

SOCRATES IN THE *CLOUDS*: EXCESS AND IMPIETY

SOCRATES IN THE *CLOUDS*: EXCESS AND IMPIETY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyse the portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds* in detail, with emphasis on the particularly unflattering aspects of the depiction, aspects which may have soured the public's perception of Socrates, or else at least may vocalize an already-soured perception of him. The establishment of the exact nature of this depiction is the primary objective of this paper then. But an interesting theme will emerge: the negative qualities in the depiction of Socrates will be shown to have a unity, rather than being random jabs. They constitute a general stereotype of the intellectual of the time, and the underlying criticism behind all of the negative qualities is that the intellectual is perceived to reject the middling egalitarian values so essential to his state. A large part of this rejection will be his religious heterodoxy, and the important implications that has for his character. The study of the nature of the portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds* is a worthwhile topic by itself, but this detailed analysis of the depiction will also provide a useful point of reference for further studies of Aristophanes' comedy, Socrates' trial, and fifth and fourth century Athenian attitudes towards intellectuals.

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# Contents

Descriptive Note . . . . .	ii
Abstract . . . . .	iii
Acknowledgements . . . . .	iv
1 Introduction . . . . .	1
1.1 The <i>Clouds</i> : A Personal Attack? . . . . .	3
1.2 The Middling Man . . . . .	10
1.3 Religion . . . . .	12
1.4 The Charge of Impiety . . . . .	18
2 The Character of Socrates in the <i>Clouds</i> . . . . .	27
2.1 Disbelief in the Traditional Gods . . . . .	27
2.2 Immorality . . . . .	33
2.3 Corruption of the Youth . . . . .	36
2.4 Natural Philosophy . . . . .	42
2.4.1 The Earth and Beneath . . . . .	46
2.4.2 The Sky . . . . .	49
2.4.3 The Impracticality of Philosophy . . . . .	56
2.5 Abuse of Rhetoric . . . . .	63

2.6 Demand for Payment . . . . .	68
2.7 Pretensions . . . . .	81
3 Concluding Remarks . . . . .	87
Primary Sources . . . . .	89
Secondary Sources . . . . .	90

# 1 Introduction

A reading of Aristophanes' *Clouds* invites a few pressing questions about the play's relationship to the historical Socrates—questions that are very difficult and perhaps unanswerable with any reasonable degree of certainty. Is the play an attack on the real Socrates' character, or is it merely typical comic convention? Did the play sour the public's opinion of Socrates, or did it reflect an already prevalent public view, or was it divorced from the public's opinion entirely? To what extent, if any, did the play affect the charges brought against Socrates, and to what extent, if any, did the play affect the final outcome of his trial?

The exploration of some of these questions might well fill volumes and remain an unsatisfying investigation. The goal of this thesis is not necessarily to answer any of these above questions, but rather to explore a couple of more basic questions, upon the investigation of which any attempt to answer the more advanced questions will depend: how exactly is Socrates characterized in the *Clouds*? and how negative is this portrayal? These may seem to be very basic questions, but again, they are essential ones that lie at the base of any attempt to answer to the more advanced questions. As foundational material, then, they deserve full investigation.

This investigation will ultimately attempt to show that the portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds* is quite negative. Through his character, the problems of intellectuals generally are examined. Further, the *Clouds* achieves this negativity by opposing



the intellectual, on a number of fronts, to the Athenian egalitarian values of the “middling man” as described by Morris,<sup>1</sup> which is described in this paper on page 10 in section 1.2, below. Among the depicted negative traits in the *Clouds*, all united by their base in anti-egalitarian characterization, are heterodoxy and careless indoctrination of students: these negative traits are interesting in themselves both because of their prominence in the *Clouds*’ portrayal of Socrates and because of their enticing similarity to the charges that were ultimately brought against the historical Socrates.

It is the *Clouds*, however, which will be the focus of this paper, and the criticisms of intellectuals that it embodies. Dover suggests that the layman distrusted intellectuals not only “due to his normal distaste for abstract reasoning,” but also because of his reliance on a religious understanding for essential cycles like farming and because reservations about the gods detracted from the enjoyment of religious and social festivities.<sup>2</sup> This reservation about the traditional gods comes from the rational analysis of myth as well as a new, more rigorous method for understanding natural phenomena: natural philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The potential for moral and social problems arising from this heterodoxy<sup>4</sup> was, I will argue, troubling to some who had a passing acquaintance with Socrates: a sentiment of which Aristophanes does not hesitate to

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<sup>1</sup>Morris, I. “The Strong Principle of Democracy.” In Ober, Josiah and Hedrick, Charles, editors. *Demokratia*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1996 p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Dover, K. *Aristophanic Comedy*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1972 p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>For more on this topic, see the appropriate part of this paper on page 42, section 2.4.

<sup>4</sup>For more on the topic of moral or social problems arising from heterodoxy, see below, page 12, section 1.3 of this paper.

take full advantage.

### 1.1 The *Clouds*: A Personal Attack?

If Aristophanes takes advantage of this sentiment to paint a negative picture of Socrates, it is an obvious question to ask, to what end? But as was said at the very beginning of this paper, on page 1, section 1, this is a very difficult question. The quest to find an author's intentions is notoriously futile in the study of literature. Further entangling any study of an author's intentions are the possibilities that the author's intentions could change during the writing of a work, or over the course of different revisions (as we may have here with the *Clouds*), or even after the work is finished? Nevertheless, it is hoped that this paper will provide a worthwhile analysis of the Socrates' representation within the play—an analysis detailed enough that it could perhaps be used as a small part of some other thorough investigation of Aristophanes' motives, however futile the attempt might be. More important than hearsay, one of the most important pieces of evidence (as far as such evidence can exist) for what Aristophanes was thinking when he wrote the *Clouds* is the play itself. The body of this paper, then, is mostly directed at discerning what exactly the depiction of Socrates is, which is a large enough question completely apart from what the motivations were behind that depiction. Even so, a brief look at the matter of possible motivations is necessary.

The general distrust of intellectuals is expressed clearly in the *Clouds*, where Socrates is attacked as a symbol for the entire intellectual movement.<sup>5</sup> But even so, this distrust is so firmly placed on Socrates that readers might draw the same conclusion as Mueller expresses when he says that “[Aristophanes] too is an ultra-conservative, but he hates Socrates at least as much as Xenophon loves him.”<sup>6</sup> Diogenes Laertius even goes so far as to suggest that Aristophanes attacks Socrates at the request of a friend:

οὗτος γὰρ οὐ φέρων τὸν ὑπὸ Σωκράτους χλευασμὸν πρῶτον μὲν ἐπήλειψεν αὐτῷ τοὺς περὶ Ἀριστοφάνην.

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For Anytus could not endure to be ridiculed by Socrates, and so in the first place he stirred up against him Aristophanes and his friends. (*Life of Socrates* 38)<sup>7</sup>

But there is not, however, enough independent evidence to conclude with a reasonable amount of certainty that Aristophanes was driven by a personal hatred. In fact, it is possible that the unique position of the *Clouds* as a revised play never produced in its surviving form is evidence that the play is not a personal attack. Dover notes that the hypothesis “tells us that the parabasis, the contest of Right and Wrong, and the burning of Socrates’ school, belong in their entirety to the revised ver-

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<sup>5</sup>This claim will be supported over the course of this thesis by the evidence that the Socrates in the *Clouds* has many conflicting traits that are more stereotypical of intellectuals. That the Socrates of the *Clouds* is not a historical representation is elaborated on a little further on, on page 8, section 1.1 of this paper.

<sup>6</sup>Mueller, G. “Another Approach to Socrates.” *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 43 Jul. (1933) No. 4 p. 429.

<sup>7</sup>This reference and all subsequent references to Diogenes Laertius’ *Life of Socrates* are from Long’s edition (1966) for the Greek text, and from Hicks’ translation (2006) for the English text.

sion.”<sup>8</sup> Basing his thought on this hypothesis, Guthrie notes a common supposition: that “Aristophanes concluded from his failure that the play had treated Socrates too kindly, and added these two scenes in the revision to make it plain that he really was against him and all the new learning.”<sup>9</sup> That is to say, the hypothesis could be one small piece of evidence suggesting that perhaps the harshness of the second version of the *Clouds* is mostly motivated by a desire to give an audience what it wants.

It is important to establish here from the outset that although the term “attack” is strong, the *Clouds* is “in a very obvious way,” as Silk puts it, “a harsh attack on Socrates.”<sup>10</sup> This does not necessarily import a reading of authorial intent, nor does such a statement imply that Aristophanes held Socrates in so little regard as the play seems to suggest. The play could be thought of as an approximation, with more or less success, of what might please the audience. The extent to which the play accomplishes this by portraying Socrates in role of a stock comic character type, the *alazon*, is elaborated more on page 81, section 2.7. It should be noted, however, that however much the character of Socrates may fit a stock comic type, that in itself does not determine the author’s intent one way or another. That is, it is theoretically possible for an author to use a common character type for an uncommon purpose.

Whether the *Clouds* attacks Socrates and philosophy only because they are ripe comic

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<sup>8</sup>Dover, K. *Aristophanes: Clouds: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*. Oxford: OUP, 1968 (repr. 1970) p. lxxxiv.

<sup>9</sup>Guthrie, W. *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Volume III, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969 p. 376.

<sup>10</sup>Silk, M. *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy*. Oxford: OUP, 2000 p. 301.

material, or whether it attacks them in an earnest effort to change public sentiment or discourage or rebuke intellectuals, it is still attacking them in the sense that it is a negative portrayal. The term “attack,” then, is used here to refer not to the author’s motives, but to the effect that the play itself has: it does not present a flattering picture of Socrates, but rather a negative one.

In the *Apology*, Plato represents Socrates as interpreting the *Clouds* as an attack of sorts:

ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνοι δεινότεροι, ὧς ἄνδρες, οἱ ὑμῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκ παίδων παραλαμβάνοντες ἔπειθόν τε καὶ κατηγοροῦν ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον οὐδὲν ἀληθές, ὥς ἔστιν τις Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, τὰ τε μετέωρα φροντιστὴς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεζητηκῶς καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν. οὗτοι, ὧς ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, οἱ ταύτην τὴν φήμην κατασκεδάσαντες, οἱ δεινοὶ εἰσὶν μου κατήγοροι· οἱ γὰρ ἀκούοντες ἡγοῦνται τοὺς ταῦτα ζητοῦντας οὐδὲ θεοὺς νομίζειν.

But those other [accusers] are more dangerous, gentlemen, who gained your belief, since they got hold of most of you in childhood, and accused me without any truth, saying, “There is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a ponderer over the things in the air and the one who has investigated the things beneath the earth and who makes the weaker argument the stronger.” These, men of Athens, who have spread abroad this report, are my dangerous enemies. For those who hear them think that men who investigate these matters do not even believe in gods. (*Apology* 18b–c)<sup>11</sup>

From this passage, then, one can gather a couple of relevant ideas. First, Socrates or Plato is arguing that, whatever Aristophanes’ intent was, the general public interpreted the negative rumours about Socrates, including the *Clouds*, as valid criticisms of Socrates’ character. Second, in the final sentence of the above passage, he (Socrates

<sup>11</sup>This reference and all subsequent references to Plato’s *Apology* are from Burnet’s edition (1967) for the Greek text, and from Fowler’s translation (2005) for the English text.

or Plato) argues that the public additionally interpreted these bad qualities as a representation of intellectuals in general. And according to the *Apology*, the *Clouds* is only one of many sources for Socrates' bad publicity:

ὁ δὲ πάντων ἀλογώτατον, ὅτι οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα οἷόν τε αὐτῶν εἰδέναι καὶ εἰπεῖν, πλὴν εἴ τις κωμωδοποιὸς τυγχάνει ὦν.

But the most unreasonable thing of all is this, that it is not even possible to know and speak their names, except when one of them happens to be a writer of comedies. (*Apology* 18c-d)

On the other hand, there is a report that Socrates actually enjoyed the play. Plutarch says that when asked if he was offended by his representation in the *Clouds*, Socrates replied as follows:

‘μὰ Δί’ οὐκ ἔγωγ’, ἔφησεν· ὥς γὰρ ἐν συμποσίῳ μεγάλῳ τῷ θεάτρῳ σκώπομαι.’

Good heavens no. He has his joke against me in the theatre as if it were a big party of friends. (Plutarch, *De liberis educandis* 10c-d)<sup>12</sup>

And indeed, at that point the public's understanding of attacks like this was not yet putting Socrates into any danger: as Guthrie points out, “the *Clouds* was produced in 423, when no one had any thought of prosecuting Socrates, and twenty four of the most unhappy years in Athenian history had to pass before such a catastrophe could occur.”<sup>13</sup> In a sense, the *Clouds* became an attack over those years, however the play may have started out. It is obvious that, however small the role the *Clouds* may have

<sup>12</sup>The Greek for this passage is from Babbitt's edition (1969), while the English translation is from Guthrie (1969), p. 375

<sup>13</sup>Guthrie (1969) p.375.

played in Socrates' trial, it only strengthened the stereotypes and depictions that the accusers were eager to exploit.

It is important to note here at the start that the Socrates represented in the *Clouds* is by no means necessarily to be taken as an accurate historical depiction. This is the position that Dover takes, and the contrary view is difficult to defend: Havelock remarks that "the *Clouds* viewed as a possible source of independent testimony [for the historical Socrates] fails to obtain serious consideration."<sup>14</sup> The position that the *Clouds* cannot be read as a historical presentation of Socrates was so well established in 1983 that Kleve can argue against it in an attempt at humour in an "impudent paper" which he asks to be read "*cum grano salis*."<sup>15</sup> Drachmann claims that "it is well known that Aristophanes chose Socrates as a representative of the modern movement. In him he embodies all the faults with which he wished to pick a quarrel in the fashionable philosophy of the day."<sup>16</sup> McPherran describes Socrates' character as "a jumbled crypto-*phusiologos* and Sophist, the head-polymath and experimental investigator of all varieties of natural and supernatural phenomena, part Thales (180) and Part Prodicus (361): a 'high-priest of poppycock' (358–361, 833–839)."<sup>17</sup>

Dover recognizes that "Aristophanes has foisted on to Socrates practices and be-

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<sup>14</sup>Havelock, E. "The Socratic self as it is parodied in Aristophanes' *Clouds*." *Yale Classical Studies*, Vol. 22 (1972) p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Kleve, K. "Anti-Dover or Socrates in the *Clouds*." *Symbolae Osloenses*, Vol. 58 (1983) p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>Drachmann, A. *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*. Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1922 (repr. 1977) p. 56.

<sup>17</sup>McPherran, M. *The Religion of Socrates*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1996 p. 96.

liefs which he could fairly have attributed to other intellectuals,” and Aristophanes possibly “chose not to recognize differences which were (and are) of great importance to historians of philosophy.”<sup>18</sup> Dover notes that “if it was Ar[istophanes]’ purpose to caricature the genus ‘intellectual’ as a whole, the evidence suggests that it is a fair caricature in essentials.”<sup>19</sup> He further points out that before Plato, there was no distinction between a philosopher and a sophist.<sup>20</sup> Andrea Nightingale elaborates on this point, citing the wide range of intellectuals that were all simply called *sophoi* or *sophistai* at this time:

Previous to Plato, [Presocratics, the mathematicians, different kinds of scientists, and the sophists], together with the poets, lawgivers, and other men of skill or wisdom, were grouped together under the headings of “*sophoi*” and “*sophistai*.” The word φιλοσοφεῖν and its cognates, in fact, rarely if ever occurs until the late fifth century [...]. Indeed, [...] φιλοσοφεῖν does not take on a specialized and technical meaning until Plato appropriates the term for his own enterprise.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, this lack of a distinction means that an attack on Socrates for being an intellectual is basically the same as an attack on intellectuals in general. This reading of the *Clouds* is analogous to the way Burnyeat reads Plato’s *Apology*, as neither necessarily about the real Socrates nor necessarily for real jurors:

If the words spoken by Socrates in the written defense are not identical with the words spoken by Socrates on the day of his trial, then the jury to which the written defence is addressed need not be identical with the

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<sup>18</sup>Dover (1972) pp. 117–8.

<sup>19</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) pp. xxxv–xxxvi.

<sup>20</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) pp. xxxv–xxxvi, n. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Nightingale, A. *Genres in Dialogue*. Cambridge: CUP, 1995 p. 10.



jury of 501 (or 500) male Athenians to whom the spoken defence was addressed. Plato's writing the *Apology* in the form of a defence speech by Socrates puts the reader—any reader—in the position of juror.<sup>22</sup>

Silk forcefully draws a conclusion similar to Dover's, claiming that the Socrates of the *Clouds* has "exaggerated traits [...] which collectively amount to a cartoon of the new intellectualism."<sup>23</sup>

Henderson, however, while he admits the unlikelihood that the Socrates of the *Clouds* is an accurate historical representation, argues that "in the absence of unbiased information about Socrates, however, we must accept *Clouds* as a valid expression of what public opinion believed, or might be expected to believe, about him in the Athens of 423–c. 416."<sup>24</sup> Whether the public believed the *Clouds*' portrayal of Socrates as an accurate depiction of the historical Socrates, or whether the audience understood it as a symbolic caricature, philosophy is attacked on a number of fronts, through Socrates' character in the *Clouds*. All of these fronts are attacked by means of their association with impiety and the lack of morality it breeds.<sup>25</sup>

## 1.2 The Middling Man

The implied criticisms of Socrates' character in the *Clouds* revolve around his inability or unwillingness to function as a "middling man." The egalitarian values of the polis

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<sup>22</sup>Burnyeat, M. "The Impiety of Socrates." *Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 17 (1997) pp. 1–2.

