

ARISTOPHANES'
"CLOUDS"

(2nd version. 1st version, presented at the Great Dionysia of 423BC. 3rd Prize)

Translated
by
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

STREPSIADES

PHIDIPPIDES

(His son)

SLAVE OF STREPSIADES

SOCRATES

SOCRATES' STUDENTS

MR WISE

MR CLEVER

PASIAS

(First Creditor)

AMYNIAS

(Second Creditor)

CHORUS OF CLOUDS

(Females. Their masks include an exaggerated nose)

WITNESS FOR THE FIRST CREDITOR

(Silent)

XANTHIAS

(Strepsiades' slave)

ANOTHER SLAVE

(Silent)

The stage has two buildings, the one opposite the other.

At Stage Right is Strepsiades' house.

At Stage Left is Socrates' Think Tank, above the door of which is suspended a clay cup, inscribed with the word "Dinos." There is a sign on the building with the words "Think Tank" on it.

This building should be low enough to accommodate the final act (l.1485f) wherein Xanthias climbs upon its roof and sets it on fire. It should also have a low enough window for one of the students to jump through (l.1505)

In Strepsiades' house we see two beds upon which sleep Strepsiades and his son, Phidippides.

Outside the house stands a small statue of Hermes.

It is still before Dawn.

The sound of a rooster in the distance.

Short pause.

Phidippides snores and farts loudly, consistently and annoyingly.

In fact there's a "chorus" of farts and snores, since his slaves are also sleeping inside.

Strepsiades is having a hard time of it. Finally, after a great deal of tossing and turning, he sits up angrily.

Strepsiades:

Bugger it, bugger it, BUGGER it! Dear Lord Zeus! How long must this bloody night drag on? It's bloody endless! Come on, come on, dear, dear Dawn, hurry up!

I thought I heard the cock crow a while back but... look at that! The slaves are still at it! Snoring away!

Ha! They wouldn't be doing that in the olden days, that's for sure! Oh, no!

Curse this war! Curse you, war and curse my endless worries and curse these slaves of mine who I

can't even kick up the bum any more! Bastards might just run off and fight for the enemy!
And then, there's this useless bloody boy of mine who'd rather lie there all day, deep inside five blankets and fart to his heart's content!

Phidippides farts again. Strepsiades, in despair, throws his arm up in the air.

Oh, hell! What's the use! I might as well get under myself!

He lies down, covers himself and tries to sleep. In vain. He suddenly jumps up again in anger.

Nope! Bugger it, bugger it, BUGGER it! Oh, I just can't do it! I just can't do this any more!

From under his pillow he drags out a mess of bills.

Poor bastard, how can I? This son of mine has piled up on me a huge mountain of all sorts of bills – stable charges! Huge, huge debts! They're all eating me up inside! (*scratches himself*) And outside! Look at him! Long haired lout! It's all horses and chariots for him. Rides them and races them. Dreams about them! And I? I get torn apart with worry as I watch the months go by, the interest mounting up and the payments getting ever closer!

He calls into the house

Ey, Boy! Boy!

A slave enters, angry at having been rudely woken up.

Boy, go inside, light up a lamp and bring me my accounts books. I want to see what I owe and to whom. Tally up all the interest.

The slave obeys and soon the lamp is put on the ground beside Strepsiades and the books handed to him. The slave lies down near by.

Now let's see... What's this entry here? Twelve minas to Pasiass... Twelve minas to Pasiass? What on earth for? Why twelve? What did I do with all those minas? Ah, damn! That's right! I used them to buy that stupid donkey –I mean horse... pedigree, no less! Branded with the letter "K"! Damned fool that I was! I should have first K.O.ed my eye out with a rock!

Phidippides farts and starts talking in his sleep.

Phidippides:

Get out of it, Philon! Stop cheating, you bastard! Get into your own lane!

Strepsiades:

There it is! There you have it, folks! That's my curse! That's the curse that's destroyed me completely! Listen to him! Even in his sleep he dreams of his dear horses.

Phidippides: *still while asleep*

What about the war chariots? How many laps do they have to run?

Strepsiades:

Ha! Laps, ey? The number of laps you've made me run, son! Run like a madman I did!

Back to his books

Now, who's next after Pasiass? Let's see... Three minas to Amyntias. Ah, yes, the tiny little chair and the tiny little pair of wheels.

Phidippides: *again in his sleep*

Let the horse roll into the sand for a while first to dry its sweat and then take it home!

Strepsiades:

Ha! Roll, ey? Listen, boy! It's me you're rolling around, now! Rolling me right out of my own house and home!

Now, here I am, I've got a whole lot of lawsuits and the creditors want to seize all the collaterals!

Bloody interest!

Phidippides awakes angrily.

Phidippides:

What's the matter with you, dad? Go back to sleep and stop tossing and spinning around all bloody night!

Strepsiades:

I can't son! There's a bailiff acting the flea in my bed! It's been biting me on the bum all night!

Phidippides:

Will you, at least, let me get some sleep, please?

Strepsiades:

By all means, my darling. You go to sleep! *Louder* But remember, my fine young man: One day, all of these debts will fall upon your own little head!

Marriage! Curse that damned matchmaker that hooked me onto your mother! May she die a horrible death! Horrible, horrible death! There I was, having a blissful life out in the open country air, single, no need to wash or shave, my own boss, free to fart and wander about wherever I chose, bees dripping with honey everywhere, beautiful sheep everywhere, all the olives I could eat! What bliss!

But then, I had to go and marry this... this niece of Megacles who was the son of the great man,

Megacles the elder, himself! So, there we were, I, Son Of Twister by name, otherwise known as Strepsiades, a pleasant peasant and she, an aristocrat, a hoity toity, a spoiled brat of a rich bitch! *Chuckles naughtily* So you can imagine what bedtime was like in our humble abode: there I was, climbing into bed, stinking of the latest vintage, of figs and of woollen fleeces in all their glory, while she was filling my nostrils up with the lofty, wafty scents of dainty perfumes, with saffron and... oh, my! How she would slurp away all night long! Endless sloppy kisses and lots and lots of slutty love! Oh, yeahhh!

She wasn't lazy though that one! Oh, no! She did lots and lots and lots of weaving and used lots and lots and lots of wool. Oh, the wool that woman used! I would show her this cloak of mine and point out the thread. "Look, darling," I'd say to her. "Look how much thread you used! Don't you think it's just a little bit too much?"

Suddenly the oil lamp is extinguished.

Slave:

Master, the oil in the oil lamp ran out.

Strepsiades:

Damn you, you fool! Why light up this lamp? You know it's the thirsty one! Get over here, you need a good beating!

Slave:

Beat me up? What for?

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Strepsiades:

Because, you fool, you used one of the thick wicks!

Strepsiades lunges towards him but the slave runs off into the house.

Back to addressing the audience.

Then, when this charming boy was born to me and to his high-class mummy, we began arguing about what name to give him. Mummy wanted a name with the word *hippos* attached to it. "Horse," in other words, like Xant-hippus, for example, or Chaer-ippus or Call-ippides and such. I, on the other hand, wanted to call him after my own father, Phidonides. Lovely name that! "Son of Thrifty," in other words. We argued about this for a bit, until we finally compromised with something that included both roots and desires. We called the boy Phidippides.

Ha! She used to pick the little boy up in her hands, dangle him this way and that and chirp at him with, "when my little man grows up he'll wear his saffron robe and drive a grand chariot to the grand Acropolis, in the grand Panathenaic festival, just like his grand uncle Megacles!" I, on the other hand, would sing him another tune: "No, my young man, when you grow up, you'll wear a nice, thick sheep skin and, just like your pappy is doing now, you'll drive home our goats from the stony cliffs of Attica."

It was no good. The boy denied me all my wishes and defied all my commands. All of them! So now, this horse disease of his has destroyed my total estate. It's all galloped away to the creditors!

Turns back into his books.

Small pause to indicate that it's now morning.

The sun is slowly raising.

Suddenly he gets an idea. Shuts the books.

Aha! I've been thinking! I've been thinking all night and now I've got it! It's devilishly simple and devilishly clever! There is but one way... Hmmm, first, though, I've got to talk to this boy. If he listens to me I'll be saved! Otherwise...

But how do I wake him up out of his deep sleep without getting him angry?

Ahhh, sweeetie? Sweet, young Phidippides? Wake up, my darling son. Come on, wake up, darling!

Phidippides:

What is it, father?

Strepsiades:

Come, first give me a kiss and give me your right hand.

Phidippides obeys reluctantly

Phidippides:

There! Now, what's up?

Strepsiades:

Tell me, first: Do you love me?

Phidippides:

By Poseidon, protector of the horses! Of course -

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Strepsiades:

No, no, not Poseidon, not that horsey god! Forget him! That's the god that's spawned all my worries!
No, but if you truly loved me, you'd listen to what I have to say and you'd do just as I tell you.

Phidippides:

Do what? What do you want me to do, exactly?

Strepsiades:

Firstly, turn your whole life around as quickly as possible! Reverse paths! Make an about turn. Then go and learn the stuff I'll tell you to learn!

Phidippides:

So, tell me. What sort of stuff do you want me to learn?

Strepsiades:

What, you mean, you are agreeing with me?

Phidippides:

Yes, by Dionysus! I do agree!

Strepsiades: *Points to the Think Tank*

Right then, my son! See that little door there at that little house?

Phidippides:

Yeah, I see it. What is it exactly, father?

Strepsiades:

Well, my son. That is called a "Think Tank." That's where all the wise souls go.

Real clever people who can argue and debate all sorts of things. They've worked out, for example, that the sky is a huge coal-fired oven and that we're the little bits of coal inside it. Isn't that clever? And what's more, these folk can teach you –if you give them lots of money, of course- they'll teach you how to win an argument with mere words. Win it outright, whether you're right or wrong!

Phidippides:

Who are these people?

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Strepsiades:

I don't exactly know what they call themselves but they are... they are... well, they are a fine and noble lot that thinks mighty deeply. They... think!

Phidippides:

Disgusting! Oh, I know that lot! Bloody wankers the lot of them. Sly, shifty bastards! Anaemic, bare-footed fools, like that Socrates and his mate, that Chaerophon guy! Bundles of misery and nothing else.

Strepsiades:

Now stop it! Stop being such a baby! Come now, my boy. If you really care at all about your pappy's daily bread, forget your horses and go join them! Get educated!

Phidippides:

No way, paps! Forget it! By Dionysus no! Not even if you gave me those fancy pheasants that Leogoras breeds!

Strepsiades:

Please, my darling boy! I'm on my knees, begging you. Go my sweet, young man, go and get educated by them, please!

Phidippides:

But educated about what?

Strepsiades:

Oh, very important and useful stuff! They tell me they know of two types of argument: the logic that wise people use and the logic that clever people use. Now, I think it is the clever logic that can get the better of the worse side of the argument. That way, if you get to learn this clever logic for me, I'll never have to pay even an obol to anyone! Not one obol of all those debts you piled up for me, see?

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Phidippides:

No, father! I just can't do it! I'd become all anaemic, scrawny and pale-faced like them. How could I possibly face all my fellow tan-skinned able-horsemen with such a sickly face? Nope, can't do it!

Strepsiades:

Well, then, my boy, you're out! Out of my house! You, your cart horse and that fancy donkey of yours! By Demeter, you won't be eating from my pantry any more! Get out of this house!

Phidippides:

Rubbish! Do you think uncle Megacles is going to stand by and watch me go without a horse? Think what you like. I'm going inside.

Phidippides goes into the house.

Strepsiades: *yelling after his son*

Ha! And if you think I'll cop this lying down, think again! I'll... I'll... pray to the gods and then go to that Think Tank and get educated myself!

Back to the audience

Hmm, easier said than done for an old man like me! Head like a sieve, as thick as two bricks—how will I ever be able to learn all those clever mental tricks of fancy logic?

He moves towards the door of the Think Tank but quickly changes his mind and rushes back to his own home. Repeats this a couple of times.

No, no, stop this dawdling, Strepsiades! You've just got to go!

This time he is determined. He thumps loudly and resolutely at the door.

Hey there, anyone home? Boy! Boy!

Student: *Within:*

O... Piss off! Who's that banging at the door like that?

Strepsiades:

Me! Strepsiades, son of Phidon, from the province of Cicyнна!

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Student: *Opens the door*

Dumb fool! Idiot! Moron! Look what you've done with all your banging at the door like that!

You've caused a great new idea to be miscarried! Inconsiderate thickhead!

Strepsiades:

Ooops! Profuse apologies! Please forgive me, I'm just an old peasant from the country... far, far away from here. Please, tell me about that idea that I've caused to miscarry. What was it?

Student:

Oh, no, I can't do that! It'd be sacrilege if I told anyone who's not an enrolled student!

Strepsiades:

Have no fear, young man! Consider me enrolled. That's the very reason I'm here!

Student:

All right then, but you've got to be careful. These things are sacred mysteries. Well, you see, just a minute ago, a flea had bitten Chaerephon's eyebrow and then it jumped off and landed on Socrates' head, which made Socrates ask Chaerephon the question, "how many flea-feet can a flea jump?"

Strepsiades:

Really? And how did Chaerephon measure the distance?

Student:

Most cleverly. See, Socrates took the flea by the feet, melted some wax, dipped two of the flea's feet into the wax, waited till the wax cooled and, bingo! He had the flea's Persian slippers! Then Chaerephon took them off the flea and used them to measure the distance!

Strepsiades:

Zeus almighty! Talk about a subtle brain!

Student: *carefully, lest anyone else heard him disclosing more "sacred mysteries."*

You think that was clever? You wanna hear another of Socrates' ideas?

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Strepsiades:

Oh, yes, please! Tell me his other idea!

Student:

Well, all right, then. Once Chaerephon asked Socrates whether mozzies hummed through their mouth or through their bum.

Strepsiades:

And what did Socrates say about the mozzies?

