

# **CLOUDS**

## **By Aristophanes**

**Translated and adapted by Graham Kirby**

### **Characters in the Play**

**STREPSIADES**, *a middle-aged Athenian*

**PHEIDIPPIDES**, *a young Athenian, son of Strepsiades*

**XANTHIAS**, *a slave serving Strepsiades*

**STUDENTS**, *Socrates' pupils, including STUDENTS 1, 2, and 3*

**SOCRATES**, *a philosopher*

**LEADER OF THE CLOUDS**

**CHORUS OF CLOUDS**

**THE RIGHT ARGUMENT**, *an older man*

**THE WRONG ARGUMENT**, *a young man*

**PASIAS**, *one of Strepsiades' creditors*

**AMYNIAS**, *one of Strepsiades' creditors*

*(SCENE:- Outside **STREPSIADES**' house. **STREPSIADES** and **PHEIDIPPIDES** are both lying on the floor, apparently asleep. **PHEIDIPPIDES** farts.)*

**STREPSIADES**

Oh! I can't sleep! Won't day ever come? And still my slaves snore away. And of course these days, with Human Rights legislation you can't beat 'em. And as they say, if you can't beat 'em, why bother teaching 'em? And then there's himself. My son. He spends all night snoring and farting. Nice and warm. Well, I guess I should try and sleep.

*(**STREPSIADES** lies down again and tries to sleep. **PHEIDIPPIDES** farts again. **STREPSIADES** finally gives up trying to sleep)*

I still can't sleep. I've got so much debt and my bank won't help me out – thanks for that, Gordon.

But him, *he* sleeps ok. Look at him with his long hair and racing horses. That's all he thinks about – bloody horses.

*(Calling to a slave)* Oi, slave! Light the lamp.

*(Enter the slave **XANTHIAS** with light and tablets)*

**XANTHIAS**

Yes boss?

**STREPSIADES**

Bring me my accounts.

**XANTHIAS**

Yes boss.

**STREPSIADES**

Credit cards. Credit cards. Right, what do I owe?

**PHEIDIPPIDES** *(talking in his sleep)*

Faster! Faster!

**STREPSIADES**

That there's my problem. Even when he's fast asleep he dreams of horses!

**PHEIDIPPIDES** (*in his sleep*)

Drive faster! Drive faster!

**STREPSIADES**

You're driving *me*, round the bend! What next?

**PHEIDIPPIDES** (*waking up*)

Dad! Shut up! I'm trying to sleep.

**STREPSIADES**

All right, keep sleeping. One day all this debt'll be yours.

(**PHEIDIPPIDES** *rolls over and goes back to sleep*)

**STREPSIADES**

I blame your mother. Until I met her life was sweet. I could lie around during the day and fart at night. But she – she wants the fancy things in life. Perfume. Fine dining. Basically, she's a snob.

And then along came him.

I wanted him to grow like his ol' man. She wanted him to be all hoity-toity. I wanted to give him a simple, ordinary name. She wanted to call him Pheidippides. Pheidippides! Now, since you're a modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century audience, you won't know what that means. But the ippos bit means horse in Greek and that's all he's into now. Horses! Horses! Horses!

And I'm in debt!

(**STREPSIADES** *leans over and gently nudges PHEIDIPPIDES*)

Pheidippides... my little Pheidippides...

**PHEIDIPPIDES** (*very sleepily*)

Dad? What is it?

**STREPSIADES**

Tell me — do you love your old dad?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Yeah...

**STREPSIADES**

And you'll do what I say?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What d'you want?

**STREPSIADES**

Promise you'll do it.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Yes, I'll do it — I swear by Poseidon, lover of horses.

**STREPSIADES**

No! No more horses, please! Look over there — you see that house?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What about it?

**STREPSIADES**

That's the Thinkery! That's where the clever people go. Give them some cash and they'll teach you any argument you like – whether it's right or wrong.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

And who are these men? I've heard of them. Liars, all of them. Socrates, Chaerophon, Peter Mandelson.

**STREPSIADES**

Shut up. I want you to give up horses and join them!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

I won't do it, by Dionysus.

