



THE CLOUDS

BY:
ARISTOPHANES (423 BCE)

Modifications, corrections and footnotes by:
Dr. Barry F. Vaughan¹

CAST:

Strepsiades - An indebted father
Phidippides - The son of Strepsiades
Sokrates - A Sophist
Pasias - First Creditor
Amunias - Second Creditor
First Disciple - A student at the “Think Shop”
Second Disciple - A student at the “Think Shop”
Good Logic – anthropomorphized traditional reasoning
Bad Logic - anthropomorphized “new” reasoning
Slave – Strepsiades’ household slave
Chorus - The Clouds

SCENE:

In the background are two houses, that of Strepsiades and that of Sokrates, the The Think Shop. The latter is small and dingy; the interior of the former is shown and two beds are seen, each occupied.

STREPSIADES: Great gods! Will these nights never end? Will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago and my slaves are snoring still! Ah! Ah! It wasn't like this [in the old days]. Curses on the war!² Has it not done me ill enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves. Again there's this brave lad, who never wakes the whole long night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content. Come! let me nestle in well and snore too, if it be possible...oh misery, it's vain to think of sleep with all these expenses, this stable, these debts, which are devouring me, thanks to this fine cavalier, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot and to dream of horses! And I, I am nearly dead, when I see the moon bringing the third decade in her train and my liability falling due ... Slave! light the lamp, and bring me my [bills].

(Enter Slave)

¹ This translation is from the 1912 version published by The Athenian Society; the translator is anonymous. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit. I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in translator's time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

²The Peloponnesian War 431 - 404 BCE.

Who are all my creditors? Let me see and [count] up the interest. What is it I owe? ... Twelve *minae* to Pasiyas ... What? Twelve *minae*³ to Pasiyas? ... Why did I borrow these? Ah, I know! It was to buy that thoroughbred, which cost me so much. How I should have prized the stone that had blinded him!

PHIDIPPIDES: (*in his sleep*) That's not fair, Philo! Drive your chariot straight, I say.

STREPSIADES: This is what is destroying me. He raves about horses, even in his sleep.

PHIDIPPIDES: (*still sleeping*) How many times round the track is the race for the war chariots?

STREPSIADES: It's your own father you are driving to death ... to ruin. [Let's see], what debt comes next, after that of Pasiyas? ... Three *minae* to Amunias for a chariot and its two wheels.

PHIDIPPIDES: (*still asleep*) Give the horse a good roll in the dust and lead him home.

STREPSIADES: Ah! Wretched boy! It's my money that you are making roll. My creditors have [seized] my goods, and here are others again, who demand security for their interest.

PHIDIPPIDES: (*beginning to awaken*) What is the matter with you, father, that you groan and turn about the whole night through?

STREPSIADES: I have a [pain in the ass debt collector] in the [sheets] biting me.

PHIDIPPIDES: For pity's sake, let me have a little sleep.

STREPSIADES: Very well, sleep on! But, remember that all these debts will fall back on your shoulders. Oh, curses on the [matchmaker] who made me marry your mother! I lived so happily in the country, a commonplace, everyday life, but a good and easy one—had not a trouble, not a care, was rich in bees, in sheep and in olives. Then indeed I had to marry the niece of Megakles, the son of Megakles; I belonged to the country, she was from the town; she was a haughty, extravagant woman, a true Korkura.⁴ On the nuptial day, when I lay beside her, I was reeking of the dregs of the wine-cup, of cheese and of wool; she was redolent with essences, saffron, voluptuous kisses, the love of spending, of good cheer and of wanton delights. I will not say she did nothing; no, she worked hard...to ruin me, and pretending all the while merely to be showing her the cloak she had woven for me, I said, "Wife, you go too fast about your work, your threads are too closely woven, and you use far too much wool!"

(*Enter Slave with lamp*)

SLAVE: There is no more oil in the lamp.

STREPSIADES: Why then did you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here, I am going to beat you.

SLAVE: What for?

STREPSIADES: Because you have put in too thick a wick ... Later, when we had this boy, what was to be his name? It was the cause of much quarrelling with my loving wife. She insisted on having some

³ Plural for 'mina', a unit of weight measure used in the ancient world and Athens. In this context it is being used as a measure of silver (the standard precious metal used as currency). When adjusted for inflation, a *mina* would be roughly equivalent to six months wages for a skilled laborer.

⁴ A polis on the island of Corfu; a colony of Corinth. Civil strife between democratic and oligarchic factions was noted by Thucydides as a major cause of the Peloponnesian war when Athens intervened on behalf of the democrats provoking Corinth (an ally of Sparta).

reference to a horse⁵ in his name, that he should be called Xanthippos, Xarippos or Kallippides. I wanted to name him Phidonides after his grandfather. We disputed long, and finally agreed to style him Phidippides ... She used to fondle and coax him, saying, "Oh! what a joy it will be to me when you have grown up, to see you, like my father, Megakles, clothed in purple and standing up straight in your chariot driving your steeds toward the town." And I would say to him, "When, like your father, you will go, dressed in a skin, to fetch back your goats from Phelleos." Alas! he never listened to me and his madness for horses has shattered my fortune.

(Exit Slave, Phidippides finally gets out of bed)

But by dint of thinking the livelong night, I have discovered a road to salvation, both miraculous and divine. If he will but follow it, I shall be out of my trouble! First, however, he must be awakened, but it must be done as gently as possible. How shall I manage it? Phidippides, my little Phidippides!

PHIDIPPIDES: What is it, father?

STREPSIADES: Kiss me and give me your hand.

PHIDIPPIDES: There! [What do you want]?

STREPSIADES: Tell me, do you love me?

PHIDIPPIDES: By Posidon, the [horse-ie] Posidon, yes, I swear I do.

STREPSIADES: Oh, do not, I pray you, invoke this god of horses; he is the one who is the cause of all my cares. But if you really love me—and with your whole heart—my boy, [listen to] me.

PHIDIPPIDES: [Listen to] you about what?

STREPSIADES: Alter your habits [immediately] and go and learn what I tell you.

PHIDIPPIDES: [Go] on, what are your orders?

STREPSIADES: Will you obey me ever so little?

PHIDIPPIDES: By Dionusos,⁶ I will obey you.

STREPSIADES: Very well then! Look this way. Do you see that little door and that little house?

PHIDIPPIDES: Yes, father. But what are you driving at?

STREPSIADES: That is the *The Think Shop* of wise souls. There they prove that we are coals enclosed on all sides under a vast [candle] snuffer, which is the sky. If well paid, these men also teach one how to [win] law-suits, whether they be just or not.

PHIDIPPIDES: What do they call themselves?

STREPSIADES: I do not know exactly, but they are deep thinkers and most admirable people.

⁵ Horses were extremely difficult to keep in the region of Attica, the territory of Athens. Only the wealthiest citizens could afford to keep horses. Anything associated with horses was, therefore, a sign of nobility and wealth.

⁶ God of the grape harvest; associated with fertility, ritual madness, excessive consumption.

PHIDIPPIDES: Bah, the wretches! I know them; you mean those quacks with pale faces, those barefoot fellows, such as that miserable Sokrates and Xaerephon?

STREPSIADES: Silence! Say nothing foolish! If you desire your father not to die of hunger, join their company and let your horses go.

PHIDIPPIDES: No, by Dionusos, even though you gave me the pheasants that Leogoras raises⁷.

STREPSIADES: Oh, my beloved son, I beseech you, go and follow their teachings.

PHIDIPPIDES: And what is it I should learn?

STREPSIADES: It seems they have two courses of [logic], the [good] and the [bad], and that, thanks to the [bad], [weak] law-suits can be [won]. If then you learn this science, which is false, I shall not have to pay an *obolos*⁸ of all the debts I have contracted on your account.

PHIDIPPIDES: No, I will not do it. I should no longer dare to look at our gallant horsemen, when I had so ruined my tan.

STREPSIADES: Well then, by Demeter! I will no longer support you, neither you, nor your team, nor your saddle-horse. Go and hang yourself, I turn you out of house and home.

PHIDIPPIDES: My uncle Megakles will not leave me without horses; I shall go to him and laugh at your anger.

(Exit Phidippides, Strepsiades goes to Sokrates' house)

STREPSIADES: One [defeat] shall not dishearten me. With the help of the gods I will enter the *The Think Shop* and learn myself. But at my age, memory has gone and the mind is slow to grasp things. How can all these fine distinctions, these subtleties be learned? Bah! Why should I dally thus instead of rapping at the door? Slave, slave!

FIRST DISCIPLE: *(from within)* A plague on you! Who are you?

STREPSIADES: Strepsiades, the son of Phidon, of the deme of Kikunna.

(Enter First Disciple)

FIRST DISCIPLE: You are nothing but an ignorant and illiterate fellow to [bang] at the door with such kicks. You have brought on a miscarriage-of an idea!⁹

STREPSIADES: Pardon me, please; for I live far away from here in the country. But tell me, what was the idea that miscarried?

FIRST DISCIPLE: I may not tell it to any but a disciple.

STREPSIADES: Then tell me without fear, for I have come to study among you.

⁷ A Wealthy Athenian from the Eupatrid noble family, father of the orator, Andokides.

⁸ A small silver coin minted in Athens, approximately one-sixth of a drachma. A very small amount of money.

⁹ The reference of a "miscarriage" is a reference to the fact that Sokrates referred to himself as a kind of midwife of ideas (his mother was an actual midwife).

FIRST DISCIPLE: Very well then, but reflect, that these are mysteries. Lately, a flea bit Xaerephon on the brow and then from there sprang on to the head of Sokrates. Sokrates asked Xaerephon, "How many times the length of its legs does a flea jump?"

STREPSIADES: And how ever did he go about measuring it?

FIRST DISCIPLE: Oh! It was most ingenious! He melted some wax, seized the flea and dipped its two feet in the wax, which, when cooled, left them shod with true Persian slippers. These he took off and with them measured the distance.

STREPSIADES: Ah, great Zeus; what a brain! What subtlety!

FIRST DISCIPLE: I wonder what then would you say if you knew another of Sokrates' contrivances?

STREPSIADES: What is it? Pray tell me.

FIRST DISCIPLE: Xaerephon, of the deme of Sphettia, asked him whether he thought a gnat buzzed through its [nose] or through its [ass].

STREPSIADES: And what did he say about the gnat?

FIRST DISCIPLE: He said that the gut of the gnat was narrow, and that, in passing through this tiny passage, the air is driven with force towards the breech; then after this slender channel, it encountered the rump, which was distended like a trumpet, and there it resounded sonorously.

