.

5 I cannot account for the fact that Aristophanes, who, like Thucydides, lived through the plague in Athens (and presented all of his comedies in the following decades), never directly alludes to that disease in his plays.

Background and Modern Parallels

For modern observers, the cultural context of ancient Attic comedy requires much explanation. In what follows, I try to give information to provide a

framework for understanding each scene, with observations on some new perspectives I have gained, suggested by contemporary COVID-19 experiences.

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Insufficient Social Security and Demagoguery

In the ancient Mediterranean world, retirees had no government support such as social security; nor were there retirement accounts such as IRAs. One worked until one died, or relied on family help, and so when the Athenian general/politician Pericles introduced pay for jury duty, probably in the 450s, it was an economic boon for the old men of Athens. Sometime between 429 and 422, the populist leader Kleon, whom Thucydides describes as “the most violent and most persuasive of the citizens (*biaiotatos tōn politōn... pithanōtatos*) and as a populist leader—using the word “demagogue” for the first time (*anēr dēmagōgos*)⁶—supported an increase in payment for jurors by 50% (from two obols to three; see *1121 triōbolon*),

implicitly making it clear that in return for this “gift,” he expected that those who served in the courts would vote in favor of his policies and cronies, and against his enemies. As NYU classicist Peter Meineck puts it, “Politicians in the 420s would use the law courts as part of political tactics, taking opponents to court and making their careers by prosecuting major public figures.”⁷

Aristophanes makes this clear in the *Wasps*, both when Philokleon is being locked in the house while calling for help to Kleon and his fellow jurymen, and when the senior citizen Chorus of jurymen claim that they are hurrying to court in order to vote in a lawsuit against Laches, one of the enemies of Kleon; they describe the latter as their *kēdemōn* (patron).⁸

6 Prior to Thucydides’ use of “demagogue,” Aristophanes in *Knights* (424 BCE) had used the word “demagoguery” (*dēmagōgia*), in a most derogatory way: The character Demosthenes tells the Sausage Seller, “A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be an ignoramus and a rogue” (tr. Eugene O’Neill Jr.). Isocrates would later use the word to describe Pericles, as a leader of the people (8.126).

7 Aristophanes I, Peter Meineck (Hackett, 1998) 129.

8 Demosthenes 24.151 (*Against Timocrates*) preserves the actual oath that the jurymen took, invoking the gods Zeus, Poseidon and Demeter, which includes the promise to hear cases with partiality neither for the prosecution nor the defense: “I shall listen to both the prosecutor and defendant both alike” *akroasomai tou te katēgorou kai tou apologoumenou homoiōs amphoin*.

Stimulus Checks and Supreme Court Appointments

Such monetary and political policies remind us of the economic stimulus checks issued under U.S. Presidents Trump and Biden, to help during the COVID-19 economic difficulties, each accompanied by signed letters from the White House. And President Trump's appointments of Supreme Court judges have been widely seen as advancing his own political agenda, with support from a

Republican-dominated legislative branch. In fairness, though, all U.S. presidential court appointments naturally reflect the political and social agendas of the executive branch. But lately the increased political polarization in the U.S. has made me more prone to relate such partisan actions to Kleon's persuasive (and pernicious) influence over the law courts and assemblies of fifth century BCE Athens.

MAGA before MAGA?

Aristophanes scholar Matthew C. Farmer has suggested that the Trump campaign slogan "Make American Great Again" finds parallels in several passages in *Wasps* in which supporters of Kleon express a nostalgic longing for the "good old days" of the Athenian past, and decry the morality, politics, and tastes of the younger generation, which they consider to be taking society in the wrong direction.⁹

Philokleon and the chorus of wasps make it clear that they prefer the old ways, and would like to "Make Athens Great Again." Before the chorus first enters, Bledykleon tells the slaves that the old men of the wasp chorus habitually summon his father to join them by singing the out-of-date (*arkhaia*) verses by Phrynichus, a popular tragic poet of the earlier generation. At their first appearance, the chorus of aged military veterans fondly recall some of their youthful hijinks at Byzantium, and recall how their friend and comrade Philokleon used to delight in singing Phrynichus' songs as he led them in procession. They recall his youthful but mischievous military prowess in the siege of Naxos.