**STREPSIADES**

Come on, son. I just want you to learn something for a change.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What is it you want me to learn?

**STREPSIADES**

I want you to learn how to argue. And how to win even when you're wrong.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

No way, man. I'm not doing it.

**STREPSIADES**

Right then. I'm not paying for any more horses. You can get out! Go on! Get out!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

You're so unfair! Uncle Megacles won't see me go without.

*(PHEIDIPPIDES stands up and goes inside the house.*

*STREPSIADES gets out of bed)*

**STREPSIADES**

Well, if he won't go, I will!

*(STREPSIADES marches up to the door of the Thinkery and knocks)*

**STUDENT 1** *(from inside)* Go away!

*(STREPSIADES knocks again. The door opens and the STUDENT appears)*

**STUDENT 1**

Who's been knocking at the door?

**STREPSIADES**

I'm Strepsiades.

**STUDENT 1**

Look, you idiot. Your knocking made me forget my important thought.

**STREPSIADES**

I'm sorry. I'm just a simple man. What were you thinking about?

**STUDENT 1**

I can't say. Unless you are as clever as me.

**STREPSIADES**

Don't worry, I've come here as a student! To study at the Thinkery!

**STUDENT 1**

Very well. But you can't tell anyone else. Last week, a flea bit Chaerophon on the eyebrow and then jumped onto Socrates' head. So Socrates asked how many feet a flea can jump.

**STREPSIADES**

And how'd he measure that?

**STUDENT 1**

Most ingeniously. He melted down some wax, then took the flea and dipped two feet in it. Once that had cooled, the flea had some super little slippers. He took those off and measured out the space.

**STREPSIADES**

By Lord Zeus, that's brilliant!

**STUDENT 1**

D'you wanna hear more then?

**STREPSIADES**

Like what? Tell me...

*(STUDENT 1 pretends to be reluctant)*

**STREPSIADES**

I'm begging you.

**STUDENT 1**

Well, ok then. Chaerophon also asked Socrates whether a gnat buzzed through his mouth or through his, er, bum.

**STREPSIADES**

What did Socrates say?

**STUDENT 1**

He said that the gnat's, er, insides were narrow — therefore air passing through it, because of the constriction, was pushed with force towards

the rear. So then that orifice transmits the noise caused by the force of air.

**STREPSIADES**

So a gnat's bum is actually a giant trumpet! What a clever man he is. I bet he could help me win my lawsuits. Come on, now, open up the Thinkery! I wanna see Socrates now!

*(More **STUDENTS** of Socrates enter)*

**STREPSIADES**

Who are these guys?

**STUDENT 1**

These are the students!

**STREPSIADES**

Why are their, er, rear ends gazing up to heaven?

**STUDENT 1**

They're studying the stars. Now get inside before Socrates finds you.

**STREPSIADES**

What's all this?

**STUDENT 1**

That's astronomy.

**STREPSIADES** *(looking at a chart)*

And what's this?

**STUDENT 1**

That's geometry.

**STREPSIADES**

I don't know what any of these mean but they sound very clever.

**STUDENT 1** *(pointing at a map)*

Look — here's a map of the world. See? Right there, this is London. You see that big yellow mark? That's Boris Johnson's new haircut.

**STREPSIADES**

I don't believe it. No-one could have hair that awful.

*(Looking up)* Hey, who's the man up there?

**STUDENT 1**

That's the main man. Socrates.

**STREPSIADES**

Call him for me.

**STUDENT 1**

You'll have to call to him yourself. I'm too busy now.

*(STUDENT 1 exits to the interior of the house)*

**STREPSIADES**

Oh, Socrates... Hello, Socrates!

**SOCRATES**

What do *you* want?

**STREPSIADES**

I want to know what you're doing up there.

**SOCRATES**

Thinking about the sun.

**STREPSIADES**

Well come down here. I want to speak to you.

**SOCRATES**

Impossible! I am up here thinking. If I come down there I might be as thick as you.

**STREPSIADES**

Come down here, Socrates. I want to learn from you.

*(SOCRATES slowly descends)*

**SOCRATES**

What do you want?