<sup>23</sup>Silk (2000) p. 240.

<sup>24</sup>Henderson, J. *Aristophanes: Clouds, Wasps, Peace (LCL 488)*. Volume II, Cambridge: HUP, 1998 (repr. 2005) p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>The association of impiety and immorality is elaborated upon on page 12 in section 1.3.

are well known. Morris argues that these values grew to prominence before the birth of the polis, and that in fact it was the prevalence of these values that led to the democratic polis in Athens by the end of the sixth century.<sup>26</sup>

According to Morris, the vagueness of the concept of *mesos* or *metrios* “middling man”

allowed *all* Athenian citizens to think of themselves as members of a community of restrained, sensible men, characterized by “same-mindedness” (*homonoia*) and tied together by *philia*, which literally means “friendship” but carries a sense like Sahlin’s “balanced reciprocity.”<sup>27</sup>

As the bedrock of the polis, to be a middling man is to be a worthy part of the community: “to deny [a man] his middling status was to cast him out of the ideal polis.”<sup>28</sup> In this way, then, not to be seen by one’s community as a middling man is a serious matter. The ideal of the middling man is not only one of community, but also, perhaps paradoxically, one of a certain degree of independence:

When Athenians called themselves *metrioi* they imagined one another as self-sufficient farmers on their own land, head of households, married with children, responsible, and self-controlled. The phalanx provided a useful metaphor for the solidarity and interdependence of the citizens.<sup>29</sup>

As is evident from the terms *mesos* and *metrios*, one essential aspect of this egalitarian ideal is moderation. Excess in either direction is a failure to live up

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<sup>26</sup>Morris (1996) pp. 19–20.

<sup>27</sup>Morris (1996) p. 22.

<sup>28</sup>Morris (1996) p. 40.

<sup>29</sup>Morris (1996) p. 22.

to one's obligations to the polis: that is to say, for example, excessive wealth and excessive poverty are both obstacles to being a middling man.

Throughout the *Clouds*, one sees Socrates having contradictory traits like these. Rather than paint a consistent portrait of Socrates, Aristophanes paints one of opposing excesses: his Socrates is both too greedy and too uninterested in money; too interested in the practical returns of rhetoric, yet too obsessed with useless trivia; on one hand he appears atheistic, and on the other he appears to follow strange new gods; he takes the mystery out of natural phenomena through prosaic explanations, yet he oozes pretentious mysticism. In these points, whose investigation compose the body of this paper, Socrates in the *Clouds* exhibits excess and departs from the *homonoia* of his fellow citizens.

### 1.3 Religion

This dangerous lack of *homonoia* that Socrates' character displays in the *Clouds* manifests itself most clearly in the religious opinions he expresses. Given the deep-rooted interconnectedness between religion, morality, and political ideals in Athens, it is easy to see how the *Clouds*' criticism of Socrates religious beliefs and resulting morality could be interpreted as a violation of this middling ideal.

Because of the perceived ordering influence that a fear of the gods had on social bonds in the community, and the way in which the society relied upon the fear of

divine punishment to motivate its members to adhere to its moral values, atheist or heterodox beliefs would be viewed as destructive and anti-social. One may think, for example, of some of the roles that Zeus plays: Zeus Xenios, Zeus Horkios, Zeus Agoraios. Each of these titles represents a different field that held the fear of Zeus as a motivating factor for the orderly running of society. Zeus Xenios, for example, compels believing citizens to be kind to guests; Zeus Horkios, to respect and uphold their oaths; and Zeus Agoraios, to trade fairly. In these roles, the spectre of Zeus is thought to enforce this essential machinery of civic life, and if all citizens believe in the myth, then the community will function as well as if Zeus really were protecting the public's social relations. In the *Clouds*, another role of Zeus, Zeus of the Fathers, is cited as an authority to enforce children's respect for their father.<sup>30</sup>

Justice itself, a concept closely tied to the political process and morality, is seen as part of the divine machinery of myth. To the Athenian, justice is divine, a gift from Zeus: for the Athenians, as Burkert puts it,

All law comes from Zeus: the men who administer justice receive their ordinances from Zeus; Hesiod enthrones Dike, Justice, alongside Zeus her father. Justice is of Zeus, *Dios Dika* [...] only someone who respects the ordinances in a dispute with an equal can be called just.<sup>31</sup>

When justice is thought of in this way, as administered by something more powerful than the state, it makes it easier for some to accept cases where human justice seems

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<sup>30</sup> *Clouds* 1468. This reference and all subsequent references to Aristophanes' *Clouds* are from Dover's edition (1970) for the Greek text, and from Henderson's translation (2005) for the English text.

<sup>31</sup> Burkert, W. *Greek Religion*. Tr. John Raffan. Cambridge: HUP, 1985 p. 130.

to have failed. It might be said that at least half of the participants in a legal case are unsatisfied with the result. At any rate, the notion that perfect justice will be had some day is understandably comforting. Dover argues for the prominence of this perspective in popular morality:

There was, moreover, a widespread and deep-seated belief in the divinity of Justice [...]. Popular morality was tenacious of the idea that the unjust man, the perjurer, the defaulting debtor, even if he escapes human detection and punishment, nevertheless meets with his deserts at the hands of the gods; or, if he dies secure and happy, his descendants pay the penalty after him; or again (as was coming to be believed increasingly in the fifth century) his soul pays the penalty in the underworld.<sup>32</sup>

Dover refers here to a shift from an earlier belief that descendants can pay for their ancestors' crimes to the later belief that places more responsibility upon the individual for his own personal actions. But throughout these periods, the connection of religion to morality is common. Burkert sees this connection deeply rooted in the early literature:

“[There is a motif that] without fear of the gods all moral barriers fall away. This motif is already contained in germ in the Cyclops scene in the *Odyssey*: Polyphemus, though a son of Poseidon, has no care for the gods, and hence he is a man-eater.”<sup>33</sup>

Besides this implicit motif, one can find examples in the *Iliad* that are much more explicit about Zeus's connection to justice. For example, recall the simile describing Hector's horses:

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<sup>32</sup>Dover (1972) pp. 111–2.

<sup>33</sup>Burkert (1985) p. 247.

ὥς δ' ὑπὸ λαίλαπι πᾶσα κελαινὴ βέβριθε χθών  
 ἤματ' ὀπωρινῷ, ὅτε λαβρότατον χέει ὕδωρ  
 Ζεὺς, ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἄνδρεςσι κοτεσσάμενος χαλεπήνη,  
 οἳ βίῃ εἰν ἀγορῇ σκολιάς κρίνωσι θέμιστας,  
 ἐκ δὲ δίκην ἐλάσωσι θεῶν ὅπιν οὐκ ἀλέγοντες·  
 τῶν δέ τε πάντες μὲν ποταμοὶ πλήθουσι ῥέοντες,  
 πολλὰς δὲ κλιτῦς τότε' ἀποτμήγουσι χαράδραι,  
 ἐς δ' ἄλλα πορφυρέην μεγάλη στενάχουσι ῥέουσαι  
 ἐξ ὀρέων ἐπικάρ, μινύθει δέ τε ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων·  
 ὧς ἵπποι Τρωαὶ μεγάλα στενάχοντο θέουσαι.

And just as beneath a tempest the whole black earth is oppressed on a day in harvest time when Zeus pours down rain most violently, when in resentment he grows angry against men who by violence give crooked judgements in the place of assembly and drive justice out, regarding not the vengeance of the gods; and all their rivers flow in flood, and many a hillside then do the torrents furrow deeply, and down to the dark sea they rush headlong from the mountains with a mighty roar, and the tilled fields of men are wasted; so mighty was the roar of the mares of Troy as they rushed on. (*Iliad* 16.384-93)<sup>34</sup>

In this case, Zeus is depicted as personally bringing punishment “ὅπιν” (16.388) from the men who drive out justice “ἐκ δὲ δίκην ἐλάσωσι” (16.388). Such, then, is the obvious link between justice, politics, religion, and morality.

Further entwining these together in civic life was the widespread use of oaths, as

Dover explains:

“The idea that the gods punish perjury is already accepted in the world which Homer depicts, and since the taking of oaths was an essential part of rival claims made in allegation or rebuttal of an injustice the punishment

<sup>34</sup>This reference and all subsequent references to the *Iliad* are from Allen's edition (1931) for the Greek text, and from the latest revision (by Wyatt) of Murray's translation (2001) for the English text.

of perjury and the punishment of dishonesty and injustice in general were not clearly distinguished.”<sup>35</sup>

In this way then, many of gods had roles that existed to regulate morality and social interactions between people. When the association between the gods and morality becomes strong enough in a society, someone who does not believe in the same gods as the society, or expresses heterodoxy, will be viewed as a dangerous subversion to morality. Drachmann summarizes this concept, explaining why heterodoxy would provoke a negative reaction:

It is not to be wondered at that such efforts evoked a vigorous reaction on the part of established society, the more so as in any case the result of the sophistic criticism—though not consciously its object—was to liquefy the moral principles on which the social order was based.<sup>36</sup>

When morality, politics, and religion are so closely connected, deviance in one of these threatens the integrity of the others. Parker rightly considers this breakdown of morality to be the driving criticism of heterodoxy in the *Clouds*:

But what harm is there in atheism? That it angers the gods, a factor often stressed in modern accounts, is not stated in the play. What is stressed instead is how, allied with rhetoric, it subverts social morality.<sup>37</sup>

This suspicion was likely not altogether unfounded: Guthrie recalls that “the profanation of the mysteries and the mutilation of the Hermae were not the work of believers. [...] [Cinesias] was also said to have defiled a statue of Hecate, an exploit

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<sup>35</sup>Dover (1972) p. 208.

<sup>36</sup>Drachmann (1922 (repr. 1977)) p. 37.

<sup>37</sup>Parker, R. *Athenian Religion: A History*. Oxford: OUP, 1996 p. 205.

parallel to the mutilation of the Hermae.”<sup>38</sup> Such then are some examples of bad behaviour by the impious.

Besides this immorality, there is an entire way of socializing and viewing life that would be obstructed by a change in religious views. Dover points out that the common man may have been naturally opposed to the growing intellectual movement because of his reliance on “the goodwill of the gods, who caused his crops to grow,” and because the “inculcation of scepticism cast a shadow over” the enjoyment of social and religious “singing, dancing, dressing up, eating, [and] drinking.”<sup>39</sup> Burnyeat recognizes how intertwined the city’s way of life and religion are:

Recall how closely a Greek community’s sense of its own identity and stability is bound up with its religious observances and the myths that support them. If Socrates rejects the city’s religion, he attacks the city. Conversely, if he says the city has got its public and private life all wrong, he attacks religion; for its life and its religion are inseparable. Let our jurors ask themselves this question: What would be left of traditional (fifth century) religion, hence what would be left of traditional (fifth century) Athenian life, if the city accepted Socrates’ view that what divinity demands from human beings is not propitiation and sacrifices, festivals, and processions, but the practice of moral philosophy?<sup>40</sup>

It is in this way that Burnyeat sees in Socrates’ rejection of public religion an offense that could be interpreted by Athenians as an attack not just on their values and their experience, but on the very fabric of their society. The weight of an actual charge of impiety, then, would not be lost on a typical Athenian.

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<sup>38</sup>Guthrie (1969) p. 245.

<sup>39</sup>Dover (1972) p. 109.

<sup>40</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 6.



## 1.4 The Charge of Impiety

The charge of impiety carries with it a broad context of associations, all of which are of course dependent on the time period and the experience of those who use the term. That is, there must be qualities, interests, and pursuits which an impious man might possess or follow, and which, taken together, are indicative of impiety. Following this thought, then, I hope that through the body of this paper it will be clear that intellectuals were deeply distrusted as possible harborers of impiety, and that the caricature of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds* is an excellent surviving embodiment of these fears and associations that follow the intellectual. Many of these are related to the charge of impiety which was eventually brought against Socrates.

But before proceeding further, a look at the charges against Socrates is necessary. After all, it is through these charges and their result that both the concept of impiety and also Aristophanes' *Clouds* have such importance to a study of Socrates. Plato's Socrates in the *Apology* likens the portrayal by Aristophanes to the actual charges brought up by his accusers, and assumes the responsibility of responding to both:

Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν δίκαιός εἰμι ἀπολογήσασθαι, ὥς ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πρὸς τὰ πρῶτά μου ψευδῆ κατηγορημένα καὶ τοὺς πρῶτους κατηγοροὺς, ἔπειτα δὲ πρὸς τὰ ὕστερον καὶ τοὺς ὑστέρους. ἐμοῦ γὰρ πολλοὶ κατήγοροι γεγόνασιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ πάλαι πολλὰ ἤδη ἔτη καὶ οὐδὲν ἀληθὲς λέγοντες, οὓς ἐγὼ μᾶλλον φοβοῦμαι ἢ τοὺς ἀμφὶ Ἄνυτον, καίπερ ὄντας καὶ τούτους δεινοὺς· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι δεινότεροι, ὥς ἄνδρες, οἱ ὑμῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκ παίδων παραλαμβάνοντες ἔπειθόν τε καὶ κατηγοροῦν ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον οὐδὲν ἀληθές [...]

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First then it is right for me to defend myself against the first false accu-

sations brought against me, and the first accusers, and then against the later accusations and the later accusers. For many accusers have risen up against me before you, who have been speaking for a long time, many years already, and saying nothing true; and I fear them more than Anytus and the rest, though these are also dangerous; but those others are more dangerous, gentlemen, who gained your belief, since they got hold of most of you in childhood, and accused me without any truth [...] (*Apology* 18a–b)

Insofar as the portrayal in Aristophanes' *Clouds* had this effect on the charges and verdict against Socrates, then, the charges and trial of Socrates must likewise influence our understanding of Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates. These charges are especially relevant to the topic of the impiety of Socrates, since, according to Diogenes Laertius, that is precisely what he was being charged with:

ἔπειτα καὶ Μέλητον συνέπεισεν ἀπενέγκασθαι κατ' αὐτοῦ γραφὴν ἀσεβείας καὶ τῶν νέων διαφθορᾶς.

Then afterwards [Anytus] helped to persuade Meletus to indict him on a charge of impiety and corrupting the youth. (*Life of Socrates* 38)

Socrates seems to have been charged, then, with ἀσέβεια: but impiety is quite a general charge. According to Diogenes Laertius, the written indictment of Meletus, however, elaborates:

ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης, οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσηγούμενος.

Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, and of introducing other new divinities. (*Life of Socrates* 40)

This report suggests that Socrates was not indicted for atheism, but rather heterodox. Xenophon's *Memorabilia* likewise leaves little doubt:

ἡ μὲν γὰρ γραφή κατ' αὐτοῦ τοιάδε τις ἦν· ἄδικεῖ Σωκράτης οὐς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καὶνὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρων· ἄδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων.

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The indictment against him was to this effect: *Socrates is guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities: he is also guilty of corrupting the youth.* (*Memorabilia* I.i.1)<sup>41</sup>

The charge of impiety against Socrates, then, seems to refer originally to what Steinberger terms “religious heterodoxy”<sup>42</sup>, rather than outright atheism, which is the charge that Socrates goads Meletus into making at *Apology* 26c-27e. Perhaps complicating matters, Steinberger points out that the Athenian jury had a great deal of flexibility in determining what was being tried, even independently of what a prosecutor might say: assuming some reliability of the *Apology*,

It was up to the jury to evaluate [the prosecutor's] testimony, including the testimony regarding the meaning of the indictment. Meletus indeed said that the charge of impiety meant atheism, but the jury was nonetheless free to accept or reject this claim if it wanted to. It was free, in other words, to decide that Meletus was wrong and the question before it—the question of Socratic impiety—was really a matter of heterodoxy, not atheism.<sup>43</sup>

Further, given the choice of a charge of heterodoxy or of atheism, and given how easily Socrates dismisses the charge of atheism in *Apology* 26c-27e, it seems evident that if

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<sup>41</sup>This reference and all subsequent references to Xenophon's *Memorabilia* are from Marchant's edition (1971) for the Greek text, and from Marchant's translation (2002) for the English text.

<sup>42</sup>Steinberger, P. “Was Socrates Guilty as Charged? *Apology* 24c-28a.” *Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 17 (1997) p. 14.

