



The Rhetoric of Plato's Republic: Democracy and the Philosophical Problem of Persuasion

James L. Kastely

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Plato isn't exactly thought of as a champion of democracy, and perhaps even less as an important rhetorical theorist. In this book, James L. Kastely recasts Plato in just these lights, offering a vivid new reading of one of Plato's most important works: the *Republic*. At heart, Kastely demonstrates, the *Republic* is a democratic epic poem and pioneering work in rhetorical theory. Examining issues of justice, communication, persuasion, and audience, he uncovers a seedbed of theoretical ideas that resonate all the way up to our contemporary democratic practices.

As Kastely shows, the *Republic* begins with two interrelated crises: one rhetorical, one philosophical. In the first, democracy is defended by a discourse of justice, but no one can take this discourse seriously because no one can see—in a world where the powerful dominate the weak—how justice is a value in itself. That value must be found philosophically, but philosophy, as Plato and Socrates understand it, can reach only the very few. In order to reach its larger political audience, it must become rhetoric; it must become a persuasive part of the larger culture—which, at that time, meant epic poetry. Tracing how Plato and Socrates formulate this transformation in the *Republic*, Kastely isolates a crucial theory of persuasion that is central to how we talk together about justice and organize ourselves according to democratic principles.

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