**STREPSIADES**

I want to learn how to argue. I'm up to my eyeballs in debt.

**SOCRATES**

Aren't we all?

**STREPSIADES**

I'll pay you whatever you want as soon as I pay off my debtors. I swear by the gods.

**SOCRATES**

How can you swear by the gods? They don't exist.

**STREPSIADES**

Eh? What? What should I swear by?

**SOCRATES**

The Clouds, of course!

**STREPSIADES**

I don't understand, Socrates.

**SOCRATES**

Let me summon them for you.

*(CHORUS OF CLOUDS enters the auditorium, but doesn't yet appear on stage)*

**CHORUS OF CLOUDS**

We are the chorus of clouds!  
We are the chorus of clouds!  
We're not just in charge of the rain.  
We can help you get a good brain.

**SOCRATES**

Did you hear that?

**STREPSIADES**

It was so amazing I wanted to fart! But also it's made me so afraid that I'm afraid I just have to –

**SOCRATES** *(interrupting)*

Stop being such an idiot. This isn't a comedy, you know.

**CHORUS**

We are the chorus of clouds!  
We are the chorus of clouds!  
We're not just in charge of the rain.  
We can help you get a good brain.

**STREPSIADES**

Who are these awesome creatures?

**SOCRATES**

I've told you, idiot, they're the clouds. They give us the power of speech.

**STREPSIADES**

That must be why I want to speak, babble, and argue.

**SOCRATES**

Look, here they come!

**STREPSIADES**

Where? Where are they?

**SOCRATES**

Look, above the audience – there they are!

*(Enter the **CLOUDS**)*

**STREPSIADES**

I can see them now. They're everywhere!

**SOCRATES**

And you mean to say that you didn't know they were gods and goddesses before?

**STREPSIADES**

Not at all. I thought they were mists and dew.

**SOCRATES**

No, they're gods and goddesses. All liars and cheats pray to them.

**STREPSIADES**

But they look just like me and you. They are a bit like...

**SOCRATES**

What are they like?

**STREPSIADES**

Well they look like little bits of wool.

**SOCRATES**

Well, you stupid man, they're divine, they can look like anything they want to.

**STREPSIADES**

What should I say to them? I'm kinda embarrassed.

**SOCRATES**

Treat them like you would any other god.

**STREPSIADES** (to the **CHORUS**)

All hail to you, holy clouds.

**CHORUS LEADER**

Old man, you're clearly very dense.  
And have come here to talk nonsense.  
So if you pay us attention  
You will gain total comprehension.

**STREPSIADES**

How holy! How reverent! How amazing!

**SOCRATES**

Well, they are *the* gods, you know. All the others are just made up.

**STREPSIADES**

What? Where? How? What about Zeus - ?

**SOCRATES**

Made up.

**STREPSIADES**

Poseidon?

**SOCRATES**

Fiction.

**STREPSIADES**

Athene?

**SOCRATES**

A fairy-story made up for children.

**STREPSIADES**

Ok, so if Zeus doesn't exist, where does the rain come from?

**SOCRATES**

The Clouds, of course! Have you never wondered why when it rains there are always clouds in the sky?

**STREPSIADES**

That really does make sense. And I always thought that the rain was Zeus weeing into a sieve.

**SOCRATES**

No, it's the Clouds.

**STREPSIADES**

How?

**SOCRATES**

Well, the clouds fill with water. Then when they want to move, they release the water as rain.

**STREPSIADES**

But doesn't Zeus make them move?

**SOCRATES**

No. It's the aerial vortex.

**STREPSIADES**

Vortex? I've never heard of him. So Zeus is dead and now Vortex is King of the Gods. What about thunder?

**SOCRATES**

Well, thunder is when clouds bang together. Then they make thunder!

**STREPSIADES**

You're making it up!

**SOCRATES**

Ok, you're clearly stupid, but I'll explain it so that you can understand. You like a good meal don't you? Yeah. Well, just say you stuffed yourself with doughnuts. What noise does your stomach make?