Student:

He said that the mozzie's gut is a narrow canal with only a small space for the air to travel through so that, when the mozzie hums, that air travels hard and fast through this canal all the way to its bum, so then, the bumhole being simply a hole attached to the narrow canal, vibrates as the wind is forced through it, see?

Strepsiades:

I see, I see! The mozzie's bum-pipe is a trombone! Oh, blessed and blessed twice again is he who could penetrate through such a gut-blasting problem! Such a mind would have no worries at all about winning law suits! Imagine having such an intricate knowledge of a mozzie's bumhole!

Student:

Indeed! But just a short while back the poor man had a very clever idea of his stolen by a lizard!

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Strepsiades:

Is that right? Go on! Tell me how that happened.

Student:

He was up on the roof, looking up with his mouth open, studying the motions and revolutions of the moon. Well, just then, suddenly, right out off the darkness, a lizard runs by and shits on his face!

Strepsiades:

Ha! Love it! A lizard, shitting on Socrates' face! Good one!

Student:

Last night there was nothing in the pantry for us to eat!

Strepsiades:

Really? Well, what did Socrates come up with to get some tucker into you?

Student:

Well, what he did was to first sprinkle a fine layer of ash (the sort they use at the wrestling school) over the table. Then, he took an iron skewer, bent it like a compass and rushed over to the wrestling school where he found a queer... then, with the bent skewer, he snatched the leg spreader's jacket and ran off and sold it!

Strepsiades:

Oh, what a marvel of a mind! Why bother with that foreign philosopher, Mr Thales from Miletus when we've got such a brilliant mind among us? Quick, boy, open up this Think Tank and let me see this Socrates fellow! Come on, man, I'm dying for some education! Quick, open the door for me!

The whole front of the Think Tank pulls away and reveals a classroom.

On a table there are various "scientific instruments," a bowl of flour (line 260) and a wreath (line 255).

There's also a dilapidated sofa, used by some students and later by Socrates. (1253 and elsewhere.)

In the Think Tank there are students holding all sorts of bizarre positions, most of which include the student's bum pointing skyward while they are closely studying something on the ground.

They are an anaemic, pale-faced lot, looking frightful enough to justify Strepsiades' following exclamation:

Good lord! By Heracles, killer of horrible beasts and monstrous monsters! What sort of horrible beasts and monstrous monsters are they?

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Student:

What's up? Why do you look so frightened? What do you think they are?

Strepsiades:

They look like them Spartan soldiers we captured in Pylos. The ones we had paraded in all our streets, poor creatures. Look at that lot! Why are they staring at the ground like that?

Student:

They're checking out what's below the earth.

Strepsiades:

Onion bulbs, you mean? *To the other students:* Hey you lot! Stop looking for them, I know where there are some beauties! *Back to the first student* And what about this other lot? What are they after, bent over like that?

Student:

Them? They're investigating the deepest caverns of Tartarus.

Strepsiades:

And their bumhole is investigating... what, the sky?

Student:

Yes, they're learning Bumhole Astronomy!

To his colleagues:

Off you go then. Inside! He mustn't find us all out here.

Strepsiades:

No, don't send them away yet. Not yet. I have a small problem of my own, I want to discuss with them.

Student:

No, they're not allowed to spend too much time out here, in the open air.

Exit the other students

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Strepsiades: *pointing at the "scientific instruments."*

Ah! By the gods! What are these things here? Tell me.

Student:

Well, this one here is for the study of astronomy.

Strepsiades:

Is that right? And what about this one here?

Student:

This one is for studying Geometry.

Strepsiades:

Which means what?

Student:

It's an instrument for measuring land.

Strepsiades:

Land? You mean the land that the government metes out by lottery for the settlers?

Student:

No, not just that land, all land. Land everywhere and anywhere.

Strepsiades:

A delightfully subtle idea. Very useful. Democratic, too!

Student:

And see this here? This is a map of the whole world. Look here. See? That's Athens right here!

Strepsiades:

You're kidding! Where are all the jurymen then? I can't see any courts in session anywhere.

Student:

It's true. All this territory, here, is Attica.

Strepsiades:

So where is my town, Cicynnia? Where are all my fellow Cicynnians?

Student:

They're here somewhere... and here is the island of Euboa, next to us, see? It covers a long stretch of land.

Strepsiades: *Chuckling*

Yes, I know. Pericles and I went over there a few years back and truly laid the whole island out on a stretcher... And Sparta? Where is she?

Student:

Somewhere... here! Here she is!

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Strepsiades:

Too close to us by far! Come on! You've got to rethink this! Move her much, much further away!

Students:

Nope, can't be done.

Strepsiades:

Zeus, almighty! *Raises his fists* You'll regret it if you don't!

Suddenly Socrates appears suspended from the ceiling in a basket

Good Lord! Who on earth is this man in the basket?

Student: *Whispering in reverential tones*

That's HIM!

Strepsiades:

HIM? Whom?

Student:

HIM! Socrates!

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Strepsiades:

Ah, Socrates, himself, is it? Call out to him for me. You've got a louder voice.

Student:

No time. You call out to him, yourself.

Exit Student

Strepsiades:

Hey Socrates! Socrates, my little mate!

Socrates:

Who is that tiny, insignificant, ephemeral creature down there? Are you calling me and why?

Strepsiades:

Why? You go first: tell me please what are you up to, up there?

Socrates:

I am walking on air... and doing so, so that I may carefully examine the sun.

Strepsiades:

Ah, so you're up there to scorn the gods from close by, from within a basket!

Hehehe! But why not do that from down here, from the ground, if that's what you want to do?

Socrates:

Because from the ground I cannot examine thoroughly enough matters pertaining to the ether. I must suspend myself from on high so that my rarefied mind can fuse with the rarefied ether. One can discover nothing looking up from down there. Earth, you see, draws to itself the very juices of one's mind, just as it does of the juices of the water cress.

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Strepsiades:

What was that you said, Socrates? The water cress draws moisture from the mind? Come down, my dear friend, Socrates! Come down now, Socrates and teach me what I've come to learn from you!

The basket is slowly lowered and Socrates climbs out of it.

Socrates:

You've come here to learn what, exactly?

Strepsiades:

Oh, Socrates! If only you knew how anxious I am to learn... to learn all I can about rhetoric. How to argue convincingly... against all sorts of dreadful creditors who are after my very blood! I want to remove all my painful debts... they're after all my possessions, all my money – I am... Collaterally Damaged!

Socrates:

And how could this ever happen to you without your knowing about it?

Strepsiades:

It was a fast thing. Like a horse race! Such an awful thing, it damned near killed me! Come, Socrates, mate, teach me one of those two arguments you know. The one that lets you escape debt. Come on, tell me your fees and I'll... I'll pay them in full. I swear by all the gods!

Socrates:

Gods? Gods? What are they? We don't have any gods around here! They have no currency in our school.

Strepsiades:

Really? So what is the local currency then? What is it you lot swear by? Not by iron coins like in Byzantium!

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Socrates:

Look, do you really want to know about gods and other divine matters? Do you want to know what these things really are... and -

Strepsiades:

Oh, yes, please. Could you, would you please tell me?

Socrates:

-and to talk with our own divinities, the Clouds?

Strepsiades:

I would, oh, yes, I would, if I could, indeed I would!

Socrates:

All right, then. Go and sit upon our sacred sofa.

Strepsiades does so

Strepsiades:

Done.

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Socrates: *Takes a wreath from the table.*

Here, put this wreath on your head.

Strepsiades:

Good god, no, Socrates! What's with the wreath, mate? What are you going to do to me? Hey, you're not going to sacrifice me on Zeus' altar, like they wanted to do to Athamas for doing the dirty on his wife, Mrs Cloudy, are you, Socrates?

Socrates:

Oh, no! This is what we do to all our new students. It's an initiation ceremony.

Strepsiades:

The benefit of which is?

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Socrates:

You wanted to learn oratory, right? Well this will give you the softest, sharpest, most subtle words you'll need to become the best squabbler ever! You'll be the very flower of oratory! Now sit still!
Socrates takes some flour from the bowl on the table and sprinkles it liberally all over Strepsiades' head.

Strepsiades:

Ugh! Did you say "flower" or "flour?" By Zeus, I know the difference and I see no petals here! You're trying to trick me!

Socrates:

Stand silent, old man and listen to the prayer:

Chanting ceremoniously.

O, You, Immeasurable Air, who holds the earth suspended in space! And You, most bright of all, Ether! You, too, Clouds who thunder and sparkle! Rise up, demure Goddesses, rise up and appear above us. Make yourselves visible to the thinker.

Strepsiades: *Looks up into the sky fearfully. Then, as he tries to cover his head with his cloak:*

Hold it! Not yet! Hang on! Wait till I cover my head before you get me soaking wet. Damn it! I've left my hat back home!

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Socrates: *Continues in the ceremonial tone*

Come to us, then, O, glorious Clouds and show Yourself to this man! Come! Whether You're on the snowy peaks of sacred Mount Olympus or if, perhaps, You're, right now, starting up a holy dance for the Nymphs in the gardens of their father Ocean, or if You're scooping up, in your golden urns, the waters in the mouths of the Nile, or if, perhaps still, You're staying at Lake Maeotis or at the snowy crags of Mimas; dear goddesses, hear my prayer and accept this sacrifice. Come and enjoy this sacred ceremony!

Chorus: *Off stage. Thunder and lightning as the clouds slowly approach the stage singing.*

Gather round, lofty queens, sisters!

Gather high above our father Ocean's

Roaring waves, high above the

Deep forests of the mountain peaks and

Let us show our bright, wind-whirled and cool bodies from up there and

Let us look upon the ends of the world

Upon our beloved earth,

This ploughed land with her countless crops which we nourish with our water.

Let us look upon the rivers and the ever-thundering sea.

Look there, sisters!

The great eye of the world has flooded the Earth with its brilliant light!

Let us cast away our rainy breath from our

Pure substance and let our eyes adore our beloved Earth from a distance!

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Socrates: *pleasantly surprised at his own achievement.*

O, most gracious Clouds! You have obviously heard my call!

(To Strepsiades) Did you hear them? Did you hear their voices and their awesome thunder?

Strepsiades:

Oh, yes! *Looking up into the sky.* I hear you, most revered goddesses. I heard your thunderclap and I became so awestruck by it that I...I tremble and fart in response! *Does so.* And, what's more... *spins around, in despair, trying to hold his pants up* I don't know if this a proper thing to request right now but I... I... I desperately need to shit!

Socrates:

Stop being so blasphemous! Are you one of those dreadful, unfunny comedians? Stop it and be still, man! The great swarm of the goddesses is approaching us with a song.

Chorus: *still off stage but getting closer.*

O, rain-pregnant virgins, let us go to Palas Athena's brilliant city,

A city replete with beautiful men,

Cecrops' miraculous land.

There it is where

The unutterable Eleusinian Mysteries are held, the

Purest mystic festival in Greece,

When the innermost hall of the temple is opened wide for the initiates.

There it is where
The holy statues and the high roofed temples of the gods
Abound,
Rich with gifts worthy of the heavens and
Where feasts in every season bring out,
In holy procession, offerings covered in
Luscious garlands and
Where, in Spring, we hear the choruses of
Bromius Dionysus, singing their melodies accompanied by the
Haunting tones of their flutes.

Strepsiades:

Zeus almighty! Such graceful voices, such a stately song! Tell, me, Socrates, I beg you, who are these women? Are they heroines by some chance?

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Socrates:

No, not heroines but Clouds. Clouds from Heaven. To the lazy man, these are very important goddesses indeed! They disseminate intelligence, the ability to chat idly all day long and the skill to hit out and escape a losing argument.

Strepsiades:

Is that so? No wonder then that my heart flew joyfully and high at the first sound of their voice! No wonder that I now thirst to start a meaningless, pointless argument about any old thing – smoke, wind or water will do! – and to slice up a point with a sharp word or two!

By the gods! If it's at all possible, Socrates, I want to see them here, in person!

Socrates: *Turns to Stage Left*

Then look that way. Up there, toward Mount Parnes. Can you see them coming down gently and quietly?

Strepsiades:

See them where? Show me.

Socrates:

Here they are. They're all coming in. The whole lot of them! They're coming out of the forests, the valleys and the ravines... Look there, to your left.

325

Strepsiades: *Leans forward to see better*

Where? I can't see them!

Socrates:

There, you fool! Behind the curtains!

Strepsiades:

Ah, I can just see them now... barely!

Socrates:

Surely you must be able to see them now! Perhaps if you had washed the muck from your eyes before it grew as large as a pumpkin, you'd be able to see them better!

Enter the chorus through Stage left.

Strepsiades:

Ah! Yes! I can certainly see them now! Everywhere! What a lot of noble-looking beauties! They've taken over everything!

Socrates:

Didn't you know they were goddesses?

330

Strepsiades:

No, Socrates. I used to think they were anything but goddesses. Fog, perhaps, or mist, or smoke – anything but goddesses!

Socrates:

That's because you were also ignorant of the fact that these ladies, here, protect and nurture all sorts of clever people: Prophets from Thuri, specialist quacks, lazy wankers with their extra long hair, their extra long nails, their extra big onyx rings in their extra long fingers... as well as the fancy pansy singers and dancers and astrologers! It's these ladies who feed them all with poetic lines and lofty songs. It is they who allow them to stay free of... well, of doing anything but sitting around all day conjuring up verses and stanzas about Clouds!

Strepsiades:

So that's why these clever poets carry on with lines like... "the awesome charge of the fearsome

clouds,” or “the lightning, snaking hundred-headed Typho,” or “the frenzied fury of the unfurling tempest... the wind-curved flight of the hurricane... the eagle-taloned carrion of the clouds...” And then, for their ‘troubles,’ they get to gloat themselves on feasts like those enjoyed by dithyrambic poets: huge plates, cluttered with dainty delicacies of delicious fish or birds! Not like us, truly talented writers of comedy, who get nothing!

Socrates:

Very true, indeed. But they really deserve it, though, don’t they?

