

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS PRESENTS:
CIRCULATING AUTHORITY:
PLATO, POLITICS, POLITICAL THEORY

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On a dominant interpretative paradigm, Plato's response to Athens' failures during the Peloponnesian War, culminating in the death of Socrates, is to displace and replace Athens' traditional democratic authorities -- poets, rhetors, politicians -- with the authority of philosophy. With a specific focus on the Republic, this paper argues, by contrast, that the dialog represents and enacts challenges to all claims to expert authority, including that of philosophy, and that it seeks instead to redistribute authority back to those who vest Athens' traditional figures and institutions with authority in the first place, namely, the people of Athens. Attending to the content of the dialog, to how the dialog's characters engage with one another, and also to the dialog's relation to its readers, I show how these multiple registers work together to orient to a new practice of self-authorization, one that may guard against the abdication of judgment characteristic of the Athenian citizenry over the course of the war, and also against their equally characteristic psychic, domestic, and imperial overreaching, *pleonexia*.

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