**STREPSIADES**

Really, really strange noises. And then when I'm sitting on the toilet –

**SOCRATES** (*interrupting*)

We really don't need to hear any more about that. Just think, if your stomach can make disgusting noises, what could a cloud do?

**STREPSIADES**

So thunder is actually a cloud farting. I didn't know that.

**CHORUS LEADER**

So you want to be clever.  
Be able to argue forever.  
Listen closely to Socrates  
And you'll learn the art of hypocrisy.

**SOCRATES**

So are you now prepared to acknowledge the clouds as the only gods?

**STREPSIADES**

If I bumped into another god in the street, I'd refuse to talk to him –  
let alone sacrifice to him.

**CHORUS LEADER**

Tell us what we can do  
At the moment we haven't a clue.  
But if you give us respect  
You'll be able to argue unchecked.

**STREPSIADES**

That's what I want! I want to be a great speaker. I want to be able to make Barack Obama look like... look like... I dunno, like he's as clever as George Bush.

**CHORUS LEADER** (to **SOCRATES**)

This man is now rather slow  
But teach him all that you know  
And right before our eyes  
You can make him really wise!

**SOCRATES**

Come on then, students, let's find out how stupid this man really is!

**STUDENT 2**

How good is your memory?

**STREPSIADES**

That depends...

**STUDENT 3**

On what?

**STREPSIADES**

Well, if someone owes me something I remember. But if I owe someone something, I forget!

**STUDENT 2**

Do you have any natural gift for speech?

**STREPSIADES**

Not for speaking — only for evading debt.

**STUDENT 3**

So how will you be able to learn?

**STREPSIADES**

Oh, don't worry. I'll be able to learn.

**STUDENT 2**

So if Socrates throw out something really clever, something really, really clever –

**STUDENT 3** (*interrupting*)

Will you be able to snatch it up?

**STREPSIADES**

You mean like a dog with a bone?

**STUDENTS 2 and 3** (*aside*)

This man is so stupid!

**STUDENT 2**

And what do you do if someone hits you?

**STREPSIADES**

Well I wait a bit, make sure there are witnesses, then I take him to court!

**SOCRATES**

Right, come on. Inside. This may take some time -

*[Exeunt **SOCRATES**, **STUDENTS** and **STREPSIADES**]*

**CHORUS LEADER**

We hope that this man  
Gets on with his plan.  
For although he is old  
We can make him bold!

**CHORUS**

Now you lot out there should take note  
Before you get smug and all gloat  
This play was performed long ago  
When the Greeks were particularly low  
They were fighting each other  
Brother fighting against brother,  
Their leaders were all on the make  
And kept on making mistakes.  
But still they kept on electing  
Politicians who were not at all fetching.  
And in his plays Aristophanes  
Made a great cacophony  
He saw the abyss  
Warned them against this  
But they didn't listen  
To his valuable lessons -

**CHORUS LEADER**

And look what happened to them!

(Enter **SOCRATES**)

**SOCRATES**

By the Clouds and by Chaos! I have never met such a crude, stupid, clumsy, stupid and even more stupid man. I teach him something, but then by the time I've finished he's forgotten the beginning!

Strepsiades! Come out here, Strepsiades! And bring your bed.

**STREPSIADES** (*from inside*)

I can't! The bugs won't let me!

**SOCRATES**

Get a move on. Now!

(**STREPSIADES** enters, carrying his bed)

**SOCRATES**

Now put it down and listen.

**STREPSIADES** (*putting the bed down*)

There!

**SOCRATES** (*holding a chicken*)

Now, what is this?

**STREPSIADES**

A chicken!

**SOCRATES** (*holding another chicken*)

And this?

**STREPSIADES**

A chicken!

**SOCRATES**

You stupid man! This (*holds out first chicken*) is a "chicken" and this one (*holds out second chicken*) is a "chickenette". One is a boy and one is a girl so they can't be called the same thing.

**STREPSIADES**

I get it now! But I think, Socrates, you are being unfair to me. Most people wouldn't know that.

**STUDENT 2**

You think?

**STREPSIADES**

I *know*. Let's see –

**STUDENT 2** (*holding out first chicken to audience*)

So, you lot, what is this one?

