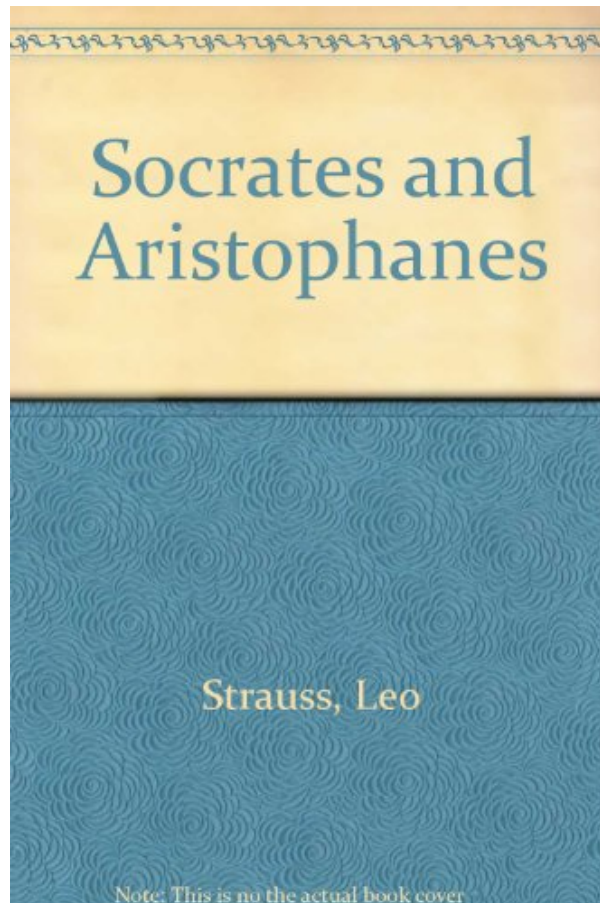
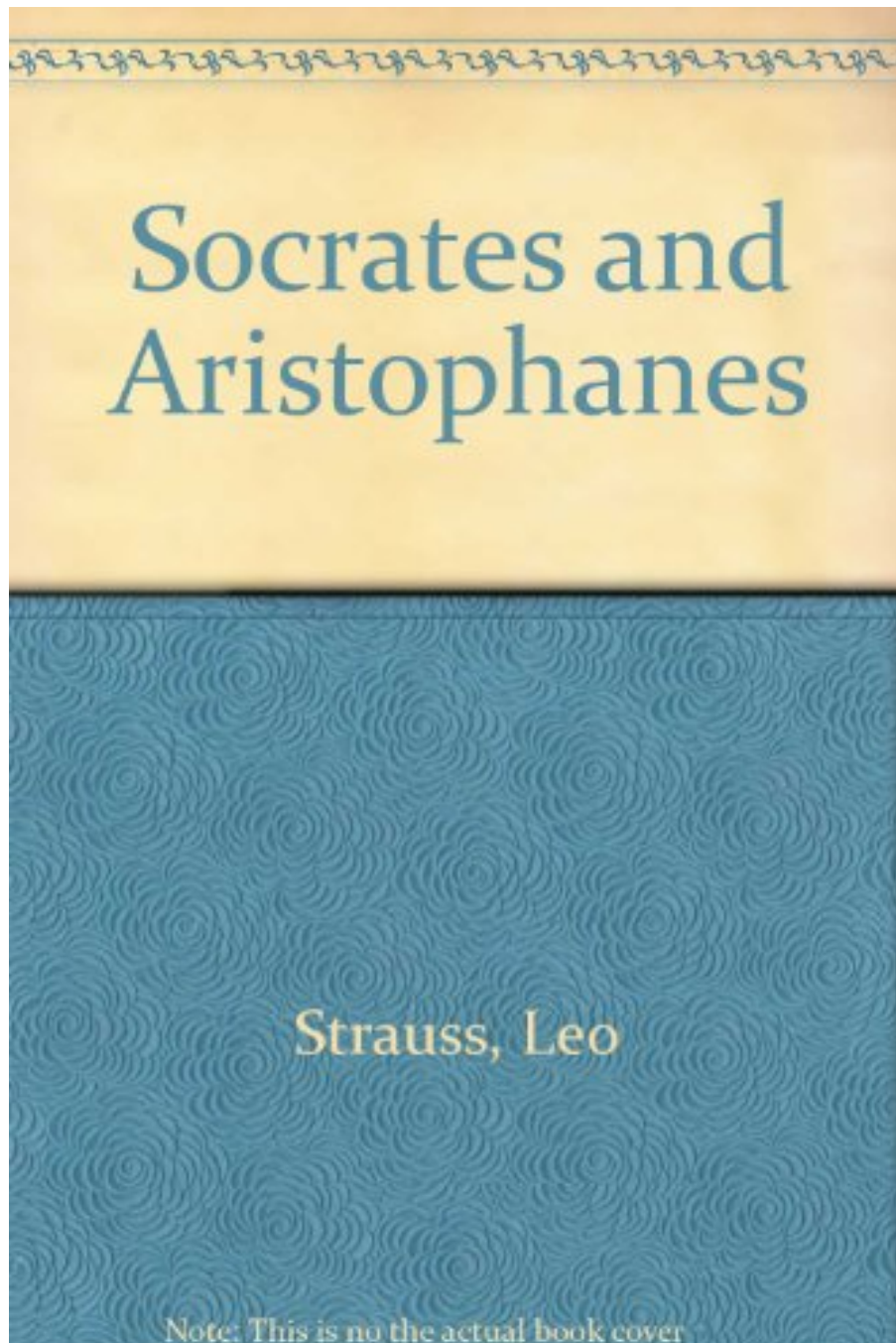


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From the Back Cover

In one of his last books, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Leo Strauss examines the confrontation between Socrates and Aristophanes in Aristophanes' comedies. Looking at eleven plays, Strauss shows that this confrontation is essentially one between poetry and philosophy, and that poetry emerges as an autonomous wisdom capable of rivaling philosophy.