340

Strepsiades:

Hmm... Tell me, how did this lot get the shape of mortals? Of women? Clouds don’t look anything like this up there!

Socrates:

What do you mean? What do Clouds look like to you?

Strepsiades:

Well, I can’t tell exactly but bloody hell, they sure don’t look anything like this! The lot in the sky is sort of like sheep’s wool, all separated and tossed about. This lot here have noses on their faces!

Socrates:

All right then. Answer me this -

Strepsiades:

Ask away. Come on, I’m ready!

Socrates:

Haven’t you ever looked up into the sky and seen things like... well, like a centaur, say, or a leopard, or a wolf – a bull, even?

Strepsiades:

Sure. What about it?

Socrates:

See? Clouds can take up any shape they want. If, for example they see someone like Xenophantes’ son, Cleonymus, the pederast, who looks like an absolute savage with massive hair and beastly fur all over him, well, they mock his mania for pederasty by taking up the shape of centaurs.

Strepsiades:

Is that right? And what if they see someone like that vulture of the tax payer’s money, Simon, what do they do then?

Socrates:

What they do is try and expose him for what he is. They turn into wolves.

Strepsiades:

Huh! That’s why, then, the other day they turned into a dirty big deer. They must have seen Cleonymus, that great glutton and coward who threw his shield away and ran for it during the battle at Delium. They must know what he’s like.

355

Socrates:

Quite so, quite so and now, they must have seen somewhere our favourite, beardless, beautiful little puppy, Cleisthenes, and so they’ve turned themselves into women!

Strepsiades: *Bowing to the Chorus*

Ladies, dear goddesses, I bow to you! Come now and, if you usually do this sort of thing, speak to me – me, a mere, mortal man. Fill the sky with your divine sound!

Chorus:

Greetings, to you, too, old man, hunter of the subtle skills of argument; and you, too, high priest of refined bulldust!

Do tell us what you want.

So far as the studies of heavenly bodies is concerned, you, Socrates and your teacher, Prodicus the pedant, are the only two clever people we listen to these days.

Prodicus, because he is intelligent and wise and you, because you swagger about in the streets of Athens, barefoot and, with your eyes spinning about this way and that, you proudly cop all sorts of blows for our sake! We salute you, Socrates!

Strepsiades:

O, dear Mother, Earth! What holy voices! What splendour! Simply wondrous!

Socrates:

Because these ladies are the only true goddesses! All the others are mere waffle.

Strepsiades:

Oh, come on, now! Dear, mother Earth! What about Zeus, the chap on Mount Olympus? Doesn't he count as a god to you lot in here?

Socrates:

Zeus? Zeus? What is this Zeus you speak of? Stop babbling, boy! There's no such thing as a Zeus!

Strepsiades:

No Zeus! What are you on about, Socrates? Who gives us rain, then? Answer that one, first!

369

Socrates:

You think it's this Zeus of yours? No, it's these dear goddesses, here, who give us the rain, of course.

Sees that Strepsiades is not convinced.

Look, I'll prove it to you with foolproof proof: Tell me, have you ever seen the rain pour down without a cloud being up there also? This Zeus of yours, if he's the one who brings down the rain, then he should be doing it when the clouds are away.

Strepsiades:

By Apollo! You took good care of that argument! And there I was, thinking that when it rained it was really Zeus piddling down on us through a sieve! But who is it who makes all that thundering noise then? Grrr, that noise makes me shake in my boots!

Socrates: *Indicating the clouds.*

They do it – by rolling about.

Strepsiades:

They do? Tell me you... you who takes on all comers, tell me exactly how they cause all that noise.

Socrates:

Well, they get bloated with water and then, because they're suspended like that up there they are forced to move, see, and, as they do, they just bump and crash into each other and then they bloat even more and then they burst and then... and then, there you have it! Boom, boom!

Strepsiades:

Ah, but who makes them move like that? Isn't it almighty Zeus?

Socrates:

No, it isn't Zeus!

Pointing at the cup above the door of the Think Tank

It's Dinos, the Great Ethereal Typhoon!

380

Strepsiades:

The Great Ethereal Typhoon? Ha! Now, that answers a lot of questions for me: There is no longer a Zeus but there is a Dinos, the Great Ethereal Typhoon! We have a new King!

Still, you haven't yet explained to me what all the thunder and the pataboomboom are all about.

Socrates:

Have you no ears, man? I've already told you: the clouds get all bloated with water and simply bump and crash and smash into one another and that's what the thunder and the pataboomboom is all about!

Strepsiades:

Oh, come on! You're kidding me right? How could anyone believe that?

Socrates:

All right then. I'll use you as an example. Have you never bloated your own stomach with the soup they serve at the Panathenea festival and then found yourself the owner of a terrible stomach ache?

Then what happens? Suddenly, you get a bit of a shake and a move in there and what have you got?

You got a real pataboomboom!

Strepsiades:

Ah, almighty Apollo! That's so bloody true! That soup does operate rather queerly. It's awful! It really moves my stomach about. It crashes and roars about in there, just like thunder. Dreadful stuff. It begins sort of slowly at first, pata, pata, pata, pata and then it picks up pace, patapatapatapatapata!

Then, just as I get down to have a shit, out roars the thunder: pataboomboomboomboom! Just like those ladies there!

Socrates:

Quite right, quite right! Still, just think how loud your farts can be, even though they roll out of such a tiny tummy and compare them with those that come out of such a vast, endless thing as the sky! No wonder then, they sound a hell of a lot louder, right? That's thunder for you!

Strepsiades:

I get you. That's why the words "thuuuunder" and "ffffffart" sound so alike!

But then, explain this to me, about the lightning bolts, Socrates: Where do they come from? They give

out huge, blazing fires and sometimes burn the crap out of some poor people but, at other times they just singe them and let them go. Surely that's Zeus hurling his bolts at all the perjurers!

397

Socrates:

You blithering moron! You're still back in the times of Cronos! I can just see you, still dancing at the festival of Cronia! Phew! The smell of old age on you is downright toxic! Look, you, you dunderhead! If Zeus wanted to have a go at perjurers then he'd have cremated people like Simon or Cleonymus or Theorus and the like. They're the real perjurers. Instead, what does he do? He goes and strikes his bolts at his own damned temple, at Sunium, Athens' peninsula, as well as at his own sacred oaks! What's the point of doing that? Can oak trees perjure themselves? What's he on?

Strepsiades:

I don't know! Still, you seem to have covered this argument nicely, thank you. Now what about this bolt? What is it then? What's it made of?

Socrates:

Look! Here's a dry wind, right? And it's rising and rising and rising all the way till it get to the clouds. Then, it... penetrates them and gets them all bloaty from inside them. Turns them into something like our own bladder. Then, when the wind sees that it's got nowhere to go, it gets angry and busts them open and escapes with a mean pressure, a friction and speed so mean and nasty that it gets itself all fired up.

Strepsiades:

Zeus, almighty! That's right! That's what happened to me once! I was at the festival of Diasia once, with all my relatives and I was trying to cook a pig's belly. Damned thing, I forgot to cut a bit of a slit on it so the bloody thing bloated right up and then suddenly, bang! It burst open with such a force it splattered blood and crap into both my eyes and gave me burns to the whole of my face!

Chorus:

O, dear Strepsiades! You seek great wisdom from us, wisdom that will make you the happiest of all Athenians – of all the Greeks even, but this will happen if and only if:

You have a good memory,

You know how to think,

Your soul is imbued with patience and endurance,

You don't get fatigued by either standing still or walking around for hours on end,

You are not bothered by the cold,

You are not fussed if you miss out on breakfast, or on wine, or on your visits to the gymnasia and on other such trivialities,

You believe, like the rest of us clever folk, that virtue is:

Victory in action,

In good counsel and

In the battle of the tongues.

420

Strepsiades:

Ha! My soul is made of sturdy stuff,

My nights are taken up by thinking,

My stomach is utterly penurious, abstemious and is nourished by mere herbs;

So, I'm certain, therefore, that I can stand before your anvil to be hammered into shape!

Socrates:

So, my good man, you will, henceforth, believe in no other god than those we believe in here, to wit, Chaos, Clouds and Tongue. This Holy Trinity alone, right?

Strepsiades:

The Holy Trinity alone. Absolutely! I shall utter not a single word to any other gods, even if I bump into them in the street. I won't even sacrifice to them or pour libations to them or offer incense to them or anything!

Chorus:

Come then, dear man, tell us what you want from us. Come now, don't be afraid because if:

You honour us,

You respect us and if

You thirst for cleverness,

You will never be hurt by evil.

429

Strepsiades:

Well, then, dear Ladies, let me ask just this one teeny, weeny favour from you: Please make me the absolutely best speaker of all the Greeks –best, I mean by one hundred stadia!

Chorus:

This will be granted to you. Henceforth, no one, but no one will have more motions moved and seconded in the Assembly than you!

Strepsiades:

O, no, no, no! Motions in the Assembly is not what I'm after! No serious speeches for me, please! That I don't need! I just need to... sort of twist the verdicts of the court to my favour, that's all. Escape all my creditors!

Chorus:

That, too. It's not a problem for us, believe me. Now then, be indomitable and hand yourself over to our teachers here.

Strepsiades:

Being screwed by marriage and by thoroughbreds, I have no choice but to trust you and to do as you say.

Here's my body! I'm handing it over to them to do with it as they please and I do so with great pleasure!

They may:

Beat it,

Deprave it of food and water,

Neglect it till it stinks to high heaven,

Freeze it and flay it and turn it into a wine skin!

Let them do all that

If:

That's what will set me free from debts,

Be eulogised by everyone for being:

Fearless in front of fear,

A pushy bastard,

A slippery bastard,

An insolent bastard,

A hateful, abominable bastard,

A perjuring bastard,

A word conjuring bastard,

A twister of legal babble,

A pettifogging lawyer,

A chatter box

A fox,

A loophole in the law,

A sleaze bag,

A forked tongue,

A slimy, certified crook,

A fraudster,

A low down, grubby bastard,

A bent and weird bastard,

A troublesome pest of a bastard,

And,

A scavenger of meaningless banter!

Now, if these teachers can make those people I bump into in my daily life call me names like these, then, there'll be no objections on my part at all: they can do what they like with me, including –by Demeter!- turning me into snags and serving me up to all the thinkers!

457

Chorus:

Oh, ho! Here's a man with galloping courage, guts and fervour!

Once you've learnt all this from us, the sky is the limit when it comes to glory among mortals!

Strepsiades:

Really and truly?

Chorus:

Yeap. For the whole time you'll be with us, your life will be the envy of all!

Strepsiades:

You're not kidding me? Will I really get to be the envy of all one day?

Chorus:

No, we're not kidding! One day there'll be huge crowds hanging about your door, all of them anxious to meet with you and discuss with you all sorts of matters of law and issues concerning vast sums of money. You'd be asked your opinion on matters that are worthy of your high intelligence.

To Socrates

Now, Socrates, begin this man's lessons immediately. Challenge his mind and examine his cleverness.

Socrates: *To Strepsiades*

Come on, then. Tell me about yourself. What sort of a beast are you? Tell me what you're like so that I may construct a syllabus of assault.

481

Strepsiades:

What's that? Good gods, are you thinking of assaulting me?

Socrates:

No, no, no! I just need to find out a few things about you. For example, do you have a good memory?

Strepsiades:

That's a twofold question. See, if, for example, someone owes me money, my memory is perfect but if, for yet another example, I, poor bastard that I am, owe somebody else any money, then my memory is a total failure.

Socrates:

I see. Well, do you have the gift of the gab?

Strepsiades:

Gift of the gab, no. Gift of delaying payments, yes.

Socrates:

Hmm, no gift of gab. Pity. How will you learn anything then?

Strepsiades:

O, don't worry about me, I'll do all right.

490

Socrates:

Very well then. Let's see. Now whatever clever thing about... for example, heavenly objects, I toss at you, you grab it quickly and don't let it go. Right?

Strepsiades:

Grab it quickly? Not let it go? Am I to grab cleverness like a dog grabs a bone?

Socrates:

Ha! This man is an ignoramus and a barbarian! Listen, old man. I think you need a bit of a beating...

Tell me, what would you do if someone did beat you?

Strepsiades:

I'd get beaten, of course, and I'd gather some witnesses. Then, after I did that, I'd take him to court.

Socrates:

All right then. Take off your cloak and spread it out here.

Strepsiades:

Why? What have I done now?

Socrates:

No, you done nothing wrong. It's the law. Those who enter my school for the first time must do so naked.

Strepsiades:

But... do you think I'll be searching the place for stuff to steal and hide under my cloak?

Socrates:

Take it off, I said and stop this jabbering!

500

Strepsiades: *obeys reluctantly*

Tell me then, if I'm diligent and willing to learn, which student of yours will I be like?

Socrates:

There will be no difference between you and Chaerephon, so far as your character is concerned.

Strepsiades:

O, no! Poor bastard, I'll look like death-warmed-up!

Socrates:

Drop the chit chat and come on, follow me in here. Hurry up now!

Strepsiades: *Highly afraid of doing so and agitated.*

Let me have a honey cake first. I'm afraid of entering this place without one...

This place looks like Trophonius' shrine in there: a cave full of snakes...
I need the cake as an offering to them...

Socrates:

Move it! Stop this shilly shallying about the doorway... and stop looking so worried!

Strepsiades and Socrates enter the Think Tank

510

Chorus: *to Strepsiades*

Go, Strepsiades, go and, thanks to your courage, all joy will accompany you!

Turning towards the audience

May happiness come to this man because even though he's quickly entering the depths of his old age, his soul seeks new colours in views and in cleverness.

And now, dear Dionysus, you, who raised us, please help us now speak honestly with our darling spectators.

Dearies, the truth of the matter is that I, a very clever chap, indeed, am as worthy of the first prize in this contest, as you, whom I consider to be high achievers in intellectual activities, are worthy of seeing it. I have worked very hard on this charming, highly sophisticated comedy; worked hard and did so for many sleepless nights and that's why I had wished you to be the first to enjoy it. But what happened? Crass men, who were absolutely unworthy of it, have, instead, won the prize and I had to leave this place thoroughly defeated!