STREPSIADES: So the ass of a gnat is a trumpet. Oh, what a splendid *ass*-evation! Thrice happy Sokrates! It would not be difficult to succeed in a law-suit, knowing so much about a gnat's guts!

FIRST DISCIPLE: Not long ago a lizard caused him the loss of a sublime thought.

STREPSIADES: In what way?

FIRST DISCIPLE: One night, when he was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard [shat] upon him from the top of the roof.

STREPSIADES: A lizard [shitting] on Sokrates! That's rich!

FIRST DISCIPLE: Last night we had nothing to eat.

STREPSIADES: Well, what did he contrive to secure you some supper?

FIRST DISCIPLE: He spread over the table a light layer of [ash], [while] bending a [skewer]. Then he [picked] up a "compass" and at the same moment, and unhooked [the coat] of the victim which was hanging in the *palaestra*.¹⁰

STREPSIADES: And we still dare to admire Thales!¹¹ Open, open this home of knowledge to me quickly! Haste, haste to show me Sokrates; I long to become his disciple. But do please open the door.

¹⁰ The meaning of this passage turns on the double entendre of the word 'compass' (Gk., *diabetes*) which refers to both the mathematical instrument as well as a submissive gay man. Basically, Sokrates distracted his target, then stole his coat and wallet. A *palestra* is a place where wrestling was practiced.

(The door opens, revealing the interior of The Think Shop, in which the disciples of Sokrates are seen in various postures of meditation and study; they are pale and emaciated creatures.)

Ah, by Herakles! What country are those animals from?

FIRST DISCIPLE: Why, what are you astonished at? What do you think they resemble?

STREPSIADES: The captives of Pylos.¹² But why do they look so fixedly on the ground?

FIRST DISCIPLE: They are seeking for what is below the [earth].

STREPSIADES: [I get it]! They're looking for onions. Do not give yourselves so much trouble; I know where there are some, fine big ones. But what are those fellows doing, bent all double?

FIRST DISCIPLE: They are sounding the abysses of Tartaros.¹³

STREPSIADES: And what are their [asses] looking at in the heavens?

FIRST DISCIPLE: They are studying astronomy on their own account. But come in so that the master may not find us here.

STREPSIADES: Not yet; not yet; let them not change their position. I want to tell them my own little matter.

FIRST DISCIPLE: But they may not stay too long in the open air and away from school.

STREPSIADES: *(pointing to a celestial globe)* In the name of all the gods, what is that? Tell me.

FIRST DISCIPLE: That is astronomy.

STREPSIADES: *(pointing to a map)* And that?

FIRST DISCIPLE: Geometry.

STREPSIADES: What is that used for?

FIRST DISCIPLE: To measure the land.

STREPSIADES: But that is apportioned by lot.¹⁴

FIRST DISCIPLE: No, no, I mean the entire earth.

STREPSIADES: Ah! what a funny thing! How generally useful indeed is this invention!

FIRST DISCIPLE: There is the whole surface of the earth. Look! Here is Athens.

¹¹ Thales of Meletos, first philosopher in the Western Tradition, and one of the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece.

¹² The battle of Pylos (425 BCE) was a major victory for Athens over Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. 420 Spartan soldiers were captured, including 120 of the Spartan elite—the Spartiate, or *homoioi*.

¹³ The outer darkness. The nearly infinite chasm beneath Hades.

¹⁴ A reference to the practice of the Athenian polis to give land seized from other cities that opposed their political ambition to their own citizens for colonization.

STREPSIADES: Athens? You are mistaken; I see no courts in session.

FIRST DISCIPLE: Nevertheless it is really and truly the Attic territory.

STREPSIADES: And where are my neighbors of Kikunna?

FIRST DISCIPLE: They live here. This is Euboea; you see this island, that is so long and narrow.

STREPSIADES: I know. Because we and Perikles have stretched it by dint of squeezing it. And where is Lacedaemon?¹⁵

FIRST DISCIPLE: Lacedaemon?¹⁶ Why, here it is, look.

STREPSIADES: How near it is to us! Think it well over, it must be removed to a greater distance.

FIRST DISCIPLE: But, by Zeus, that is not possible.

STREPSIADES: Then, woe to you, and who is this man suspended up in a basket?

FIRST DISCIPLE: That's *himself*.

STREPSIADES: Who's himself?

FIRST DISCIPLE: Sokrates.

STREPSIADES: Sokrates! Oh! I pray you, call him right loudly for me.

FIRST DISCIPLE: Call him yourself; I have no time to waste.

(Exit First Disciple, Enter Sokrates in a basket suspended above the floor)

STREPSIADES: Sokrates, my little Sokrates!

SOKRATES: Mortal, what do you want with me?

STREPSIADES: First, what are you doing up there? Tell me, I beseech you.

SOKRATES: I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

STREPSIADES: Thus it's not on the solid ground, but from the height of this basket, that you slight the gods, if indeed...

SOKRATES: I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle essence of my mind with this air, which is of the like nature, in order clearly to penetrate the things of heaven. I should have discovered nothing, had I remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth by its force attracts the sap of the mind to itself. It's just the same with the watercress.

¹⁵ A reference to the Athenian invasion of Euboea in 446 BCE.

¹⁶ The home territory of the polis of Sparta, the chief enemy of Athens in the Peloponnesian War.

STREPSIADES: What? Does the mind attract the sap of the watercress? Ah, my dear little Sokrates, come down to me! I have come to ask you for lessons.

SOKRATES: And for what lessons?

STREPSIADES: I want to learn [oratory]. I have borrowed money, and my merciless creditors do not leave me a moment's peace; all my goods are at stake.

SOKRATES: And how was it you did not see that you were getting so much into debt?

STREPSIADES: My ruin has been the madness for horses, a most rapacious evil; but teach me one of your two methods of reasoning, the one whose object is not to repay anything, and, may the gods bear witness, that I am ready to pay any fee you may name.

SOKRATES: By which gods will you swear? To begin with, the gods are not a [currency] with us.

STREPSIADES: But what do you swear by then? By the iron money of Byzantium?

SOKRATES: Do you really wish to know the truth of celestial matters?

STREPSIADES: Why, yes, if it's possible.

SOKRATES: ... and to converse with the clouds, who are our [demons]?¹⁷

STREPSIADES: Without a doubt.

SOKRATES: Then be seated on this sacred pallet.

STREPSIADES: I am seated.

SOKRATES: Now take this chaplet.¹⁸

STREPSIADES: Why a chaplet? Alas, Sokrates, would you sacrifice me, like Athamas?

SOKRATES: No, these are the rites of initiation.

STREPSIADES: And what is it I am to gain?

SOKRATES: You will become a thorough rattle-pate, a hardened old stager, the fine flour of the talkers...But come, keep quiet.

STREPSIADES: By Zeus! That's no lie! Soon I shall be nothing but wheat-flour, if you powder me in that fashion.

SOKRATES: Silence, old man, give heed to the prayers. Oh, most mighty king, the boundless air, that keepeth the earth suspended in space, thou bright Aether and ye venerable goddesses, the Clouds, who carry

¹⁷ The Classical Greek term *daimosin* carried no negative connotations. A demon was a minor deity, or demi-god.

¹⁸ A wreath, garland, or crown worn on the head for religious ceremonies, often associated with ritual sacrifice. The reference is probably to the now lost play *Athamas*, by Sophokles. Athamas was to be sacrificed by Zeus for the crimes of his wife, Nephele (i.e., the clouds).

in your loins the thunder and the lightning, arise, ye sovereign powers and manifest yourselves in the celestial spheres to the eyes of your sage.

STREPSIADES: Not yet! Wait a bit, till I fold my [coat], so as not to get wet. And to think that I did not even bring my travelling cap! What a misfortune!

SOKRATES: Come, oh! Clouds, whom I adore, come and show yourselves to this man, whether you be resting on the sacred summits of Olympus, crowned with hoar-frost, or tarrying in the gardens of Ocean, your father, forming sacred choruses with the Nymphs; whether you be gathering the waves of the Nile in golden vases or dwelling in the Maeotic marsh or on the snowy rocks of Mimas, hearken to my prayer and accept my offering. May these sacrifices be pleasing to you.

(Enter Chorus of Clouds)

CHORUS: (singing) Eternal Clouds, let us appear; let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.

SOKRATES: Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call! Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?

STREPSIADES: Oh, adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off my thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me. *(He farts.)* Faith; whether permitted or not, I must, I must [shit]!

SOKRATES: No scoffing; do not copy those damned comic poets. [Be quiet!] A numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.

CHORUS: (singing) Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Kekrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate ... What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, is to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and the serious melodies of the flute.

STREPSIADES: By Zeus! Tell me, Sokrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?

SOKRATES: Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.

STREPSIADES: Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.

SOKRATES: Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.

STREPSIADES: But where, where? Show them to me.

SOKRATES: They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.

STREPSIADES: Strange! I can see nothing.

SOKRATES: There, close to the entrance.

STREPSIADES: Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.

SOKRATES: You must see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with [mush] as thick as pumpkins.

STREPSIADES: Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.

SOKRATES: And you did not know, you never suspected, that they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES: No, indeed; I thought the Clouds were only fog, dew and vapor.

SOKRATES: But what you certainly do not know is that they are the support of a crowd of quacks, the diviners, who were sent to Thurium, the notorious physicians, the well-combed fops, who load their fingers with rings down to the nails, and the braggarts, who write dithyrambic verses, all these are idlers whom the Clouds provide a living for, because they sing them in their verses.

STREPSIADES: It is then for this that they praise "the rapid flight of the moist clouds, which veil the brightness of day" and "the waving locks of the hundred-headed Tupon"¹⁹ and "the impetuous tempests, which float through the heavens, like birds of prey with aerial wings loaded with mists" and "the rains, the dew, which the clouds outpour." As a reward for these fine phrases they bolt well-grown, tasty mullet and delicate thrushes.

SOKRATES: Yes, thanks to these. And is it not right and meet?

STREPSIADES: Tell me then why, if these really are the Clouds, they so very much resemble mortals. This is not their usual form.

SOKRATES: What are they like then?

STREPSIADES: I don't know exactly; well, they are like great packs of wool, but not like women-no, not in the least....And these have noses.

SOKRATES: Answer my questions.

STREPSIADES: Willingly! Go on, I am listening.

SOKRATES: Have you not sometimes seen clouds in the sky like a centaur, a leopard, a wolf or a bull?

STREPSIADES: Why, certainly I have, but what of that?