In the first parabasis, the Chorus claims that they, the older generation, were best at both dancing and fighting, and that the current generation, with its curly hair, fancy

clothes, and sexual indecency (*euruprōktia*) is no match for them. They then brag that their prowess in land and sea battles against the Persians had made Athens the great power that had amassed the tribute money that the current generation is now stealing.

In the play's last episode, Xanthias announces that Philokleon has drunkenly been executing the archaic dances (*arkhaia*) of Thespis, the founder of Athenian tragic poetry and is wildly challenging the modern (*tous nun*) tragic dancers, whom he considers his inferiors, to match his prowess.¹⁰

In Aristophanes' plays, the desire to go back to the old days is not unique to *Wasps*. The characters Strepsiades and Just Argument in *Clouds* (423 BCE), and the chorus of old men in *Lysistrata* (411 BCE) espouse similar sentiments: their grandfathers were the Greatest Generation, and current Athenians fall short of them in character and manliness. The idea that the present generation is a degenerated version of a glorious past, and the concomitant desire for a return to former greatness finds resonance in both ancient Athenian and modern American imagination.

⁹ Email correspondence from Matthew C. Farmer: June 23, 2021.

¹⁰ The Phrynichus that Philokleon mentions at 1490 and 1524 is not the tragic poet of an earlier generation, but a contemporary Athenian known for his dancing. See Michael V. Melitor "Phrynichos, a Note on Aristophanes *Vespae* 1490-3." *Hermes* 112.2 (1984) 252-254.

Social Distancing and Reluctant Quarantine

Like the first modern social distancing anti-COVID-19 measures, Bdelykleon's solution to his father Philokleon's pathological addiction to jury service is to keep him out of public life by imposing a home quarantine, to keep him and his community safe.

Aristophanes creates a lot of comic capital describing how the son had sealed off the windows, doors, and chimney to prevent his father's escape. Philokleon even tried to sneak out by clinging to the underside of a donkey, and calling himself "Nobody, from Ithaca" in a parodic allusion to the *Odyssey's*

Cyclops scene, where Odysseus escapes from the monster's cave under a large ram.

People in the U.S. were encouraged to stay home as much as possible during the first wave of COVID-19, but in Greece, for example, it became illegal for people to leave their homes without permission, and citizens who left the house had to show proof that they had gotten approval to be out. In Greece in 2020, the phrase *ménoume spíti* ("We are staying at home") became a national byword for domestic sequestration.

Working from Home

Worldwide, many workers had to quarantine and work remotely when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, using whatever equipment in their homes that could serve that end. To some this has been a hardship, but others have found home-based work to have some advantages, or even to be comfortable. Likewise, Bdelykleon figures out how to let his incorrigible father work from home by letting him judge cases there, and highlights some of the advantages of doing so. Philokleon, concerned about his loss of income, asks who will pay his salary (*misthos*), and Bdelykleon replies that he will supply it for him. He also points out to the old man the flexibility he would have by staying at home: in good weather he can work in the courtyard, and inside by the fire if it snows or rains. If he is hungry, he can eat while doing home jury duty. Bdelykleon helps as much as possible to replicate the physical environment of the courtroom, with a chamber pot that can also function as a water clock (*clepsydra*) to

time the speeches, a shrine of Lycus, just as at the real court, and makeshift voting urns. Instead of real-life witnesses, Philokleon calls on household utensils to testify on behalf of the defendant, including a bowl, pestle, cheese grater, brazier, pot, and other paraphernalia. Finally, the accused dog's puppies are brought in, in imitation of the actual courtroom practice of introducing defendants' young children in order to provoke pity among the jurymen and thereby secure an acquittal.¹¹ The squealing pups cause even the hardened Philokleon to tear up with emotion even as he practices his jurymen's trade at his own home. Like modern employees who have had to work remotely to ameliorate quarantine conditions, Bdelykleon found ways to "make do" with implements found in the home.