And who's to blame for that? You, of course! You! I had placed an enormous amount of confidence in your cleverness and that's why I had put so much effort into this work. Still, there are some truly clever and more discerning men among you and to them I say, stick with me, I shall never let you down! I remember well the wonderful reception you gave to my *Banqueteers*, a play about two boys, one chaste and the other a sex-starved queer. It is a great pleasure for me to point out to you that there are such clever gentlemen among you!

I was still a young, literary virgin, those days and I just couldn't give birth publicly, you see, so I left my little literary bastard to some other, literary mother, by the name of Callistratus, who took it up and brought it, here, before you. You, of course, raised it, nurtured it and educated it—very noble of you, thank you very much. Since then, you and I had made sworn pledges that I shall receive from you favourable judgements of all my babies. The literary ones, I mean, of course.

So, here's my latest baby then, which, like the famous Elektra, is searching through this very clever audience for something that resembles her brother's hair which, if she sees it, believe you me, she will acknowledge it!

Now just observe how demure my little darling is.

First of all, you don't see some huge thick, red-tipped leather cock stitched onto her clothes and dangling all the way down to the floor, just for a few childish laughs. Nor do you hear her making fun of bald men nor are they dancing the lewd, crude and deplorable dance, the kordax which only drunks and uncouth comedians indulge in. As well, you haven't yet nor will you, still, see some old man beating the crap out of his fellow actor with a stick, just to cover the idiocy of his unfunny jokes. No, my little lady here doesn't rush out with blazing torches and, in a huff and a puff of despair, shout out, "Oh, wretched me! Oh poor, poor me!" On the contrary, my friends, this lady has placed her full trust on herself and on her script. A bit like me, really because that's the sort of poet I am: sincere and genuine. I don't act the high class smart arse who tries to rip you off by presenting to you the same material over and over again. Not me! I am a highly skilled playwright, quite capable of presenting to you always fresh and novel works, each of which is a genuine original and a very clever work, indeed. Remember my *Knights*? That's right, it was I who gave our savage leader, Cleon one in the guts during the peak of his career... though I wasn't such an unconscionable bastard as to persist with it when the chap was down. Not like what all the others did to Hyperbolos, Cleon's successor, for example. The moment he took his eyes off them, they jumped on him for all their worth and hadn't let up since. Jumped on his poor mother, too, the bastards! First, we've had that so-called playwright, Eupolis who brought out his *Maricas* which was nothing more than a hatchet job on my *Knights*, him being a hatchet man himself. In that play he added some old drunken hag to do that vulgar dance, the Kordax. That character was invented, of course, years ago, by Phrynichus and he had her being pursued by a huge ocean monster.

Then we also had Hermippus doing the same hatchet job on poor Hyperbolus with another of his plays and now a whole lot of other poets have joined in the chorus against the poor man, and doing so by copying all my lovely metaphors about eels. Believe me, those who find such plays funny, well, they will not be too enamoured by my truly lovely plays.

Remember though, if you love me and love my little ladies also then the world will for ever think of you as clever men.

563

The highest of all the gods, Zeus, our great
 Guardian and king is the first I invite to my dance.
 Then I'd like Poseidon, shaker of the great, awesome trident,
 Almighty father who makes mountains and
 Oceans alike tremble wildly to also join us.
 Then, Aether, too, who nurtures all life and
 Apollo, the brilliant charioteer, king of the
 Dazzling rays that fill the whole of Earth with light,
 Mighty among gods and mortals.

575

Come, now, you clever Athenians, spectators of this play. Come and listen to our complaints about
 how awfully you've treated us!
 Though we are the gods who serve and protect you and your city the best, we are also the only gods to
 whom you never make any sacrifices or pour any libations! We warn you with our thunder, lightning
 and rain, whenever you're about to embark on a mindless expedition. In fact, remember when you
 were about to put in charge of the army a certain god-hated tanner, Cleon, the Paphlagonian? We tried
 our very best to warn you. We gathered our brows in anger and did all sorts of things to frighten you.
 We crashed our thunder and cast lightning rods, we made the moon spin out of her usual path, and the
 sun to withdraw its bright wick, refusing to ever shine on you if you made Cleon chief of the army and
 still, you, stubborn fools that you are, went ahead and elected him as your general! Still, the gods, as
 always, had turned your bad decisions into good results. Look now, for example. We can tell you that if
 you condemn that vulture, Cleon, for bribery and theft and place his neck into the pillory things will
 return back to normal again for you and your city. It will be as if you had never made the grave error of
 electing him general!
 You, too, Phebus, Apollo, Lord of Delos,
 Whose temple is on the sharp, stony cliffs of Cythus,
 Come and join us also,
 And
 Artemis, most blessed lady who lives in the
 Golden temple of Ephesus,
 Revered by Lydian virgins,
 And
 Athena, protector of our own city,
 Bearer of the broad aegis
 And
 Dionysus, owner of all the rocks on Mount Parnassus,
 Reveller, shaker of blazing torches of pine,
 Leader of the Delphic Bacchae,
 Come to us also!

607

As we were getting ready to start our journey here, the Moon bumped into us accidentally and told us
 to firstly greet all the Athenians and her allies but then to express her anger towards you because you
 have treated her so badly even though she has helped you all so much, not only with mere words but
 also with real deeds. Deeds like, for example, the drachma she saves you on torches, at night. You
 know what you do: every time the moon is out, you tell your slaves not to buy a torch because the
 moon is shining brightly enough. And then there are a whole lot more things such as your getting all
 mixed up and confused about all the dates relating to the calendar. You just don't keep a good track of
 her paths so that the gods are always angry at her because they miss out on their festival dinners and go
 hungry because of your mismanagement of the calendar dates.
 And then, when it's time for a sacrifice what do you do? Instead of celebrating a holy day, you get
 stuck on some poor bastard, twisting him about and taking him to court! As well, when all of us gods
 are fasting because we'd be mourning over the deaths of, say, Memnon, son of Dawn and Zeus' son,
 Sarpedon, both of whom were killed at Troy, you'd be all disrespectful and inconsiderate and you'd be
 pouring drunken libations and having a good old orgy full of laughs!
 That was why, Hyperbolous had his wreath ripped off his head by the gods, when he was made head of
 the Religious Council. That should teach him how to make better use of the lunar calendar when he
 wants to count the days of his life.

Socrates comes out of the Think Tank.

627

Socrates:

By the Holy Trinity of Breath, Chaos and Wind! I've never, ever come across such a peasant! Such a numbskull! Such an idiot! Such a gawky scatterbrain!

You try to teach him even the tiniest morsels of wisdom and no sooner he learns them and he forgets every single one of them!

Still, I think I'll call him out here, into the light. See if that will help at all.

He calls through the door

Oi, Strepsiades! Are you there? Come out! Arise, pick up your sofa and get out here!

Strepsiades: *From within.*

Can't! The sofa bugs won't let me! They've got their teeth right into it.

A few seconds later Strepsiades appears at the door dragging his sofa behind him.

Socrates:

Come, on, move it! Now put it down there and listen carefully to me.

Strepsiades obeys

Strepsiades:

Here you are.

Socrates:

Now tell me. Of all the things you... haven't learnt what do you want to learn first? Do you want to know about measures, or rhythms, words, perhaps?

Strepsiades:

Teach me about measures, Socrates, because just the other day a flour seller ripped me off with her scales by a good couple of kilos.

Socrates:

No, not this sort of measures. I meant musical measures. Which do you think is the most delightful measure, the three-beat or the four-beat?

Strepsiades:

Hmmm! I think I prefer the litre.

Socrates:

There you go again, talking utter nonsense!

645

Strepsiades:

Oh, yea? Well, do you want a bet that a litre consists of little quarter litres?

Socrates:

Damn it! What a hell of a rough-head peasant I'm dealing with here! Perhaps rhythms is a bit easier for you.

Strepsiades:

Rhythms? Will they help me earn my daily bread?

Socrates:

They will. Because by being able to discern between marching rhythms and rhythms made by the finger, you'll look very elegant and clever among your friends.

Strepsiades: *Raising his middle finger crudely*

Ha! The finger? I know all about that rhythm, by Zeus almighty!

Socrates:

Oh, yeah? Well tell me about it then. Which finger are you talking about?

Strepsiades: *Waving his middle finger at Socrates*

Well, when I was a kid it was this one here, so it must still be this one.

Socrates:

Oh, you're such a crass hillbilly!

655

Strepsiades:

Listen, you woeful teacher! I'm not here to learn any of this stuff!

Socrates:

Well what are you here for then? What is it you want to learn?

Strepsiades:

I'm here to learn about that... that other style of argument. The Clever style.

Socrates:

But there is a huge number of other things you must learn first. For example, tell me, which of the four-legged beasts are truly masculine?

Strepsiades:

The masculine ones? I'm not that stupid. I know them all. Let's see. There's the ram, the billy goat, the bull, the dog, the chook...

Socrates:

Can you see your error, right there? Chook! Do you use the same word for both male and female chook?

Strepsiades:

Error? What error? Please explain.

Socrates:

Explain? You're using the same word for both genders, chook for the one and chook for the other!

Strepsiades:

That's right... Well? By Poseidon, tell me, what am I supposed to call them?

Socrates:

You should call the male one "chook" and the female one "chookette!"

Strepsiades:

Chookette! By the Wind! Well done, Socrates! Such brilliant education deserves a trough of flour. Full to the brim!

670

Socrates:

There you go again! Same mistake. You treat "trough" as a masculine noun whereas, in fact it's feminine!

Strepsiades:

Masculine? The trough? Should I be using it as a masculine noun?

Socrates:

Sure you do. You treat the noun like you treat Cleonymus.

Strepsiades:

Please explain!

Socrates:

Look! According to your brain, the words "trough" and "Cleonymus" are one and the same thing.

Strepsiades:

... Ah... eh... dah... but, but, but... Cleonymus never had a trough... at least not for kneading his flour... Cleonymus was a wanking queer. He preferred a round trough and for kneading his dough he used his prick. So you see, Cleonymus is really a... feminine noun! Anyhow, how should I call the trough from now on?

Socrates:

Use the word, "troughette," to rhyme with Socratette.

Strepsiades:

Troughette is a feminine word?

Socrates:

But of course!

680

Strepsiades:

I see! All right, I can cop that! Troughette and Cleonymette! Beauty!

Socrates:

Good. Now there is still the matter of people's names. You have to be able to separate the male names from the female ones.

Strepsiades:

Ha! I know which names are feminine.

Socrates:

Do you? Well?

Strepsiades:

Well, there's Lyssila, Philinna, Cleitagora, Demetria...

Socrates:

Right. And what about the masculine names?

Strepsiades:

Masculine? Well, we've got zillions of them: Philoxenos, Melesias, Amynias –

Socrates:

You twit! These aren't masculine names!

Strepsiades: *Looks around the Think Tank amazed.*

What? Don't you people around here think that these are masculine names?

Socrates:

Of course not! Look! Let's say, you came across Arynias in the street one day and you wanted to call out to him. How would you do that? What word would you use? What's the vocative case of Arynias?

690

Strepsiades:

... How would I call him? Well, I'd call out, "hey, here, here, Arynias!"

Socrates:

See? "Arynias!" You're turning Arynias into a woman!

Strepsiades:

But of course I am! The little hussy won't serve in the army! Look, what's the point of all this,

Socrates? What's the point of teaching me what everyone already knows?

Socrates:

Teaching you? No point at all! Now lie down on your sofa.

Strepsiades:

What for?

Socrates:

For thinking purposes. Take a problem of yours, any problem and think it through.

Strepsiades:

Here? On this sofa? O, please, please, Socrates, not on this sofa! If I must do any thinking at all, please let me do it on the ground!

Socrates:

Not an option. The sofa it must be!

Exit Socrates into the Think Tank

Strepsiades: *Dithering*

Poor me! O, poor me! The sofa bugs will get their fill of me today!

700

Chorus:

Now ponder and wonder!

Let your brain spin about every which way and yonder!

Let it grab the thought by its jugular

And

If you can't do that, then go back

And

Grab another one!

And

If delicious, soul-refreshing sleep begins to tantalise your eyes,

Wake up!

Strepsiades: *Shifting about uncomfortably in the sofa*

Ouch... agh... god damn... ouch... ouch, ouch, my pouch!

Chorus:

What's up Strepsiades? What's going on in there?

Strepsiades:

It's murder! It's slaughter! They're killing me! They're armed to the teeth, these Corinthian bugs!

They're chomping at my ribs and sucking up my blood! Now they're tugging at my balls, climbing up my bum hole, digging up a tunnel in there! Murderrrrrr!

Chorus:

Come on, it's not so bad. Stop bellyaching!

Strepsiades:

Stop bellyaching? How can I? They've run off with my possessions, tore away my lovely flesh,

pinched my shoes and, if that wasn't enough, here I am, whistling in the dark! There's little of me left!

Enter Socrates

Socrates:

Hey, you! What on earth are you up to? You should be in deep thought by now!

Strepsiades:

I am, I am, by Poseidon! I sure am!

Socrates:

So, what did you come up with?

725

Strepsiades:

With a question: Will these sofa bugs leave any part of me intact?

Socrates:

Damn you and your education!

Strepsiades:

Damn me? I'm damned already!

Socrates storms out in disgust

Chorus:

Come no, don't go weak on us now!

Cover your head with those sheets and think deeply. You need to come up with a real good scheme of defrauding and ripping people off!

Strepsiades:

Please! Somebody do that! Throw me a real good scheme of defrauding and ripping people off! Here, throw it under these sheets, please! I'll bury myself under them!

Enter Socrates again

Socrates:

Now let's see what this man is up to this time. *Pokes at the bundle that covers Strepsiades.* Hey you!

Are you asleep under there?