¹⁹ A mythical serpent from Hesiod's *Theogony*. The son of Gaia and Tartarus. One of the last titans to oppose Zeus.

SOKRATES: They take what metamorphosis they like. If they see a [libertine] with long flowing locks and hairy as a beast, like the son of Xenophantes,²⁰ they take the form of a Centaur in derision of his shameful passion.

STREPSIADES: And when they see Simon, that thief of public money, what do they do then?

SOKRATES: To picture him to the life, they turn at once into wolves.

STREPSIADES: So that was why yesterday, when they saw Kleonumos,²¹ who cast away his shield because he is the [the most cowardly coward] amongst men, they changed into deer.

SOKRATES: And to-day they have seen Klisthenes,²² you see ... they are women

STREPSIADES: Hail, sovereign goddesses, and if ever you have let your celestial voice be heard by mortal ears, speak to me, oh! speak to me, ye all-powerful queens.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Hail! veteran of the ancient times, you who burn to instruct yourself in fine language. And you, great high-priest of subtle nonsense, tell us; your desire. To you and Prodikos²³ alone of all the hollow orators of to-day have we lent an ear-to Prodikos, because of his knowledge and his great wisdom, and to you, because you walk with head erect, a confident look, barefooted, resigned to everything and proud of our protection.

STREPSIADES: Oh, Earth! What august utterances! How sacred! How wondrous!

SOKRATES: That is because these are the only goddesses; all the rest are pure myth.

STREPSIADES: But by the Earth! Is our father, Zeus, the Olympian, not a god?

SOKRATES: Zeus? What Zeus? Are you mad? There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES: What are you saying now? Who causes the rain to fall? Answer me that!

SOKRATES: Why, these, and I will prove it. Have you ever seen it raining without clouds? Let Zeus then cause rain with a clear sky and without their presence!

STREPSIADES: By Apollo! That is powerfully argued! For my own part, I always thought it was Zeus pissing into a sieve. But tell me, who is it makes the thunder, which I so much dread?

SOKRATES: These, when they roll one over the other.

STREPSIADES: But how can that be, you most daring among men?

²⁰ According to J. Henderson, he was probably a poet who was a dedicated pederast; hence the image of a centaur with the phallic exaggeration. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. *Aristophanes, vol. 2, Clouds, Wasps, Peace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 57, note 27.

²¹ Athenian general and politician who was regarded as a coward for “dropping” his shield at the Athenian defeat at the battle of Delium in 424 BCE. Henderson also states that he was obese. *Ibid.*, 59, note 29.

²² Again, according to Henderson, Klisthenes was a beardless man, and therefore considered effeminate. Not to be confused with Klisthenes of the Alkmaeonid clan, son of Agariste, and founder of the Athenian democracy. *Ibid.*

²³ Prodikos of Keios, a first generation sophist and famous orator.

SOKRATES: Being full of water, and forced to move along, they are of necessity precipitated in rain, being fully distended with moisture from the regions where they have been floating; hence they bump each other heavily and burst with great noise.

STREPSIADES: But is it not Zeus who forces them to move?

SOKRATES: Not at all; it's the aerial *Vortex*.²⁴

STREPSIADES: The Vortex? Ah! I did not know that. So Zeus, it seems, has no existence, and it's the Vortex that reigns in his stead? But you have not yet told me what makes the roll of the thunder?

SOKRATES: Have you not understood me then? I tell you, that the Clouds, when full of rain, bump against one another, and that, being inordinately swollen out, they burst with a great noise.

STREPSIADES: How can you make me credit that?

SOKRATES: Take yourself as an example. When you have heartily gorged on stew at the Panathenaea,²⁵ you get [pains] of stomach-ache, and then suddenly your belly resounds with prolonged rumbling.

STREPSIADES: Yes, yes, by Apollo I suffer, I get colic, then the stew sets to rumbling like thunder and finally bursts forth with a terrific noise. At first, it's but a little gurgling *pappax, pappax!* then it increases, *papapappax!* and when I take [a shit], why, it's thunder indeed, *papapappax! pappax!! papapappax!!!* Just like the clouds.

SOKRATES: Well then, reflect what a noise is produced by your belly, which is but small. Shall not the air, which is boundless, produce these mighty claps of thunder?

STREPSIADES: And this is why the names are so much alike: [fart] and [thunder]. But tell me this. Whence comes the lightning, the dazzling flame, which at times consumes the man it strikes, at others hardly sings him. Is it not plain, that Zeus is hurling it at the perjurers?

SOKRATES: Out upon the fool, the driveller; he still savors the Golden Age! If Zeus strikes at the perjurers, why has he not blasted Simon, Kleonumos and Theoros? Of a surety, greater perjurers cannot exist. No, he strikes his own temple, and Sunium, the promontory of Athens, and the towering oaks.²⁶ Now, why should he do that? An oak is no perjurer.

STREPSIADES: I cannot tell, but it seems to me well argued. What is the lightning then?

SOKRATES: When a dry wind ascends to the Clouds and gets shut into them, it blows them out like a bladder; finally, being too confined, it bursts them, escapes with fierce violence and a roar to flash into flame by reason of its own impetuosity.

STREPSIADES: Ah, that's just what happened to me one day. It was at the feast of Zeus! I was cooking a sow's belly for my family and I had forgotten to slit it open. It swelled out and, suddenly bursting, [splashing] itself right into my eyes and burnt my face.

²⁴ *Gk., dinos*, "whirl", or "void". From the atomist theory that everything is composed of atoms moving through an infinite void. Collisions of the eternally moving atoms cause larger and larger objects to be formed until we arrive at the kosmos as we perceive it. This reductivist and materialistic model does not require the traditional gods as causal forces in the universe.

²⁵ The "all" Athena festival held in Athens in which there was a great public feast.

²⁶ Oak trees were associated with Zeus.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Oh, mortal, you who desire to instruct yourself in our great wisdom, the Athenians, the Greeks will envy you your good fortune. Only you must have the memory and ardor for study, you must know how to stand the tests, hold your own, go forward without feeling fatigue, caring but little for food, abstaining from wine, gymnastic exercises and other similar follies, in fact, you must believe as every man of intellect should, that the greatest of all blessings is to live and think more clearly than the vulgar herd, to shine in the contests of words.

STREPSIADES: If it be a question of hardiness for labor, of spending whole nights at work, of living sparingly, of fighting my stomach and only eating chickpeas, rest assured, I am as hard as an anvil.

SOKRATES: Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods but Xaos, the Clouds, and the Tongue, these three alone.

STREPSIADES: I would not speak to the others, even if I met them in the street; not a single sacrifice, not a libation, not a grain of incense for them!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Tell us boldly then what you want of us; you cannot fail to succeed. If you honor and revere us and if you are resolved to become a clever man.

STREPSIADES: Oh, sovereign goddesses, it is only a very small favor that I ask of you; grant that I may outdistance all the Greeks by a hundred stadia in the art of [persuasive] speaking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: We grant you this, and henceforward no eloquence shall more often succeed with the people than your own.

STREPSIADES: May the gods shield me from possessing great eloquence! That's not what I want. I want to be able to turn [weak] law-suits to my own advantage and to slip through the fingers of my creditors.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: It shall be as you wish, for your ambitions are modest. Commit yourself fearlessly to our ministers, the sophists.

STREPSIADES: This I will do, for I trust in you. Moreover there is no drawing back, what with these cursed horses and this marriage, which has eaten up my [innerds]. So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to slip through any hole; supple as a [leather] strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain; a knave with a hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. With such epithets do I seek to be greeted; on these terms they can treat me as they choose, and, if they wish, by Demeter, they can turn me into sausages and serve me up to the philosophers.

CHORUS: (*singing*) Here have we a bold and well-disposed pupil indeed. When we have taught you, your glory among the mortals will reach even to the skies.

STREPSIADES: (*singing*) Wherein will that profit me?

CHORUS: (*singing*) You will pass your whole life among us and will be the most envied of men.

STREPSIADES: (*singing*) Shall I really ever see such happiness?

CHORUS: (*singing*) Clients will be everlastingly besieging your door in crowds, burning to get at you, to explain their business to you and to consult you about their suits, which, in return for your ability, will bring you in great sums.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: But, Sokrates, begin the lessons you want to teach this old man; rouse his mind, try the strength of his intelligence.

SOKRATES: Come, tell me the kind of mind you have; it's important that I know this, that I may order my [weapons] against you in the right fashion.

STREPSIADES: Eh, what in the name of the gods? Are you purposing to assault me then?

SOKRATES: No. I only wish to ask you some questions. Have you any memory?

STREPSIADES: That depends: if anything is owed [to] me, my memory is excellent. But if I owe, alas! I have none whatever.

SOKRATES: Have you a natural gift for speaking?

STREPSIADES: For speaking, no. For cheating, yes!

SOKRATES: How will you be able to learn then?

STREPSIADES: Very easily, have no fear.

SOKRATES: Thus, when I throw forth some philosophical thoughts and things celestial, you will seize them in their very flight?

STREPSIADES: Then I am to snap up wisdom much as a dog snaps up a [treat]?

SOKRATES: (*aside*) Oh, the ignoramus, the barbarian!

(*To Strepsiades*) I greatly fear, old man, it will be necessary for me to [beat you]. Now, let me hear what you do when you are beaten.

STREPSIADES: I receive the blow, then wait a moment, take my witnesses, and finally summon my lawyer.

SOKRATES: Come, take off your [coat].

STREPSIADES: Have I robbed you of anything?

SOKRATES: No, but the usual thing is to enter the school without your [coat].

STREPSIADES: But I have not come here to look for stolen goods.

SOKRATES: Off with it, fool!

STREPSIADES: Tell me, if I prove thoroughly attentive and learn with zeal, which of your disciples shall I resemble, do you think?

SOKRATES: You will be the image of Xaerephon.

STREPSIADES: Ah, unhappy me! Shall I then be only half alive?

SOKRATES: A truce to this chatter! Follow me and no more of it.

STREPSIADES: First give me a honey-cake, for to descend down there sets me all a-tremble; it looks like the cave of Trophonios.²⁷

SOKRATES: But get in with you! What reason have you for thus loitering at the door?

(Exit Sokrates and Strepsiates into the The Think Shop)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Good luck! You have courage; may you succeed, you, who, though already so advanced in years, wish to instruct your mind with new studies and practice it in wisdom!

(To the Audience)

Spectators! By Dionusos, whose servant I am, I will frankly tell you the truth. May I secure both victory and renown as certainly as I hold you for adept critics and as I regard this comedy as my best. I wished to give you the first view of a work, which had cost me much trouble, but which I withdrew, unjustly beaten by unskillful rivals. It is you, oh, enlightened public, for whom I have prepared my piece that I reproach with this.