¹¹ Socrates' reference to this practice in Plato's *Apology* (34c-d) is proof that Athenians actually engaged in these melodramatic exhibits in court.

Conspiracy theorists often charge those who oppose them with hating their country, which is exactly what the Chorus does when they call upon Kleon to help rescue Philokleon from his quarantine.

Conspiracy Theory

Numerous opponents of vaccination, social distancing, and mask mandates have recourse to unfounded ideas that such measures are simply machinations meant to undermine freedom and to exercise control over the populace, under the guise of helping improve public health. Such conspiracy theories are difficult to counter, and are cherished by those who hold them. It is therefore of interest that the chorus of wasps in this play, in condemning Bdelykleon for keeping his father in quarantine, repeatedly accuses him of being part of a conspiracy against the state, when he is in fact looking out for his father's own good.

When Philokleon tells the chorus that his son is keeping him inside against his will, they reply that Bdelykleon must be some sort of conspirator (*xsynōmotēs*). This was a charge that Kleon and his coterie seemed habitually to have leveled against their political opponents, as apparent in its frequent use in reference to Kleon, both in this play and by the Kleon character Paphlagon in Aristophanes' *Knights*.

Conspiracy theorists often charge those who oppose them with hating their country, which is exactly what the chorus does when they call upon Kleon to help rescue Philokleon from his quarantine: "Boys, run and shout and announce these things to Kleon, and tell him to come out against a man who hates his country!" (*ep' andra misopolin*). In response to Bdelykleon's refusal to let his father out, they cry that he is presenting them with "out-and-out tyranny" (*turannis estin emphanēs*).

Before the play's main debate (*agōn*), the Chorus sound more and more like conspiracy theorists when they say to Bdelykleon that the poor people do not see the clear signs that tyranny is stealthily sneaking up from behind, and that by keeping Philokleon locked up at home he is depriving them of their legal rights. They call him an "enemy of the people" and a "lover of monarchy," and a friend of the Spartan general Brasidas (*misodēme kai monarkhias erasta xsynōn Brasidai*). They repeat the charges of conspiracy and tyranny before an exasperated Bdelykleon has had enough:

How you see tyranny and conspirators everywhere as soon as anyone voices a criticism large or small! I hadn't even heard the word being used for at least fifty years, but nowadays it's cheaper than sardines.

He goes on to say that even minor disputes about fish result in charges of conspiring to tyranny, and pointedly asserts that his care for his father has resulted in his being called a conspirator with a mind set on tyranny.

Just as modern anti-vaccine proponents and opponents of mask mandates have insisted that government efforts for public health are really a nefarious plot to deprive them of their rights, and have spread the lie that anti-COVID-19 inoculation is a scheme to track their movements, so also the chorus of wasps, as supporters of Kleon, considers the benevolent actions of Bdelykleon as a treacherous conspiracy to undermine the state.

Ineffective Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

The big question for many during the time of COVID-19 is, “When is it safe to go out again, and what precautions must we take?” In *Wasps*, the question about Philokleon’s situation is similar. When to let him out? After his domestic “jury service” reaches its comic completion, Bdelykleon thinks that it is safe to allow him to leave quarantine and enter into society again—with certain precautions and safeguards.

Instead of modern personal protection equipment like facemasks, facepiece respirators, gloves, isolation gowns, hand sanitizers, and face shields, the son has his own ideas about PPE to protect his irascible father. Bdelykleon thinks that if his father is well dressed, he can leave quarantine and safely interact with his peers, so he takes away the old man’s ratty jacket (*tribōn*), and replaces it with a fine new cloak (*chlaina*). But Philokleon fights to keep his beloved old clothing, and also balks when Bdelykleon tries to force him to don fine new Laconian shoes and give up his “accursed sandals” (*kataratous embadas*).