Strepsiades:

No, almighty Apollo, no, I'm not!

Socrates:

Well, then. Have you got anything?

Strepsiades:

Zeus almighty! No I don't!

Socrates:

You've got nothing?

Strepsiades:

Nothing but my cock. My right hand's got it.

Strepsiades sticks his head out of the blankets

735

Socrates:

Well, shove your head back under there and think of something. And hurry up with it.

Strepsiades:

But what should I think about, Socrates? You tell me.

Socrates:

Tell me, first, what is it that you wish to learn about? What discovery do you want to make while you're here?

Strepsiades:

You've heard what I want a million times, now. I want to learn how to avoid paying my interest payments! No interest paid to anyone, ever!

740

Socrates:

Fine, then. Get back under the covers.

Strepsiades obeys

Now, slice up your thinking into small bits. Refine it. Take your question a bit at a time, sort out all the different bits and place them in correct order, then examine each one of them thoroughly.

Strepsiades:

Ouch! Ouch! Bugger it, bugger it, bugger it! Ouch!

Socrates:

Stop buggerising about and sit still! Now, if you come up to a dead end with one of your ideas, just drop it. Leave it alone for a while and then, have a go at it again later.

Slight pause

Strepsiades:

Socrates? Socrates, my sweetie...

Socrates:

Yes? What is it, old boy?

Strepsiades:

Guess what? I've just come up with a great idea about interest avoidance!

Socrates:

Is that right? Tell me.

Strepsiades:

Sure. Now then, what if...

Socrates:

If what?

Strepsiades:

What if I went out and bought myself one of those witches from Thessaly and some dark night I got her to pull down the moon, lock it up in a tight little round box, just like a mirror and then kept guard over it?

Socrates:

And that would help you... how, exactly?

Strepsiades:

It would help me exactly because the moon would never rise again and so... no moon, no interest payments!

755

Socrates:

Why's that?

Strepsiades:

Because, sweetie, all monies are lent out by the Lunar month.

Socrates:

Now that's good. Right. Let me now throw you another question, this time a bit more demanding. Let's say, someone is suing you for the payment of five talents. What would you do to get the case thrown out of court?

Strepsiades:

Thrown out of court, ey? Let me see. Let me think now... *He is shaking under the blankets.*

Socrates:

Look, grandpa, don't get all uptight and stressed out when you're trying to think. Loosen up, man. Let your thoughts fly through the air. Pretend they're beetles and hold them in your hand by a string tied to one of their legs.

Small pause

Strepsiades:

Ha! I've just come up with an idea that even you will love. I know how to make lawsuits vanish.

765

Socrates:

Vanish? How?

Strepsiades:

You know that lovely, clear stone that one can get at the pharmacies? People can start fires with it.

Socrates:

Yes. You mean glass, right?

Strepsiades:

That's right, that's the one. Well, what if I went and bought one of them and when I'm in court, and, just as the clerk is about to write up my charges on his wax tablet, I stand back a bit—have him in front of me and the sun behind me— and then... well, couldn't I just make all his writing melt away?

Socrates:

Wow! By the Graces! That's a very clever idea!

Strepsiades:

Woo hoo! I feel fabulous. Just think, I've just melted away a five-talent charge!

Socrates:

Well, then, quickly come and grab this new problem!

Strepsiades:

Tell me!

Socrates:

You're about to lose a case because you've no witnesses. What counter argument would you use so that you'd dismiss this case and launch another against your accuser?

Strepsiades:

Oh, that'd be an easy, simple thing to do.

Socrates:

Oh, yeah? How?

Strepsiades:

Well, the moment the docket for the case before mine appears and when they're about to call my name, I just run off and... hang myself!

Socrates:

Be sensible!

Strepsiades:

But I am being sensible! Who could ever bring up a charge against me if I'm dead?

Socrates:

You've got a head full of drivel! Forget it! I shall be your teacher no longer!

Strepsiades: *Begging*

But why not Socrates? Please, please, Socrates. In the name of all the gods, Socrates!

785

Socrates:

Why not? Because, you idiot, a moment after you've learnt something, it flies out of your skull! You forget it straight away. Tell me: What was the first lesson I just taught you... no more than a minute ago?

Strepsiades:

Hang on, let me think... the first lesson... the first lesson... now what was it? What was that thing we knead the flour in... now what was it? Damn it! I just can't remember!

Socrates:

To the crows with you! Get lost you forgetful, thick-headed old codger!

791

Strepsiades:

Oh, no! What will I do now? They'll destroy me if I don't get to learn how to turn out clever phrases. Come, you Clouds, advise me. Tell me something I can use.

Chorus:

Our advice, old man, is that you should replace yourself with your son, if you have one. Send him to school instead.

Strepsiades:

Yes, I do have a son. A really clever boy, sharp as a tack but –what can I do? He hates education!

Chorus:

And you allow this sort of attitude?

Strepsiades:

He's a strong boy, that one. Well built, mighty! Descendant of the high-flying, snotty-nosed women of Coesyra! But I'll go and see if I can bring him here. Either that, or kick him out of the house, if he refuses. Right out of my house, that's for sure! Socrates, you go inside for a moment and wait for me. I won't be long.

Strepsiades leaves the Think Tank and walks towards his house. Socrates is about to go inside the Think Tank's rooms. The chorus stops them both on their tracks and addresses each separately.

804

Chorus: *To Strepsiades*

Surely you can see the huge package of rewards you'll get from us –us your only gods? This genius here will do anything you ask him to do.

To Socrates

And you, too, Socrates. See how overwhelmed he is by your genius? He is thoroughly excited about education, so grab this opportunity quickly and enjoy it because such chances are not always that certain or permanent.

Socrates and Strepsiades exit.

Short pause before Strepsiades and Phidippides enter. Strepsiades is pushing Phidippides angrily, out of his house.

Strepsiades:

Out, damn you! By Fog! Get out of my house! You're not staying here a second longer! Go on! Off you go and let uncle Megacles with his columns feed you from now on!

Phidippides:

Pappy, you poor, old man! What's got into you all of a sudden? By Zeus from Mount Olympus, you must have totally lost it!

Strepsiades:

Ha! Listen to him! "Zeus from Mount Olympus!" Stupid, stupid boy! You still believe in Zeus of Mount Olympus! You should be ashamed of yourself, at your age!

Phidippides:

Why? What's so odd about that?

820

Strepsiades:

I pinch myself to remind me that you're still a child! You've got such old fashioned ideas!

Look! Come over here and let me educate you about a secret or two, which, once you've understood them you'll be able to call yourself a grownup! But... don't tell anyone else about them, right?

Phidippides: *tentatively*

Sure, papa, what is it?

Strepsiades:

Didn't you just swear by Zeus? "Zeus of Mount Olympus?"

Phidippides:

Yeah, so?

Strepsiades:

Ha! Now take note how useful a good education is: There's no such thing as a Zeus!

Phidippides:

No? No Zeus? What then? Who then?

Strepsiades:

From now on, it's... Dinos! Dinos, the Great Ethereal Typhoon! Dinos shoved Zeus out of the kingdom of gods!

Phidippides:

I was right! You've gone drivelling mad!

Strepsiades:

Believe me, boy! That's the new world order!

Phidippides:

Who told you this stuff?

Strepsiades:

A... It was Socrates... of Melos. And Chaerephon, specialist in fleas' footsteps.

Phidippides:

My, oh my! Are you that far gone that you actually believe what those poxy idiots tell you?

Strepsiades:

Use your mouth for good boy and stop saying nasty things about such righteous men, such intelligent men, such frugal men! Men who know how not to waste their money on soap or on barbers or on oil for their skin. Whereas you! You have washed me away from my own house and home! It's as if I'm already dead and gone.

Go on, now, move! Get into that think tank and get educated –for my sake!

840

Phidippides:

But people like that, what could they possibly teach you that's of any value?

Strepsiades:

Are you kidding? These guys will teach you the complete knowledge of the human race! Then you'll see just what a thick-headed ignoramus you really are!

Now wait here for a sec.

Strepsiades goes into his house

Phidippides:

Bloody hell! What am I going to do? My old man's gone nuts!

Should I go to court and have him declared medically insane?

Enter Strepsiades and a slave carrying a chicken each.

Strepsiades: *To his son.*

Right! Now, son, look at this and tell me what you call it.

Phidippides:

... I call it a chicken.

Strepsiades:

Good. Now look carefully. *Indicating the other chicken.* What about this one?

Phidippides:

... that's a chicken, too.

Strepsiades:

Hahahaha! A chicken this and a chicken that? How you make me laugh, my son! You better stop this practice of misnaming things right now and begin by calling this one a chicken and that one a chickenette.

Phidippides:

Chickenette? What is this? Is this the sort of clever stuff you've learnt from those soiled sickos?

854

Strepsiades:

Absolutely! That and a whole lot more but I'm just too old, you see and I forget everything the very next moment I've learnt it!

Phidippides:

I suppose that's the reason you've also lost your cloak!

Strepsiades:

No, I haven't lost my cloak... I've... donated it to science!

Phidippides:

And what about your shoes, you fool? In whose pastures are they grazing?

Strepsiades:

My shoes? I'll reply as Pericles replied when he was quizzed about the vanished ten talents: "I've made appropriate appropriation of them!"

But, forget all that. Come now, hurry up and go to the Think Tank. You're allowed to be naughty for the sake of your daddy! I've done the same thing for you once, remember? You were still a tiny, lithping little baby, when I spent the very first obol I had earned for my jury service on a brand new toy for you. When we were at the festival of Diasia.

865

Phidippides: *Moves ahead reluctantly.*

All right, father but you will live to regret this one day!

Strepsiades:

Good boy! Good to see you're obeying your father.

Bangs at the door of the Think Tank.

Socrates! Hey, Socrates! Come out here!

Enter Socrates.

Here you are, Socrates. I've brought you my son. He was reluctant at first but I've finally persuaded him!

Socrates: *Examining Phidippides.*

But he's only a boy. A child. He wouldn't have a clue about what baskets go up and what basket come down, in a place like this!

Phidippides:

Not a clue? Well, since you've got the clues and the baskets, see if you can manage to go and hang yourself!

Strepsiades:

Stone the crows, boy! How dare you insult your teacher like that?

Socrates:

Oooh! He's not just a baby, he's a moron! See how he speaks? It's baby babble! Mouth wide open, lips drooping... how on earth will this child ever learn how to make refined, eloquent, court-room speeches? He'll never learn how to articulate a defence, or a summons, or how to bemuse and perplex anyone!

Still, Hyperbolus has managed to learn all these skills –though for the hefty price of a talent, of course!

Strepsiades:

Don't you worry, Socrates! Go ahead and teach him. He's got philosophy in his soul this boy. He's very clever. You should have seen him when he was a tiny toddler. Just this high he was and he would stay at home and build houses made of clay, or carve boats or carts out of fig wood and real cute little frogs out of pomegranates!

Just make sure he learns those two styles of argument: the Wise argument –whatever that might be – and the Clever argument, the one that beats the crap out of the wise one and makes everyone convinced that bad is good and good is bad. But if you can't teach him both, then at least teach him that second one, the Clever style of argument, right?

886

Socrates:

Mister Wise and Mister Clever will do the teaching themselves. I'm off!

Strepsiades:

Keep in mind this one thing, though, Socrates. He needs to learn how to deflect all the just charges against me!

Exit Socrates, Strepsiades and the Slave.

Enter Mr Wise.

Mr Wise: *Calling inside.*

Come out here, Mister Clever! Come and show yourself to our audience. Come on, you're such a show-off you need no special invitation for that!

Enter Mr Clever.

Mr Clever:

Any place, any time, Mister Wise! Let's get in front of the hoi polloi and I'll have you utterly and absolutely destroyed!

Mr Wise:

Oh yeah? And who do you think you are?

Mr Clever:

Me? I'm Mister Clever, a form of logic.

Mr Wise:

Yes, the loser's logic!

Mr Clever:

And you think you're the winner's logic. Bah! I'll beat you hands down.

895

Mr Wise:

Oh yeah? By what piece of wisdom will you do that?

Mr Clever:

By the fact that I always come up with new ideas.

Mr Wise:

Yes, that's certainly the new fashion, thanks to these idiots here! *Indicating the audience.*

Mr Clever:

Idiots? These people are not idiots. They are very... clever!

Mr Wise:

I shall demolish you, Mr Clever!

Mr Clever:

Is that so? And how will you do that, do please tell us!

900

Mr Wise:

By talking about Justice.

Mr Clever:

Ha! Justice? That's one argument I'll have turned upon its head in no time. There is absolutely no Justice!

Mr Wise:

You say there's no such thing?

Mr Clever:

Come on then, show me. Where is this Missy Justice of yours?

Mr Wise:

Justice is with the gods.

Mr Clever:

How can Justice be up there when Zeus is still unpunished after all he's done to his father, Cronos? He had the poor old god chained and destroyed!

Mr Wise:

Damn! This man is thoroughly and utterly nauseating! Quick, somebody bring me a puke pan!

Mr Clever:

Conceited piece of anachronism! Old fogey!

Mr Wise:

Shameless bum splicer!

Mr Clever:

Ah! You're showering me with rose petals!

Mr Wise:

Temple beggar!

Mr Clever:

You're crowning me with wreaths of lily!

Mr Wise:

Father killer!

Mr Clever:

I don't suppose you realise that you're smothering me with gold!

Mr Wise:

Gold? Yes, these words might be gold these days but once they used to be lead!

Mr Clever:

Perhaps so. Perhaps those days they were! But these days they're like adornments.

Mr Wise:

Brash bastard!

915

Mr Clever:

And you, you're a genuine antique!

Mr Wise:

It's thanks to you that none of the young men wants to come to my school! One day the Athenians will wake up to what sort of teaching you've been giving these (*ie the audience*) mindless creatures.

Mr Clever:

Phew! You're such a stinky poo!

