2. Essay on *Clouds*

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay comparing three moments from *Clouds* to another work in order to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of classical Athens, responding to one of the following three prompts.

IMPORTANT:

- **Watch the video**. The overview video explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.
- **Before you upload**, make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers, including formatting, structure, and citations.
- **For how to do citations and bibliographies**, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

OPTION 1: Right and wrong in *Clouds*

Clouds emphasizes traditional values throughout the play and then ends with violence. Does *Clouds* offer an internally inconsistent message on morality?

- First, choose a tragedy from the Greek classical period in which morality is a key issue. (Popular options include *Medea* by Euripides; *Elektra* by Euripides or Sophocles; and *Antigone* by Sophocles; but there are other possibilities as well.)
- Describe and discuss three incidents from *Clouds* that involve a moral decision or an argument between characters about what the morality of an action. Compare each of these incidents with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the tragedy you've selected.
- Make an argument for the consistency of the moral argument of *Clouds* by comparing it with the moral argument in the tragedy. Where do both plays stand with regard to the Athenian debate on relative morality (*nomos vs. physis*)?

OPTION 2: Aristophanes's agenda

The surviving plays of Aristophanes range over a long and turbulent period of Athenian history. Do Aristphanes's opinions and technique change over time?

- First, choose another play by Aristophanes. (Popular options include *Frogs*, mounted in 405 BCE, 11 years after the revised version of *Clouds*; *Birds*, mounted in 414; and *Wealth*, mounted in 388; but any of the 11 surviving plays is fair game. Full texts in English are available here.)
- Describe and discuss three moments from *Clouds* that reflect either Aristophanes's opinions or how he makes the play reflect them. Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the other comedy.
- Make an argument for the consistency of Aristophanes's approach to writing, and the evolution of his overall philosophy across this most troubled period. What themes and ideas are present in both plays? Is his approach, methodology, or agenda consistent? If not, how does it change?

OPTION 3: Socrates vs. Socrates

The "Socrates" found in Aristophanes's *Clouds* is a deliberate distortion driven by a desire to discredit the real Socrates. What does this version of Socrates have in common with the one depicted in works by Socrates's student, Plato?

- First, choose a work by Plato in which Socrates is a major character. (Possibilities include: *Phaedo*, which has Socrates discussing life and afterlife on the brink of his execution; *Apology*, a version of Socrates's self-defense against charges of irreligion; or any of the other dialogs that focus on how Plato wanted to show Socrates's methods and beliefs. Full texts in English are available here.)

- **Describe and discuss** three moments from *Clouds* that reflect an opinion or behavior expressed by Aristophanes's version of Socrates. Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the work by Plato. What characteristics of Socrates and his philosophy were most exaggerated by the two authors (either in ridicule or praise), and why?
- **Make an argument** about how Socrates was seen by Athenians in their time of strife. What stood out about his behavior and beliefs that caused him to be venerated by some, and yet so feared by others that he was executed?
- (What's important to remember is that both versions of Socrates are distortions, twisted in the service of what their authors were trying to say about them. Aristophanes and Plato each had an agenda with respect to how they wanted to show Socrates. That means that both authors offered a distorted picture of Socrates that separates us from the real-life man.)