Next, with his new wardrobe the old man suffers through some lessons from his son

on proper public behavior. In order to survive in the world, Philokleon must learn how to conduct himself in polite company. The son tries to teach his father how to walk with a seemingly gait, how to converse in a polite and impressive manner, how to recline gracefully on the couch at a symposium, how to join in with the symposium’s traditional drinking songs (*skolia*), how to drink properly, and how to fend off criticism by telling witty anecdotes, like stories from Aesop or about the Sybarites. Such strategies are meant to shield the old man from embarrassment arising from his ignorance when he goes out.

Of course, Philokleon objects to each and every one of these well-intentioned restrictions on his freedom, and mocks them all. He refuses to use the PPE his son suggests. Subsequent scenes show that he misuses his son’s advice, resulting in a second wave of disaster, with more casualties. Philokleon simply cannot stay socially healthy when he leaves home. In his interaction with others, he gets disorderly, commits assault and theft, and provokes general mayhem.

Second Wave with Dangerous New Variant (*Hubris*), and Second Lockdown

After the symposium, Xanthias reports that when Philokleon had gotten drunk and had had his fill of good food, the old man began to dance inappropriately, to fart, and to deride his fellow partygoers. He beat his own slave, insulted and mocked the guests, and left the party, taking with him an enslaved woman; he struck anyone he came across, and threatened people with a torch. He drove off a man who summoned him to court for his hubristic acts, treated the slave woman in a most vulgar manner, beat a woman selling bread, ruined her

wares, and cruelly insulted her. He treated another accuser with violence before his son Bdelykleon managed to pick him up and carry him inside, returning him to lockdown.

Modern frustration with COVID-19 mandates and restrictions has coincided with an uptick in customer violence against service-industry workers, most notably airline flight attendants. Some of these attackers, acting under the influence of alcohol, have faced legal repercussions for their misbehavior. Similarly, Philokleon,

fueled by the symposium's wine (in addition to his own addiction to mayhem), abuses Athenian service workers who were simply trying to do their jobs, and (ironically) scorns threats of lawsuits that would have held him accountable for his aggression. Intolerant of public order and decency, our diseased protagonist, having been in and out of quarantine, lashes out at those around him as he spreads his contagion.

In *Wasps*, any breaking of quarantine is a mistake. Philokleon's first disease of jury addiction was harmful, in that he had always favored the guilty verdict, thus harming many innocent people. In this

second wave, however, he displays a new variant, a dangerous mutation that results in Philokleon physically harming innocent victims. The comic lesson here is: "You can dress him up, but you can't take him out." Aristophanes shows that the old man is both too irrepressible to be kept in the house, and that his public presence is a danger to society, in a new way. Aristophanes repeatedly describes these physical assaults as "pride/arrogance/violence" (*hubris*). His character simply is not compatible with staying home. This second wave, as we might call it, containing a new variant of Philokleon's illness, was a catastrophe.

The Third Wave: Manic Transcendence

In the play's last scene, Philokleon escapes from the house again, in a frenzy of dancing, emerging in order to challenge tragic dancers to a dance contest. This time Xanthias diagnoses his condition as "madness" (*mania*), and prescribes its traditional cure: a dose of hellebore. This antidote, however, is ignored, and, like the attempts to cure the original *nosos*, would have been ineffective against Philokleon's strong character.

