

Giovanni Cerri, *Le Nuvole di Aristofane e la realtà storica di Socrate*

in F. Perusino e M. Colantonio (eds.), *La commedia greca e la storia*
(Pisa 2012: ETS), 151-194

Abstract

The character of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, though farcical, corresponds substantially to the man described by Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and by the subsequent historical tradition. Their testimony confirms Aristophanes' witness: just as for obvious chronological reasons Aristophanes cannot depend on those writers, so too it is impossible to imagine that they have constructed their Socrates on the basis of an old farcical comedy. Given the correspondence between the portraits, it is evident, then, that both the comic and the philosophical descriptions derive from the very reality of the historical Socrates. These are the crucial points of comparison:

1) The physical science of the comic character and of the young Socrates: Socrates' experiments in the *Clouds*, correspond precisely, although of course in a humorous manner, to those listed by Plato in the *Phaedo*.

2) Socrates' sophistical teaching: the weak versus the strong discourse is found both in the *Clouds* and the *Phaedo*.

3) Aristophanes called Socrates' house and school *Phrontisterion*; Xenophon, Plato and other contemporary sources inform us that Athenian people used to call Socrates playfully "the *phrontistés*" ('the Thinker'): also here the comic invention has evidently its roots in the real life.

4) Socrates and the *Clouds*, in the course of the dramatic action, are converted from the weak to the strong discourse: so, at the end, Aristophanes reconciles his Socrates with the real one, as he appears in the Socratic sources.

5) Aristophanes ascribes to Socrates musicological doctrines virtually identical to those attributed him by Plato in his dialogues.

6) "Know thyself".

7) Dialectical praxis in the *Clouds* and in *Phaedo*.

8) Importance of the memory in the dialectical praxis.

9) The notion of 'idea'.

10) Physiognomic portrait.

11) Chaerephon, zealous pupil of Socrates in the *Clouds* and in the *Socrates' Apology*.

12) Socrates' pauperism.