<sup>43</sup>Steinberger (1997) p. 16.

the jury considered the charge to be that of atheism, Socrates should have been found innocent. Of course, the *Apology* does not necessarily reflect the actual words of the trial, but it does show how easily the charge of atheism could have been dismissed. But because of how easily Socrates could have refuted the charge of atheism, and how poorly he could have refuted the charge of heterodoxy, given the close division of the vote (281 guilty to 220 innocent, following Burnet's proposed emendation and reading of Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Socrates*, II.40.<sup>44</sup>), it is interesting to speculate that the jury was more divided about the meaning of the charges than about Socrates' guilt of either of those charges: that is to say, perhaps the majority interpreted the charge of impiety as a charge of heterodoxy, and the close minority interpreted the charge as one of atheism. This can only be speculated, however: both Xenophon's and Diogenes Laertius's testimonies say that the indictment was for heterodoxy. For the jury to be torn between trying him for heterodoxy or for atheism, some from that jury would have to exercise the power they had over interpretation of the charges. Even Meletus in the *Apology* appears to have some ability to redefine his charges as he pursues Socrates.

As for the actual criminality of heterodoxy in Athens, Steinberger makes a good point: despite a lack of prior charges, the jury "would also have had considerable discretion to decide just how broadly the law against impiety could be applied."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Burnet, J. *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, and Crito*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 p. 151.

<sup>45</sup>Steinberger (1997) p. 24.

Furthermore, Steinberger points out, Socrates in *Apology* 26c seems to assume that heterodoxy is a crime, when he asks Meletus whether he is bringing a charge of atheism or heterodoxy: surely one would not bring a charge for something that is not even illegal.<sup>46</sup>

Given that the charge was more likely interpreted by the jury as a charge of heterodoxy, then, Socrates's defense against atheism, if the *Apology* is accurate, is quite unsatisfactory. As Burnyeat points out, "nowhere in the *Apology* does Socrates say he does believe in the gods the city believes in."<sup>47</sup> Likewise in the *Apology*, after Socrates goads Meletus into accusing him of not believing in the divinity of the sun and moon, he answers the charge as follows:

Ἀναξαγόρου οἷι κατηγορεῖν, ὦ φίλε Μέλητε· καὶ οὕτω καταφρονεῖς τῶνδε καὶ οἷι αὐτοὺς ἀπείρους γραμμάτων εἶναι ὥστε οὐκ εἰδέναι ὅτι τὰ Ἀναξαγόρου βιβλία τοῦ Κλαζομενίου γέμει τούτων τῶν λόγων· καὶ δὴ καὶ οἱ νέοι ταῦτα παρ' ἐμοῦ μανθάνουσιν, ἃ ἔξεστιν ἐνίοτε εἰ πάνυ πολλοῦ δραχμῆς ἐκ τῆς ὀρχήστρας πριαμένοις Σωκράτους καταγελαῖν, ἐὰν προσποιῇται ἑαυτοῦ εἶναι, ἄλλως τε καὶ οὕτως ἄτοπα ὄντα·

Do you think you are accusing Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus, and do you so despise these gentlemen and think they are so unversed in letters as not to know, that the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian are full of such utterances? And forsooth the youth learn these doctrines from me, which they can buy sometimes (if the price is high) for a drachma in the orchestra and laugh at Socrates, if he pretends they are his own, especially when they are so absurd! (*Apology* 26d–e)

As Burnyeat points out about this passage, "Socrates makes fun of Meletus for con-

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<sup>46</sup>Steinberger (1997) p. 25.

<sup>47</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 3.

fusing him with Anaxagoras and claiming he says the sun is a stone and the moon earth, [...] But he does not say that he does believe that the sun and moon are gods.”<sup>48</sup> His analysis is correct, although Henderson’s translation of ἄτοπα as “absurd” does appear to signify to some extent that Socrates disapproves of the idea. However, the word can also mean “out of place” or “unusual” and related meanings, which might conceivably be a neutral or even approving term coming from someone pretentious. Socrates claims that he is not the originator of the idea that the sun is a rock or the moon is earth, and that he could not teach that idea, but he makes no claim about his belief in it. To an astute juryman, Socrates’ defense would harm his case by its omissions, and it would reinforce the prejudices that jury members might harbour about his unscrupulous command of rhetoric.<sup>49</sup>

If interpreted strictly as heterodoxy there can be little doubt that he is guilty of the charge. Even a sympathetic primary source such as Plato’s *Apology* seems to confirm Socrates’ guilt.<sup>50</sup> Vlastos points out,

It would be hard to find a human female acting more viciously than this goddess [Hera] does in the myths. What would be left of her and of the other Olympians if they were required to observe the stringent norms of Socratic virtue which require every moral agent, human or divine, to act only to cause good to others, never evil, regardless of provocation? [...] Their ethical transformation would have become tantamount to the destruction of the old gods, the creation of new ones—which is precisely what Socrates takes to be the sum and substance of the accusation at his

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<sup>48</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>A more detailed look at this stereotype of a teacher of rhetoric is available on page 63 in section 2.5 of this paper.

<sup>50</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 3.

trial.<sup>51</sup>

There is little to say that could make Socrates innocent of this charge, considering that Socrates or at least Plato seems unwilling to answer it directly. Burnyeat even goes so far as to suggest cautiously that Plato's *Apology* be read as attacking Athenian religion further, rather than as arguing that Socrates did not attack it:

I offer it as no more than a possibility to think about, a rather sobering hypothesis concerning the verdict Plato himself had in view when he wrote the *Apology*. The verdict was this:—

Yes, Socrates was guilty as charged of not believing in the traditional gods and introducing new divinities. But what is shown by the fact that so good a man as Socrates was guilty of impiety under Athenian law? The impiety of Athenian religion.<sup>52</sup>

Burnyeat need not be so cautious. Plato's feelings about the traditional gods, as depicted by the poets, are clear from the *Republic*:

Πρῶτον μὲν, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο.

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"There is, first of all," I said, "the greatest lie about the things of the greatest concernment." (*Republic* 377e)<sup>53</sup>

That is, Plato makes his own position about the traditional gods clear. It is true that he claims to talk about the traditional gods, but by dismissing all their traditional stories, as Vlastos points out in the quotation above, Plato is changing the gods so much that it is a stretch to claim they are the same gods.

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<sup>51</sup>Vlastos, G. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991 pp. 165–6.

<sup>52</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 12.

<sup>53</sup>This reference and all subsequent references to Plato's *Republic* are from Burnet's edition (1968) for the Greek text, and from Shorey's translation (2003 and 2006) for the English text.

Wallace plays down the seriousness of the heterodoxy charge, noting that hardly anyone was charged with it. He starts with a long list of intellectuals who are reported to have been persecuted for *asebeia*<sup>54</sup>, and he grants that “if all of this is true, the evidence is certainly sufficient to show that what is commonly regarded as the great age of Greek enlightenment was marked—in the words of E. R. Dodds—by the ‘banishment of scholars, blinkering of thought, and even (if we can believe the tradition about Protagoras) burning of books.’”<sup>55</sup> But he questions the authenticity of the reports, concluding that “after the very long list of persecuted intellectuals provided at the beginning of this essay, we are reduced to Sokrates and Damon.”<sup>56</sup> Wallace’s reasons for discounting the reports on the charge of Anaxagoras are unsatisfactory and self-contradictory, and this is discussed on page 52 in section 2.4.2 of this paper, where it fits into a discussion about Socrates’ supposed interest in astronomy in the *Clouds*.

Wallace argues that the reasons for Damon’s ostracism are likely more political than religious, basing his reasoning on Damon’s friendship to Perikles and his theories about connecting his music to politics.<sup>57</sup> If this is true, then the charge of impiety for its own sake is very rare indeed, whether Wallace is right about Anaxagoras’ particular case or not. It is quite possible that the charge of *asebeia*, while applicable

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<sup>54</sup>Wallace, R. “Private Lives and Public Enemies: Freedom of Thought in Classical Athens.” In Boegehold and Scafuro (1994) p. 128.

<sup>55</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 129.

<sup>56</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 138.

<sup>57</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 142.



to Socrates, was brought for political reasons. A large part of the political reasons that Athenians might consider Socrates a public enemy can be found in the attitudes and actions of his students: a topic discussed in more detail on page 36 in section 2.3 of this paper. Nevertheless, even if the charge of heterodoxy were brought for ulterior political reasons, the charge is still that of heterodoxy, and a jury might still evaluate the charge on its own merits.

## 2 The Character of Socrates in the *Clouds*

The character of Socrates in the *Clouds*, then, exhibits many popular prejudices about intellectuals. The common thread of these is their anti-democratic nature, in that these qualities or interests are not the qualities or interests of the middling man. For example, his apparent wealth or poverty, and his lack of *homonoia* with his fellow citizens. But perhaps the strongest fibre in this common anti-middling thread is the disbelief that Socrates' character has in the traditional gods. This disbelief runs into and intertwines with other critical aspects of his portrayal: his teachings to his pupils; his interest in natural philosophy; his apparent immorality—and extending from this immorality, his abuse of rhetoric. Because of its prominence, then, the *Clouds*' portrayal of Socrates as a nonbeliever should be examined before the other topics.

### 2.1 Disbelief in the Traditional Gods

The near-atheism of Socrates in the the *Clouds*—a violation of the *homonoia* of the middling man—is especially interesting, because of its similarity to the charge of impiety brought against Socrates, which is discussed on page 18 in section 1.4 of this paper.

Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates is apparently similar to the historical allegations against Socrates concerning disbelief in the traditional gods, and the con-

struction of new ones. Of course, in Aristophanes' version the replacement of the gods is hyperbolized. In the *Clouds*, Socrates' new gods, the Clouds, are indeed described as divine:

{Σω.} βούλει τὰ θεῖα πράγματ' εἰδέναι σαφῶς  
 ἅττ' ἐστὶν ὁρθῶς·  
 {Στ.} νῆ Δί', εἴπερ ἐστί γε.  
 {Σω.} καὶ συγγενέσθαι ταῖς Νεφέλαισιν εἰς λόγους,  
 ταῖς ἡμετέραισι δαίμοσιν·  
 {Στ.} μάλιστά γε.

Socrates: Would you like to know the truth about matters divine, what they really are?

Strepsiades: I certainly would, if it's actually possible.

Socrates: And to have converse with the Clouds, our own deities?

Strepsiades: Yes, very much. (*Clouds* 250–3)

This has prompted Edmunds to investigate the possibility that “the clouds are a comic representation of [Socrates'] inner voice.”<sup>58</sup> He argues that “for Socrates' contemporaries, the *daimonion* must have been his most notorious attribute.”<sup>59</sup> This notoriety, of course, would be a prerequisite to a successful comic mockery. Nussbaum, however, argues for a striking difference between the chorus of *Clouds* and the *daimonion* that Socrates mentions in the *Apology*: “the *daimonion* of Plato's Socrates is no standard tutelary deity at all, but an ironic way of alluding to the supreme authority of dissuasive reason and elenctic argument.”<sup>60</sup> And in opposition to the notoriety that Edmunds argues for, she asserts that “it would not be difficult for [...] any

<sup>58</sup>Edmunds, L. “Aristophanes' Socrates.” In Cleary (1986) p. 210.

<sup>59</sup>Edmunds (1986) p. 212.

<sup>60</sup>Nussbaum, M. “Commentary on Edmunds' ‘Aristophanes' Socrates.’” In Cleary (1986) p. 234.

other Athenian [...] to conclude that what is really happening is that reason itself is being made the new god.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, however, Nussbaum and Edmunds do not necessarily have to disagree on this point: if one understands, like Nussbaum, Socrates’ notorious “inner voice” as a metaphor for the supremacy of reason, and yet one also believes, like Edmunds, that the Clouds are a representation of the *daimonion*, one need only postulate further that the Clouds are likewise meant by Aristophanes as a representation of the supremacy of reason.

This reading of Socrates’ *daimonion* as a symbol of submission to reason rather than divinity seems to be Burkert’s assumption when he says that when Socrates

sought to find a word for that unique inner experience which would compel him in all kinds of situations to stop, say no, and turn about, rather than speak of something divine, he preferred to speak of something daimonly, the *daimonion* that encountered him. This was open to misinterpretation as dealings with spirits, as a secret cult.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, it would seem that Burkert holds a position close to Nussbaum about the historical Socrates’ *daimonion*, but he has a position closer to Edmunds about the contemporary interpretations of it. The interpretation of Socrates’ *daimonion* that Burkert and Nussbaum hold, though somewhat more secular than Edmunds’, is not inconsistent with the Socrates that Aristophanes portrays:

{Σω.} ἄλλο τι δῆτ’ οὐ νομιεῖς ἤδη θεὸν οὐδένα πλὴν ἅπερ ἡμεῖς,  
τὸ Χάος τουτὶ καὶ τὰς Νεφέλας καὶ τὴν Γλῶτταν, τρία ταυτί·

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<sup>61</sup>Nussbaum (1986) p. 234.

<sup>62</sup>Burkert (1985) p. 181.

Socrates: Then I take it you will now believe in no god but those we believe in: this Void, and the Clouds, and the Tongue, and only these three? (*Clouds* 423–4)

That is, abstractions are crystallized into concrete representations: worshipping the Tongue represents the value of persuasion, and worshipping the rainbearing Clouds instead of Zeus is the elevation of scientific explanation over superstition.

However, although Socrates' *daimonion* can be seen as an abstraction parallel to the Clouds in Aristophanes' play, this would be a narrow interpretation that does not acknowledge the social climate at the time of the play's writing. McPherran points out that the historical Socrates "takes a large step in the direction of sophistic humanism through his rejection of naive voluntarism, divine immorality and enmity, and those other anthropopsychisms [...]."<sup>63</sup> The abstraction of the traditional gods into nothing was by no means unique to Socrates, and should instead be interpreted not as an attack on Socrates as an individual, but as a representative of the type of the intellectual. Intellectuals began to see their world as a rational system, where events happen for reasons beyond the arbitrary will of a divinity: Dover remarks that

such explanation left little room for the traditional gods; whether it implicitly denied their existence, or divested them of personality and removed them to a remote stratum of being, or simply drew attention to the fact that mythology was a mass of conflicting tradition which did not admit of rational proof, its spirit was not easily reconcilable with the intimate personal association characterizing the Greek's relations with the gods of his household, locality, or city.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>McPherran (1996) p. 175.

<sup>64</sup>Dover (1972) p. 109.

McPherran focuses on the “remote stratum of being” strategy for intellectuals to reconcile their divinities to their new understanding of the world: that is, he concludes that for these intellectuals, the gods could only be thought of as “impersonal, law-obeying deities.”<sup>65</sup> As a result, formal worship or attempts to appease the gods could appear “superfluous” to the intellectual.<sup>66</sup> Essentially, the gods that Socrates worships in the *Clouds* are no gods at all, but rather, they are symbolic of the rejection of the gods. Dover comments favorably on this possibility:

there is no consistency in the portrayal of Socrates’ ‘atheism’; we find him invoking Aer and Aither (264ff.) and swearing by Breath, Chaos, and Aer (626). The Greek tendency to personification of natural phenomena and abstractions ensures that a man who is regarded as rejecting the traditional gods is assumed to worship gods of his own choice, not to reject worship as such.<sup>67</sup>

That is, to an Athenian eye, the wholesale rejection of gods is indistinguishable from the adoption of different ones. Likewise, Parker states, “the strength of [the *Clouds*’ Socrates’] reverence for the new gods does not excuse but underlines his turning away from the old; ‘kainotheism’ is not an alternative to atheism but the form it takes.”<sup>68</sup> Besides this worship of abstractions, then, the Socrates of the *Clouds* is quite explicit about his disbelief in the old gods:

{Σω.} ποίους θεοὺς ὁμεῖ σύ· πρῶτον γὰρ θεοὶ  
ἡμῶν νόμισμ’ οὐκ ἔστι.

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<sup>65</sup>McPherran (1996) p. 102.

<sup>66</sup>McPherran (1996) p. 103.

<sup>67</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. xxxv.

<sup>68</sup>Parker (1996) pp. 204–5.

Socrates: What do you mean, you'll swear by the gods? First of all, gods aren't legal tender here. (*Clouds* 247–8)

There is a pun here on νόμισμα, since as a term for currency, it is appropriate to how Strepsiades attempts to use his oaths; but additionally as a derivative of νόμος, the term νόμισμα more generally refers to customs and established conventions. Since there is little more customary or established in Athens than the gods, the divorcing of the two is quite jarring. The spirit of this jarring disbelief is shown more completely in the effect of the training on Socrates' pupil Phidippides: as Strauss notes, after the training Phidippides' "belief in the nonexistence of Zeus and the other gods is unshakable (he never believed in the divinity of the Clouds). He has nothing but contempt for his father's relapse into the archaic beliefs [...]." <sup>69</sup> This contempt is easily seen in Phidippides' response to Strepsiades' argument that Zeus of the Fathers should dissuade Phidippides from beating his father:

{Φε.} ἰδοὺ γε Δία πατρῶον. ὥς ἀρχαῖος εἶ.