The old man challenges the tragic poet Carcinus' sons (dressed as crabs) to a dance competition which continues wildly to the end of the play. As we have seen, when the

second wave of Philokleon's *hubris* contagion broke out, disaster followed. The frenetic antics of Philokleon's third wave resulted from the old man's innate mania, another variant of his basic irrepressibility, and in accordance with the normal practice of the genre, they bring an upbeat ending to the play, consisting of harmless comic musical and terpsichorean chaos. Unlike the toll that COVID-19 has taken on its myriad victims, often as the result of new mutations of the virus and the failure of social distancing, *Wasps* must have a happy ending—in spite of the repeated outbreaks of its "diseased" main character.

Vaccination? No Thank You

Modern widespread vaccination against COVID-19 has begun to cause the virus to retreat, but there was no such immunization to shield Philokleon from his mischief-making disease(s). The suggestion of hellebore is as close to a mention of vaccination as there could be, but the context makes it clear that such an

inoculation would not work, even if he were to accept it, for he was naturally irrepressible. Philokleon's problem was his own powerful personality. I imagine that if he were asked why he would refuse something that would keep his malady from re-surfacing, he would say, like contemporary anti-vaxxers, that such

solutions infringe on his personal freedom, or are part of a conspiracy. He might indeed have paraphrased the well-known retort from Herodotus (in which Hippokleides' reply to Cleisthenes after his drunken crudeness and wild dancing had cost him an advantageous marriage to Cleisthenes' daughter Agariste), and say, "Ou phrontis Philokleoni!" (Philokleon doesn't care!).¹²

It is unfortunate that Philokleon's selfish attitude is prevalent among people who practice vaccine hesitancy today. Our world is not a comic stage; the consequences of irresponsible actions during the pandemic are more severe than those which any character in a Greek comedy ever faced. Unlike Philokleon, we are obliged to care.

Conclusion. The Moral of the Story.

In the prologue, the enslaved character Xanthias describes to the audience the play's plot (*logos*):

*No, what we've got here is just a little story (logidion), but with a moral (gnōmē), something we can all understand. Don't worry, it won't go over your heads, but it will be on a higher level than those other disgusting, obscene farces.*¹³

Unfortunately, nowhere does Aristophanes clearly state the play's actual moral. We, however, having examined *Wasps* through the public health lens of COVID-19, may conclude that Aristophanes, like an ancient Dr. Anthony Fauci, makes one main point in *Wasps*: "This is how Philokleon behaves. Don't be like Philokleon." ◻

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Further Reading

Some recent works that examine the Coronavirus through ancient sources include:

Akrigg, Ben. "Thucydides in the Time of Coronavirus" March, 2020. University of Toronto Department of Classics. classics.utoronto.ca/news/newsletter/thucydides-in-the-time-of-coronavirus

Bass, Gary. "The Athenian Plague: A Cautionary Tale of Democracy's fragility." June 10, 2020. *The New Yorker*. www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-athenian-plague-a-cautionary-tale-of-democracys-fragility

Christiansen, Joel. "Plagues follow bad leadership in ancient Greek tales." March 12, 2020. *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/plagues-follow-bad-leadership-in-ancient-greek-tales-133139

Crane, David. "I Am A Virus." June 22, 2020. *Eidolon*. eidolon.pub/i-am-the-virus-2a23b57e8e75

Gallia, Andrew. "COVID Through the Eyes of Historians: Thucydides." June 24, 2020. University of Minnesota. cla.umn.edu/history/news-events/story/covid-through-eyes-historians-andrew-gallia

¹² Philokleon shows just such an attitude in his retort to the baker woman whom he had just assaulted, when he says, "Lasus and Simonides were contesting against each other for the singing prize. Lasus said, 'Damned if I care'" (Eugene O'Neil Jr, tr.).

In Book 6 of his *Histories*, Herodotus had recorded Hippokleides' reply to Cleisthenes as "Ou phrontis Hippokleidei!" ("Hippokleides doesn't care!").

¹³ *Wasps* 64-66.

- Gardner, Hunter. "When Plague is Not a Metaphor." July 14, 2020. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. www.chronicle.com/article/When-Plague-Is-Not-a-Metaphor/249175
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