Mr Wise:

You're acting the successful man now but it wasn't that long ago when you were acting the beggar, just like Telephus, King of Mysia. You had no ideas of your own so you used to carry a little sack in which you kept some scraps of ideas you used to steal from that crooked lawyer, Pendeletus!

Mr Clever:

Such wisdom!

Mr Wise:

Such lunacy!

Mr Clever:

Such delusion!

Mr Wise:

You and your madness – and the madness of this whole city that nurtures the likes of you while you go about polluting the minds of our younger folk!

Mr Clever: *Notices Phidippides*

Hey, old Cronus! You're not thinking of becoming this boy's teacher, are you?

930

Mr Wise:

Absolutely! I shall be his teacher and keep him safe and away from teachers of utter drivel, like you.

Mr Clever: *Taking Phidippides by the hand and speaking softly, slyly to him.*

Come, young man. Come with me and let this idiot go on exercising his madness!

Mr Wise grabs Phidippides' other hand and drags him violently to his side.

Mr Wise:

Oh, no you don't! Put a hand on this boy and you'll regret it!

A member of the Chorus gets between them and tries to stop them from fighting

Chorus:

Stop it! Stop all this fighting and all these insults.

They obey.

Now, instead of all this nonsense, each of you should make an individual presentation. You, Mr Wise, please explain to us what sort of an education you gave to our previous generation; and you, Mr Clever, talk to us about this new type of schooling that you do. Let the boy hear both of you so he can go to the school of his own choosing.

Mr Wise:

I'll do that.

Mr Clever:

Me too.

940

Chorus:

Well done! Now, who's the first speaker?

Mr Clever:

I'll grant him that privilege. Then, once he's made his little speech, I'll have it all completely shot down with some brand new words and views. After that, if he so much as mumbles anything – anything at all! – I'll get both his eyes and his whole face thoroughly pricked by my sharp counterpoints. He'll feel like a man attacked by a swarm of wasps. He'll be annihilated!

Chorus:

And now, let these two men show us what their skills in agility of thought, of eloquence and what their intelligence and their spin doctoring can achieve for them. Let us see by their speech who's the winner

of the orator's prize.

Wisdom, dear audience is in dire danger here! Which of these friends will win this great contest? You, Mr Wise, have placed the glorious wreaths of good character upon the heads of our older generation. Come then, make the speech your heart desires and let us see the nature of your own soul.

961

Mr Wise:

I shall indeed!

Let me explain what it was like during the time when I was at my peak. The old education system was all about virtue and common decency. These were the acceptable norms in our society then.

The first, most important rule was that young boys should be seen but never heard; not a sound, not even a whisper out of them! Then, it was a strict rule that all the boys from the same neighbourhood would march together to their music school, in an orderly fashion and, even if it was snowing snow as thick as flour outside, these kids would be wearing nothing. At the music school, their teacher would first sit them down –thighs spread open to avoid self stimulation- and then get them all to memorise great songs, like “O, Palas Athena, awesome goddess who destroys cities” or “I hear the distant sound of a cry.” Songs which the boys had to sing in the same way that their own fathers used to sing them. No boy dared buggerise around with that style by adding his own, new little fancy, flowery improvisations like that aggravating Phrynus does with his guitar. He'd be severely whipped with a lash for adulterating the good work of the Muses.

At the gym, when the boys had to sit down on the sand, they did so with their thighs crossed so as not to exhibit anything that could shock the onlooker and when they got up, they'd immediately smooth the sand upon which they were sitting so that they would erase all imprints of their pubescent bodies lest their lover would leer over them.

When a boy oiled himself, he'd never rub his body below his navel and so his balls would glisten with a soft, cool dew, much like the skin of a quince. And when he went for walks with his lovers he wouldn't make his voice all soft and sleazy or drop his glances coyly at other boys like a pimp.

When our young men sat at the table, they wouldn't snatch their radishes like ill-mannered fools, or eat dainty little morsels, or steal the dill or the parsley out of the plates of the older men, nor was he allowed to guffaw or sit cross-legged.

Mr Clever:

Old-fashioned, prehistoric, stuffy stuff, reminiscent of the festivals of Dipolieia with all those adornments of golden cicadas, slaughtered bulls and the songs of Cedeides!

985

Mr Wise:

But it's precisely these teachings of mine that nurtured men fit enough to go and fight at the battle of Marathon. Whereas your boys, these modern men you teach, they're all thoroughly spoiled. They spend their whole lives wrapped up in thick cloaks! I get so angry when I see young men, dancing the martial dances at the Panathenea festivals, and instead of raising their shield high above their naked bodies and swinging it vigorously about, they just hold it down low, in front of their dick! No respect at all for our thrice-born goddess, Athena!

Turning to Phidippides

That's why young fella, you should choose to learn my style of argument – a far better argument than Mr Clever's style. From me you will learn to:

Hate the market place,

Stay away from public bath houses,

Feel ashamed of what is shameful,

Get your soul all fired up and angry when someone makes fun of you,

Give up your seat to the old men about you,

Be respectful of your parents,

Do nothing that may attack our sense of modesty by doing something immodest,

Avoid running off into a dancing girl's house where some little whore might hit you with an apple and you get to destroy your fine name,

Avoid contradicting your father,

Avoid reminding him of his true age by calling him names like Iapetus, Cronus' brother. Poor man, he's spent all of his years bringing you up from a baby.

1000

Mr Clever:

Don't you believe this man for a single moment, my son, or, by Dionysus, people will be making fun of you! “Here comes Demophon, or Pericles or Telessipus, Hippocrates' son! What a wanker!” they'll be saying.

Mr Wise:

And there's more! You'll be spending your time at the gym, making your body taut, trim and terrific. Not like the other young fools of today who just waste their days chattering idly in the market place, telling each other vulgar jokes!

And you won't be the one who'd get dragged into court for some ugly, slippery and trivial dispute. No, my boy! Instead, you'll be attending the Academy where you'll be able to have a sensible friend of your own age, all fragrant with the scent of yew trees, with whom you can sit under the sacred olive trees, crown yourselves with white reed, have a race and be free of any concerns. There, where the poplars shed their subtle leaves and the plane trees whisper to the elms, rejoicing in Spring's finest hour.

Now, my young man, if you follow my advice, if you keep everything I said in your head and do as I say, you'll:

Always have a splendid chest,

A resplendent skin,

Huge shoulders,

A tiny tongue,

A terrific bum

And,

A cute, slender dicky.

But!

If you engage in practices common to the youth of today –well! To begin with,

Your shoulders will be that of a weakling,

Your skin will be ghastly and sallow,

Your chest will be narrow,

Your tongue will be immense,

Your bum will be puny and your...

Voting right will be of a great length!

As well,

Mr Clever here, will have you believe that what's evil is virtue and what's virtue is evil!

And furthermore,

You will catch, from this man, Antimachus' disease, namely, that of bum poking!

1024

Chorus: To Mr Wise

O, darling man, who practices lofty, beautiful wisdom, how sweetly the scent of decency's blossoms attends your words! How blessed must have been those men who lived in the golden, olden days of Cronus!

To Mr Clever

You, Mr Clever must now make a truly novel speech to rebut your opponent here. He has put his case excellently, indeed. You need to show us your skill at its best. Use the Muse of making vacuous but sweetly spun debates.

It's obvious that you'll need to employ some mighty tactic to rebut and beat him at this, or else you'll be laughed at prodigiously.

1037

Mr Clever:

Well, the fact is, my gizzards nearly choked, waiting so anxiously to tear this man's drivel to bits with all my opposing arguments! And this is why intellectuals call me Mr Clever. I was the first to take up the opposite side of that which conventional thinking in courts usually take. And this, my boy, is what will give you all the money, thousands and thousands of talents: the ability to take on the losing side and win!

Now watch what I do with this man's views on education. Watch my cross-examination and learn.

He forbids you to have warm baths!

To Mr Wise

What on earth is your reasoning here? Why object to warm baths?

1046

Mr Wise:

Because they're very bad for you. They turn you into a sissy!

Mr Clever:

Ha! Got you there, mate, with your very first words! Got you around the waist. Inescapable grip this one. Could you answer me this question, please? Which one of all of Zeus' children had the mightiest heart and accomplished the most difficult labours?

Mr Wise:

I believe that would be no one else but Hercules.

Mr Clever:

And have you ever seen any cold water around Hercules' Springs? No, because they are all hot! Hot Springs!

Mr Wise:

And that's our big problem! That's all that our youth carries on about these days, hanging around the bath houses while leaving the wrestling schools totally empty.

Mr Clever:

You also don't like them hanging around the market place! Why not? That's a bloody good thing, I reckon! Why else would Homer call Nestor and all the other clever men, "men of the market place?"

Real orators speak to the masses! Then you've made a point about the tongues of the young men!

Folks, Mr Wise here, would have us believe that young men ought not exercise their tongues!

Ridiculous. Well, I say they should exercise them all they can! Then, after that, he mumbled something about decency. Two dreadful opinions, if you ask me! Who has ever benefited in any way, in this world, by being decent? No one! Have you? Come on, tell me. Refute my argument please!

Mr Wise:

There are lots of them! Peleus, for example! Had he not been a decent man, Cheiron, the centaur who was also decent, would have never given him his knife to defend himself against the other, nasty centaurs!

1064

Mr Clever:

Ha! A knife! What a joke of a reward the poor bastard received for his decency! Here we have Hyperbolus, who sells lamps at the market, an utterly corrupt individual, making an absolute fortune yet, has anyone given him a knife? No! It's a joke, right?

Mr Wise:

As well, it was his decency that saw him marrying the goddess Thetis.

Mr Clever:

Sure it did. And what did she do, to repay him for his decency? She ran away, of course! Deserted the poor sod simply because he wasn't crude and crusty enough. Lousy in bed, too. Not a hard banger between the sheets. Women love a bit of the rough and shameful behaviour in bed. But look at you! A real, old fashioned, antiquated Cronus!

Decency! Ha! Listen, my boy! Listen to what decency is really all about and the sort of delights you're going to miss out on by being decent!

No boys!

No women!

No drunken orgies!

No gambling!

No tasty morsels of any sort!

No drinking!

No laughs!

So I ask you, my boy: what's the point of living if you're deprived of all these wonderful things, ey?

Right! So let me explain to you about human nature's little necessities. Let us suppose you make the great mistake of falling in love with someone. You get yourself tangled up in a bit of, say, adultery and then, boom! You get caught! What would be the result if you were not clever enough to argue your way out of the predicament, ey? I'd say you'd be travelling up shit creek without a paddle, right?

If, however, you follow my teachings, you'd be able to go ahead and do whatever your heart desires:

You'd be able to bounce about and dance about and laugh all you like and consider nothing to be shameful! If you happen to be caught in the act by the hubby, for example, all you'd need to do is to tell him that you have done no wrong. It was all Zeus' fault! After all, how can a mere mortal be stronger than the mightiest of gods? Had he not been tortured himself by the lust for women?

Mr Wise:

But what if the boy listens to your advise and ends up with a radish up his arse and his pubes singed with hot ashes by the husband, who has every right to inflict that upon him? What clever excuse will you furnish him with when he'll have to prove that his bum hole is not wide?

1085

Mr Clever:

Wide bum hole? Wide bum hole? What's the big deal about having a wide bum hole? Why should that worry him?

Mr Wise:
Is there anything worse than having a wide bum hole?

Mr Clever:
Now, look! What will you do if I defeat you on this very point, ey?

Mr Wise:
If you defeat me on this, I shall simply silence myself. What else could I do?

Mr Clever:
Right then, do tell us, from what group of mortals do the lawyers come from?

Mr Wise:
They come from the group of Wide Bum Holes!

Mr Clever:
Quite right. Next. What about our Tragedians? What's their group?

Mr Wise:
Same. From the group of Wide Bum Holes.

Mr Clever:
Correct again. What about our politicians?

Mr Wise:
Same again. From the group of Wide Bum Holes.

Mr Clever:
Now do you get it? You see? You have no case! Look! Look at them (*indicating the audience*) What do you see? What group does the majority of them come from?

Mr Wise:
Let me see...

Mr Clever:
Well? What's your view on them?

Mr Wise:
By all the gods in Heaven! The greater majority of them are from the group of... Wide Bum Holes! I know that one there is for sure... and that one there... and here, that one with the long hair...

1101

Mr Clever:
So... what's your verdict now?

Mr Wise:
Beaten! *To the audience* You bloody bugging, wiggling bum holes! *Takes off his cloak and throws it at the audience* Here, for god's sake, take my cloak. I'm deserting this group and joining yours!
Exit Mr Wise into the Think Tank

Mr Clever: *To Strepsiades.*
Now, Mr Strepsiades, what would you like to do with this son of yours? Do you want to take him home or should I teach him clever arguments for you?

Strepsiades:
No, no! Teach him! By all means teach him, smack him about, put him straight for me! Sharpen one side of his jaw for small squabbles and the other for major legal matters.

1111

Mr Clever:
Have no fear. Your boy will return to you a very clever man!

Phidippides:
A clever man AND a pale-faced wretch!

Chorus:
Well then, off you go the lot of you. As for you, though, Strepsiades, I reckon you'll rethink all this later.
Mr Clever and Phidippides enter the Think Tank while Strepsiades enters his home.

Now, dear audience, let us tell you what wonderful benefits are in store for the judges if they, indeed, help this chorus –and, of course, it is right and proper that they should do so.
The first benefit you'll receive from us will be priority in our rain. If you want to plough your fields at the right time of the year, then you, dear judges, will get the rain ahead of everyone else!
The second benefit is that of our own, personal protection from drought and flood. Your fruit trees and vines will feel the effects of neither of these two blights.
But, then again, people who are considering ways of not honouring us as true goddesses should know the dire consequences they will suffer from us:
Their fields will yield no harvest of wine or anything else,
When their olive trees and vines begin to sprout, we'll destroy them utterly with endless blasts of hail, if

we see them making bricks, we'll send even more blasts of hail and rain and smash his roof tiles to smithereens and, finally, if they or their friends try and have a wedding we'll rain upon it the whole night long!