**AUDIENCE**

A chicken.

**STREPSIADES**

I didn't hear them.

**STUDENT 1** (*holding out the same one*)

What is this one?

**AUDIENCE**

A chicken!

**STUDENT 1**

And this one?

**AUDIENCE**

A chickenette!

**SOCRATES** (*to STREPSIADES*)

See, you really *are* stupid! Get into your bed and think about how stupid you are.

**STREPSIADES**

No, please! The bugs'll eat me alive!

**SOCRATES**

Do it! You've got no choice.

(**STREPSIADES** *crawls very reluctantly into bed.* **SOCRATES** *exits back into the Thinkery*)

**STREPSIADES**

Oh, god... ahhhhh...

**CHORUS LEADER**

What's wrong with you?

**STREPSIADES**

I'm being eaten alive!

**CHORUS LEADER**

Don't complain so much.

**STREPSIADES**

Why not? I'm skint and it seems I'm too stupid to learn anything that Socrates has to teach me.

*(Enter **SOCRATES**)*

**SOCRATES**

Have you thought of anything yet?

**STREPSIADES**

Yes, I have!

**SOCRATES**

Excellent! What is it?

**STREPSIADES**

I have thought that there isn't going to be anything of me left when these bugs have finished with me.

**SOCRATES**

Idiot!

*(Exit **SOCRATES**)*

**STREPSIADES**

It's no good. I can't learn anything. I really am too stupid. But wait a minute – I do have an idea! And it's a brilliant idea. Just you wait and see what a brilliant idea it is! By the Clouds! Pheidippides! Pheidippides! Come here!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

By Zeus, dad, why are you shouting?

**STREPSIADES**

Hear that — “Zeus”! Ridiculous! To believe in Zeus — and at your age!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What are you laughing at?

**STREPSIADES**

You are so out of date! But you’re not a total loss. You can learn. And your ol’ dad will teach you something right now!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

All right, what is it?

**STREPSIADES**

Zeus is dead!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What?

**STREPSIADES**

Vortex is now king. He’s pushed out Zeus.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What are you talking about? Who says so?

**STREPSIADES**

Socrates! And he knows about clouds farting too!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Him! He’s a really –

**STREPSIADES** (*interrupting*)

Watch your tongue, Pheidippides. Besides, you are going to take my place and learn from Socrates. (**STREPSIADES** goes into his house and returns with two chickens) Ok, look at these. (*Holding out the first chicken*) What is this?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

It’s a chicken.

**STREPSIADES**

Good. And what is this?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Er, it's a chicken?

**STREPSIADES**

Crazy! Tell him, audience, what is this one?

**AUDIENCE**

A chicken!

**STREPSIADES**

And this one?

**AUDIENCE**

A chickenette!

**STREPSIADES**

See, they know it! Now go inside and learn. Else I'll make sure you never get a penny from me again.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Ok, I will. But you're gonna regret it.

**STREPSIADES**

Good. (*Calling out*) Socrates! Socrates!

**SOCRATES**

Oh. It's *you*. What do you want now?

**STREPSIADES**

Teach my boy, not me. He's a clever lad. Get him to learn the two arguments – the right one and the wrong one.

**SOCRATES**

I'll do better than that. He can learn from them himself!

(*Enter the **RIGHT ARGUMENT***)

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Come on you. Show yourself. If you're bold enough.

*(Enter the **WRONG ARGUMENT**)*

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Well, here I am. And I'm ready to give you the mugging you deserve.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Ha! You can't! Who do you think you are?

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

An argument.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Yes, but the wrong argument.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

You may be right, but I'll still beat you.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

How?

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

By arguing against Justice.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

The audience won't put up with that.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Oh, they will. They look like a dodgy crowd.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

If you argue against Justice, I'll destroy you utterly.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Tell me how.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

By arguing for what's just and right.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Well, I will argue that there's no such thing as justice.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

No such thing as justice! You really mean that?

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Well, if justice exists, where is it?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

With the gods.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Well, if justice exists, how come Zeus hasn't been punished for chaining up his dad?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Fetch me a bucket so I can be sick.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

See!