Nevertheless I shall never willingly cease to seek the approval of the discerning. I have not forgotten the day, when men, whom one is happy to have for an audience, received my [*Virtuous Boy*] and my [*Naughty Boy*]²⁸ with so much favor in this very place. Then as yet virgin, my Muse had not attained the age for maternity; she had to expose her first-born for another to adopt, and it has since grown up under your generous patronage. Ever since you have as good as sworn me your faithful alliance.

Thus, like the Electra²⁹ of the poets, my comedy has come to seek you today, hoping again to encounter such enlightened spectators. As far away as she can discern her Orestes, she will be able to recognize him by his curly head. And note her modest demeanor! She has not sewn on a piece of hanging leather, thick and reddened at the end, to cause laughter among the children; she does not rail at the bald, neither does she dance the *kordax*; no old man is seen, who, while uttering his lines, batters his questioner with a stick to make his poor jests pass muster. She does not rush upon the scene carrying a torch and screaming, *'Iou! Iou!'* No, she relies upon herself and her verses. My value is so well known, that I take no further pride in it. I do not seek to deceive you, by reproducing the same subjects two or three times; I always invent fresh themes to present before you, themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever.

I attacked Kleon³⁰ to his face and when he was all-powerful; but he has fallen, and now I have no desire to kick him when he is down. My rivals, on the contrary, now that this wretched Hyperbolos³¹ has given them the cue, have never ceased setting upon both him and his mother. First Eupolis presented his Marikas; this was simply my Knights, whom this plagiarist had clumsily furbished up again by adding to the piece an old drunken woman, so that she might dance the cordax. It was an old idea, taken from Phrynichus, who caused his old hag to be devoured by a monster of the deep. Then Hermippos fell foul of Hyperbolos and now all the others fall upon him and repeat my comparison of

²⁷ Trophonios is the common name for a demigod that is associated with a chthonic (underworld) form of Zeus. Trophonios is also sometimes called “the nourish-er” and is associated with bees and bee-keeping.

²⁸ These are characters from an earlier play by Aristophanes. *The Good Boy* is the one who resists the sexual advances of an older man, *The Naughty Boy* is the one who eagerly gives in to his pederast.

²⁹ A famous mythological figure associated with vengeance.

³⁰ An Athenian general and politician, defender of the interests of the merchant class (though he himself was an aristocrat). Today he would be called a “hawk”.

³¹ An Athenian politician, thought to be a demagogue by Aristophanes, who came to prominence after the death of Kleon.

the eels. May those who find amusement in their pieces not be pleased with mine, but as for you, who love and applaud my inventions, why, posterity will praise your good taste.³²

CHORUS: (singing) Oh, ruler of Olympus, all-powerful king of the gods, great Zeus, it is thou whom I first invoke; protect this chorus; and thou too, Posidon, whose dread trident upheaves at the will of thy anger both the bowels of the earth and the salty waves of the ocean. I invoke my illustrious father, the divine Aether, the universal sustainer of life, and Phoebus, who, from the summit of his chariot, sets the world aflame with his dazzling rays, Phoebus, a mighty deity amongst the gods and adored amongst mortals.

CHORUS: Most wise spectators, lend us all your attention. Give heed to our just reproaches. There exist no gods to whom this city owes more than it does to us, whom alone you forget. Not a sacrifice, not a libation is there for those who protect you! Have you decreed some mad expedition? Well, we thunder or we fall down in rain. When you chose that enemy of heaven, the Paphlagonian tanner,³³ for a general, we knitted our brow, we caused our wrath to break out; the lightning shot forth, the thunder pealed, the moon deserted her course and the sun at once veiled his beam threatening, no longer to give you light, if Kleon became general. Nevertheless you elected him; it is said, Athens never resolves upon some fatal step but the gods turn these errors into her greatest gain. Do you wish that his election should even now be a success for you? It is a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Kleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight round his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity.

CHORUS: (singing) Aid me also, Phoebus, god of Delos,³⁴ who [rules] on the cragged peaks of Kunthia; and thou, happy virgin, to whom the Lydian damsels offer pompous sacrifice in a temple; of gold; and thou, goddess of our country, Athena, armed with the aegis, the protectress of Athens; and thou, who, surrounded by the bacchantes of Delphi; roamest over the rocks of Parnassus shaking the flame of thy resinous torch, thou, Dionusos, the god of revel and joy.

CHORUS: As we were preparing to come here, we were hailed by the Moon and were charged to wish joy and happiness both to the Athenians and to their allies; further, she said that she was enraged and that you treated her very shamefully, her, who does not pay you in words alone, but who renders you all real benefits. Firstly, thanks to her, you save at least a drachma each month for lights, for each, as he is leaving home at night, says, "Slave, buy no torches, for the moonlight is beautiful," - not to name a thousand other benefits. Nevertheless you do not reckon the days correctly and your calendar is naught but confusion. Consequently the gods load her with threats each time they get home and are disappointed of their meal, because the festival has not been kept in the regular order of time. When you should be sacrificing, you are putting to the torture or administering justice. And often, we others, the gods, are fasting in token of mourning for the death of Memnon or Sarpedon, while you are devoting yourselves to joyous libations. It is for this, that last year, when the lot would have invested Hyperbolus with the duty of Amphiktuon,³⁵ we took his crown from him, to teach him that time must be divided according to the phases of the moon.

(Enter Sokrates)

SOKRATES: By Respiration, the Breath of Life! By Chaos! By the Air! I have never seen a man so gross, so inept, so stupid, so forgetful. All the little quibbles, which I teach him, he forgets even before he has learnt them. Yet I will not give it up, I will make him come out here into the open air. Where are you, Strepsiades? Come, bring your bed out here.

³²This entire speech, given by the leader of the chorus, is the playwright breaking the fourth wall to speak directly to the judges of the play, pleading his case for why his plays have been underrated.

³³A reference to Kleon who was an Athenian general; he was considered by Aristophanes and Thucydides to be an anti-aristocratic (though he was from an aristocratic family) demagogue who bullied political opponents with informants and public accusations.

³⁴I.e., Apollo.

³⁵Mythical king of Thermopylae and Athens.

STREPSIADES: (*from within*) But the [bedbugs] will not allow me to bring it.

SOKRATES: Have done with such nonsense; place it there and pay attention.

(*Enter Strepsiades carrying a pallet*)

STREPSIADES: Well, here I am.

SOKRATES: Good! Which science of all those you have never been taught, do you wish to learn first? The measures, the rhythms or the verses?

STREPSIADES: Why, the measures; the flour dealer cheated me out of two *xoinix*³⁶ the other day.

SOKRATES: It's not about that I ask you, but which, according to you, is the best measure, the [three meter verse] or the [four meter verse]?

STREPSIADES: The one I prefer is the [gallon].³⁷

SOKRATES: You talk nonsense, my good fellow.

STREPSIADES: I will wager your tetrameter *is* the [gallon].

SOKRATES: Plague seize the dunce and the fool! Come, perhaps you will learn the rhythms quicker.

STREPSIADES: Will the rhythms supply me with food?

SOKRATES: First they will help you to be pleasant in company, then to know what is meant by enhoplion rhythm and what by the dactylic.³⁸

STREPSIADES: Of the dactyl? I know that quite well.

SOKRATES: What is it then, other than this finger here?

STREPSIADES: Formerly, when a child, I used this one.

SOKRATES: You are as low-minded as you are stupid.

STREPSIADES: But, wretched man, I do not want to learn all this.

SOKRATES: Then what do you want to know?

STREPSIADES: Not that, not that, but the art of false reasoning.

SOKRATES: But you must first learn other things. Come, what are the male quadrupeds?

³⁶ A unit of volume equaling about two pints.

³⁷ Strepsiades is confusing measuring the meter of a poem with measuring the volume of a commodity. The Greek word *hemiekteo* doesn't translate well into English.

³⁸ Dactylic rhyme is the pattern in poetry when a long syllable is followed by two short syllables. The finger was used as a device to teach the idea. Again, Strepsiades is confusing the finger itself with the idea being expressed.

STREPSIADES: Oh! I know the males thoroughly. Do you take me for a fool then? The ram, the buck, the bull, the dog, the pigeon.

SOKRATES: Do you see what you are doing; is not the female pigeon called the same as the male?

STREPSIADES: How else? Come now!

SOKRATES: How else? With you then it's pigeon and pigeon!

STREPSIADES: That's right, by Posido, but what names do you want me to give them?

SOKRATES: Term the female pigeonette, and the male pigeon.

STREPSIADES: Pigeonette! Hah, by the Air! That's splendid; for that lesson bring out your bread-maker and I will fill him with flour to the brim.

SOKRATES: There you are wrong again; you make 'trough' masculine and it should be feminine.

STREPSIADES: What? if I say, *him*, do I make the 'trough' masculine?

SOKRATES: Assuredly! Would you not say *him* for Kleonymus?

STREPSIADES: Well?

SOKRATES: Then 'trough' is of the same gender as Kleonymus?

STREPSIADES: My good man! Kleonymus never had a bread-maker; he used a round mortar for the purpose. But come, tell me what I should say!

SOKRATES: For 'trough' you should say *her* as you would for Soktrate.

STREPSIADES: *Her?*

SOKRATES: In this manner you make it truly feminine.

STREPSIADES: That's it! *Her* for 'trough' and *her* for Kleonymus.

SOKRATES: Now I must teach you to distinguish the masculine proper names from those that are feminine.

STREPSIADES: Ah! I know the female names well.

SOKRATES: Name some then.

STREPSIADES: Lysilla, Philinna, Clitagora, Demetria.

SOKRATES: And what are masculine names?

STREPSIADES: They are countless—Philoxenus, Melesias, Amunias.

SOKRATES: But, wretched man, the last two are not masculine.

STREPSIADES: You do not count them as masculine?

SOKRATES: Not at all. If you met Amunias, how would you hail him?

STREPSIADES: How? Why, I should shout, "Hi, there, Amunias!"

SOKRATES: Do you see? It's a *feminine* name that you give him.

STREPSIADES: And is it not rightly done, since he refuses military service? But what use is there in learning what we all know?

SOKRATES: You know nothing about it. Come, lie down there.

STREPSIADES: What for?

SOKRATES: Ponder awhile over matters that interest you.

STREPSIADES: Oh! I pray you, not there but, if I must lie down and ponder, let me lie on the ground.