Perhaps then these judges might wish they were in Egypt instead of having cast their vote in favour of the other plays!

Enter Strepsiades carrying a small sack

1131

Strepsiades: *Counts the days on his fingers.*

Now let me see... we have the fifth day, followed by the fourth day, then the third day... after that comes the second day – God, how I hate that day! It gives me the utter shits! Grrr! It makes me shake and tremble that bloody day! The day after that is the worst day of the month. It's the Old-and-New day, the day when every single creditor of mine has sworn to take me to court and totally destroy me! Stuff me right up!

What I don't understand is this: I've often attempted to talk fairly to them. Ask for a fair treatment, like, for example, I'd plead with them, "Come on, my good man, be reasonable, take a little time over this debt, don't ask for the money right now," or "be nice and just forget about this one, will you?" But they bark back at me, "the way you're going," they say, "we'll never get paid" and they begin with their insults and their threats to sue me! "Dishonest," they call me! Me! Dishonest!

Ah, but do I care any more if they take me to court? Absolutely not! Not if my darling Phidippides has learnt to conduct clever arguments!

But I'll soon know if he did.

Reads the sign above the school:

Think Tank! I'll knock on their door.

Does so and waits a moment. No answer.

Hey boy! Anyone there? Boy!

Socrates opens the door

1145

Socrates:

Greetings, Strepsiades!

Strepsiades:

Greetings to you, too, Socrates! Firstly, please accept this little gift in utter appreciation of the fact that you were my son's good teacher.

Hands him the little sack.

Now tell me about my boy. Has he learnt the style of argument Mr Clever was talking about earlier?

Socrates:

Indeed he has, Strepsiades!

Strepsiades:

Oh, darling, almighty goddess Fraudulence! Well done, Socrates!

Socrates:

Henceforth, my good man, you'll be able to defend yourself against any law suit and win!

Strepsiades:

Really? Even if there were witnesses present when I took out the loan?

Socrates:

Let there be thousands of them! The more witnesses the better!

Strepsiades:

Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I shall shout out loud!

To the audience

Ahoy there, you greedy money lenders! Weep with heartfelt grief now!

Shed now a flood of tears for your principal and for your interest and for your interest upon your interest!

You can cause me no more grief, now that I have, in these halls, a son of mine who, on my behalf has been trained to have a doubly-sharp, doubly gleaming, double edged tongue! He'll be my guardian, the saviour of my house, the curse of all my enemies! And he will come to his father's rescue –rescue him from his unbearable burdens!

Run inside, Socrates and call him out here for me.

Socrates obeys

Ah, my darling, darling boy! My darling son, come out of the Think Tank and listen to your daddy!

Enter Socrates with Phidippides

Socrates:

Here you are! Here's your boy!

Strepsiades: *Hugs and kisses his son.*

Oh, my darling boy!

Socrates:

He's all yours to take home!

Socrates returns to the Think Tank

1170

Strepsiades: *Carefully studies his son in disbelief for a moment*

Woohoo! What an absolute delight it is for my eyes to see your lovely pale face! Let me see! Yes! No colour at all!

By the gods, what a joy it is to see – with one, single glance!- that you are fully trained to argue, to refuse and refute! That's it! That's the look, the iconic look of our national character! There, upon that look of yours one sees the firmly planted attitude of "Who me?" and "Why, whatever DO you mean?" Hahaha! That's the very look that turns you from a criminal into a victim! Oh, yes! That's Athens, all right! Written all over your face! Hahaha!

But now, my son, now is the time for you to save me. You've ruined me, so now you must save me!

Phidippides:

Save you? Save you from what? What are you afraid of?

Strepsiades:

Old Day-New Day, my son. That's what I'm afraid of!

Phidippides:

You mean... there's a day which is both, old AND new?

Strepsiades:

Yep! That's the day when my creditors say they will file legal proceedings against me.

1180

Phidippides:

Then they'll lose. How can one day be two? Can't happen!

Strepsiades:

No? Really?

Phidippides:

Of course not. Can a single woman be both, an old crow and a young virgin, at the same time?

Strepsiades:

Well, no, but that's what the law says.

Phidippides:

No, that's wrong. I reckon they simply don't know how to interpret the law correctly.

Strepsiades:

What is the correct way of interpreting it then?

Phidippides:

You see, our old law maker, Solon, was basically one who loved the common folk...

Strepsiades:

How does that relate to the Old Day-New Day thing?

Phidippides:

Well, the fact is that Solon had set up two distinct days: the Old Day and the New Day so that people wanting to file a law suit would do it on the day of the new moon.

Strepsiades:

So, what was the point of the Old day then?

Phidippides:

The point of the Old Day, dear daddy, was to allow the defendants to arrive in court a day early and settle the matter OUTSIDE the court because if they couldn't, they'd be pooping themselves outside the court on the following morning, the morning of the New Moon!

1196

Strepsiades:

But then, why don't the magistrates accept the filings on the new moon but insist on the Old Day-New Day?

Phidippides:

Because they want to act like food inspectors on the day before a festival: Get there as early as you can, grab as many of those deposits as you can and start tasting the stuff as early as you can. One whole day early, in fact.

Strepsiades:

Excellent! Fabulous! Well done!

To the audience

You pack of sorry-looking clods! Look at you! You sit there like hollow dumb bells, ready for us clever men to take you to the cleaners! What are you, stones, mere numbers, sheep, a clattering of empty pots and pans?

Ha! The son and I deserve a song! A song of triumph! A song of praise! A song of good fortune!

He sings

Oh, happy is the father –that’s me, Strepsiades!

Who’s raised a son –that’s you, Phidippides!

The cleverest of all the sons of his friends and of the folk all around!

And when they’ll see me in the street

They’ll say “dear, dear Strepsiades, what a son you’ve raised!”

That’s AFTER you win a victory against my creditors,

Using your clever skill of twisting oratory.

But let me first, my son,

Take you home and give you a real homely party!

They both enter the house. Some riotous laughter then silence.

Night is followed by early morning.

The sound of a rooster.

Enter Pasiás and a friend.

Short pause.

1214

Pasiás: *loudly*

How can a man throw away half his property for no reason at all, ey? He can’t! He just can’t! Never!

Ha! It would have been better if I had told him to piss off and refuse to lend him the money in the first place, rather than feel this embarrassing hassle now. Here I am dragging you along today to be a witness for the sake of my own money... And on top of all that, I’m also making an enemy out of a neighbour of mine! But, mark my words: So long as I live I will never disgrace my own country! I’m going to definitely sue Strepsiades!

He bangs loudly at Strepsiades’ door

Strepsiades: *From within the house. Annoyed.*

Yes? Who the Hades is it?

Pasiás:

It’s about Old Day-New Day!

Strepsiades opens the door.

Strepsiades: *Looks around at the audience and smiles knowingly.*

Ha! Did you hear that? I call upon you all to bear witness to the fact that he mentioned two distinct days. *To Pasiás.* Now what’s all this about?

Pasiás:

It’s about the twelve minas you’ve borrowed from me, to buy that grey horse of yours!

1225

Strepsiades:

A grey horse? *To the audience* Did you hear that? A horse, he says! You all know that I absolutely hate horses!

Pasiás:

And, by Zeus, you swore by all the gods of Heaven that you’d pay me back!

Strepsiades:

No, by Zeus, I won’t be paying you back. My son, Phidippides wasn’t acquainted back then with the clever arguments he’s acquainted with now. Unbeatable arguments, they are!

Pasiás:

And so now you’ll refuse to pay me back?

Strepsiades:

What would be the joy in having paid for his lessons otherwise?

Pasiás:

And I suppose you’d be willing to swear by whatever gods I tell you, that you’ve never borrowed any money from me.

Strepsiades:

Gods? What gods?

Pasiás:

Zeus, Hermes, Poseidon, for example.

1235

Strepsiades:

By Zeus! Of course, I'd swear by Zeus! Not only that but I'd even pay three more obols to have the most pleasant honour of swearing by Zeus – by Zeus!

Pasias:

What a shameless bastard you are. I hope it will be your death one day!

Strepsiades: *Patting Pasias on the belly.*

Hahaha! You would do well to turn this little belly of yours into a wine skin. Start by rubbing some salt on it! Hahaha!

Pasias: *Infuriated.*

Oh! You're making fun of me?

Strepsiades:

Let's see... I reckon it would hold about six pitchers of wine!

Pasias:

Zeus almighty! Almighty gods! You won't get away with this! I'll teach you to make fun of me like this!

Strepsiades:

Listen to him: "Gods," he says! Gods! Listen you! Swearing by Zeus is a joke among us clever people! What a delightfully funny little man you are!

Pasias:

Have no fear, Strepsiades. One day you'll pay most heavily for this. I swear it. Now, before I leave tell me for sure. Will you give me back my money?

Strepsiades:

Hold it there for a minute. Don't move. I'll be back with an answer very soon.

Strepsiades leaves them and enters his house.

Pasias: *To his friend*

What do you think? Do you think he'll pay me?

Enter Strepsiades with a kneading trough.

Strepsiades:

Tell me what is this?

Pasias:

That? That's a trough. For kneading bread.

1249

Strepsiades:

Hahaha! A trough? What an ignoramus! He calls this a trough and then he expects me to pay him back his money! This, a trough! It's a troughette, you ignoramus! You won't get an obol of your money back, now or ever!

Pasias:

So the answer is no?

Strepsiades:

That's right. The answer is not on your life! Now quickly remove yourself from my threshold! Off you go!

Pasias:

All right. I'm leaving but be in no doubt that I'll be putting in my deposit for a law suit against you! If it's the last thing I ever do!

Strepsiades:

Then you'll be losing that money on top of your twelve minas! Still I'd hate this to happen to you simply because you were ignorant enough to call this a trough!

Exit Pasias and his witness.

Enter Amynias.

Amynias: *Miserably*

Oh, bugger it, bugger it, BUGGER IT! Oh, bugger me, bugger me – DEAD!

1260

Strepsiades:

What? Now who can that be? What a sad lamentation! Surely it's not one of Cratinus' gods crying is it? Not one of our beloved tragedian's deities, surely!

Amynias:

Who am I, indeed! You want to know who I am? Do you really want to know who I am? I'm... a most unfortunate man! I'm bloody buggered!

Strepsiades:

Buggered, ay? Then bugger off out of here!

Amyntias: *Rising his hands to the sky in prayer.*

Oh, you harsh, harsh goddess, Palas Athena! You dreadful smasher of chariot wheels! You have me destroyed thoroughly! I am well and truly and totally buggered!

Strepsiades:

Was it Cratinus' Tlempolemus who did it to you? What's he done this time?

Amyntias:

This is no joke mate! Just go in there and tell your son to pay me back the money he owes me. I need it desperately now – now that I'm so buggered!

Strepsiades:

Money? What money?

1270

Amyntias:

The money he borrowed from me.

Strepsiades:

No wonder you feel buggered!

Amyntias: *Momentarily distracted.*

Bloody hell, bloody buggered is right! I was just driving my chariot and then, suddenly, I fell off it!

Strepsiades:

Hehe! More likely you fell off a donkey, the way you're crapping on!

Amyntias:

Do you call asking your son to pay me back my own money, "crapping on?"

Strepsiades: *Examines Amyntias' head for lumps.*

Hmm, looks like severe brain damage to me! Way beyond repair!

Amyntias:

And you, by Hermes, you look like you're heading for a lawsuit – if you don't give me back my money!

Strepsiades:

Tell me this, Amyntias: Do you think that Zeus rains upon us brand new, fresh water every time it rains or... do you think that the Sun sucks up from down here all that water that has already fallen... eh, so that it can rain it down again the next time?

Amyntias:

How should I know – and why should I care?

Strepsiades:

Ha! You know nothing about such meteoric matters and yet you want your money back? How on earth do you justify that?

1285

Amyntias:

What? Look, if you haven't got all the money right now, then at least pay back the interest on it.

Strepsiades:

Interest? Interest? What sort of beast is this "interest" of yours?

Amyntias:

You know very well what interest is! It's the stuff that makes money grow in time. Day by day, month by month, interest is added on it so as to make it grow.

1290

Strepsiades:

Uttered most eloquently! Now, what about the sea, my good man? Do you reckon it's bigger now than in the olden days?

Amyntias:

Zeus almighty! No, it isn't! It couldn't be or else it would be going against all the Laws!

Strepsiades:

Well then, you miserable bugger, why is it that your money can grow day by day, month by month whereas the sea, with all its rivers flowing right into it, never ever does? Now bugger off out of here or else... *Calls into his house* Somebody bring me the cattle prod!

Amyntias: *Indicating the audience*

I have witnesses!

A slave comes and hands Strepsiades a cattle prod with which Strepsiades rushes about beating Amyntias.

Strepsiades:

Go on! Off with you, you bastard! Get out of here or you'll end up being a branded ass yourself!

Amyntias: *Turning to the audience*

Ah! Ouch! Do you see this? See this outrageous behaviour? See this insult?

1300

Strepsiades:

Still hanging about? Go on! Run! Run yourself out of here before I shove this up your thoroughbred bum hole, you... you bum hole! That's it! Run!

Amyntias exits running

Hahaha! I knew I'd eventually make you fly off... you and your chariot wheels and your branded donkeys! Stupid bugger!

Exit Strepsiades into his house

Chorus:

It sure is a bugger of a thing to love mischief. Just like this old man in there does!

He loves it so much that he won't repay the money he owes people! But mark my words! The old man will fall victim of his own mischief today. That little clever man, in there will certainly regret all the mischief he stirred up today.

Soon he'll come face-to-face with what he always wanted: His clever son will present to him an argument against justice and truth; and it will be an unbeatable argument, using all the clever sophistic spin he can muster. No one will be able to raise a strong enough refutation. So much so that, I reckon, he'll most probably be wishing that his clever son be struck dumb!

Strepsiades rushes in, closely pursued by his angry son, Phidippides, poking him with the cattle prod.