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

You're a terrible argument.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Music to my ears!

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Idiot.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Thank you. I accept your compliment.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

It's thanks to you that MPs spend all their time taking our money.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

I know. But there's no need to thank me.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

You are crazy. It's also because of you that the banks have lost all our money.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

And what do you have to say that's relevant to today?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I can teach him about old fashioned values. Like we used to learn. You – you're just scum.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Idiot.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Liar!

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Fool.

**CHORUS LEADER**

Stop it you two. Stop this fighting, all these abusive words. Both of you present your argument and we'll decide who wins.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I'm willing to do that.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Fine by me.

**CHORUS LEADER**

Come on then, which one of you's going first?

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

He can. Then I'll shoot him down.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Well, in the old days, things were different. For a start, children were there to be seen and not heard. They walked in straight lines and didn't wear the ridiculous clothes that young people wear these days. And if they were heard they would be singing wonderful songs like [insert your own reference here] or [again]. Those were the days! We didn't have hot baths in those days. And if any child made a sound, misbehaved or fooled around he was beaten, soundly thrashed – his punishment. And how we used to enjoy those beatings from our betters!

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

That's rubbish.

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

The point is, these were decent children. They knew how to behave. Now look at children of today – look at them. (*Gesturing first at the audience as a whole, then individual audience members*) Look at what that one is wearing! And that one! Disgusting! Children never used to insult their parents or muck around in class.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

And look at the audience's faces. Like they want to go back to those days at all. (*Pointing at an audience member*) And you, man, do you wanna end up like him?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

We would spend our time learning and reading. Not listening to "hip hop" music or "Snoop Doggy Doo" or "Pee Daddy" – or whatever they are called. But that man there will have you believing that what's bad is good and what's good is bad. And you'll end up like him!

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Have you finished? Great! About time! I was about to be sick with all the rubbish he was talking. I just wanted to tear apart his ridiculous arguments. He may be right but I can still beat him. Ok, first of all, you say that people shouldn't have warm baths. Why not?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

It turns them into cowards.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Already I've caught you out! Who is the bravest man in the whole world?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Hercules, of course.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

And when have you ever seen Hercules have a cold bath? See! And who is the most famous Greek?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I'd say it was Homer.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

And when did he ever shut up? You say that everyone should be quiet, but Homer was always banging on. You talk about self-restraint. When did that ever help anyone?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Loads of times actually. Peleus won a sword!

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

A sword! Lucky him! I bet all those MPs and bankers who have been raking it in these last years wished they'd won a sword!

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

But Peleus got to marry Thetis.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

And she ran off with someone else, he was so boring! *(To audience)* Now think, dude, what you would be missing if you showed self-restraint like he wants. All the pleasures you could get. That's what life is all about, innit? Even Zeus knows a thing or two about getting the most out of life. How many women has he had? And who are we not to follow his example? How can we mere mortals be better than a god?

*(To RIGHT ARGUMENT)* Look at this audience. What kinda people would you say they are?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I'm looking.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Well?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

By the gods, they disgust me.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

How would you describe them?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

I can't. I'd get into trouble for using rude words.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

So what do you say now?

**RIGHT ARGUMENT**

Well, I used to say if you can't beat 'em, why bother to teach. But now I say if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. I'm off.

*(Exit **RIGHT ARGUMENT**)*

**WRONG ARGUMENT** *(to **STREPSIADES**)*

So what now, Strepsiades? Do you want me to teach your son?

**STREPSIADES**

Yes. Knock him into shape. Teach him your argument so he can help me get rid of my debts.

**WRONG ARGUMENT**

Don't worry. When he comes back you won't recognize him.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

I told you, you're gonna regret this.

*(Exeunt **WRONG ARGUMENT** and **PHEIDIPPIDES**)*

**CHORUS LEADER**

Pheidippides seems pretty bright  
And will now have to learn wrong from what's right  
But Strepsiades who did abet this  
Will maybe come to regret this.