SOKRATES: That's out of the question. Come, on the pallet!

STREPSIADES: What cruel fate! What a torture the [bedbugs] will this day put me to!

CHORUS: (*singing*) Ponder and examine closely, gather your thoughts together, let your mind turn to every side of things; if you meet with a difficulty, spring quickly to some other idea; above all, keep your eyes away from all gentle sleep.

STREPSIADES: (*singing*) Oh, woe, woe, woe is me!

CHORUS: (*singing*) What ails you? why do you cry so?

STREPSIADES: Oh! I am a dead man! Here are these cursed Korinthians³⁹ advancing upon me from all corners of the pallet; they are biting me, they are gnawing at my sides, they are drinking all my blood, they are yanking off my balls, they are digging into my ass, they are killing me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Not so much wailing and clamor, if you please.

STREPSIADES: How can I obey? I have lost my money and my complexion, my blood and my slippers, and to cap my misery, I must keep awake on this pallet, when scarce a breath of life is left in me.

SOKRATES: Well now, what are you doing? Are you reflecting?

STREPSIADES: Yes, by Posidon!

SOKRATES: What about?

STREPSIADES: Whether the [bedbugs] will entirely devour me.

SOKRATES: May death seize you, accursed man!

³⁹ The polis of Korinth was an ally of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War.

STREPSIADES: Ah it has already.

SOKRATES: Come, no giving way! Cover up your head; the thing to do is to find an ingenious alternative.

STREPSIADES: An alternative, ah! I only wish one would come to me from within these [sheets]! *(Pause)*

SOKRATES: Wait! Let us see what our fellow is doing! [Hey], are you asleep?

STREPSIADES: No, by Apollo!

SOKRATES: Have you got hold of anything?

STREPSIADES: No, nothing whatever.

SOKRATES: Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES: No, nothing except my [dick], which I've got in my hand.

SOKRATES: Aren't you going to cover your head immediately and ponder?

STREPSIADES: On what? Come, Sokrates, tell me.

SOKRATES: Think first what you want, and then tell me.

STREPSIADES: But I have told you a thousand times what I want. Not to pay any of my creditors.

SOKRATES: Come, wrap yourself up; concentrate your mind, which wanders to lightly; study every detail, scheme and examine thoroughly.

STREPSIADES: Alas! Alas!

SOKRATES: Keep still, and if any notion troubles you, put it quickly aside, then resume it and think over it again.

STREPSIADES: My dear little Sokrates!

SOKRATES: What is it, old man?

STREPSIADES: I have a scheme for not paying my debts.

SOKRATES: Let us hear it.

STREPSIADES: Tell me, if I purchased a Thessalian witch, I could make the moon descend during the night and shut it, like a mirror, into a round box and there keep it carefully...

SOKRATES: How would you gain by that?

STREPSIADES: How? Why, if the moon did not rise, I would have no interest to pay.

SOKRATES: Why so?

STREPSIADES: Because money is lent by the month.

SOKRATES: Good! But I am going to propose another trick to you. If you were condemned to pay five talents, how would you manage to quash that verdict? Tell me.

STREPSIADES: How? How? I don't know, I must think.

SOKRATES: Do you always shut your thoughts within yourself? Let your ideas fly in the air, like a mayfly, tied by the foot with a thread.

STREPSIADES: I have found a very clever way to annul that conviction; you will admit that much yourself.

SOKRATES: What is it?

STREPSIADES: Have you ever seen a beautiful, transparent stone at the pharmacy, with which you may kindle fire?

SOKRATES: You mean a crystal lens.

STREPSIADES: That's right. Well, now if I placed myself with this stone in the sun and a long way off from the clerk, while he was writing out the conviction, I could make all the wax, upon which the words were written, melt.⁴⁰

SOKRATES: Well thought out, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES: Ah! I am delighted to have annulled the decree that was to cost me five talents.

SOKRATES: Come, take up this next question quickly.

STREPSIADES: Which?

SOKRATES: If, when summoned to court, you were in danger of losing your case for want of witnesses, how would you make the conviction fall upon your opponent?

STREPSIADES: That's very simple and easy.

SOKRATES: Let me hear.

STREPSIADES: This way. If another case had to be pleaded before mine was called, I should run and hang myself.

SOKRATES: You talk rubbish!

STREPSIADES: Not so, by the gods! If I were dead, no action could lie against me.

SOKRATES: You are merely beating the air. Get out! I will give you no more lessons.

STREPSIADES: Why not? Oh! Sokrates, in the name of the gods!

⁴⁰ The Greeks, like the Romans, used wax tablets for writing things down.

SOKRATES: But you forget as fast as you learn. Come, what was the thing I taught you first? Tell me.

STREPSIADES: [Umm], let me see. What was the first thing? What was it then? [Oh], that thing in which we knead the bread, oh my god, what do you call it?

SOKRATES: Plague take the most forgetful and silliest of old [puddingheads]!

STREPSIADES: Alas, what a calamity! What will become of me? I am undone if I do not learn how to ply my tongue. Oh Clouds, give me good advice.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Old man, we counsel you, if you have brought up a son, to send him to learn in your stead.

STREPSIADES: Undoubtedly I have a son, as well endowed as the best, but he is unwilling to learn. What will become of me?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: And you don't make him obey you?

STREPSIADES: You see, he is big and strong; moreover, through his mother he is a descendant of those fine birds, the race of Koesura. Nevertheless, I will go and find him, and if he refuses, I will turn him out of the house. Go in, Sokrates, and wait for me awhile.

(Exit Sokrates into the The Think Shop, Exit Strepsiades into his own house)

CHORUS: *(singing)* Do you understand, Sokrates, that thanks to us you will be loaded with benefits? Here is a man, ready to obey you in all things. You see how he is carried away with admiration and enthusiasm. Profit by it to clip him as short as possible; fine chances are all too quickly gone.

(Enter Strepsiades and Phidippides from the house)

STREPSIADES: No, by the Clouds! You stay here no longer; go and devour the ruins of your uncle Megakles' fortune.

PHIDIPPIDES: Oh my poor father! What has happened to you? By the Olympian Zeus! You are no longer in your senses!

STREPSIADES: [Ha]! "The Olympian Zeus." Oh, you fool! To believe in Zeus at your age!

PHIDIPPIDES: What is there in that to make you laugh?

STREPSIADES: You are then a tiny little child, if you credit such antiquated rubbish! But come here, that I may teach you; I will tell you something very necessary to know to be a man; but do not repeat it to anybody.

PHIDIPPIDES: Tell me, what is it?

STREPSIADES: Just now you swore by Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES: Sure I did.

STREPSIADES: Do you see how good it is to learn? Phidippides, there is no Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES: What is there then?

STREPSIADES: The *Vortex* has driven out Zeus and is King now.⁴¹

PHIDIPPIDES: What drive!

STREPSIADES: You must realize that it is true.

PHIDIPPIDES: And who says so?

STREPSIADES: Sokrates, the Melian, and Xaerephon, who knows how to measure the jump of a flea.

PHIDIPPIDES: Have you reached such a pitch of madness that you believe those bilious fellows?

STREPSIADES: Use better language, and do not insult men who are clever and full of wisdom, who, to economize, never shave, shun the gymnasia and never go to the baths, while you, you only await my death to eat up my wealth. But come, come as quickly as you can to learn in my stead.

PHIDIPPIDES: And what good can be learnt of them?

STREPSIADES: What good indeed? Why, all human knowledge. Firstly, you will know yourself grossly ignorant. But await me here awhile.

(Exit Strepsiades into the house)

PHIDIPPIDES:

Alas! what is to be done? Father has lost his [mind]. Must I have him certificated for [insanity], or must I order his coffin?

(Enter Strepsiades with a bird in each hand)

STREPSIADES: Come, what kind of bird is this? Tell me.

PHIDIPPIDES: A pigeon.

STREPSIADES: Good! And this female?

PHIDIPPIDES: A pigeon.

STREPSIADES: The same for both? You make me laugh! In the future you must call this one a *pigeonnette* and the other a pigeon.

PHIDIPPIDES: A *pigeonnette*! These then are the fine things you have just learnt at the school of these sons of Earth!

STREPSIADES: And many others; but what I learnt I forgot at once, because I am to old.

PHIDIPPIDES: So this is why you have lost your cloak?

⁴¹ According to Hesiod, Zeus became king by overthrowing his father, Kronos, who had overthrown his father before him. So now, Strepsiades is claiming that Zeus has been overthrown by Vortex.

STREPSIADES: I have not lost it, I have consecrated it to Philosophy.

PHIDIPPIDES: And what have you done with your sandals, you poor fool?

STREPSIADES: If I have lost them, it is for what was necessary, just as Perikles did. But come, move yourself, let us go in; if necessary, do wrong to obey your father. When you were six years old and still lisped, I was the one who obeyed you. I remember at the feasts of Zeus you had a consuming wish for a little chariot and I bought it for you with the first *obol* which I received as a juryman in the courts.

PHIDIPPIDES: You will soon [regret] what you ask me to do.

STREPSIADES: Oh, now I am happy! He obeys. Come, Sokrates, come! Come out quick! Here I am bringing you my son; he refused, but I have persuaded him.

SOKRATES: Why, he is but a child yet. He is not used to these baskets, in which we suspend our minds.

PHIDIPPIDES: To make you better used to them, I [wish] *you* were hung.

STREPSIADES: A curse upon you, you insult your master!

SOKRATES: "I [wish] you were hung!" What a stupid speech; and so emphatically spoken! How can one ever get out of an accusation with such a tone, summon witnesses or touch or convince? And yet when we think, Hyperbolus learnt all this for one *talent*!⁴²

STREPSIADES: Rest undisturbed and teach him. He has a most intelligent nature. Even when quite little he amused himself at home with making houses, carving boats, constructing little chariots of leather, and understood wonderfully how to make frogs out of pomegranate rinds. Teach him both methods of reasoning, the strong and also the weak, which by false arguments triumphs over the strong; if not the two, at least the false, and that in every possible way.

SOKRATES: Good and Bad Logic themselves shall instruct him. I shall leave you.

STREPSIADES: But forget it not, he must always, *always* be able to [defeat the Good Logic].

(Exit Sokrates into The Think Shop; Enter Good and the Bad Logic quarrelling violently)

GOOD LOGIC: Come here! Shameless as you may be, will you dare to show your face to the spectators?

BAD LOGIC: Take me where you will. I seek a throng, so that I may the better annihilate you.

GOOD LOGIC: Annihilate me! Do you forget who you are?

BAD LOGIC: I am Reasoning.