1321

Strepsiades:

Bugger it, bugger it, bugger it! Help me you lot! Ouch! Ouch! Come on, neighbours, come on, relos, come on, fellow citizens! Come up here and help me! Ouch! Save me! Do something! Can't you see? I'm being poked to death!

Phidippides hits him on the head and slaps him on the face.

Ouch, my head! Ouch, my jaw!

Damn you, you bastard, are you beating your own father?

Phidippides:

Of course I am, daddy!

Strepsiades:

Ouch! See that, friends? He admits it! Ouch!

Phidippides:

Of course I do! Here, take that!

Strepsiades:

Ouch! Damn you, you lousy shit! You father-killer! You lousy criminal!

Phidippides:

Oh, man! How I love it when you talk dirty! Go on! Say some more! Insult me, please! I love it!

More, please!

Strepsiades:

Cave-size bum hole!

1330

Phidippides:

Oh, yes! I'm being beaten with roses! Go on, strike me again! More roses, please!

Strepsiades:

Ouch! You're beating your own father?

Phidippides:

But – by Zeus!- of course I am! And do you want to know why? *Strepsiades nods* Fine, let me tell you.

Let me explain to you why I am right in beating you.

Strepsiades:

You little shit! What could possibly make it all right for someone to beat his own father?

Phidippides:

I'd be happy to demonstrate. This argument is mine!

Strepsiades:

You'll prove that it is right to beat your father?

Phidippides:

Too right! It'll be a cinch! Just tell me which of the two arguments you prefer.

Strepsiades:

Arguments? What do you mean "which of the two arguments?"

Phidippides:

The wise argument or the clever argument?

Strepsiades:

Zeus almighty! I really have done it, this time, haven't I? I really have taught you how to win an argument from the unjust side, if you can succeed in proving that it's a proper thing for a father to be beaten up by his own sons!

Phidippides:

Yes, I've no doubt that once you've heard my argument, you, too, will be convinced! You'll be able to say nothing against it!

Strepsiades:

Is that a fact? Well then, I'm most eagerly waiting to hear this argument of yours.

1345

Chorus:

Watch out, old boy! You've got a real job ahead of you now! Think of a way of showing that you're stronger than him because, if the young bugger didn't think he had something up his sleeve he wouldn't be so bloody cocky! That's obvious from here. Though, you'd better begin by telling us how this fight began in the first place. This, you're obliged to do.

Strepsiades:

Certainly! I'll tell you how all these insults began flying! You know, we were having a fabulous feast inside and when the mood became jolly, I asked him to pick up his lyre and sing for me this lovely song by Simonides, called "How The Ram Got Shorn." Well! "No way," he says. "All this singing and playing the lyre at feasts is old hat! It's like when the women sing while they're cleaning barley."

Phidippides:

I should have pounded and stomped upon you at that! Wanting me to sing! What did you think you were doing, entertaining cicadas?

1361

Strepsiades:

See? That's the sort of rubbish he was spouting inside, too! Reckons Simonides is a bad poet!

Insufferable stuff! I mean, I did suffer it but only just –for a while! Then I said, all right, if you don't want to pick up the lyre then at least pick up a sprig of myrtle, as is the custom, and sing me something out of Aeschylus!

Well! What do you think the little bastard say to that? "In my opinion," he said, "In my opinion, I reckon that Aeschylus is foremost among all poets: foremost in noise, foremost in gobbledygook, foremost in ridiculous grandiloquence, and foremost in wanky waffle!" Yeah, that's what he said! Well, you can imagine what that did to my poor heart! I had thumping palpitations! But still, I steadied my angry heart and said to him, "all right, then, recite for me something new, something contemporary, something clever from these modern poets. Anything!" Immediately he jumps up and recites something from Euripides. Some damned thing about –god strike me dead if I'm telling a lie- something about some brother who loved to screw his sister. Siblings from the same mother! I was furious! I just couldn't suffer any more of it, so I began throwing at him all sorts of terrible, insulting words – and that's how we got to the predictable point of chucking insults at one another. He to me and me back to him!

Then, the wanker, jumps up at me and begins to smack me about, beat me up, throttle me, trying to turn me into powder!

Phidippides:

That's because you wouldn't praise Euripides! He's the wisest poet there is!

Strepsiades:

Fine! He's the wisest; but what about you? What shall I call you? No, I better not answer that. You'll start beating me again!

Phidippides:

But of course I'd start beating you again. You'd deserve it!

1380

Strepsiades:

Deserve it? Me? Why, you shameful little twirp? I'm your father, remember? I'm the one who raised you, the one who would listen and who could understand all of your baby babble. I was the one who knew what you wanted when you blurted out the words "shoo-shoo" and I'd rush off to get you some water. Or if you asked for a "bwed" I knew you'd want some bread and if it was "poo-poo" you lisped, then I'd take you outside straight away and hold your little cheeks apart!

But you! Just now when you were choking me to death, I howled in agony. I yelled out, "I want a shit!"

but did you pick me up and carry me outside? Did you try and hold my cheeks apart? No, you did not, you mean and nasty creature, so... so I just crapped into my bum-sack there and then!

1391

Chorus:

Ah! I can hear the hearts of the young boys, pounding in anticipation of his reply!

If a son can act the way this young man is acting towards his father, and can justify it with his type of argument, then watch out all of you old men! Your hides are in extreme danger!

Come on then, young man, you clever young cobbler of spin, you manufacturer of “modern logic!”

Talk to us! Persuade us! Prove to us that your thinking is right!

Phidippides:

I'd be dee-lighted! Because it's, indeed, an absolutely delightful thing to speak with knowledge about all the new and clever things and, as well, to be able to pour scorn upon the established but oh, so antiquated laws!

In the days before my education, I thought that only the ponies mattered. So far as making speeches is concerned, forget it; I couldn't string three words together! I'd be all over the place with them. I'd be tripping over every word. But now, now that this man here has stopped my hippophilia dead on its tracks, I've learnt how to take part in the most refined and subtle arguments and to understand a variety of views and thought processes.

Being that well educated, I'm certain that I can prove that it is right to beat one's father...

1406

Strepsiades: *Interrupts him.*

Glorious Zeus! Get back to your horse-loving days then! I'd rather have to pay for a four-horse team than to be copping your dreadful thrashing every day!

Phidippides:

Oh, I'll go back all right. Back to where I was before you interrupted me!

Ahem! I continue with a question to you: Did you never lay a hand on me when I was a young boy?

Strepsiades:

Sure I did but that was because of love and concern for you.

Phidippides:

Love and concern, ey? Well then, is it not the same with what I'm doing? Obviously, one beats someone who one is concerned about, so I beat you! Are you suggesting that your body should be exempt from beatings but mine shouldn't be?

Why should it be that only children be made to cry? Why shouldn't the fathers be made to cry also?

Sure, I know what you're going to say to that. You're going to say that tradition permits the thrashing of children. Well, my man, to that I say, old men like you are in their second childhood. You're children again! In fact, the old men should be beaten all the more, to make absolutely certain that they don't misbehave!

1420

Strepsiades:

But there's no law that considers the beating of a father to be right.

Phidippides:

The maker of that law was a man just like you who persuaded the men of the olden times to vote it in. So, why should I not be allowed to bring about a new law to the effect that the sons of the future be able to return the honour and beat their fathers?

All right, we'll forget about all the beatings we, children, copped before the law took effect and we'll even seek no compensation for our suffering; not like all the cocks and other animals who exact revenge upon their fathers, though we are hardly any different from them... except, that is, that animals don't vote for any laws...

1430

Strepsiades:

Cocks? Do you really want to be like the cocks? Well then, go sleep on a perch and start pecking dung!

Phidippides:

Not the same thing at all, old boy! Ask Socrates.

Strepsiades:

Socrates or no Socrates, forget about beating me or, you'll be beating yourself one day!

Phidippides:

And this is because?

Strepsiades:

Why? Because I have every right to spank you, just like you'll have every right to spank your own son –if you ever get one!

Phidippides:

And if I don't ever get one, then I'd have done all that howling for nothing and you – you'd be laughing your head off in your grave!

Strepsiades: *Frustrated, he turns to the audience.*

Now listen all you old fellers like me, out there! It appears to me that he put up a good argument. I reckon we should accept the fact that these young men have a fair point and that we should cop a beating ourselves and do some crying – whenever we do something wrong.

Phidippides:

Now turn your mind to yet another proposition...

1440

Strepsiades:

No, no, I've had enough! Any more propositions and I'll die!

Phidippides:

No, really, let me speak. Perhaps it'll make you feel a bit better about what you've suffered so far.

Strepsiades:

Better? Better? Please explain?

Phidippides:

Well, I'll beat mother the same way I beat you!

Strepsiades:

What? What did you just say? What are you going to do, again? This is an even worse outrage!

Phidippides:

Oh yeah? What if, though, by arguing in the same, clever, way, I get to win over the argument and prove that it is right to beat one's mother?

Strepsiades:

Well then, if you're going to achieve something like that, then you might as well, take Mr Socrates and Mr Clever and all three of you together jump into the executioner's pit!

Turns to the Chorus

You! It's all your fault, lady Clouds! It's because of you lot that I have to suffer all this! I had trusted you wholeheartedly with all my affairs!

Chorus:

Oh, no, this whole thing was your idea. You're the one who turned to the sly ways of conducting business.

1456

Strepsiades:

So why didn't you warn me at the beginning, instead of leading me on, me, an ignorant old man?

Chorus:

That's how we deal with the likes of you. Every time we see someone who just loves to do the sly and smart-arsey thing, we drop him right into a huge disaster, so that he may learn his lesson and turn his love to the gods, instead.

Strepsiades:

A painful lesson, indeed, Clouds but fair, nevertheless! I shouldn't have tried to avoid paying back that money I owed.

Now, my darling son, I think you should come with me and together we'll try and take out that low life, Chaerephon and his mate Socrates who ripped both us both off.

Phidippides:

Oh, no! I couldn't do that! I couldn't harm my teachers!

Strepsiades:

Oh, yes you could – and you should! You must pay your respect to Zeus, protector of all fathers!

Phidippides:

Ha! Look at that! Zeus, the protector of all fathers? How old fashioned can you be? Does Zeus exist?

Strepsiades:

Of course he does.

Phidippides:

No he doesn't! Dinos, The Great Ethereal Typhoon has knocked Zeus off his perch and now he's the king.

Strepsiades:

He hasn't knocked him off his perch. Look there!

Points at the cup hanging above the door of the Think Tank

I used to think that because of that doodah up there!

Talking to the cup

Oh what an idiot I was to think that you, a mere piece of pottery, was a god!

1475

Phidippides:

Right! You... you just hang around here all by yourself and babble all the waffle you want. I'm out of here!

Phidippides goes into the house

Strepsiades:

God, how paranoid can one be! I must have been out of my wits to scorn the gods for Socrates' sake!

Walks over to the statue of Hermes and directs his speech towards it.

Now, listen dear Hermes! Please don't get mad at me! Don't go hurling some dreadful, awful, destructive disaster upon me. Please forgive me! It's not my fault if I lose my mind now, is it? I lost my mind and fell for all their clever gobbledygook in there.

Now give me some advice. What do you think I should do? Shall I sue them? Drag them all to court? What do you reckon?

Puts his ear to the statue and pretends to be having a discussion with the god. Finally:

Quite right, quite right! You're absolutely right! Excellent advice! I'll forget about taking them to court and just go over there and burn their place down. I'll just rush over there and burn that chit-chatter down. Straight away!

Calls into his house

Xanthias! Xanthias! Come out here and bring a ladder and a hatchet with you!

Enter Xanthias with the ladder and the hatchet

Now tell me, do you love your master? *Xanthias reluctantly nods.* Good, now climb up there, up on the roof of that Think Tank there and demolish the roof so that the whole place will cave in on them.

Xanthias obeys. He climbs onto the roof and begins to smash it down.

Strepsiades, highly excited, calls out into his house again.

Oi! Someone in there bring me a lighted torch!

Enter another slave who hands Strepsiades a lighted torch.

Hahaha! The great arrogant bastards! I'll make them pay for what they did to me! I'll make them pay very, very dearly!

Student 1: *From within the Think Tank*

Oi! Help! Help!

Strepsiades:

Come on my little torchy! Give it to them! Give it to them good and proper! Let there be lots of light!

He sets fire to the Think Tank and this forces lots of students to rush out.

Student 2:

Hey, you, up there! Oi! What do you think you're doing up there?

Strepsiades:

Who me? What do you think I'm doing? I'm having a clever little debate with the rafters of your house here!

Student 3: *Through the window*

Hey, who set fire to the place?

Strepsiades:

It's me! Me, whose cloak you've pinched!

Student 4:

Stop that! Stop it right now! You'll kill us all!

1500

Strepsiades:

My intentions exactly! That is, if this hatchet does justice to my wishes, or if I don't fall on my arse and break my neck!

Socrates rushes out, smoke billowing from his clothes and his hair.

Socrates: *Between coughs and splatters.*

Hey, what are you doing up on the roof?

Strepsiades:

I am walking on air... and doing so, so that I may carefully examine the sun.

Socrates:

Bugger it, bugger it, BUGGER IT! I'm going to choke to death! Cough, cough! Ah, bugger me dead!

1505

Student 3: *Still through the window, between coughs and splatters.*

Me too, bugger it! I'm going to choke too! No, I'm going to be burnt alive!

Jumps out through the window.

Strepsiades and Xanthias come down from the roof and confront Socrates.

Strepsiades:

Where did you learn to insult the gods like that, ey? And why go staring up at the Moon's bum?

To Xanthias

Chase them! Chase them and beat the crap out of them! Stone them all! They deserve it all and more!

They've insulted our gods!

Strepsiades and Xanthias chase Socrates and his students away and off the stage.

Chorus:

Let's dance our way out of here! We've done our bit for today!

Exit Chorus

**END OF ARISTOPHANES'
"CLOUDS"**