**STREPSIADES**

Any day now I'm for it. Any day now, my creditors are gonna come at me and take me to the cleaners. I'll be in court and probably end up in prison. How I wish I was an MP! You can bet anything you like we won't see any of them in prison. But Pheidippides should have learned the wrong argument by now. He'll be able to save me. *(Calling out)*  
Pheidippides!

*(**SOCRATES** comes to the door)*

**SOCRATES**

Hey, Strepsiades.

**STREPSIADES**

Tell, me Socrates, has my boy learned the wrong argument?

**SOCRATES**

Yes, he has!

**STREPSIADES**

Phew!

**SOCRATES**

He'll be able to defend you, don't worry. He's so corrupt we're even thinking of getting him to join the Labour Party.

**STREPSIADES**

He really is a good liar then. Could he defend me if there were witnesses?

**SOCRATES**

The more witnesses the better! He can lie so much, he makes David Cameron look honest.

*(Enter **PHEIDIPPIDES**)*

**SOCRATES**

Here he is.

**STREPSIADES**

My son! My hero!

**SOCRATES**

Now take him and leave me alone.

*(Exit **SOCRATES**)*

**STREPSIADES**

Come on, come on. You have work to do. After all, it was you who got me into this mess.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

What are you so scared about?

**STREPSIADES**

The day of the Old Moon and the New.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

You mean there's a day that's old and new?

**STREPSIADES**

That's when my creditors are coming.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

They'll lose. There's simply no way one day can be two days.

**STREPSIADES**

It can't?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Unless it's possible that someone can at the same time be both old and young.

**STREPSIADES**

Wonderful! I have no idea what he means but it's wonderful. And here, right on time, is one of my creditors.

*(Enter PASIAS)*

**PASIAS**

Strepsiades, it is the Old Day and the New.

**STREPSIADES**

And? What's the matter?

**PASIAS**

Today is the day that I get the money back for those horses you wanted.

**STREPSIADES**

Horses? Everyone knows I hate horses.

**PASIAS**

But you swore by Zeus that you'd pay me back.

**STREPSIADES**

That was before Pheidippides here knew the wrong argument.

**PASIAS**

So you mean you're not going to pay me?

**STREPSIADES**

Why else would I have got him to learn it?

**PASIAS**

Are you prepared to swear by the gods that you don't owe me anything?

**STREPSIADES**

Which gods?

**PASIAS**

By Zeus, by Hermes, by Poseidon.

**STREPSIADES**

That's so funny. To swear by any of those gods is quite ridiculous to those who know.

**PASIAS**

Will you or will you not pay me my money? Give me an answer, and I'll leave.

**STREPSIADES**

I'll give you a clear answer in a bit.

*(STREPSIADES goes into his house)*

**PASIAS**

Well, what do you think he's going to do?  
*(Enter STREPSIADES carrying a bucket)*

**STREPSIADES**

Tell me, what's this?

**PASIAS**

It's a bucket.

**STREPSIADES**

No, it's a bucketette. A female bucket. You dare to ask for money when you're so stupid?

**PASIAS**

So you're not gonna repay me?

**STREPSIADES**

Not a penny. Now go away.

**PASIAS**

I'm going, Strepsiades, but you'll regret this.

*(Exit PASIAS. Enter AMYNIAS, another creditor, limping)*

**AMYNIAS**

Oh, poor me!

**STREPSIADES**

What's this?

**AMYNIAS**

I'm the stupid idiot who lent your son money and now I want it back.

**STREPSIADES**

What money?

**AMYNIAS**

The money I gave him as a loan.

**STREPSIADES**

What's wrong with you?

**AMYNIAS**

I was driving in my chariot and fell out.

**STREPSIADES**

You must have hit your head when you fell out. We don't owe you any money.

**AMYNIAS**

I want my money back!

**STREPSIADES**

You are obviously suffering some kind of brain haemorrhage.

.

**AMYNIAS**

Why's that?

**STREPSIADES**

Well you're not making any sense.

**AMYNIAS**

I'll be suing you if I don't get that money back!

**STREPSIADES**

Tell me, do you think that the rain is Zeus peeing into a sieve?

**AMYNIAS**

I don't know and I don't care.

**STREPSIADES**

Well, if you don't know about stuff like that, you don't deserve your money back.