GOOD LOGIC: Yes, the weaker Reasoning.

BAD LOGIC: [Yet] I triumph over you, who claim to be the stronger.

GOOD LOGIC: By what cunning [moves], pray [tell]?

⁴² A *talanton* or "talent" was the unit of weight of silver currency with the highest value in Athenian society.

BAD LOGIC: By the invention of new maxims.

GOOD LOGIC: ... which are received with favor by these fools.

BAD LOGIC: Say rather, by these *wise* men.

GOOD LOGIC: I am going to destroy you mercilessly.

BAD LOGIC: How? Let us see you do it.

GOOD LOGIC: By saying what is true.

BAD LOGIC: I shall retort and shall very soon have the better of you. First, maintain that justice has no existence.

GOOD LOGIC: Has no existence?

BAD LOGIC: No existence! Why, where is it?

GOOD LOGIC: With the gods.

BAD LOGIC: How then, if justice exists, was Zeus not put to death for having put his father in chains?

GOOD LOGIC: Bah, this is enough to turn my stomach! A toilet, quick!

BAD LOGIC: You are an incompetent old fool and an idiot.

GOOD LOGIC: And you are a shameless asshole!

BAD LOGIC: Hah! What sweet expressions!

GOOD LOGIC: An impious buffoon.

BAD LOGIC: You crown me with roses and with lilies.

GOOD LOGIC: A parricide.

BAD LOGIC: Why, you shower gold upon me.

GOOD LOGIC: Formerly it was a hailstorm of blows.

BAD LOGIC: I deck myself with your abuse.

GOOD LOGIC: What impudence!

BAD LOGIC: What tomfoolery!

GOOD LOGIC: It is because of you that the youth no longer attends the schools. The Athenians will soon recognize what lessons you teach those who are fools enough to believe you.

BAD LOGIC: You are overwhelmed with wretchedness.

GOOD LOGIC: And you, you prosper. Yet you were poor when you said, "I am the Musian Telephos,"⁴³ and used to stuff your wallet with maxims of Pandeletos⁴⁴ to nibble at.

BAD LOGIC: Oh, the beautiful wisdom, of which you are now boasting!

GOOD LOGIC: Madman! But yet madder the city that keeps you, you, the corrupter of its youth!

BAD LOGIC: It is not you who will teach this young man; you are as old and out of date as Kronos.

GOOD LOGIC: Nay, it will certainly be I, if he does not wish to be lost and to practice verbosity only.

BAD LOGIC: (to Phiddipides) Come here and leave him to beat the air.

GOOD LOGIC: You'll regret it, if you touch him.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: A truce to your quarrellings and abuse! But you expound what you taught us formerly, and you, your new doctrine. Thus, after hearing each of you argue, he will be able to choose [between] the two [methods of argument].

GOOD LOGIC: I am quite agreeable.

BAD LOGIC: And I too.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Who is to speak first?

BAD LOGIC: Let it be my opponent, he has my full consent; then I shall follow upon the very ground he shall have chosen and shall shatter him with a hail of new ideas and subtle fancies; if after that he dares to breathe another word, I shall sting him in the face and in the eyes with our maxims, which are as keen as the sting of a wasp, and he will die.

CHORUS: (singing) Here are two rivals confident in their powers of oratory and in the thoughts over which they have pondered so long. Let us see which will come triumphant out of the contest. This wisdom, for which my friends maintain such a persistent fight, is in great danger.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Come then, you, who crowned men of other days with so many virtues, plead the cause dear to you, make yourself known to us.

GOOD LOGIC: Very well, I will tell you what was the old education, when I used to teach justice with so much success and when modesty was held in veneration. Firstly, it was required of a child, that it should not utter a word. In the street, when they went to the music-school, all the youths of the same district marched lightly clad and ranged in good order, even when the snow was falling in great flakes. At the master's house they had to stand with their legs apart, and they were taught to sing either, "Pallas, the Terrible, who Overturneth Cities," or "A Noise Resounded from Afar" in the solemn tones of the ancient harmony. If anyone indulged in [silliness] or lent his voice any of the soft inflexions, like those which today the disciples of Phrunis take so much pains to form, he was treated as an enemy of the Muses and [beaten]. In the wrestling school they would sit with outstretched legs and without display of any indecency to the curious. When they rose, they would smooth over the sand, so as to leave no trace to excite obscene thoughts. Never was a child rubbed with oil below the belt; the rest of their bodies thus retained its fresh bloom and down, like a velvety peach. They were not to be seen approaching a lover and

⁴³ Telephos was the son of Herakles, and was wounded, and later healed by, Axilles.

⁴⁴ According to Henderson, he was a character in Euripides' play, Telephos, who hid his true identity in order to defend himself in a legal action. Cf., Henderson, 137, note 65.

themselves rousing his passion [with effeminate speech] and lustful gaze. At table, they would not have dared, before those older than themselves, to have taken a radish, an aniseed or a leaf of parsley, and much less eat fish or thrushes, or cross their legs.

BAD LOGIC: What antiquated rubbish! Have we [gone] back to the days of the festivals of Zeus Polieos, to the Buphonia, to the time of the poet Kedeidos and the golden cicadas?

GOOD LOGIC: Nevertheless by such teaching I built up the men of Marathon. But you, you teach the children of to-day to bundle themselves quickly into their clothes, and I am enraged when I see them at the Panathenaea forgetting Athena while they dance, and covering their dicks with their [shields]. Hence, young man, dare to range yourself beside me, who follow justice and truth; you will then be able to shun the public place, to refrain from the baths, to blush at all that is shameful, to fire up if your virtue is mocked, to give place to your elders, to honor your parents; in short, to avoid all that is evil. Be modesty itself, and do not run to applaud the dancing girls; if you delight in such scenes, some [prostitute] will cast you her apple and your reputation will be done for. Do not [argue] with your father, nor treat him as a [fool], nor reproach the old man, who has cherished you, with his age.

BAD LOGIC: If you listen to him, by Dionusos, you will be the image of the sons of Hippocrates and will be called [a “mamma’s boy].

GOOD LOGIC: No, but you will pass your days at the gymnasia, glowing with strength and health; you will not go to the public place to cackle and wrangle as is done nowadays; you will not live in fear that you may be dragged before the courts for some trifle exaggerated by quibbling. But you will go down to the Academy to run beneath the sacred olives with some virtuous friend of your own age, your head encircled with the white reed, enjoying your ease and breathing the perfume of the yew and of the fresh sprouts of the poplar, rejoicing in the return of springtide and gladly listening to the gentle rustle of the plane tree and the elm. If you devote yourself to practicing my precepts, your chest will be stout, your color glowing, your shoulders broad, your tongue short, your hips muscular, but your tool small. But if you follow the fashions of the day, you will be pallid in hue, have narrow shoulders, a narrow chest, a long tongue, small hips and a big thing; you will know how to spin forth long-winded arguments on law. You will be persuaded also to regard as splendid everything that is shameful and as shameful everything that is honorable; in a word, you will wallow in [homosexuality] like Antimaxos.

CHORUS: (*singing*) How beautiful, high-souled, brilliant is this wisdom that you practice! What a sweet odor of honesty is emitted by your discourse! Happy were those men of other days who lived when you were honored! And you, seductive talker, come, find some fresh arguments, for your rival has done wonders.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: You will have to bring out against him all the battery of your wit, if you desire to beat him and not to be laughed out of court.

BAD LOGIC: At last! I was choking with impatience, I was burning to upset his arguments! If I am called the Bad Logic in the schools, it is just because I was the first to discover the means to [confuse] the laws and the decrees of justice. To invoke solely the Bad Logic and yet triumph is an art worth more than a hundred thousand drachmae. But see how I shall batter down the sort of education of which he is so proud. Firstly, he forbids you to bathe in hot water. What grounds have you for condemning hot baths?

GOOD LOGIC: Because they [make] men [weak].

BAD LOGIC: Enough said! Oh! you poor wrestler! From the very outset I have seized you and hold you round the middle; you cannot escape me. Tell me, of all the sons of Zeus, who had the stoutest heart, who performed the most [manly] deeds?

GOOD LOGIC: None, in my opinion, surpassed Herakles.

BAD LOGIC: Where have you ever seen cold [springs] called 'Bath of Herakles'? And yet who was braver than he?

GOOD LOGIC: It is because of such quibbles, that the [public] baths are seen crowded with young folk, who chatter there the livelong day while the gymnasia remain empty.

BAD LOGIC: Next you condemn the habit of frequenting the market-place, while I approve this. If it were wrong Homer would never have made Nestor speak in public as well as all his wise heroes. As for the art of speaking, he tells you, young men should not practice it; I hold the contrary. Furthermore he preaches chastity to them! Both precepts are equally harmful. Have you ever seen chastity of any use to anyone? Answer and try to confute me.

GOOD LOGIC: To many; for instance, Peleus won a sword thereby.

BAD LOGIC: A sword! Ah, what a fine present to make him! Poor wretch! Hyperbolos, the lamp-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than ... [I] do not know how many talents, but certainly no *sword*.

GOOD LOGIC: Peleus owed it to his chastity that he became the husband of Thetis.

BAD LOGIC: ... who left him in the lurch, for he was not the most [eager] in those nocturnal sports between the sheets, which so please women, he possessed little [talent]. Get you gone, you are but an old fool. But you, young man, just consider a little what this temperance means and the delights of which it deprives you-young fellows, women, play, dainty dishes, wine, boisterous laughter. And what is life worth without these? Then, if you happen to commit one of these faults inherent in human weakness, some seduction or adultery, and you are caught in the act, you are lost, if you cannot speak [well]. But follow my teaching and you will be able to satisfy your passions, to dance, to laugh, to blush at nothing. Suppose you are caught in the act of adultery. Then up and tell the husband you are not guilty, and recall to him the example of Zeus, who allowed himself to be conquered by love and by women. Being but a mortal, can you be stronger than a god?

GOOD LOGIC: Suppose your pupil, following your advice, gets the radish rammed up his ass and then is depilated with a hot coal;⁴⁵ how are you going to prove to him that he is not a [twink]?

BAD LOGIC: What's the matter with being a [twink]?

GOOD LOGIC: Is there anything worse than that?

BAD LOGIC: Now what will you say, if I beat you even on this point?

GOOD LOGIC: I should certainly have to be silent then.

BAD LOGIC: Well then, reply! Our [orators], what are they?

GOOD LOGIC: Sons of [twinks].

BAD LOGIC: Nothing is more true. And our tragic poets?

GOOD LOGIC: Sons of [twinks].