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Phidippides: Listen to him, "Zeus of the Fathers"! How antiquated.  
(*Clouds* 1469)

The immorality that results from this godless education gives Phidippides, as Dover puts it, a "cool dexterity in invalidating, or at least parrying, the protests of tradition."<sup>70</sup> This is elaborated upon partly in the next section on immorality, and partly

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<sup>69</sup>Strauss, L. *Socrates and Aristophanes*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1966 p. 45.

<sup>70</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. xxxv.

on the section about Socrates' education and corruption of the youth, beginning on page 36, section 2.3.

## 2.2 Immorality

As outlined in the discussion on page 12, section 1.3, religion and morality are perceived to be closely intertwined. In accordance with this principle, it is evident that just as the *Clouds*' Socrates places no stock in conventional religion, so likewise with morality. He himself is shown acknowledging the interconnection between traditional religion and morality as he abandons them both:

{Στ.} ἄλλ' ὁ κεραυνὸς πόθεν αὖ φέρεται λάμπων πυρί, τοῦτο διδάξον,  
καὶ καταφρύγει βάλλων ἡμᾶς, τοὺς δὲ ζῶντας περιφλεύει.  
τοῦτον γὰρ δὴ φανερώς ὁ Ζεὺς ἴησ' ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐπιόρκους.  
{Σω.} καὶ πῶς, ὦ μῶρε σὺ καὶ Κρονίων ὄζων καὶ βεκχεσέληνε,  
εἴπερ βάλλει τοὺς ἐπιόρκους, δῆτ' οὐχὶ Σίμων' ἐνέπρησεν  
οὐδὲ Κλεώνυμον οὐδὲ Θέωρον· καίτοι σφόδρα γ' εἶσ' ἐπίορκοι.  
ἀλλὰ τὸν αὐτοῦ γε νεῶν βάλλει καὶ Σούνιον, ἄχρον Ἀθηνέων,  
καὶ τὰς δρυὺς τὰς μεγάλας, τί μαθῶν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ δρυὺς γ' ἐπιорκεῖ.

Strepsiades: But now explain this: where does the lightning bolt come from, blazing with fire, that incinerates us on contact and badly burns the survivors? It's quite obvious that Zeus hurls it against perjurers.

Socrates: How's that, you moron redolent of Cronia, you mooncalf! If he really strikes perjurers, then why hasn't he burned up Simon or Cleonymus or Theorus, since they're paramount perjurers? On the other hand, he strikes his own temple, and Sunium headland of Athens, and the great oaks. What's his point? An oak tree certainly doesn't perjure itself! (*Clouds* 395–402)



Here, then, Socrates attempts to dissuade Strepsiades from traditional religion by showing that traditional morality (in this case, the specific act of oath breaking) is not enforced. The link between heterodoxy and immorality is not disputed by any party in the *Clouds*: there are simply some who reject both, and some who revel in both.

Socrates' immorality is closely related to the abuse of rhetoric<sup>71</sup> and his corruption of the youth<sup>72</sup>, both of which topics are significant enough aspects of Socrates' portrayal in the *Clouds* that they have their own sections in this paper. The following passage illustrates the interconnection well:

{Φε.} εἰπὲ δὴ μοι,  
οὐ καὶ σοὶ δίκαιόν ἐστιν εὐνοεῖν ὁμοίως  
τύπτειν τ', ἐπειδὴ περ γε τοῦτ' ἔστ' εὐνοεῖν, τὸ τύπτειν.

Phidippides: Then tell me, if administering beatings is an expression of good will, isn't it right that I show you good will the in the same way, with a beating? (*Clouds* 1410-2)

It is the abuse of rhetoric that allows Phidippides to justify the crime of father-beating. As a young student, his character here also showcases the result of Socrates' corruption of the youth. And finally, as a model student who excelled at Socrates' studies and won his approval, Phidippides represents what can only be inferred as the immoral views of his teacher. But he goes one step further:

{Φε.} τὴν μητέρ' ὥσπερ καὶ σὲ τυπτήσω.  
{Στ.} τί φῆς, τί φῆς σὺ.

<sup>71</sup>For more on the abuse of rhetoric, see page 63, section 2.5.

<sup>72</sup>For more on the corruption of the youth, see page 36, section 2.3.

τοῦθ' ἕτερον αὖ μείζον κακόν.

Phidippides: I'll beat mother as I beat you.

Strepsiades: What's that? What did you say? That's different, a far greater crime! (*Clouds* 1443–4)

Halliwell finds an interesting trend in the parent beatings of Aristophanes' works, which may represent the accepted boundaries of comedy:

'Mother-, father-beater.' Only fictional characters are alleged to be such malefactors (esp. *Ar. Nu.* 911, 1321 ff., 1399 ff. [...]); [...] But the motif does not occur, so far as the surviving evidence goes, in ὀνομαστὶ κωμωιδεῖν.<sup>73</sup>

Out of the three passages from the *Clouds* that he cites, two are the above quoted passages where Phidippides and Strepsiades are talking about the matter. The other one is where the Better Argument simply calls the Worse argument a πατραλοίας "parricide."<sup>74</sup> In any event, strictly speaking Halliwell is correct that the references to beating one's parents are not ὀνομαστὶ κωμωιδεῖν. Even so, if Halliwell's tentative estimation that a comedy was not allowed to name a citizen as a father beater, then Aristophanes in the *Clouds* comes as close to it as possible. After all, Phidippides is constructed as Socrates' perfect pupil, and it is only after receiving Socrates' learning from the Worse Argument that Phidippides' values are warped enough for him to consider beating his parents. In this way, one may see in the *Clouds* a fairly consistent allegation that Socrates is imparting his immorality to the youths.

<sup>73</sup>Halliwell, S. "Comic Satire and Freedom of Speech in Classical Athens." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 111 (1991) p. 52.

<sup>74</sup>*Clouds* 911.

## 2.3 Corruption of the Youth

The famous charge against Socrates of corrupting the youth, of course, comes much later than the *Clouds*. Nevertheless, there is a trend in the play that unmistakably reflects a range of what such a charge could mean. One need only look at Socrates' pupils in the play, who, with the exception of Strepsiades, represent the youth: this much is clear through the constant references to Strepsiades' unusually advanced age. Consider Strepsiades' own charge against Socrates, where he seems to accuse Socrates of teaching him atheism:

{Στ.} οἷμοι παρανοίας. ὥς ἐμαινόμην ἄρα  
 ὅτ' ἐξέβαλον καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς διὰ Σωκράτη.  
 ἀλλ' ὦ φίλ' Ἑρμῆ, μηδαμῶς θύμαινέ μοι,  
 μηδέ μ' ἐπιτρίψης, ἀλλὰ συγγνώμην ἔχε  
 ἐμοῦ παρανοήσαντος ἀδολεσχία.

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Strepsiades: Dear me, what lunacy! I must have been insane when I rejected the gods for Socrates. Well, Hermes old friend, don't be angry with me or bring me some disaster, but forgive me for taking leave of my senses because of their idle talk. (*Clouds* 1476–80)

The phrase “διὰ Σωκράτη” in line 1477 places the responsibility for Strepsiades' disbelief in the gods squarely upon Socrates. It is not necessary for the audience, however, since they already have seen Socrates teaching impiety to him. Recall, for example, the passage where Socrates forbids Strepsiades from swearing by the gods,<sup>75</sup> quoted below on page 71, section 2.6 of this paper. This is not only an example of the

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<sup>75</sup> *Clouds* 247–8.

*Clouds*' Socrates' own personal disbelief in the gods, but also an explicit portrayal of his teaching this atheism to his pupils as part of his doctrine. It is echoed a hundred lines later in a similar lesson in disbelief:

{Σω.} ποῖος Ζεὺς· οὐ μὴ ληρήσεις. οὐδ' ἐστὶ Ζεὺς.  
 {Στ.} τί λέγεις σύ·  
 ἀλλὰ τίς ὕει· τουτὶ γὰρ ἔμοιγ' ἀπόφηναι πρῶτον πάντων.  
 {Σω.} αὖται δὴπου· μέγαλοις δέ σ' ἐγὼ σημείους αὐτὸ διδάξω.

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Socrates: What do you mean, Zeus? Do stop driveling. Zeus doesn't even exist!

Strepsiades: What are you talking about? Then who makes it rain? Answer me that one, first of all.

Socrates: These [clouds] do, of course! And I'll teach you how, with grand proofs. (*Clouds* 367–9)

Of course, Strepsiades is not technically a youth, but his age is noted quite pointedly as an exception throughout his training, and he nevertheless undertakes the beginning of the training that Socrates gives to his younger pupils. That is to say, the instruction that the audience sees Socrates giving him is the instruction they must suppose a younger student will hear at some point. In fact, by repeatedly pointing out Strepsiades' age, the play emphasizes that his lessons are intended for the youth—that is, the exception here proves the rule. For example, here is a heterodox teaching that Socrates originally gives to Strepsiades:

{Σω.} ἥριστ', ἀλλ' αἰθέριος δῖνος.  
 {Στ.} Δῖνος· τουτί μ' ἐλελήθει,  
 ὁ Ζεὺς οὐκ ὦν, ἀλλ' ἀντ' αὐτοῦ Δῖνος νυνὶ βασιλεύων.

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Socrates: Not at all; it's cosmic whirl. Strepsiades: Whirl? That's a new

one on me, that Zeus is gone and Whirl now rules in his place. (*Clouds* 380–1)

Although the audience never sees Socrates give this particular lesson to Phidippides, it is clear that the instruction has taken place. Later on, after his instruction, Phidippides evidently holds this belief.

{Φε.} Ζεὺς γάρ τις ἐστίν·  
 {Στ.} ἐστίν.  
 {Φε.} οὐκ ἔστ', οὐκ, ἐπεὶ  
 Δῖνος βασιλεύει, τὸν Δί' ἐξεληλακώς.

Phidippides: Do you think there's a Zeus? Strepsiades: I do. Phidippides: There isn't, no, because Whirl is king, having kicked out Zeus. (*Clouds* 1470–1)

Thus, in the play, Socrates has evidently imparted to his pupil a disbelief in an old god, Zeus, and the new belief in the Clouds. The corruption charge is grave for a reason similar to that of the heterodoxy charge. What made the newer philosophers especially dangerous, Drachmann says, was that “they were not theorists themselves, but practitioners; their business was to impart the higher education to the more mature youth.”<sup>76</sup> Or, as Dover puts it,

First, the Athenians of the fifth century were accustomed to regard the relation between teacher and pupil or between master and apprentice as the transmission of techniques, not as the development of abilities which might issue in independent critical thought. It was [...] assumed that the principles and attitudes of the teacher were embodied in the pupil; this, after all, was the purpose of traditional Athenian education. [...] it gives

<sup>76</sup>Drachmann (1922 (repr. 1977)) p. 37.

rise to such notions as “Socrates was really responsible for what Kritias did.”<sup>77</sup>

This imparting of thought is an important element of the perception of Socrates’ wrongdoing, since, as Steinberger notes, “The charge levied against Socrates included not simply his belief in ‘other new divinities’ but his corruption of the youth; and [...] the corruption part of the indictment was based on the heterodoxy part. Thus, Socrates’s impiety was a matter of teaching heterodox beliefs to young people.”<sup>78</sup> That is, the charge of corruption of the youth, in a way, reinforces the charge of heterodoxy: where some might possibly question the purpose of a charge of heterodoxy, its very coupling with the charge of corruption of the youth provides a justification. After all, they are by no means two loosely related charges: corruption of the youth, and the associated harm to the city, provides a fresh reason (as if it were needed) to justify shock at and fear of heterodoxy. If there were any doubt that the first charge, heterodoxy, is an outrageous offence, then the second charge serves to justify the removal of some of that doubt. The addition of “corrupting the youth” to the charge not only brings the full weight of a public offence behind it, but it also is an easy charge to accept. As Burnyeat notes, “I suggest that it is true that Socrates does not believe in the gods the city believes in, and that a large part of what is involved in his corrupting the young is that they end up not believing in them either.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Dover, K. “Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society.” *Talanta*, Vol. 7 (1976) p. 51.

<sup>78</sup>Steinberger (1997) pp. 24–5.

<sup>79</sup>Burnyeat (1997) p. 3.

This disbelief, passed from teacher to pupil, carries with it a freedom from morality. This is because of the connection between religion and morality, which is discussed above on page 12, section 1.3 of this paper. Thus, Neumann sees that, in the *Clouds*, a more scientific study of nature begets atheism, and atheism severs the bindings of religion:

[...] the reason for [Pheidippides'] father's expulsion from Socrates' school [is] his inability to perceive the relation between successful law-breaking and knowledge of nature. Lacking this information, Strepsiades was congenitally incapable of knowing that punitive gods were non-existent. Thus genuine liberation from the gods of his city necessarily eluded him. Pheidippides' next suggestion reveals his ignorance of the magnitude of this attachment in his father. For he now proposes to demonstrate his newly-won Socratic detachment from conventional ties by beating his mother.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, through the influence of Socrates' teachings, Phidippides has reversed the disciplinary roles of parents and child, and overturned the respect that society would expect him to submit to his parents. It is the influence of Socrates on his students that is perceived as particularly dangerous, and it plays no small role in the eventual trial and indictment of Socrates. Wallace points out that "the Athenians only really got exercised about intellectual speculation when this activity was conducted in public and affected the *polis*."<sup>81</sup> Examples of how Socrates' teachings threatened the *polis* are not rare: Wallace points out that "Sokrates was closely associated with Alkibiades and some of the thirty tyrants" and "Plato's philosophy was fundamentally

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<sup>80</sup>Neumann, H. "Socrates in Plato and Aristophanes: In Memory of Ludwig Edelstein (1902-1965)." *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 90 Apr. (1969) No. 2 pp. 210-1.

<sup>81</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 141.

antidemocratic and also probably impious by normal Athenian standards.”<sup>82</sup>

In other words, it would not be a stretch for Athenians to see Socrates as teaching impiety. And as Ostwald argues, at this time there was already an unusually harsh tension between the young and the old in Athens, which a teacher of the youth could easily be blamed for:

Tension between the young and the old exists at all times; but the way it set in and dominated the internal social and political life of Athens in the course of the Archidamian War is so unprecedented in Athenian history that we are justified in treating it as a further feature of the polarization of society [...]. [There] is the tendency to find the old [...] portrayed as staunch supporters of the institutions of the Athenian democracy, while the young [...] are presented as at odds with the aims and methods of the democratic establishment and the demagogues who manipulate it.<sup>83</sup>

Given, as has been discussed in this paper already, how much the ancient Greeks expected the pupils to be copies of their teacher, any teacher of these youths could well be risking a poor reputation among the more conservative, older citizens. The supposed effects of this teaching, then, were publically thought to be destructive to the established order. This resentment that the Socrates in the *Clouds* may earn, as Parker points out, could be parallel to one that the historical Socrates may have earned on his own:

Clearly, the Socrates of the play [the *Clouds*] and the Socrates of the indictment are the same man. Both are atheists; both corrupt the young. And these are the prejudices that, very largely, the *Apologies* of Plato and

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<sup>82</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 141.

<sup>83</sup>Ostwald, M. *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law: Law, Society, and Politics in Fifth-Century Athens*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1986 p. 229.



Xenophon seek to dispel. According to Plato, Socrates was hated because he exposed the ignorance of older men in the presence of his younger followers: the same charge of setting the younger generation against the old is translated into comic fantasy in the father-beating scene in *Clouds*.<sup>84</sup>

Socrates' teachings in the *Clouds* that, as Strauss puts it, "father-beating and incest are just",<sup>85</sup> are unlikely to be so specific, even within the context of the *Clouds*: rather, the teachings that are behind Phidippides' argument are more likely the lesson liberating him from the gods that enforce traditional morality, and the lesson on what Dover calls "the power of oratory, as a weapon to be wielded in one's own interest, and the pleasures available to those who have learned to demolish by destructive argument the precepts of traditional morality."<sup>86</sup> Further discussion of the role of rhetoric in Socrates' teaching follows on page 63, section 2.5 of this paper.

## 2.4 Natural Philosophy

Part of Socrates' rejection of the traditional gods in the *Clouds* is his replacement for them: after all, on some level the traditional gods are meant as an explanation for the proceedings of nature. In the *Clouds*, Socrates replaces the gods with his own reasoning ability, investigating the natural world using his intellect instead of tradition. Whereas in most ancient historical accounts, Socrates is preoccupied with ethics, in the *Clouds* he is most interested in natural philosophy. Natural philosophy,

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<sup>84</sup>Parker (1996) pp. 205–6.

<sup>85</sup>Strauss (1966) p. 50.

