Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists

In this book, Marina McCoy explores Plato’s treatment of the rhetoric of philosophers and sophists through a thematic treatment of six different Platonic dialogues, including *Apology, Protagoras, Gorgias, Republic, Sophist,* and *Phaedrus.* She argues that Plato presents the philosophers and the sophists as difficult to distinguish insofar as both use rhetoric as part of their arguments. Plato does not present philosophy as rhetoric-free but rather shows that rhetoric is an integral part of the practice of philosophy. However, the philosopher and the sophist are distinguished by the philosopher’s love of the forms as the ultimate objects of desire. It is this love of the forms that informs the philosopher’s rhetoric, which he uses to lead his partner to better understand his deepest desires. McCoy’s work is of interest to philosophers, classicists, and communications specialists alike in its careful yet comprehensive treatment of philosophy, sophistry, and rhetoric as portrayed through the drama of the dialogues.

Marina McCoy is assistant professor of philosophy at Boston College. A former National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, she has published articles in several journals, including *Ancient Philosophy* and *Philosophy and Rhetoric.*
Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists

MARINA McCoy

Boston College
# Contents

---

**Acknowledgments**  page vii

1. Introduction  1
2. Elements of Gorgianic Rhetoric and the Forensic Genre in Plato’s *Apology*  23
3. The Rhetoric of Socratic Questioning in the *Protagoras*  56
4. The Competition between Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Gorgias*  85
5. The Dialectical Development of the Philosopher and Sophist in the *Republic*  111
6. Philosophers, Sophists, and Strangers in the *Sophist*  138
7. Love and Rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus*  167

**Bibliography**  197

**Index**  209
Acknowledgments

So many people have contributed to this book’s development that it would be impossible to name them all. Still, I will make an effort and ask for pardon from anyone that I inadvertently overlook. I am indebted to all of my teachers from Boston University but especially to Charles Griswold and David Roochnik. I am always inspired not only by the quality of their writing but also their passion for philosophy. I have learned a great deal from them through conversations both in word and in print. Most of all, I am thankful for their philosophical friendship, and I dedicate this book to them.

My colleagues at Boston College have been most supportive and helpful. I thank the College of Arts and Sciences for a Research Incentive Grant that made writing this book possible and John Carfora for his assistance in developing the project for the grant. The support and friendship of colleagues such as Eileen Sweeney, Patrick Byrne, Mary Troxell, Kerry Cronin, Brian Braman, and Paul McNellis, SJ, was invaluable. My graduate research assistants over the past years, Matt Robinson, Phillip Braunstein, and especially Jeff Witt, worked tirelessly, and I thank them for their aid. Also important have been graduate students in my seminars who helped me to think through these issues with their many insightful comments and questions. In particular, I thank Joshua Shmikler for helpful conversations and comments on the *Sophist*.

I am grateful to many friends, colleagues, and scholars whose thoughts in various ways contributed to the development of this book. Again, I thank David Roochnik and Charles Griswold but also Colin Anderson, John Cleary, Gregory Fried, Jill Gordon, Gary Gurtler, SJ, Katya Haskins, Enrique Hülß, Michael Kelly, Thornton Lockwood, Arthur Madigan, SJ,
Acknowledgments

Joe McCoy, Matthew Ostrow, Nick Pappas, Nick Smith, and Ronald Tacelli, SJ, for helpful comments on chapters or related talks or articles. Two anonymous referees also gave wonderful comments that greatly improved the book. Special thanks are due to my editor at Cambridge University Press, Beatrice Rehl, for all her work and amazing efficiency in working with the book. Thanks also to Mary Cadette, my project manager, and her staff. Any errors that remain are my own.

I thank my whole family but especially my parents and my husband, John, and children, Katherine and James, for their understanding, support, and love while I was writing the book. They inspire me both as a scholar but more importantly as a human being, and I am always grateful for their loving presence.