BAD LOGIC: Well said again. And our demagogues?

⁴⁵ This was a punishment that could befall someone convicted of adultery.

GOOD LOGIC: Sons of [twinks].

BAD LOGIC: You admit that you have spoken nonsense. And the spectators, what are they for the most part? Look at them.

GOOD LOGIC: I am looking at them.

BAD LOGIC: Well! What do you see?

GOOD LOGIC: By the gods, they are nearly all [twinks]. See, this one I know to be such, and that one, and that other [one] with the long hair.

BAD LOGIC: What have you to say, then?

GOOD LOGIC: I am beaten. [Libertines], in the name of the gods, [take] my [coat]; I pass over to your ranks.

(Exit Good Logic into the Think Shop)

BAD LOGIC: Well then! Are you going to take away your son or do you wish me to teach him how to speak?

STREPSIADES: Teach him, chastise him and do not fail to sharpen his tongue well, on one side for petty law-suits and on the other for important cases.

BAD LOGIC: Don't worry, I shall return him to you an accomplished sophist.

PHIDIPPIDES: Very pale, then, and thoroughly hang-dog-looking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Take him with you.

(Exit Bad Logic and Phidippides into the Think Shop; exit StrepsiaDES into his own house) I think you will regret this.

(The CHORUS: turns and faces the audience)

Judges, we are all about to tell you what you will gain by awarding us the crown as equity requires of you. In spring, when you wish to give your fields the first dressing, we will rain upon you first; the others shall wait. Then we will watch over your corn and over your vinestocks; they will have no excess to fear, neither of heat nor of wet. But if a mortal dares to insult the goddesses of the Clouds, let him think of the ills we shall pour upon him. For him neither wine nor any harvest at all! Our terrible slings will mow down his young olive plants and his vines. If he is making bricks, it will rain, and our round hailstones will break the tiles of his roof. If he himself marries or any of his relations or friends, we shall cause rain to fall the whole night long. Verily, he would prefer to live in Egypt than to have given this iniquitous verdict.

(Enter StrepsiaDES)

STREPSIADES: Another four, three, two days, then the eve, then the day, the fatal day of payment! I tremble, I quake, I shudder, for it's the day of the old moon and the new. Then all my creditors take the oath, pay their deposits, I swear my downfall and my ruin. As for me, I beseech them to be reasonable, to be just, "My friend, do not demand this sum, wait a little for this other and give me time for this third one."

Then they will pretend that at this rate they will never be repaid, will accuse me of bad faith and will threaten me with the law.

Well then, let them sue me! I care nothing for that, if only Phidippides has learnt to speak fluently. I am going to find out; I'll knock at the door of the school [Hey], slave, slave!

(Enter Sokrates)

SOKRATES: Welcome! Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES: Welcome Sokrates! But first take this sack; it is right to reward the master with some present. And my son, whom you took off lately, has he learnt this famous reasoning? Tell me.

SOKRATES: He has learnt it.

STREPSIADES: Wonderful! Oh, divine [trickery]!

SOKRATES: You will win just as many [cases] as you choose.

STREPSIADES: Even if I have borrowed before witnesses?

SOKRATES: So much the better, even if there are a thousand of them!

STREPSIADES: *(singing)* Then I am going to shout with all my might:

Woe to the [bankers], woe to their capital, and their interest, and their compound interest! You shall play me no more bad turns. My son is being taught there, his tongue is being sharpened into a double-edged weapon; he is my defender, the savior of my house, the ruin of my foes! His poor father was crushed down with misfortune and he delivers him.

Go and call him to me quickly. Oh, my child, my dear little one! Run forward to your father's voice!

SOKRATES: *(singing)* [See], the man himself!

STREPSIADES: *(singing)* Oh, my friend, my dearest friend!

SOKRATES: *(singing)* Take your son, and get [going].

STREPSIADES: Oh, my son! Oh, what a pleasure to see your [pale complexion]! You are ready first to deny and then to contradict; it's as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, "What have you to say now?" How well you know, I am certain, to put on the look of a victim, when it is you who are making both victims and dupes! And what a truly Attic glance! Come, it's for you to save me, seeing it is you who have ruined me.

PHIDIPPIDES: What is it you fear then?

STREPSIADES: The day of the old and the new.

PHIDIPPIDES: Is there then a day of the old and the new?

STREPSIADES: The day on which they threaten to pay deposit against me.

PHIDIPPIDES: Then so much the worse for those who have deposited; for it's not possible for one day to be two.

STREPSIADES: What?

PHIDIPPIDES: Why, undoubtedly, unless a woman can be both old and young at the same time.

STREPSIADES: But so runs the law.

PHIDIPPIDES: I think the meaning of the law is quite misunderstood.

STREPSIADES: What does it mean?

PHIDIPPIDES: Old Solon⁴⁶ loved the people.

STREPSIADES: What has that to do with the old day and the new?

PHIDIPPIDES: He has fixed two days for the summons, the last day of the old moon, and the first day of the new; but the deposits must only be paid on the first day of the new moon.

STREPSIADES: And why did he also name the last day of the old?

PHIDIPPIDES: So, my dear sir, that the debtors, being there the day before, might free themselves by mutual agreement, or that if not, the creditor might begin his action on the morning of the new moon.

STREPSIADES: Why then do the magistrates have the deposits paid on the last of the month and not the next day?

PHIDIPPIDES: I think they do as the gluttons do, who are the first to pounce upon the dishes. Being eager to carry off these deposits, they have them paid in a day too soon.

STREPSIADES: Splendid! *(to the audience)* Ah, you poor brutes, who serve for food to us clever folk! You are only down here to swell the number, true blockheads, sheep for shearing, heap of empty pots! Hence I will sing a song of victory for my son and myself. "Oh! happy, Strepsiades, what cleverness is thine, and what a son thou hast here!" Thus, my friends and my neighbors will say, jealous at seeing me gain all my suits. But come in, I wish to regale you first.

(Exit Strepsiades and Phidippides, Enter Pasiás with his witness)

PASIAS: A man should never lend a single *obolos*. It would be better to put on a brazen face at the outset than to get entangled in such matters. I want to see my money again and I bring you here to-day to attest the loan. I am going to make a foe of a neighbor; but, as long as I live, I do not wish my country to have to blush for me. Come, I am going to summon Strepsiades...

(Enter Strepsiades)

STREPSIADES: Who is this?

PASIAS: ... for the old day and the new.

⁴⁶ The ancient Law-giver of Athens.

STREPSIADES: I call you to witness, that he has named two days. What do you want of me?

PASIAS: I claim of you the twelve *minae*, which you borrowed from me to buy the dapple-grey horse.

STREPSIADES: A horse; do you hear him? I, who detest horses, as is well known.

PASIAS: I call Zeus to witness, that you swore by the gods to return them to me.

STREPSIADES: Because at that time, by Zeus! Phidippides did not yet know the irrefutable argument.

PASIAS: Would you deny the debt on that account?

STREPSIADES: If not, what use is his [knowledge] to me?

PASIAS: Will you dare to swear by the gods that you owe me nothing?

STREPSIADES: By which gods?

PASIAS: By Zeus, Hermes, and Posidon!

STREPSIADES: Why, I would give three *obols* for the pleasure of swearing by them.

PASIAS: Woe upon you, impudent [thief]!

STREPSIADES: Oh, what a fine wine-skin you would make if flayed!

PASIAS: Heaven! He jeers at me!

STREPSIADES: It would hold six gallons easily.

PASIAS: By great Zeus! by all the gods, you shall not scoff at me with impunity,

STREPSIADES: Ah, how you amuse me with your gods! How ridiculous it seems to a sage to hear Zeus invoked.

PASIAS: Your blasphemies will one day meet their reward. But, come, will you repay me my money, yes or no? Answer me, that I may go.

STREPSIADES: Wait a moment, I am going to give you a distinct answer.

(He goes indoors and returns immediately with a bread-maker)

PASIAS: What do you think he will do? Do you think he will pay?

STREPSIADES: Where is the man who demands money? Tell me, what is this?

PASIAS: Him? Why, he is your bread-maker.

STREPSIADES: And you dare to demand money of me, when you are so ignorant? I will not return an *obolos* to anyone who says *him* instead of *her* for a bread-maker.

PASIAS: You will not repay?

STREPSIADES: Not if I know it. Come, an end to this, pack off as quick as you can.

PASIAS: I go, but may I die, if it be not to pay my deposit for a summons.

(Exit Pasias)

STREPSIADES: Very well! It will be so much more loss to add to the twelve *minae*. But truly it makes me sad, for I do pity a poor simpleton who says *him* for a bread-maker

(Enter Amunias)

AMUNIAS: Woe! Ah woe is me!

STREPSIADES: Wait, who is this whining fellow? Can it be one of the gods of Karkinos?

AMUNIAS: Do you want to know who I am? I am a man of misfortune!

STREPSIADES: Get on your way then.

AMUNIAS: Oh, cruel god! Oh Fate, who hast broken the wheels of my chariot! Oh, Pallas, thou hast undone me!

STREPSIADES: What ill has Tlepemos done you?

AMUNIAS: Instead of jeering me, friend, make your son return the money he [borrowed from] me; I am already unfortunate enough.

STREPSIADES: What money?

AMUNIAS: The money he borrowed.

STREPSIADES: You have indeed had misfortune, it seems to me.

AMUNIAS: Yes, by the gods! I have been thrown from a chariot.

STREPSIADES: Why then drivell as if you had fallen off an ass?

AMUNIAS: Am I drivelling because I demand my money?

STREPSIADES: No, no, you cannot be in your right senses.

AMUNIAS: Why?

STREPSIADES: No doubt your poor wits have had a shake.

AMUNIAS: But by Hermes! I will sue you in court, if you do not pay me.

STREPSIADES: Just tell me; do you think it is always fresh water that Zeus lets fall every time it rains, or is it always the same water that the sun pumps over the earth?

AMUNIAS: I neither know, nor care.

STREPSIADES: And actually you would claim the right to demand your money, when you know not an iota of these celestial phenomena?

AMUNIAS: If you are short, [at least] pay me the interest.

STREPSIADES: What kind of animal is interest?

AMUNIAS: What? Does not the sum borrowed go on growing, growing every month, each day as the time slips by?

STREPSIADES: Well put. But do you believe there is more water in the sea now, than there was formerly?

AMUNIAS: No, it's just the same quantity. It cannot increase.

STREPSIADES: Thus, poor fool, the sea, that receives the rivers, never grows, and yet you would have your money grow? Get you gone, away with you, quick! Slave, bring me the cattle-prod!