<sup>86</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. xxxv.

in this sense, refers especially to the burgeoning scientific field made famous by the Presocratics in which philosophers investigated phenomena in their natural world and sought to predict them and understand their causes. This is an intellectual pursuit for its own sake, as much as for the profit such knowledge may bring, but since the conclusions of such studies provide explanations that fit poorly with the prior, mythological explanations, this pursuit may be seen as connected to impiety, and even outright atheism, as Meletus in Plato's *Apology* at one point is convinced to claim:

Ταῦτα λέγω, ὥς τὸ παράπαν οὐ νομίζεις θεούς. [...] Μὰ Δί', ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, ἐπεὶ τὸν μὲν ἥλιον λίθον φησὶν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ σελήνην γῆν.

That is what I want to say, that you do not believe in gods at all. [...] No, by Zeus, judges, since he says that the sun is a stone and the moon earth. (*Apology* 26c-d)

Whether the philosophers who practiced this *intended* to diminish the power of mythology or not, there is a connection, and it is clearly a connection that Aristophanes detects and employs. In the *Clouds*, as Parker points out, "[Socrates'] atheism is wholly based on scientific arguments [...]"<sup>87</sup>

Guthrie discusses a distinction between empiricism and rationalism, where empiricists place precedence on their experience, and rationalists place precedence on their mind's ability to reason;<sup>88</sup> the Socrates of the *Clouds* tends towards the side of an empiricist. His interest in such Presocratic natural science is exaggerated, and a

<sup>87</sup>Parker (1996) p. 204.

<sup>88</sup>Guthrie (1969) pp. 7-8.

large part of his character's philosophy consists in observing and measuring: consider, for instance, the large array of measuring tools in *Clouds* 200ff. The rationalist side of Socrates, on the other hand, is not made as explicit as it could be in the *Clouds*, since Phidippides learns rhetoric from the arguments themselves, while Socrates is absent. In addition, the premise that rhetoric will make the wrong argument seem stronger directly subverts the power that a proponent of rationalism might argue can be achieved through reason. In other words, those aspects of the rationalist philosopher that do show themselves in the character of Socrates of the *Clouds* are made to seem superficial.

Neumann rightly sees religious implications in the intellectual pursuits in natural philosophy or science, arguing, like Dover,<sup>89</sup> that natural science engenders the skepticism necessary to remove the "super-human or divine sanctions for the laws or conventions which Strepsiades yearns to circumvent."<sup>90</sup> Silk explains that there is a dichotomy running through the play, an opposition of the "traditional country, rough but healthy, and innovating town, refined but degenerate."<sup>91</sup> The opposition is set up from the very beginning:

{Στ.} ταύτην ὅτ' ἐγάμουν, συγκατεκλινόμην ἐγὼ  
 ὄζων τρυγός, τρασιᾶς, ἐρίων, περιουσίας,  
 ἢ δ' αὖ μύρου, κρόκου, καταγλωττισμάτων,  
 δαπάνης, λαφυγμοῦ, Κωλιάδος, Γενετυλλίδος.

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<sup>89</sup>Dover (1972) p. 109.

<sup>90</sup>Neumann (1969) p. 209.

<sup>91</sup>Silk (2000) pp. 361–2.

Strepsiades: When I married her I climbed into bed smelling of new wine, figs, fleeces, and abundance; and she of perfume, saffron, tongue kisses, extravagance, gluttony, Colias and Genetyllis. (*Clouds* 49–52)

This opposition is pertinent to Socrates' interest in natural philosophy, because natural philosophy is an abstraction of nature: such an interest makes Socrates into what Silk calls a symbol of "abstract and esoteric thought."<sup>92</sup> Just like Strepsiades' urban wife, then, the intellectual is portrayed as a devotee of the extravagant and useless, because of his interest in natural philosophy. The innovations of the urban centre involve the type of learning that Strepsiades is not meant to understand: holding the study of rhetoric aside for a moment, the obtuseness of the intellectual's studies is mocked in Socrates' studies of the earth and the sky.

The uselessness of these studies is portrayed more in the useless, trivial applications that Socrates makes of his knowledge. The precise nature of the uselessness of some of the philosophy of the Socrates in the *Clouds* is explored on the pages following page 56, in section 2.4.3. Some of these aspects are presented in the character of one of Socrates' students, but these students are not very usefully considered separately from Socrates, since in the play there is no indication that their interests diverge significantly from those of Socrates. They are supposed to have inherited Socrates' interests, learning, beliefs, and values. Strepsiades in this sense is the only student not to be considered here as representative of his teacher, since it is as a student that

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<sup>92</sup>Silk (2000) p. 362.

he is a failure.

### 2.4.1 The Earth and Beneath

Socrates and his pupils, by investigating the sky and beneath the earth as part of their investigations into natural science, are invading two of the three original domains of the Olympian gods (that is, heaven, for Zeus; the underworld, for Hades; and the sea, for Poseidon).

As Strepsiades is introduced into the thinkery, he sees Socrates' students, prying below the earth into the underworld:

{Μα.} οὔτοι δ' ἐρεβοδιφῶσιν ὑπὸ τὸν Τάρταρον.

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Pupil: They're scrutinizing the murkiness below Tartarus. (*Clouds* 192)

In this way, peering into what is not the natural domain for mortals, such investigation is presumptuous and ignores the proper place for mortals as it would be understood by more religious Athenians. The actions of these students, as of Phidippides later on, are relevant to the portrayal of Socrates' character, since as Dover points out in a passage quoted above on page 38, section 2.3 of this paper, students were expected to reflect the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their teachers.

Petrie sees Socrates as interested in geometry only insofar as it has a practical end:<sup>93</sup> but that is likely not the aspect of it that Aristophanes wishes to emphasize

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<sup>93</sup>Petrie, R. "Aristophanes and Socrates." *Mind*, Vol. 20 Oct. (1911) No. 80 p.515.

in this passage, where one of Socrates' students is showing off the tools of geometry (γεωμετρία):

{Μα.} γεωμετρία.  
 {Στ.}                    τοὔτ' οὖν τί ἐστι χρήσιμον·  
 {Μα.} γῆν ἀναμετρεῖσθαι.  
 {Στ.}                    πότερα τὴν κληρουχικήν·  
 {Μα.} οὐκ, ἀλλὰ τὴν σύμπασαν.  
 {Στ.}                    ἀστεῖον λέγεις·  
 τὸ γὰρ σόφισμα δημοτικὸν καὶ χρήσιμον.

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Pupil: Geometry.

Strepsiades: So what's that good for?

Pupil: For measuring land.

Strepsiades: You mean land for settlers?

Pupil: No, land in general.

Strepsiades: Talk about sophisticated! That device is democratic, and useful too! (*Clouds* 202–5)

In reading this passage as an example of Socrates' interest in geometry as a practical pursuit, Petrie reads only line 202 and the first half of 203.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, at that point it does sound as if geometry is valued for its practical purpose; however, whatever practical usage Socrates' student may or may not have, Strepsiades belittles it by expecting more: first when he expects the tools to make him a cleruchy, (πότερα τὴν κληρουχικήν). Second, two lines later he seems to be under the impression that geometry can divide up the entire world (τὴν σύμπασαν) for the Athenians: Dover, commenting on the word δημοτικὸν in line 205, says that "Strepsiades thinks that 'geometry' is some (magical?) device for distributing all the land in the world gratis

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<sup>94</sup>Petrie (1911) p. 515.

to Athenian citizens like himself.”<sup>95</sup>

In this way, by the hyperbolic expectations of Strepsiades, whatever utility the implements might have in Greek society is downplayed. The pupil’s answer that the implements are “for measuring land [...] in general” says nothing for the practicality of the study, and rather suggests that Socrates and his pupils are possibly interested in measuring land for the sake of measuring it. That is, although the tools might have an important application in agricultural Greek life, that was not the interest of Socrates the sophist. Immediately following this belittlement of geometry, geography is similarly presented. Again, it is presented by a student of Socrates, who should be taken as a representative of Socrates’ teaching:

{Μα.} αὕτη δέ σοι γῆς περίοδος πάσης.

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Pupil: And look, this is a map of the entire world. (*Clouds* 206)

After examining the map, Strepsiades deflates its importance by assuming it has more practical value than it has. He does not have the patience to use the knowledge of the map, and for his ignorant rural character type, in order to be useful the tool must have an immediate and direct physical influence on the media which it describes:

{Στ.} ἀλλ’ ἡ Λακεδαίμων ποῦ ’στίν·  
 {Μα.} ὅπου ’στίν’ αὐτή.  
 {Στ.} ὡς ἐγγὺς ἡμῶν. τοῦτο μεταφροντίζετε,  
 ταύτην ἄφ’ ἡμῶν ἀπαγαγεῖν πόρρω πάνυ.

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Strepsiades: But where’s Sparta?

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<sup>95</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p.123.

Pupil: Let me see; right here.

Strepsiades: So close to us! Do change your minds and move it very far away from us! (*Clouds* 214–6)

As with the tools of geometry, so then with geography: Strepsiades overestimates the practical usefulness of the tool (in this case the map), and the pupil of Socrates does not explain any useful functions. Thus, even in these tools, which might have practical agricultural or military applications, the interest that Socrates is portrayed to have never exceeds the bounds of the purely theoretical.

#### 2.4.2 The Sky

Like Socrates' supposed prying beneath the earth, so too his prying into the heavens would be seen at some level as being impious. Strepsiades describes such investigation as *hubris* at the end of the play.

{Στ.} τί γὰρ μαθόντες τοὺς θεοὺς ὕβριζετε  
καὶ τῆς σελήνης ἐσκοπεῖσθε τὴν ἔδραν·

Strepsiades: Then what was the idea of outraging the gods and peering at the backside of the Moon? (*Clouds* 1506–7)

As an example of *hubris*, then, Socrates' prying into the sky is anti-democratic. Morris explain how *hubris*, by causing strife and imbalance between citizens, is quite certainly not the behaviour of the middling man.<sup>96</sup> Astronomy is an interest that the Socrates of the *Clouds* pursues actively, an interest that Socrates shows throughout the work, even before he is introduced, as his pupil depicts him:

<sup>96</sup>Morris (1996) p. 22.



{Μα.} ζητοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆς σελήνης τὰς ὁδοὺς  
καὶ τὰς περιφοράς, εἴτ' ἄνω κεχηνότος  
ἀπὸ τῆς ὀροφῆς νύκτωρ γαλεώτης κατέχεσεν.

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Pupil: He was investigating the moon's paths and revolutions, and as he was looking upwards with his mouth open, from the roof in darkness a gecko shat on him. (*Clouds* 171–3)

Likewise, the pupil not only describes the study, but also names it specifically, “ἀστρονομία,” as one of his interests:

{Μα.} ἀστρονομία μὲν αὕτηί.

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Pupil: This one [instrument] here is for astronomy. (*Clouds* 201)

The study of astronomy carries with it the *Clouds*' Socrates' thematic severing of traditional beliefs and intellectual study. In fact, the *Apology* makes it clear that Meletus used Socrates' supposed interest in astronomy as evidence of his outright atheism:

τὸν μὲν ἥλιον λίθον φησὶν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ σελήνην γῆν.

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he says that the sun is a stone and the moon earth. (*Apology* 26D)

Of course, the sun and moon were traditionally thought of as personified and divine. The concern of the religious towards astronomers, then, is indeed older than Copernicus or Galileo. Evans tells the more or less traditional account of Anaxagoras:

Perhaps inspired by the fall of a meteorite, he called the Sun a red-hot stone. These and other remarks were offensive to the religious conservatives of Athens, who believed that the sun and the moon were gods or

else were directly controlled by gods. Anaxagoras was accused of impiety and tried on that charge, among others. While there is no doubt that his views were genuinely shocking to some, the case was also used by the political conservatives as a way of discrediting Pericles.<sup>97</sup>

Wallace has some doubt about the authenticity of the story of Anaxagoras, because there are so many versions:

The two traditional approaches in dealing with the many variants of this story are either to pick out one version, or else to pick and choose details from among several. [...] In the first case, all the stories may be erroneous; or if one is right, how to determine which? [...] The second case runs the risk of violating the integrity of every source in accordance with subjective criteria, yielding an account that agrees with nothing.<sup>98</sup>

Further, Wallace says that the only thing the disparate accounts have in common is “that he was accused and brought to trial.”<sup>99</sup> The easiest, most direct choice would be to accept the commonality among these stories. After all, his objection to picking details is that it might run “the risk of violating the integrity of every source in accordance with subjective criteria, yielding an account that agrees with nothing.” And by accepting the common elements as an account of admittedly limited detail, he would have an account that is selected by non-subjective criteria and agrees with everything.

But Wallace takes a different path because, in his view, the varied accounts are due to “scholarly elaboration” of that common point.<sup>100</sup> His assumption, then, is that

<sup>97</sup>Evans, J. *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy*. Oxford: OUP, 1998 p. 46.

<sup>98</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 136.

<sup>99</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 136.

<sup>100</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 136.

the elaboration of a story must come from the scholar writing it down. This neglects the quite plausible possibility that Anaxagoras really was accused and brought to trial, and different people remembered it in different ways after generations of oral transmission, before it was written down by various historians. Based on his assumption, however, Wallace believes that all the scholarly sources must derive from one written source that gives the account without elaboration or details.<sup>101</sup> The question remaining, in Wallace's view, is what is the original source upon which scholars are elaborating? Wallace's answer to this question relies on the following passage from Plato's *Apology*:

Plato's *Apology*:

ὦ θαυμάσιε Μέλητε, ἵνα τί ταῦτα λέγεις· οὐδὲ ἥλιον οὐδὲ σελήνην ἄρα νομίζω θεοὺς εἶναι, ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι·  
 Μὰ Δί', ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, ἐπεὶ τὸν μὲν ἥλιον λίθον φησὶν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ σελήνην γῆν.  
 Ἀναξαγόρου οἷε κατηγορεῖν, ὦ φίλε Μέλητε· καὶ οὕτω καταφρονεῖς τῶνδε καὶ οἷε αὐτοὺς ἀπείρους γραμμάτων εἶναι ὥστε οὐκ εἰδέναι ὅτι τὰ Ἀναξαγόρου βιβλία τοῦ Κλαζομενίου γέμει τούτων τῶν λόγων·

You amaze me, Meletus! Why do you say [that I do not believe in gods at all]? Do I not even believe that the sun or yet the moon are gods, as the rest of mankind do?

"No, by Zeus, judges, since he says that the sun is a stone and the moon earth."

Do you think you are accusing Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus, and do you so despise these gentlemen and think they are so unversed in letters as not to know, that the books of Anaxagoras the Clazomenian are full of such utterances? (*Apology* 26D)

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<sup>101</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 137.

From here, Wallace jumps to the startling assertion that all the varying accounts are elaborations of the same distorted misreading of the above section of Plato's *Apology*: "Gershenson suggests that on the basis of this passage ancient writers concluded that Anaxagoras had been tried. We ourselves have noticed examples of the ancient scholarly technique of mining philosophical works for historical 'information.'" <sup>102</sup> Making this unlikely assertion even more strained, Wallace immediately discards all the sources that he perceives as based upon this passage (that is, in his mind, every source that gives an account of Anaxagoras' accusation and trial) because, in his words, "this passage does not at all presuppose that Anaxagoras had been tried, and may well exclude it." <sup>103</sup> There is no denying that the passage "does not at all presuppose that Anaxagoras had been tried, and may well exclude it": but it is surprising to hear it from Wallace, who has taken for granted a few sentences earlier that every author read the passage and interpreted it as if it *did* presuppose that Anaxagoras had been tried and as if it *did not* suggest excluding it. If the passage clearly has no relation to the reports of the sources of this story, then why does Wallace bring this passage up in the first place as the best candidate for an original source of the story? Rather than having every author misinterpret this passage in the same way to signify practically the opposite of what it clearly signifies, it is perhaps more productive to postulate that the authors heard about Anaxagoras' accusation and trial *from a source that*

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<sup>102</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 137.

<sup>103</sup>Wallace (1994) p. 137.

*actually mentions them.*

At any rate, it is likely that despite Wallace's frequent attempts to downplay popular prejudices against intellectuals of any sort, many ancient writers found the story a credible account of attitudes towards an astronomer. Evans notes that

Aristarchus's Sun-centered cosmology drew some unfavourable attention from his contemporaries. For example, the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes of Assos said that Aristarchus ought to be 'indicted on a charge of impiety for putting into motion the hearth of the universe.' As far as we know, no formal indictment was made.<sup>104</sup>

In the *Clouds*, Socrates characterizes himself as precisely this type of philosopher:

{Σω.} ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.

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Socrates: I tread the air and scrutinize the sun. (*Clouds* 225)

His preoccupation at the start of the play is in τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα "meteorological phenomena," which he gives as the explanation for the use of the basket on the crane:

{Σω.} οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε  
ἐξηϋρον ὀρθῶς τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα  
εἰ μὴ κρεμάσας τὸ νόημα καὶ τὴν φροντίδα,  
λεπτὴν καταμείξας εἰς τὸν ὅμοιον ἀέρα.

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Socrates: Why, for accurate discoveries about meteorological phenomena I had to suspend my mind, to commingle my rarefied thought with its kindred air. (*Clouds* 227–30)

This is another interest, then, on top of astronomy, but closely related to it in so far as it is prying into matters traditionally left to the gods.