About the Author

Leo Strauss (1899–1973) was one of the preeminent political philosophers of the twentieth century. He is the author of many books, among them *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, *Natural Right and History*, and *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, all published by the University of Chicago Press.

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"Strauss gives us an impressive addition to his life's work—the recovery of the Great Tradition in political philosophy. The problem the book proposes centers formally upon Socrates. As is typical of Strauss, he raises profound issues with great courage. . . . [He addresses] a problem that has been inherent in Western life ever since [Socrates'] execution: the tension between reason and religion. . . . Thus, we come to Aristophanes, the great comic poet, and his attack on Socrates in the play *The Clouds*. . . [Strauss] translates it into the basic problem of the relation between poetry and philosophy, and resolves this by an analysis of the function of comedy in the life of the city." —Stanley Parry, *National Review*

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The madness of war

By Wm M Hatch

While the introduction, conclusion and first essay (on "Clouds") is apparently anchored in an argument between philosophy and poetry, the further Strauss leaves "Clouds" behind, the more we see through his close reading of the plays, in a way we never do from the younger Plato, the cultural disintegration of Athens under the assault of the war. Euripides, not Socrates, emerges at the real opponent and comedy triumphs over

both tragedy and philosophy as the best teacher. This brings us close to an historical experience so often lost in classical studies, particularly in political philosophy, the madness in the streets of Athens and the fully-formed, transcendent characters which emerge with the comic treatment. These are not the spoiled aristocratic youth clustered around Socrates or the sophists (Plato's real enemies - not the poets). These are the men and women at the corner bar. This book makes you wish Strauss had done a "Hobbes and Shakespeare." His evident enjoyment of his subject leaks through with increasing intensity the further he seems to drift from his dichotomy. Could it be Strauss wished to remind his followers, ever so gently, to, like, lighten up and read a good comedy, even in the Greek some labor so hard to acquire? The book at least raises two questions: how did the bold Aristophanes avoid capital punishment? why did the ironic, diplomatic Socrates accept his?

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Aristophanes: the Neglected Political Philosopher

By Eleni

In this book Leo Strauss takes Aristophanes depiction of Socrates as a serious political attack. No longer is Aristophanes's attack rationalized away as a mistake as it is usually done by many authors (e.g. that he mistook Socrates as a Sophist) or that Socrates was an easy target for ridicule because of his 'ugly' looks. Strauss, writes that Aristophanes personally knew Socrates (unlike for example Aristotle), and as seen in the Platonic dialogue 'The Symposium' he was also a good friend of Socrates. Thus, Aristophanes attack on Socrates is not done out of hate, rather it was done in friendship. The same kind of friendship that we also see in Plato's Republic, where Socrates attacks Thrasymachus while at the same time becoming his friend. What Aristophanes depicts in his play 'The Clouds' is a "young" Socrates, one who does not know yet the wisdom of respecting a city's Gods. The Socrates that we all know and like, emerges much later and it is the Platonic Socrates, not the Socrates that Aristophanes knew. The Aristophenian Socrates had yet to learn his 'lessons'. Strauss is not biased against the profane language found in Aristophanes plays and does not view Aristophanes any less of a wise man for it. Indeed, Strauss seems to share some of the same convictions in regards to Aristophanes as Friedrich Nietzsche. In Nietzsche's book Beyond Good and Evil, one reads: "As for Aristophanes-that transfiguring, complementary spirit for whose sake one forgives everything Hellenic for having existed, provided one has understood in its full profundity all that needs to be forgiven and transfigured here-there is nothing that has caused me to meditate more on Plato's secrecy and sphinx nature than the happily preserved petit fait that under the pillow of his deathbed there was found no "Bible", nor anything Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic-but a volume of Aristophanes. How could even Plato have endured life-a Greek life he repudiated-without an Aristophanes? (section, 28)

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

How the other half lives

By J. C. Woods

This book follows the typical Strauss pattern: In the first few pages he makes a blanket statement (in this case, Aristophanes is a reactionary; in Thoughts on Machiavelli it was, Machiavelli is evil), then follows it up with a torturous and nuanced analysis of the thinker's ideas until you begin to wonder: In what way is Aristophanes a reactionary or Machiavelli, evil. He tells you the picture is black and white, then he brings you in so close that it all turns gray. Be this as it may, Plato's Symposium and Republic (especially Republic X where Socrates bans the poets from his just city) tells only half the story (philosophy's side). In this book Strauss tells the other half (poetry's side). In essence, Symposium and Republic (and to a certain extent, Phaedo) make up Plato's case as to why philosophy should be the teacher of public morality instead of poetry. Strauss' book takes Aristophanes' eleven existing plays and presents his opposing arguments, his defence of poetry and attack on philosophy. Interesting read for we who sit the other side of Plato's Republic (i.e. Medieval Christendom, where there is no longer any contest between Thomas Aquinas and Dante Alighieri).

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