AMUNIAS: I have witnesses to this.

STREPSIADES: Come, what are you waiting for? Will you not budge, old goat!

AMUNIAS: What an insult!

STREPSIADES: Unless you start trotting, I shall catch you and stick this in your ass, you sorry packhorse!

(Exit Amunias)

Ah, you start, do you? I was about to drive you pretty fast, I tell you-you and your wheels and your chariot!

(Exit Strepsiades)

CHORUS: (*singing*) Whither does the passion of evil lead! Here is a perverse old man, who wants to cheat his creditors; but some mishap, which will speedily punish this rogue for his shameful schemes, cannot fail to overtake him from to-day. For a long time he has been burning to have his son know how to fight against all justice and right and to gain even the most iniquitous causes against his adversaries every one. I think this wish is going to be fulfilled. But [perhaps], [just perhaps], will he soon wish his son were dumb [instead]!

(Enter Strepsiades being chased by Phidippides)

STREPSIADES: Oh! Ouch! Neighbors, kinsmen, fellow-citizens, help! Help to the rescue, I am being beaten! Oh, my head! Oh! my jaw! Scoundrel! Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPPIDES: Yes, father, I do.

STREPSIADES: See! He admits he is beating me.

PHIDIPPIDES: Of course I do.

STREPSIADES: You villain, you ingrate, you [punk]!

PHIDIPPIDES: Go on, do your worst, call me a thousand other names, if it please you. The more you curse, the greater my amusement!

STREPSIADES: Oh! You little son-of-a-bitch!

PHIDIPPIDES: How fragrant the perfume breathed forth in your words.

STREPSIADES: Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPPIDES: Yes, by Zeus! And I am going to show you that I do right in beating you.

STREPSIADES: You little bastard! How can it be right to beat [your own] father?

PHIDIPPIDES: I will prove it to you, and you shall admit that you are beaten.

STREPSIADES: Admit that I am beaten on a point like this?

PHIDIPPIDES: It's the easiest thing in the world. Choose whichever of the two Logics you like.

STREPSIADES: Of which Logics?

PHIDIPPIDES: The Good or the Bad.

STREPSIADES: You little shit! Why, I am the one who had you taught how to refute what is right. And now you would persuade me it is right a son should beat his father.

PHIDIPPIDES: I think I shall convince you so thoroughly that, when you have heard me, you will not have a word to say.

STREPSIADES: Well, I am curious to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS: (*singing*) Consider well, old man, how you can best triumph over him. His brazenness shows me that he thinks himself sure of his case; he has some argument which gives him nerve. Note the confidence in his look!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: But how did the fight begin? Tell the Chorus; you cannot help doing that much.

STREPSIADES: I will tell you what was the start of the quarrel. At the end of the meal, as you know, I bade him take his lyre and sing me the air of Simonides, which tells of the fleece of the ram. He replied bluntly, that it was stupid, while drinking, to play the lyre and sing, like a woman when she is grinding barley.

PHIDIPPIDES: Why, by rights I ought to have beaten and kicked you the very moment you told me to sing.

STREPSIADES: That is just how he spoke to me in the house, furthermore he added, that Simonides was a detestable poet. However, I mastered myself and for a while said nothing. Then I said to him, "At least, take a myrtle branch and recite a passage from Aeschylus to me. "For my own part," he at once replied, "I look upon Aeschylus as the first of poets, for his verses roll superbly; they're nothing but incoherence,

bombast and turgidity." Yet still I smothered my wrath and said, "Then recite one of the famous pieces from the modern poets." Then he commenced a piece in which Euripides shows, oh, horror, a brother, who violates his own twin sister. Then I could not longer restrain myself, and attacked him with the most injurious abuse; naturally he retorted; hard words were hurled on both sides, and finally he sprang at me, broke my bones, bore me to Earth, strangled and started killing me!

PHIDIPPIDES: I was right. What, not praise Euripides, the greatest of our poets?

STREPSIADES: He the greatest of our poets? Ah, if I but dared to speak! But the blows would rain upon me harder than ever.

PHIDIPPIDES: Undoubtedly and rightly too.

STREPSIADES: Rightly! Oh, what impudence! To me, who brought you up, when you could hardly lisp, I guessed what you wanted. If you said "goo-goo," I brought you your milk; if you muttered, I gave you bread; and before you could even say, "outside," I took you outside and held you in the sunlight. And just now, when you were strangling me, I shouted, I bellowed that I was about to [shit]; and you, you scoundrel, had not the heart to take me outside, so that, though almost choking, I was compelled to do my [shitting] right there.

CHORUS: (*singing*) Young men, your hearts must be panting with impatience. What is Phidippides going to say? If, after such conduct, he proves he has done well, I would not give an *obolos* for the hide of old men.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: Come, you, who know how to brandish and hurl the keen shafts of the new science, find a way to convince us, give your language an appearance of truth.

PHIDIPPIDES: How pleasant it is to know these clever new inventions and to be able to defy the established laws! When I thought only about horses, I was not able to string three words together without a mistake, but now that the master has altered and improved me and that I live in this world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation, I count on being able to prove satisfactorily that I have done well to thrash my father.

STREPSIADES: Mount your horse! By Zeus! I would rather defray the keep of a four-in-hand team than be battered with blows.

PHIDIPPIDES: I revert to what I was saying when you interrupted me. And first, answer me, did you beat me in my childhood?

STREPSIADES: Why, assuredly, for your good and in your own best interest.

PHIDIPPIDES: Tell me, is it not right, that in turn I should beat you for your good, since it is for a man's own best interest to be beaten? What, must your body be free of blows, and not mine? Am I not free-born too, the children are to weep and the fathers go free? You will tell me, that according to the law, it is the lot of children to be beaten. But I reply that the old men are children twice over and that it is far more fitting to chastise them than the young, for there is less excuse for their faults.

STREPSIADES: But the law nowhere admits that fathers should be treated thus.

PHIDIPPIDES: Was not the legislator who carried this law a man like you and me? In those days he got men to believe him; then why should not I too have the right to establish for the future a new law, allowing children to beat their fathers in turn? We make you a present of all the blows which were received before his law, and admit that you thrashed us with impunity. But look how the cocks and other animals fight

with their fathers; and yet what difference is there [between] them and ourselves, unless it be that they do not propose decrees?

STREPSIADES: But if you imitate the cocks in all things, why don't you scratch up the dunghill, why don't you sleep on a perch?

PHIDIPPIDES: That has no bearing on the case, good father; Sokrates would find no connection, I assure you.

STREPSIADES: Then do not beat at all, for otherwise you have only yourself to blame afterwards.

PHIDIPPIDES: What for?

STREPSIADES: I have the right to chastise you, and you to chastise your son, if you have one.

PHIDIPPIDES: And if I have not, I shall have cried in vain, and you will die laughing in my face.

STREPSIADES: What say you, all here present? It seems to me that he is right, and I am of opinion that they should be accorded their right. If we think wrongly, it is but just we should be beaten.

PHIDIPPIDES: Again, consider this other point.

STREPSIADES: It will be the death of me.

PHIDIPPIDES: But you will certainly feel no more anger because of the blows I have given you.

STREPSIADES: Come, show me what profit I shall gain from it.

PHIDIPPIDES: I shall beat my mother just as I have you.

STREPSIADES: What do you say? What's that you say? Hah, this is far worse still.

PHIDIPPIDES: And what if I prove to you by our school reasoning, that one ought to beat one's mother?

STREPSIADES: Ah, if you do that, then you will only have to throw yourself, along with Sokrates and his reasoning, into [death row]. Oh, Clouds! All our troubles emanate from you, from you, to whom I entrusted myself, body and soul.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: No, you alone are the cause, because you have pursued the path of evil.

STREPSIADES: Why did you not say so then, instead of egging on a poor ignorant old man?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: We always act thus, when we see a man conceive a passion for what is evil; we strike him with some terrible disgrace, so that he may learn to fear the gods.

STREPSIADES: Alas, oh Clouds! That's hard indeed, but it's just! I ought not to have cheated my creditors ... But come, my dear son, come with me to take vengeance on this wretched Xaerephon and on Sokrates, who have deceived us both.

PHIDIPPIDES: I shall do nothing against our masters.

STREPSIADES: Oh show some reverence for ancestral Zeus!

PHIDIPPIDES: Mark him and his ancestral Zeus! What a fool you are! Does any such being as Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES: Why, assuredly.

PHIDIPPIDES: No, a thousand times no! The ruler of the world is the Vortex, that has unseated Zeus.

STREPSIADES: He has not dethroned him. I believed it, because of this [whirle] here. Unhappy wretch that I am! I have taken a piece of clay to be a god.

PHIDIPPIDES: Very well! Keep your stupid nonsense for your own consumption.

(Exit into Strepsiades' house.)

STREPSIADES: Oh, what madness! I had lost my reason when I threw over the gods through Sokrates' seductive phrases.

(Addressing the statue of Hermes)

Oh! good Hermes, do not destroy me in your wrath. Forgive me; their babbling had driven me crazy. Be my counselor. Shall I pursue them in court or shall I ...? Order and I obey. You are right, no law-suit; but up, let us burn down the home of those [tricksters]. Here, Xanthias, here! Take a ladder, come forth and arm yourself with an axe; now mount upon the *The Think Shop*, demolish the roof, if you love your master, and may the house fall in upon them. Ho! bring me a blazing torch! There is more than one of them, arch-impostors as they are, on whom I am determined to have vengeance.

FIRST DISCIPLE: *(from within)* Oh no!

STREPSIADES: Come, torch; do your duty! Burst into full flame!

FIRST DISCIPLE: What are you up to?

STREPSIADES: What am I up to? Why, I am entering upon a subtle argument with the beams of the house.

SECOND DISCIPLE: *(from within)* Hello! Hello, who is burning down our house?

STREPSIADES: The man whose [coat] you have appropriated.

SECOND DISCIPLE: You are killing us!

STREPSIADES: That is just exactly what I hope, unless my axe plays me false, or I fall and break my neck.

SOKRATES: *(appearing at the window)* Hey, you fellow on the roof, what are you doing up there?

STREPSIADES: *(in a mocking tone)* I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

SOKRATES: Ah, oh! woe is upon me! I am suffocating!

SECOND DISCIPLE: And I, alas, shall be burnt up!

STREPSIADES: Ah, you insulted the gods! You studied the face of the moon! Chase them, strike and beat them down! Forward, they have richly deserved their fate-above all, by reason of their blasphemies.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS: So let the Chorus file off the stage. Its part is played.