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<sup>104</sup>Evans (1998) p. 68.

Socrates has elevated meteorological phenomena—such as the αἰθέριος δῖνος “cosmic Whirl”, and of course the οὐράναι Νεφέλαι “heavenly Clouds”—to the level of gods. This elevation may signify a switch to new gods, or may signify the complete replacement of the gods by these non-religious types of knowledge. Socrates’ description in the *Clouds* of the Clouds seems to support the latter option. Although they are superficially presented as gods, what they stand for is anything but sacred:

{Σω.} ἤχιστ', ἀλλ' οὐράναι Νεφέλαι, μεγάλαι θεαὶ ἀνδράσιν ἀργοῖς,  
αἵπερ γνώμην καὶ διάλεξιν καὶ νοῦν ἡμῖν παρέχουσιν  
καὶ τερατεῖαν καὶ περίλεξιν καὶ κροῦσιν καὶ κατάληψιν.  
{Στ.} ταῦτ' ἄρ' ἀκούσας' αὐτῶν τὸ φθέγμ' ἡ ψυχὴ μου πεπόνηται καὶ λεπτο-  
λογεῖν ἤδη ζητεῖ καὶ περὶ καπνοῦ στενολεσχεῖν καὶ γνωμιδίῳ γνώμην νύξασ'  
ἐτέρῳ λόγῳ ἀντιλογῆσαι· ὥστ' εἴ πως ἐστίν, ἰδεῖν αὐτὰς ἤδη φανερώς ἐπι-  
θυμῶ

Socrates: Not at all; they’re heavenly Clouds, great goddesses for idle gentlemen, who provide us with judgement and dialectic and intelligence, fantasy and circumlocution and verbal thrust and parry.

Strepsiades: So that’s why my soul has taken flight at the sound of their voice, and now seeks to split hairs, prattle narrowly about smoke, and meet argument with counterargument, punctuating a point with a pointlet. So if at all possible, I want to see them in person. (*Clouds* 316–21)

Their status as gods is diminished with such negative or diminutive words as ἀργοῖς, περίλεξιν, λεπτολογεῖν, στενολεσχεῖν, and γνωμιδίῳ. Combined with more religious sounding language, like Strepsiades’ ἡ ψυχὴ μου πεπόνηται, the absurdity makes the contrast clear enough. The Clouds are likely not gods, but anti-gods: in other words, the direct replacement of the sacred with the subject of secular investigation. As Strauss notes, “Phcidippides shows no signs of ever having been initiated into the

worship of the Clouds or the belief in their divinity. He merely was liberated by Socrates from belief in the gods and from respect for the law.”<sup>105</sup> The role of the Clouds, along with Whirl, as a replacement for traditional gods is made explicit later on: Strepsiades interprets the replacement as actual succession in a passage<sup>106</sup> quoted above on page 37, section 2.3 of this paper.

Note that in this case, it is not Socrates who is even likening δῖνος to a god, but rather Strepsiades, who only half understands the study. As Henderson says, “the rotation of the universe was widely recognized in the fifth century, and *dinos* ‘whirl’ was a fundamental element of atomic theory.”<sup>107</sup> According to Dover, “Demokritos used the word δῖνος (B167), as did Antiphon (B25).”<sup>108</sup> In other words, it would have been widely understood that, apart from the pun,<sup>109</sup> δῖνος is a term situated in a framework far removed from that of Zeus and the other Olympians.

#### 2.4.3 The Impracticality of Philosophy

The interest that Socrates is portrayed to have in natural science is shown to tend to the purely theoretical and impractical. This is a consistent trend in nearly all of the research of the *Clouds*’ Socrates, as far as it is shown within the play, although rhetoric, which is abused for practical effects by his student Phidippides, might be

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<sup>105</sup>Strauss (1966) p. 50.

<sup>106</sup>*Clouds* 380–1.

<sup>107</sup>Henderson (1998 (repr. 2005)) p. 63.

<sup>108</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 150.

<sup>109</sup>The pun on δῖνος is discussed in more detail on page 57 in section 2.4.3 of this paper.

considered somewhat of an exception, by the principle used above that in the *Clouds* the actions of students reflect the attitudes and beliefs of their teacher.<sup>110</sup> This role of rhetoric will be explained in detail beginning on page 63 in section 2.5 of this paper.

So, besides the criticism that the heterodox beliefs of the new philosophers breed a dangerous immorality, then, there is inherent in the *Clouds* a seemingly opposite criticism that these philosophers are preoccupied with the useless, the narrow, and the trivial. Some of their interests have seemingly no value in themselves, and even the pursuits that do have value are trivialized or demeaned. The quotation above about the clouds on page 55, section 2.4.2 of this paper is an example of this that has already been explored: the phrase ἀνδράσιν ἀργοῖς “idle gentlemen” in that quotation is evidently meant to be a summary of men with philosophic interests. Likewise, we have already mentioned the methods used to demean the geometric and geographic tools on page 47, section 2.4.1 of this paper.

By mistaking the object of Socrates’ veneration for a common drinking cup, Strepsiades demeans it:

{Στ.} οὐκ ἐξελήλακ’, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ τοῦτ’ ὥόμην  
διὰ τουτονὶ τὸν δῖνον. ὦμοι δέλαιος,  
ὅτε καὶ σὲ χυτρεοῦν ὄντα θεὸν ἡγησάμην.

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Strepsiades: [Whirl] hasn’t kicked [Zeus] out. I thought he had, because of this whirligig. What a poor sap I was to treat you, a mere piece of pottery, like a god! (*Clouds* 1472–4)

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<sup>110</sup>Dover (1976) p. 51.



As Henderson notes, “in everyday usage *dinos* meant a kind of cup.”<sup>111</sup> Dover supposes that this vessel is in fact on stage, and that it, “symbolizing the gods of the sophists, stands beside Sokrates’s door.”<sup>112</sup> This pun, then, deflates the powerful Whirl to a mere cup, trivializing the object of Sokrates’ respect. Likewise, the likening of thunder to the Clouds’ breaking wind demeans the Clouds:

{Σω.} σκέψαι τοίνυν ἀπὸ γαστριδίου τυννουτοῦ οἷα πέπορδας·  
τὸν δ’ ἄερα τόνδ’ ὄντ’ ἀπέραντον πῶς οὐκ εἰκὸς μέγα βροντᾶν·  
ταῦτ’ ἄρα καὶ τῶνόματ’ ἀλλήλοιν, “βροντῇ” καὶ “πορδῇ”, ὁμοίω.

Socrates: Now then, consider what farts you let off from such a little tummy; isn’t it natural that this sky, being limitless, should thunder mightily? [Strepsiades:]<sup>113</sup> So that’s why the words are similar, *bronte* “thunder” and *porde* “fart”! (*Clouds* 392–4)

Part of the effect of this passage is not only from the comparison of the supposedly divine to the commonplace and base, but also more particularly from the scatological reference. In this way, then, a technique for demeaning the importance of intellectual pursuit is simply interrupting it with scatological humour:

{Μα.} ζητοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆς σελήνης τὰς ὁδοὺς  
καὶ τὰς περιφοράς, εἴτ’ ἄνω κεχηνότος  
ἀπὸ τῆς ὀροφῆς νύκτωρ γαλεώτης κατέχεσεν.

Pupil: He was investigating the moon’s paths and revolutions, and as he was looking upwards with his mouth open, from the roof in darkness a gecko shat on him. (*Clouds* 171–3)

<sup>111</sup>Henderson (1998 (repr. 2005)) p. 63.

<sup>112</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 265.

<sup>113</sup>Dover’s text gives line 394 to Sokrates, while Henderson’s gives this line to Strepsiades.

Apart from the scatology, this is similar to the famous story about the philosopher who fell into a hole while walking and observing the stars. The philosopher and the details vary, as Krappe relates:

[there is] a widely current anecdote variously ascribed to Thales of Miletus or other men renowned for their learning. Thales, so the tale runs, went out at night to gaze at the stars, but looking at the sky he fell into a cistern, whereupon his witty Thracian maid called out that he tried to know what there was in the sky but failed to see what was close to him at his very feet.<sup>114</sup>

The point of this popular series of anecdotes seems to be the impracticality of philosophy. Common, everyday knowledge, such as knowledge of the location of a hole in the ground, is more important than abstract knowledge. Abstract knowledge may have a use at some point—in the case of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, that point is that some day it may help win an argument—but to common people with common sense, the knowledge is deemed useless.

Furthermore, the power of rhetoric gained through abstract knowledge is only useful against non-intellectuals in the *Clouds* if they accept its power. Once a non-intellectual realizes this, even the remote, indirect power of the intellectual dissolves. The power of common abilities against the philosopher's power is highlighted near the end of the play:

{Στ.} ὁρθῶς παραινεῖς οὐκ ἔῶν διχορραφεῖν  
ἀλλ' ὥς τάχιστ' ἐπιμπράναι τὴν οἰκίαν

<sup>114</sup>Krappe, A. "Tiberius and Thrasyllus." *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 48 (1927) No. 4 pp. 364-5.

τῶν ἀδολεσχῶν.

That's good advice: I shouldn't cobble up lawsuits but rather burn down the idle talkers' house as quick as I can. (*Clouds* 1483–5)

That is, the least intellectual form of dispute, violence, is used. Against this, even a master of intellectual pursuits has no chance. The practicality of any part of philosophy is questioned very much by the violent ending of the play, since even its most potent force, rhetoric, is ultimately utterly helpless against Strepsiades. Strepsiades in this instance is representative of the opposite of an intellectual: he has tried it, and he has failed, because his nature is simply not that of an intellectual. Thus, the least intellectual of men defeats the most intellectual, by the least intellectual means, brute force.

Another way that Aristophanes presents intellectual pursuits as narrow, useless, and trivial is by showing philosophers passionately interested in insects. After Strepsiades has exaggerated the power and wisdom he expects to find in Socrates, the following stories let the audience down by the sheer triviality of the subject matter:

{Μα.} ἀνήρετ' ἄρτι Χαιρεφῶντα Σωκράτης  
 ψύλλαν ὀπόσους ἄλλοιτο τοὺς αὐτῆς πόδας.  
 δακοῦσα γὰρ τοῦ Χαιρεφῶντος τὴν ὀφρῦν  
 ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τὴν Σωκράτους ἀφήλατο.  
 {Στ.} πῶς δῆτα διεμέτρησε·  
 {Μα.} δεξιώτατα.  
 κηρὸν διατήξας, εἴτα τὴν ψύλλαν λαβὼν  
 ἐνέβαψεν εἰς τὸν κηρὸν αὐτῆς τῷ πόδε,  
 χᾶτα ψυχρίσῃ περιέφυσαν Περσικαί.  
 ταύτας ὑπολύσας ἀνεμέτρει τὸ χωρίον.

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Pupil: Just now Socrates asked Chaerephon how many of its own feet a flea can jump, because one had bitten Chaerephon's eyebrow and jumped off onto Socrates' head.

Strepsiades: And how did he measure it off?

Pupil: Very cleverly. He melted some wax, then picked up the flea and dipped both its feet in the wax, and then when the wax cooled the flea had Persian slippers stuck to it. He took these off and went about measuring the distance. (*Clouds* 144–52)

Note that this scenario degrades Socrates in a number of ways: he lives, it seems, somewhere infested with fleas. By being unable to combat the discomfort of living alongside these pests, Socrates' character is further degraded. Note that the degradation is analogous to scatological humor: the degradation, then, is not from the rarity of what is endured. Also, his time is so worthless that he is ready to occupy it based on the actions of a flea: one may wonder, for example, what Socrates' plans were before the flea-bite took over his afternoon. In addition, a flea is not only a pest, but also so small as to earn the audience's automatic disgust and natural association with triviality. Moreover, Socrates does not concentrate on this tiny flea, but rather, on its still tinier feet. A similar episode follows immediately:

{Μα.} ἀνήρετ' αὐτὸν Χαιρεφῶν ὁ Σφήτιος  
 ὁπότερα τὴν γνώμην ἔχοι, τὰς ἐμπίδας  
 κατὰ τὸ στόμ' ἄδειν ἢ κατὰ τοῦρροπύγιον.  
 {Στ.} τί δῆτ' ἐκεῖνος εἶπε περὶ τῆς ἐμπίδος·  
 {Μα.} ἔφασκεν εἶναι τοῦντερον τῆς ἐμπίδος  
 στενόν, διὰ λεπτοῦ δ' ὄντος αὐτοῦ τὴν πνοὴν  
 βίᾳ βαδίζειν εὐθὺ τοῦρροπυγίου·  
 ἔπειτα κοῖλον πρὸς στενῷ προσκείμενον  
 τὸν πρωκτὸν ἡγεῖν ὑπὸ βίας τοῦ πνεύματος.

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Pupil: Chaerephon of Sphettus asked him where he stood in regard to the question, whether gnats hum via the mouth or via the rump.

Strepsiades: So what did Socrates say about the gnat?

Pupil: He said that the gnat's gut is narrow, and that air travels violently through this small space on its way to the rump, and then the arsehole, being an orifice attached to a narrow tube, resounds from the force of the wind. (*Clouds* 156–64)

Note the scatology added to the episode here, which lowers the study still further (if possible) in the audience's eyes. As in the last story, Socrates focuses not on a tiny bug, but on an even tinier part of that tiny bug. The similarity of this story to the last one makes it clear that the worthlessness of Socrates' time, and the meanness of his objects of interest are a pattern rather than a single episode. Further, by showing such interest in these ridiculous questions, the *Clouds*' Socrates trivializes by association the value of his other studies, like his studies of natural sciences. He seems to find the anus of a gnat just as interesting as the study of astronomy and geometry. As a teacher of astronomy and geometry, then, he does little to recommend them in these episodes.

The impracticality of philosophy is put into Socrates' own mouth when Strepsiades questions him about the use of learning formal grammar:

{Στ.} ἀτὰρ τί ταῦθ' ἃ πάντες ἵσμεν μανθάνω.  
{Σω.} οὐδὲν μὰ Δί' [...]

---

Strepsiades: But what's the point of my learning these things? We all know them.

Socrates: No point at all, by god. (*Clouds* 693–4)

In a way, then, even Socrates' character explicitly derides the uselessness of his own studies. Dover interprets this response of Socrates as a reference to how useless the lesson would be only for Strepsiades "because of Strepsiades' lack of interest."<sup>115</sup> Indeed, Dover's interpretation makes the most sense for Socrates' arrogant character to make. But in the context of this quotation, Socrates fails to justify to Strepsiades the attention he wishes to pay to gendered nouns. For the audience of the play, then, Strepsiades' question is not foolish: Socrates does no better a job recommending the practicality of his studies by a discussion of grammar than he does by his discussion of a gnat's rump or a flea's stride. Socrates' response to the question is a response that does not actually answer the question. It seems best, therefore, to read this response "οὐδὲν μὰ Δί'" not only as Dover reads it (that is, as a mild insult to Strepsiades' ability) but also as a kind of unwitting admission of Socrates that this study really is useless.

## 2.5 Abuse of Rhetoric

The abuse of rhetoric is a topic deeply intertwined with the scientific pursuits discussed above, as well as the immorality (also discussed above) publicly understood to be derived from heterodoxy. In fact, some of the suspicion and dislike of scientific study comes not only from the direct relation between natural investigation and heterodoxy, but also from the indirect relation, through rhetoric. Dover explains:

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<sup>115</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p.185.

The fact that in some cases scientific and philosophical interests really were combined with rhetoric encouraged the ordinary man to associate all intellectual pursuits with the desire of clever and wealthy young men to be taught the techniques of attaining political power and a degree of immunity from prosecution for civil offences.<sup>116</sup>

But in the *Clouds*, although the unethical use of rhetoric for profit is covered in full detail, it is actually the opposite criticism that is tied most closely to Socrates: that he does not have a use for it at all, ethical or otherwise. As it was noted in the section on natural science, the interest that *Clouds*' Socrates is portrayed to have in his research hardly exceeds the bounds of the purely theoretical. This otherwise consistent trend of uselessness in nearly all of the research of the *Clouds*' Socrates seems perhaps at first to have an exception because rhetoric is abused for practical effects by his student Phidippides, by the generally accepted principle in ancient times that in the *Clouds* the actions of students reflect the attitudes and beliefs of their teacher.<sup>117</sup>

This exception, however, is not so clear as it first appears, since the main driving force of this abuse of rhetoric is not Socrates or Phidippides, but Strepsiades, who has only an incomplete education from Socrates. While Socrates teaches the capability to abuse rhetoric, it is not so clear that he or his students in the *Clouds* are nearly as interested in applying it as Strepsiades (the non-intellectual) is. This is not to say that Socrates is held back by some sense of decency or morality, since he evidently

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<sup>116</sup>Dover (1972) pp. 110–1.