**AMYNIAS**

Well, if you can't pay the whole amount, just pay the interest.

**STREPSIADES**

This "interest", what sort of animal is it?

**AMYNIAS**

It's not an animal. It's how we make money grow.

**STREPSIADES**

And what about the sea? Do you think it has more water in it than before?

**AMYNIAS**

No, it's the same as before.

**STREPSIADES**

Well if you don't think the sea increases, why should your money? Goodbye. *(Calling into the house)* Bring me my whip!

*(AMYNIAS runs off stage and STREPSIADES goes back into his house)*

**CHORUS**

It's so great, it's so fine, it's so nice  
To ignore right and just worship vice.  
But with any luck this old schmuck

Will soon find his plans come all unstuck!

*(Enter **STREPSIADES**, running out of his house with Pheidippides close behind him, hitting him over the head)*

**STREPSIADES**

Help! Help! You, help me — I'm begging you! I'm being assaulted! Owww, I'm in such pain — my head... my jaw! *(To **PHEIDIPPIDES**)*  
How could you hit your own father?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Yes, dad, I could.

**STREPSIADES**

See that! He admits he's beating me!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

I do indeed.

**STREPSIADES**

You'd hit your father?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Yes, and by the gods! And now I'll show how I was right to hit you.

**STREPSIADES**

It can't be right to hit your own father!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

I'll prove it to you — and win the argument.

**STREPSIADES**

You'll beat me on this point?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Easy. So which of the two arguments do you want?

**STREPSIADES**

What two arguments?

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

The right and the wrong.

**STREPSIADES**

Well, I taught you to argue the wrong, so use that.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Once you've heard my argument, you'll take a beating like a good father.

**STREPSIADES**

Go on then.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Just for this moment, I'm pleased that I learned the wrong argument. Before I couldn't string two words together. Now I can use arguments to justify beating my father.

**STREPSIADES**

Well, get back to your horses then. Please! Just stop beating me.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Did you hit me, or ever threaten to hit me when I was a child?

**STREPSIADES**

Yes – but I was doing it for your own good.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Then is it not right for me to hit you for your own good? Why is it right for you to be able to hit me but wrong for me to be able to hit you?

**STREPSIADES**

I dunno. I dunno.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

And surely the person who first brought in the law was a father. So why shouldn't I start a new law, saying it's ok for sons to hit fathers?

**STREPSIADES**

Even so, don't hit me. If you do you'll have yourself to blame.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Consider now another point –

**STREPSIADES**

No more! No more!

*(STREPSIADES turns towards the CHORUS)*

You clouds, you're to blame for this! It's your fault. I trusted you.

**CHORUS LEADER**

No, it's your fault, Strepsiades. You wanted this.

**STREPSIADES**

But I'm stupid. You knew that!

**CHORUS**

It's our fault, you say, we're to blame.  
You never wanted any of this, so you claim.  
But you would not be advised  
And so should not be surprised  
That your story has ended in shame.

**STREPSIADES**

What was I thinking? Why didn't I listen? I should just have paid back  
the money I owed. But what can I do now?  
I know! Come on son! Let's make Socrates pay! He tricked us.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

But I couldn't hurt the man who taught me.

**STREPSIADES**

You must, by Zeus.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

Just listen to yourself! Zeus? How out of date you are! Does Zeus  
exist?

**STREPSIADES**

He does. He does.

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

No, he doesn't. Vortex has done away with Zeus.

**STREPSIADES**

No he hasn't. That was Socrates!

**PHEIDIPPIDES**

I'm off. I'll leave you to babble to yourself.

*(Exit **PHEIDIPPIDES**)*

**STREPSIADES**

I must have been mad to cast aside the gods just because Socrates said so. But the minute this play is over, he's going to get a lesson from me. Slave, get me a torch. I'm gonna burn down the Thinkery! And at least I still have that whip –

*(Exit **STREPSIADES**)*

**CHORUS**

We hope you've enjoyed our short play  
Although old it's still valid today:  
That wrong can never be right  
And black can never be white.

*(The **CHORUS** exits)*

**THE END**