Aristophanes' *Clouds* was produced in 423 B.C.\(^1\) -- Our text of the play is a revision dating from a few years later. -- In 423, Socrates, one of the characters in the play, was forty-five. He was a well-known figure in Athens,\(^2\) both for his mannerisms and for his bravery during the Athenian retreat from Delium in 424. He was also the friend of prominent Athenians. Aristophanes is one of three contemporary sources for our knowledge of Socrates. The others are Plato and Xenophon. But the use of Aristophanes as a source is an old chestnut in classics. The problem is simply this: in Aristophanes, Socrates teaches science and forensic oratory for pay. In Plato and Xenophon, whom we have no good reason to doubt, Socrates teaches neither science nor forensic oratory and he does not teach for pay. One might conclude that Aristophanes is worthless as a source. Not all classicists have drawn this conclusion. The field is sharply divided. There are those who consider this Aristophanic Socrates a caricature of the natural philosopher and of the sophist and nothing more. There are those who maintain that the

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1. Except for a few phrases, this lecture remains in the form in which it was given in the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA, February 21, 1985. Some of the footnotes simply give references; others attempt to reply to the criticisms of Professor Nussbaum, which appear in this volume after my lecture.

Aristophanic Socrates is essentially historical. This second group bases its case on various details in the text of *Clouds* that correspond to the philosophic methods of the Socrates of Plato and/or Xenophon.

Now my position is as follows. The play does in fact provide enough of these details to make it obvious that we are facing the same Socrates known to us from Plato and Xenophon. As for the broad caricature of Socrates as a type, a type to which Socrates did not belong, Aristophanes has not misled anyone. Socrates is presented as a sophist, yes, as a master of forensic rhetoric, whose skills are worth a fortune (474). At the same time, Aristophanes never stops joking about the poverty of this Socrates and his students. This barefoot, esurient Socrates was known to the Athenians from other comedies, and the comic character corresponded to the Socrates they could see in the streets and the marketplace. In a more respectable unworldliness, it is the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues. The caricature of Socrates as a type, then, is built on a comic portrait of the historical Socrates. As a result, the sophistry of Socrates appears more openly comical, more frankly extravagant, and Aristophanes forces us to ask what connection he saw between the activity of Socrates, on the one hand, and that of the sophists, on the other.

I'll have something to say about that in my conclusion, but my main purpose is to pursue the historical Socrates in what might seem the least historical part of the play. I want to ask if the Clouds themselves, who form the chorus of the comedy, may not have something to do with two of the most notable characteristics of the Socrates whom we know from Plato and Xenophon. One of the characteristics I have in mind is the famous inner voice of Socrates and the other is his famous irony. Is it possible that the Clouds are a comic representation of the inner voice? Do the


5. Aristotle *EN* 1127b22; Cicero *Ac. Pr.* 2.5.15.