<sup>117</sup>Dover (1976) p. 51.

has neither: rather, he simply seems to prefer the abstract and trivial to the useful or political. His immorality and power in a way are held in check by his lack of interest in the world that real men should care about. Thus, the interest that *Clouds*' Socrates shows in the natural sciences may be much more like his interest in rhetoric than it first appears. Further, the power of rhetoric is challenged and defeated in the end by brute, unintellectual force—a situation that Strepsiades is well aware of when he mocks the power of words against the burning rafters:

{Στ.} ὅτι ποῶ· τί δ' ἄλλο γ' ἢ  
 διαλεπτολογοῦμαι ταῖς δοκοῖς τῆς οἰκίας·

---

Strepsiades: What am I doing? What do you think? I'm mincing words with the rafters of your house! (*Clouds* 1495–6)

This failure of rhetoric to serve its practitioners when they need it most is also discussed on page 59, section 2.4.3 of this paper, since it is closely related to the apparent impracticality of philosophy. In the end, even the seemingly powerful art of rhetoric, with all of its potential abuses, is nothing more than useless words. These words have power only to those who would listen.

But as little as Socrates' character may personally care for the fruits of abusing rhetoric for practical purpose, he encourages such abuse in Strepsiades. It is this practical purpose, in fact, that interests Strepsiades so much: as Dover explains,

Strepsiades in the *Clouds* does not want his son to learn science and philosophy in order to be a cultured man, but in order to win lawsuits, whether he is in the right or in the wrong. It was therefore felt that a



young man who had been taught systematically by an intellectual had at his disposal a weapon which he would use for his own advancement in the community, and against which the man whose education had been traditional could not contend.<sup>118</sup>

Strepsiades does not attempt to hide this desire. In fact, for him it is the main purpose of Socrates' school:

{Σω.} ἤλθες δὲ κατὰ τί·  
 {Στ.} βουλόμενος μαθεῖν λέγειν·  
 ὑπὸ γὰρ τόκων χρηστών τε δυσκολωτάτων  
 ἄγομαι, φέρομαι, τὰ χρήματ' ἐνεχυράζομαι.

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Socrates: And why have you come?

Strepsiades: Anxious to learn public speaking. You see, I'm being harried and plundered by debts and cantankerous creditors, and having my property foreclosed. (*Clouds* 239–41)

And Socrates' response shows that he accepts some students with these values: but further, it shows that he encourages such a mindset:

{Σω.} λέγειν γενήσῃ τρῖμμα, κρόταλον, παιπάλῃ.  
 ἀλλ' ἔχ' ἀτρεμεί.

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Socrates: At speaking you'll become a smoothie, a castanet, the flower of orators. Now don't move. (*Clouds* 260–1)

Likewise, when Strepsiades suggests using a focused lens to burn the records of his case and thereby escape justice, Socrates' response is one of praise:

{Σω.} σοφῶς γε νή τὰς Χάριτας.

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Socrates: By the Graces, that's ingenious! (*Clouds* 773)

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<sup>118</sup>Dover (1976) p. 51.

Socrates' lack of concern in the *Clouds* over the use of his teachings is a character trait entirely in keeping with his earlier portrayal. After all, it is a common theme, discussed in the introduction to this paper on page 13, section 1.3, that concern for justice comes through belief in the traditional gods. Thus, in a certain way, when the Socrates of the *Clouds* shows indifference or even encouragement to his pupil's intention to abuse rhetoric, his actions constitute not only a willing corruption of the pupil, but also the impiety to which he has already clearly admitted. And as Dover points out, the Wrong argument, "who embodies the spirit of Socrates' teaching, [...] values [...] the pleasures available to those who have learned to demolish by destructive argument the precepts of traditional morality."<sup>119</sup> It is this Wrong, or Worse, argument that Strepsiades desires to learn:

{Στ.} εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς φασὶν ἄμφω τὸ λόγῳ,  
τὸν κρείττον', ὅστις ἐστί, καὶ τὸν ἥττονα.  
τούτοιον τὸν ἕτερον τοῖν λόγοιιν, τὸν ἥττονα,  
νικᾶν λέγοντά φασι τὰδίκωτερα.  
ἦν οὖν μάθῃς μοι τὸν ἄδικον τοῦτον λόγον,  
ἃ νῦν ὀφείλω διὰ σέ, τούτων τῶν χρεῶν  
οὐκ ἂν ἀποδοίην οὐδ' ἂν ὀβολὸν οὐδενί.

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Strepsiades: I'm told they have both Arguments there, the Better, whatever that may be, and the Worse. And one of these Arguments, the Worse, I'm told, can plead the unjust side of a case and win. So, if you learn this Unjust Argument for me, then I wouldn't have to pay anyone even a penny of these debts that I now owe on your account. (*Clouds* 112–8)

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<sup>119</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. xxxv.

Thus, although Strepsiades pushes hard for the abuse of rhetoric, and sees Socrates' school as useful only for this possibility, and although Socrates promises him undeserved rewards for this corrupt behaviour, Socrates personally shows no interest in abusing rhetoric despite his ability, because of his preoccupation with useless theory. In this way, Socrates is associated with the worst of both worlds: not only with the destruction of justice and disregard for fairness, but also, in tense opposition, with a lack of interest in participating in the outside world. Both extremes are unfit for a participant in a democratic state, and as extremes, are against the ideal of the middling man. It is this lack of interest in practicality that is ridiculed in the *Clouds*, as much as immorality. This pattern of opposite extremes parallels the demands for money and wealth associated with sophists.

## 2.6 Demand for Payment

As with Socrates' apparent desire to abuse rhetoric for personal gain, so too his apparent demand for money in return for teaching is based mostly on the expectation of Strepsiades, a character who consistently cannot fathom Socrates' preoccupation with the abstract and useless. And again, two contradictory faults are associated with Socrates: first, greed and the power to take vast amounts of money; and second, poverty, through a lack of interest in the real, the useful, and the material. And just as with the abuse of rhetoric, so too regarding the demand for payment: the greed and

abuse are shown primarily through Strepsiades' expectations, while the indifference and aloofness are shown through Socrates' own behaviour.

It is well known that sophists charged large sums for their teachings,<sup>120</sup> but there is some doubt about when these fees became a major point of popular distrust of sophists. Fredal, for example, says that

fifth century references to sophists are sometimes pejorative, but they do not emphasize pay as especially objectionable or particularly relevant to "the sophist problem."<sup>121</sup>

Fredal's position is that the later emphasis on the greed of the sophist comes from Plato's writings, where he distinguishes sophists and philosophers in part by their demand for payment.<sup>122</sup> It is mainly after Plato, he argues, that "sophists are equated with fees and thereby with greed and immorality."<sup>123</sup> But the *Clouds* seems to provide evidence for an opposing view: there are a number of clear references to payment, and it is difficult to see their purpose if they are not meant to portray the desire for large amounts of money as an objectionable trait. This does not completely contradict Fredal, however, since he at no point claims that there was absolutely no objection to the sophists' demands for large amounts of money before Plato: he only claims that Plato popularized this criticism in a way that strongly influenced those after him.

In this context, Fredal evaluates the *Clouds*' merits as a historical representation

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<sup>120</sup>Dover (1972) p. 111.

<sup>121</sup>Fredal, J. "Why Shouldn't the Sophists Charge Fees?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 38 April (2008) No. 2 p. 151.

<sup>122</sup>Fredal (2008) pp. 151ff.

<sup>123</sup>Fredal (2008) p. 155.

of Socrates: “Strepsiades offers to pay Socrates [...]. Significantly, though, Socrates refuses the offer, one of the few aspects of Socratic teaching that Aristophanes apparently got right.”<sup>124</sup> One problem with this evaluation is the claim that “Socrates refuses the offer,” which is by no means so explicit in the text. Socrates does, however, seem to have little interest in Strepsiades’ promises of payment, as Hulley notes:

Socrates’ impatient and abrupt dismissal of Strepsiades (783; 789–90) seems altogether inconsistent with the behavior one would expect of a person who feels a compelling desire for, or need of, a fee.

There is, then, in the dramatic action to line 803 no sufficient indication that Socrates is anticipating a fee.<sup>125</sup>

Up until about line 808, Strepsiades is the only one focused on the payment, and Socrates shows absolutely no interest in the subject. Far from being praise for Socrates, however, it is a back-and-forth battle over these two negative stereotypes (greed and indifference) of intellectuals. The first mention of money is when Strepsiades explains what Socrates does:

{Στ.} οὗτοι διδάσκουσ', ἀργύριον ἥν τις διδῶ,  
λέγοντα νικᾶν καὶ δίκαια καὶ ἀδίκαια.

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Strepsiades: These people train you, if you give them money, to win any argument whether it's right or wrong. (*Clouds* 98–9)

In accordance with this understanding of Socrates’ interests, then, Strepsiades makes the following offer to Socrates:

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<sup>124</sup>Fredal (2008) p. 151.

<sup>125</sup>Hulley, K. “A Note on Aristophanes’ “Clouds”, 804–813.” *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 69 Feb.–Mar. (1974) No. 3 p. 224.

{Στ.}                      μισθὸν δ' ὄντιν' ἀν  
πράττη μ', ὁμοῦμαί σοι καταθήσειν τοὺς θειούς.

Strepsiades: Whatever fee you may charge, I'll swear to the gods to pay in cash. (*Clouds* 245–6)

In reply to this, however, Socrates ignores the matter of payment, being distracted by the particular manner of expression Strepsiades uses. For Socrates, the matter of the true gods is irresistible:

{Σω.} ποίους θεοὺς ὁμεῖ σύ· πρῶτον γὰρ θεοὶ  
ἡμῖν νόμισμ' οὐκ ἔστι.

Socrates: What do you mean, you'll swear by the gods? First of all, gods aren't legal tender here. (*Clouds* 247–8)

As Hulley says of this passage, “it is striking that Socrates disregards the offer itself as if he were not interested in it and, questioning the oath by the gods, proceeds to declare what his gods really are.”<sup>126</sup> Even so, it is not enough to distract Strepsiades from the matter of payment. He tries again, suggesting that coins must be what Socrates is after:

{Στ.} τῷ γὰρ ὁμνυτε.  
[ῆ] σιδαρέοισιν, ὥσπερ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ.

Strepsiades: So, what do you swear by? Iron coins, as in Byzantium?  
(*Clouds* 248–9)

But Socrates completely ignores him again in his reply. Payment can wait when he is excited about his philosophy:

<sup>126</sup>Hulley (1974) p. 223.

{Σω.} βούλει τὰ θεῖα πράγματ' εἰδέναι σαφῶς  
 ἅττ' ἐστὶν ὁρθῶς.

Socrates: Would you like to know the truth about matters divine, what they really are? (*Clouds* 250–1)

After this, Hulley notes, there is not “any further reference to fees prior to the choral passage in question [ll. 804–813]”<sup>127</sup> At this point, it must be remembered, the only references to payment have been brought up by Strepsiades, and they have been ignored by Socrates. Now, however, it seems that the chorus says that Socrates will profit from teaching Phidippides:

{Χο.} σὺ δ' ἄνδρὸς ἐκπεπληγμένου  
 καὶ φανερώς ἐπηρμένου  
 γνοὺς ἀπολάψεις ὅτι πλεῖστον δύνασαι  
 ταχέως· φιλεῖ γάρ πως τὰ τοι-  
 αῦθ' ἐτέρᾳ τρέπεσθαι.

Chorus: (*to Socrates as he enters the Thinkery*)  
 And you, recognizing a man infatuated  
 and visibly keyed up,  
 will doubtless lap up as much as you can—  
 but quickly, for this sort of business has a way  
 of taking unexpected turns. (*Clouds* 808–12)

There is some trouble with the word ἀπολάψεις, as Dover explains: “there is no other example of (ἀπο)λάπτειν or (ἀπο)λείχειν in the sense ‘extract money’.”<sup>128</sup> At any rate, even if ἀπολάψεις, translated by Henderson as simply ‘lap up’, does refer to extracting payment, it is still the Chorus, rather than Socrates himself, who suggest

<sup>127</sup>Hulley (1974) p. 223.

<sup>128</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 198.

that Socrates should be eager for payment. The only real potential reference that Socrates makes to his own payment comes when he is mocking Phidippides:

{Σω.} πῶς ἂν μάθοι ποθ' οὗτος ἀπόφευξιν δίκης  
 ἢ κληῖσιν ἢ χάνωσιν ἀναπειστηρίαν·  
 καίτοι ταλάντου τοῦτ' ἔμαθεν Ὑπέρβολος.

Socrates: How could this one ever learn courtroom defence, or summoning, or effective bamboozling? But then again, Hyperbolus managed to learn them, for a very high fee. (*Clouds* 874–6)

Dover interprets this statement as a sly way for Socrates to set a high price for training Phidippides:

Socrates is a clever salesman. Having in effect refused Pheidippides as a hopelessly immature pupil—and having thus created an agonizing anxiety in Strepsiades—he adds musingly, “All the same, for a *talent*...”, implying that he might be able to teach Pheidippides but it cannot fail to be very difficult and very expensive. A talent is a prodigious fee.<sup>129</sup>

But that is not the only possible interpretation. Hulley disputes Dover’s reading:

But the point of expense is not followed up nor is any bargain struck in the response of Strepsiades, who seems concerned only with rebutting (877–881) the difficulty suggested by Socrates (872–875) — namely, that Pheidippides appears to lack the ability to be an apt pupil — and with breaking down his reluctance, real or pretended, to accept Pheidippides as a student.<sup>130</sup>

The implication is that Socrates is possibly referring to the difficulty of teaching such students, rather than trying to increase his earnings. The reading is ambiguous:

<sup>129</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 207.

<sup>130</sup>Hulley (1974) p. 223.



Dover's reading is at the very least completely possible. This means that Fredal's assumption, in its current state without explanation or justification, that "Socrates refuses the offer" of payment in the *Clouds*<sup>131</sup> is inadequate.

Further confusing the matter of payment, there is another ambiguous passage after Phidippides has finished training, where it is possible that Socrates is paid. Strepsiades greets Socrates, and gives him something, *τουτονι*:

{Στ.} χαῖνωγέ σ'. ἀλλὰ τουτονι πρῶτον λαβέ.  
 χρὴ γὰρ ἐπιθαυμάζειν τι τὸν διδάσκαλον.

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Strepsiades: The same [greetings] to you. (*giving him a purse*) But first, take this here, since one should show the teacher some appreciation. (*Clouds* 1146–7)

In this translation, Henderson interprets the object as a purse of money for payment. But there is no more discussion in the *Clouds* of what this *τουτονι* is, and there are really many possibilities. Unlike the previous ambiguous passage, however, this passage would have been clear in performance, if the line was in the original, performed version of the play. Dover speculates on what *τουτονι* could refer to, and in fact, payment in money does not seem occur to him as a likely possibility (in fact, he does not mention the possibility):

Σ<sup>RVE</sup> (recalling 668 f.) suggests that Strepsiades has brought a sack (θύλακος) of flour; but I would be surprised if Ar. missed a comic opportunity here. Possibly *τουτονι* refers to an emaciated he-goat or a decrepit dog; better, though (to remind us simultaneously of 54 f. and the complex 179/497 ff./856 f.), he brings a tattered χιτών: he could appear with

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<sup>131</sup>Fredal (2008) p. 151.

it folded under his arm and only reveal its true nature while speaking  
1146.<sup>132</sup>

While Dover's commentary here is perhaps exceedingly imaginative, it does illustrate at the very least that one cannot take for granted that this passage refers to a monetary exchange. There is one last category of evidence in the *Clouds* that suggests that Socrates is not so successful at earning money after all. That is, he seems to live in poverty.

Of course, before proceeding, one must acknowledge that Aristophanes has no obligation to provide continuity in his characters. In this way, passages that present Socrates as poor do not have to be somehow reconciled with passages that could be read as enriching him. Since we have already discussed on page 8, section 1.1 of this paper how Socrates' character is not strictly historical, and how he may be a representative of an entire class of intellectuals, the character may well possess contradictory attributes without causing us too much consternation. This is important to remember, since it would be a mistake simply to assume that the poverty of Socrates at some points in the comedy should shed light on his policy towards accepting fees at other points. He could be an immoral, wealthy, justice-betraying sell-out, and at the same time also be a poor, foolish stargazer with no marketable skills. In this way, he can embody any stereotypes about intellectuals.

Therefore, Socrates' apparent poverty should not rule out Dover's reading of

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<sup>132</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 232.

Socrates as a “clever salesman,”<sup>133</sup> nor need it be smoothed over by extratextual rationalizations such as poor money management or unusual lack of interest in personal hygiene. Socrates may be poor, and he might also be rich too. Edmunds sees the train of jabs at Socrates’ poverty throughout the entire work,<sup>134</sup> and this need not get in the way of the equally consistent mentions (mostly by Strepsiades) of Socrates’ potential to earn vast amounts of wealth. It is clear that Strauss sees the poverty of Socrates too, because he says that in the *Clouds* “Socrates is a pauper for the sake of his study of the things aloft.”<sup>135</sup> But his desire for consistency of character causes Strauss to imagine evidence to support his view: for example, he claims that Strepsiades’ sarcastic mocking of Socrates’ language while he burns down the thinkery “reveal[s] implicitly that Socrates did not take monetary advantage of Strepsiades.”<sup>136</sup> He does not cite any specific passages by line to support this claim, and a survey reveals that nothing Strepsiades says while burning down the thinkery necessarily implies that Socrates took no payment.

At any rate, one sign of poverty that is evident is the infestation of fleas and gnats in which the *Clouds*’ Socrates lives. The trick in which Socrates measures the stride of a flea, for example, has already been quoted and discussed on page 61, section 2.4.3 of this paper.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, Socrates shows himself to be an expert on gnats’

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<sup>133</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p. 207.

<sup>134</sup>Edmunds (1986) p. 210.

<sup>135</sup>Strauss (1966) p. 50.

<sup>136</sup>Strauss (1966) p. 45.

<sup>137</sup>*Clouds* 144–52.

vocal systems in the passage already quoted and discussed on page 62, section 2.4.3 of this paper.<sup>138</sup> The infestation is evident too in Strepsiades' fear of the bed in the thinkery, which Socrates forces him to lie in:

{Στ.} κακοδαίμων ἐγώ.  
οἷαν δίκην τοῖς κόρεσι δώσω τήμερον.

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Strepsiades: Heavens me, I'm going to pay the bedbugs dearly tonight!  
(*Clouds* 698–9)

Soon after, the bugs are ferociously biting Strepsiades:

{Στ.} ἀπόλλυμαι δειλῖος. ἐκ τοῦ σκίμματος  
δάκνουσί μ' ἐξέρποντες οἱ Κορίνθιοι,  
καὶ τὰς πλευρὰς δαρδάπτουσιν  
καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκπίνουσιν  
καὶ τοὺς ὄρχεις ἐξέλκουσιν  
καὶ τὸν πρωκτὸν διορύττουσιν,  
καὶ μ' ἀπολοῦσιν.

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Strepsiades: Calamity! I'm undone! Some Cootie-rinthians are crawling out of the pallet and biting me! They're chomping my flanks, draining my lifeblood, yanking my balls, poking my arsehole and altogether killing me! (*Clouds* 709–15)

This environment is a fitting home for the members of the thinkery. The filth of these intellectuals themselves is made explicit later on, when Strepsiades ironically praises them for their squalor and cheapness:

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<sup>138</sup> *Clouds* 156–64.

{Στ.} εὐστόμει  
καὶ μηδὲν εἴπης φλαῦρον ἄνδρας δεξιούς  
καὶ νοῦν ἔχοντας, ὧν ὑπὸ τῆς φειδωλίας  
ἀπεκείρατ' οὐδείς πώποτ' οὐδ' ἡλείφατο  
οὐδ' εἰς βαλανεῖον ἦλθε λουσόμενος.

Strepsiades: Watch your mouth, and don't say anything disrespectful about sage and intelligent men, men so frugal that not one of them has ever cut his hair or anointed himself or gone to the bath house to wash. (*Clouds* 833–7)

It is perhaps this chronic poverty, in the face of their squandered potential to earn money through lawsuits, that compels these intellectuals to steal items, particularly cloaks, to survive. As a thief, then, Socrates shows the untrustworthiness that excludes the poor from being middling men:

The good man's attitude toward "the poor" was also like that of the fourth-century *metrios*. They should not be mocked, but neither can they be trusted, for their empty bellies degraded them and forced them to lie.<sup>139</sup>

It is for this reason that Strepsiades' cloak is missing after his episode at the thinkery:

{Φε.} διὰ ταῦτα δὴ καὶ θοῖμάτιον ἀπώλεσας·  
{Στ.} ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπολώλεκ', ἀλλὰ καταπεφρόντικα.

Phidippides: I guess that's also why you lost your cloak. Strepsiades: It's not lost, merely sublimated. (*Clouds* 856–7)

This recalls the passage when Strepsiades first enters the thinkery. Socrates tells him that it is the custom for all who enter to go inside undressed:

<sup>139</sup>Morris (1996) p. 28.

{Σω.} ἴθι νυν κατάθου θοιμάτιον.

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Socrates: Come on, lay down your cloak. (*Clouds* 497)

Later, Strepsiades' shame and attempts to hide his lost cloak are overtaken by anger, when he explicitly accuses the intellectuals of the thinkery of stealing it. As he is burning their home, Strepsiades exclaims to the pupils of Socrates (and possibly Socrates too, since the verb is plural):

{Στ.} ἐκεῖνος οὐπερ θοιμάτιον εἰλήφατε.

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Strepsiades: It's me, whose cloak you stole! (*Clouds* 1498)

This practice is revealed early on as a method by which the residents of the thinkery were able to afford their meals. In an early passage, for example, the pupils recount how Socrates stole a cloak:

{Μα.} ἐχθὲς δέ γ' ἡμῖν δεῖπνον οὐκ ἦν ἐσπέρας.  
 {Στ.} εἶέν. τί οὖν πρὸς τάλφιτ' ἐπαλαμήσατο·  
 {Μα.} κατὰ τῆς τραπέζης καταπάσας λεπτήν τέφραν,  
 κάμψας ὀβελίσκον, εἴτα διαβήτην λαβών,  
 ἐκ τῆς παλαιστρας θοιμάτιον ὑφείλετο.

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Pupil: Yes, and last night we had no dinner to eat.

Strepsiades: Aha. So how did [Socrates] finagle your eats?

Pupil: Over the table he sprinkled a fine layer of ash and bent a skewer, then he picked up a faggot from the wrestling school and swiped his jacket.  
 (*Clouds* 175–9)

This episode shows not only the poverty of Socrates and his students, through their lack of supper, but also their corrupt means of living. And as Henderson notes of this passage,

At first Socrates seems to have been performing a scientific demonstration, but then turns out to have robbed a passive homosexual of his clothing; the joke turns on the double meaning of *diabetes* “compass” and “one who spreads his legs.”<sup>140</sup>

That is, just when the audience expects to see Socrates finally obtain a practical result (that is, supper) through philosophical reasoning, the expectation is immediately deflated by the pun and it turns out that the dinner is obtained through common robbery. This reinforces the theme of the uselessness of philosophy, which is discussed in more detail on page 56, section 2.4.3. In fact, the uselessness of philosophy and the poverty of the philosopher are deeply connected, since it is in part through the impracticality of most philosophy and the aloofness of its practitioners that the intellectuals are so poor. Edmunds notes this paradox well:

Socrates is presented as a sophist, yes, as a master of forensic rhetoric, whose skills are worth a fortune. At the same time, Aristophanes never stops joking about the poverty of this Socrates and his students.<sup>141</sup>

As a potentially rich man, and yet extremely poor as well, Socrates can violate the ideal of the middling man on both sides. As Morris points out,

The *metrios* was said to be content with “a little” money and was contrasted with both the rich and the poor. [...] Anyone defined as rich [...] was seen as prone to hubris. [...] Poverty, on the other hand, forced a man to do undignified things, making him vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>142</sup>

Just as the democratic process is weakened by the exploitability of the poor, then, so too the hubris of the rich can undermine the democratic polis by disrupting the

<sup>140</sup>Henderson (1998 (repr. 2005)) p. 30.

<sup>141</sup>Edmunds (1986) p. 210.

<sup>142</sup>Morris (1996) p. 22.

community. Strauss sees the burning of the thinkery in the *Clouds* as a punishment for this very crime of hubris.<sup>143</sup> In fact, the character of Socrates in the *Clouds* shows many signs of these pretensions that one might wish to thwart in a community, at least in ideals, of supposed equals.

## 2.7 Pretensions

These pretensions are in part related to the portrayal of the intellectual's dismissal of conventional religion, and his prying into subjects (for example, the cause of rain) traditionally viewed as the province of divinity. Such pretensions allow the character of Socrates to fall into a common comic role, known as the *alazon*. Northrop Frye, in a more general description of literature as a whole, describes this character type thus:

The type of character involved here we may call by the Greek word *alazon*, which means imposter, someone who pretends or tries to be something more than he is. The most popular types of *alazon* are the *miles gloriosus* and the learned crank or obsessed philosopher.<sup>144</sup>

In this way, one can see that, in the *Clouds*, Socrates' pretensions to forbidden knowledge are made worse by the constant mocking of these studies as being in fact trivial or useless (like the research on gnats, for example), a topic covered in detail on page 56 and following, section 2.4.3 of this paper. That is, insofar as pretension is the difference between one's presentation of oneself and the reality, the pretension is

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<sup>143</sup>Strauss (1966) pp. 45–46.

<sup>144</sup>Frye, N. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1957 p. 39.



increased not only by the lofty aims Socrates may have, but also by the uselessness and vulgarity of his execution of those aims. Before Socrates is even brought on stage for the first time, he is described to Phidippides, who disgustingly describes Socrates and his friend as ἀλαζόνες:

{Φε.} αἰβοῖ, πονηροί γ', οἶδα. τοὺς ἀλαζόνες,  
αἰβοῖ, πονηροί γ', οἶδα. τοὺς ἀλαζόνες,  
ὦν ὁ κακοδαίμων Σωκράτης καὶ Χαιρεφῶν.

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Phidippides: Yuk! That scum. I know them: you mean the charlatans, the pasty-faced, the unshod, like that miserable Socrates, and Chaerephon.  
(*Clouds* 102–4)

Likewise, when Strepsiades plans to undergo the training himself, he says he will be an ἀλαζών after the training.<sup>145</sup> The final place where Socrates and his students are called ἀλαζόνες is in Strepsiades' angry speech while he begins to burn the thinkery.<sup>146</sup> Socrates himself describes many of the devotees of the Clouds as essentially pretentious impostors:

{Σω.} οὐ γὰρ μὰ Δί' οἶσθ' ὅτι πλείστους αὐταὶ βόσκουσι σοφιστάς,  
[...]  
[...] ἄνδρας μετεωροφένοντας,  
οὐδὲν δρῶντας βόσκουσ' ἀργούς [...].

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Socrates: You didn't [know they were goddesses] because you're unaware they nourish a great many sophists, men of highflown pretension, whom they maintain as do-nothings. (*Clouds* 331–4)

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<sup>145</sup> *Clouds* 449.

<sup>146</sup> *Clouds* 1492.

The Clouds, too, suggest the pretentiousness of Socrates early on, as they greet him for the first time in the play:

{Χο.} [...] βρενθύει τ' ἐν ταῖσιν ὁδοῖς καὶ τῷ φθαλμῷ παραβάλλεις  
κάνυπόδητος κακὰ πόλλ' ἀνέχει κάφ' ἡμῖν σεμνοπροσωπεῖς.

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Chorus Leader: You strut like a popinjay through the streets and cast your eyes sideways and, unshod, endure many woes and wear a haughty expression for our sake. (*Clouds* 362–363)

As an *alazon*, Socrates has a clear foil in Strepsiades. Frye discusses how an *alazon* is usually exposed as an impostor by what he terms the role of the *eirōn*:

The satirist may employ a plain, common-sense, conventional person as a foil for the various *alazons* of society. Such a person [...] is often a rustic with pastoral affinities, illustrating the connection of his role with the *agroikos* type in comedy.<sup>147</sup>

This description may recall the passage where Strepsiades describes his smells as rustic, specifically contrasting it to the more sophisticated and city-bred smell of his wife,<sup>148</sup> a passage quoted above on page 45, section 2.4 of this paper. With this in mind, it may be easier to see through Strepsiades' "bumbling fool" guise to see his true role as an unwitting *eirōn*, exposing (however unintentionally) the pretensions of his more sophisticated counterpart Socrates. Strepsiades does this with, in some respects, a childlike innocence, tarnished somewhat by a simple and childlike greed, and with his practical, grounded expectations. Simplicity and bluntness are the best tools for exposing a complicated and pretentious impostor.

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<sup>147</sup>Frye (1957) pp. 226–227.

<sup>148</sup>*Clouds* 49–52.

The extreme pretension of Socrates is evident in the very manner in which he is introduced into the play. Strepsiades see him hanging in a basket, elevated above the rest of mankind:

{Στ.} φέρε τις γὰρ οὗτος οὐπὶ τῆς κρεμάθρας ἀνὴρ·

Strepsiades: Hey, who's that man in the basket? (*Clouds* 218)

The character of Socrates here would be hanging from the *mechane*, the device usually used to lower a god onto the stage. In this way, Socrates has already usurped the role of a god, not only investigating the sky from afar, but actually intruding into the heavens. By worshipping himself here, through the use of the *mechane*, Socrates' character can be seen as replacing the gods with his own immortal reasoning ability: a concept already discussed with reference to his *daimonion* on page 29 in section 2.1 of this paper. Strepsiades recognizes the pretension in Socrates' unusual use of the *mechane*, and challenges him:

{Στ.} ἔπειτ' ἀπὸ ταρροῦ τοὺς θεοὺς ὑπερφρονεῖς,  
ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, εἴπερ·

Strepsiades: So you look down on the gods from a basket? Why not do it from the ground, if that's what you're doing? (*Clouds* 226–7)

Socrates' response situates him in a tradition of intellectuals, as Dover points out, by echoing the theory of Diogenes of Appolonia that the soul is to the body as the air is to other substances.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>149</sup>Dover (1968 (repr. 1970)) p.127.

{Σω.} οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε  
 ἐξηϋρον ὀρθῶς τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα  
 εἰ μὴ κρεμάσας τὸ νόημα καὶ τὴν φροντίδα,  
 λεπτήν καταμείζας εἰς τὸν ὅμοιον ἀέρα.

---

Socrates: Why, for accurate discoveries about meteorological phenomena  
 I had to suspend my mind, to commingle my rarefied thought with its  
 kindred air. (*Clouds* 227–30)

As a pretentious intellectual, then, elevated by a *mechane* to a height reserved  
 for the gods, Socrates address Strepsiades from above in the pretentious words of one  
 who really imagines himself a god:

{Σω.}                                    τί με καλεῖς, ὦ 'φήμερε·

---

Socrates: Why do you summon me, O creature of a day? (*Clouds* 223)

By emphasizing Strepsiades' mortality by addressing him as ἐφήμερε, of course,  
 Socrates' character here appears to have deluded even himself so far as to believe  
 he truly is immortal like the gods. But as the *eirone* in Frye's terminology, Strepsi-  
 ades reveals the mortality of Socrates by the end of the play. It is quite significant  
 that this very first line that Socrates' character speaks in the play, τί με καλεῖς, ὦ  
 'φήμερε, establishes that he considers himself immortal; and the very last line that  
 Socrates' character speaks in the play is a blunt admission that his first line was  
 wrong:

{Σω.} οἷμοι τάλας δειλῆαιος, ἀποπνιγήσομαι.

---

Socrates: Ah, poor me, I'm going to choke to death! (*Clouds* 1504)

Socrates' erroneous belief in his own immortality is perhaps the highest height any hyperbolized depiction of arrogance and pretension can take. The belief violates traditional religion, it violates the egalitarian middling ideals of the state, and above all, it violates common sense.

### 3 Concluding Remarks

Such then is the depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds*. His danger to democracy and violation of middling ideas would be apparent to Athenians in his rejection of traditional religious beliefs, in his rejection of traditional morality and apathy towards ethics in general, in his overweening pretensions, and in both his poverty and his ability to cheat men out of great wealth through rhetoric. Further, his disbelief in the traditional gods is made into a strong theme, influencing most of the character's qualities, such as his prying interest in natural science, and his reputation for the abuse of rhetoric. His rejection of the traditional gods is also deeply intertwined with his pretension, since he seems to replace the gods in some sense with himself. He is depicted as making youths into copies of himself in these respects, which to an Athenian would be the same as making these youths worse.

There is a strong consistency in this portrayal, then, on two fronts: first, Socrates violates the conduct of a good democratic citizen in so many ways; and second, that most of these ways are related to his heterodox religious beliefs (this second front is a subsection, but a large subsection of the first one). This consistency does seem to rule out the possibility that the *Clouds*' portrayal of Socrates is just a random assortment of funny exaggerations of Socrates. That the depiction is not meant to be a historical presentation of a single intellectual names Socrates, at any rate, is established on page 8, section 1.1 of this paper. But even as a depiction of the stereotypical intellectual

of the time, this portrayal is still consistent on these two very negative and very serious fronts. This suggests that behind the portrayal, there is an earnest criticism here of intellectuals, whether or not it is fair. But as the introduction of this paper hinted at, this is not enough to discern Aristophanes' intent. For the earnest criticism may belong to Aristophanes, or it may be part of a collective Athenian perception of intellectuals that Aristophanes was using for his own motives, which again even in this hypothetical situation would still be debatable.

Nevertheless, there is much value in knowing this much about the representation of Socrates in the *Clouds*, since it may provide a useful point of reference, combined with other work, for further studies of Aristophanes' comedy, Socrates' trial, and fifth and fourth century Athenian attitudes towards intellectuals. But perhaps of foremost importance, the nature of this negative portrayal of Socrates, and the complex interdependence of the criticisms implied within it, make a fascinating subject of study in its own right.

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