



Isocrates and Civic Education

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Civic virtue and the type of education that produces publicly minded citizens became a topic of debate in American political discourse of the 1980s, as it once was among the intelligentsia of Classical Athens. Conservatives such as former National Endowment for the Humanities chairman William Bennett and his successor Lynn Cheney held up the Greek philosopher Aristotle as the model of a public-spirited, virtue-centered civic educator. But according to the contributors in this volume, a truer model, both in his own time and for ours, is Isocrates, one of the preeminent intellectual figures in Greece during the fourth century B.C.

In this volume, ten leading scholars of Classics, rhetoric, and philosophy offer a pathfinding interdisciplinary study of Isocrates as a civic educator. Their essays are grouped into sections that investigate Isocrates' program in civic education in general (J. Ober, T. Poulakos) and in comparison to the Sophists (J. Poulakos, E. Haskins), Plato (D. Konstan, K. Morgan), Aristotle (D. Depew, E. Garver), and contemporary views about civic education (R. Hariman, M. Leff). The contributors show that Isocrates' rhetorical innovations carved out a deliberative process that attached moral choices to political questions and addressed ethical concerns as they could be realized concretely. His notions of civic education thus created perspectives that, unlike the elitism of Aristotle, could be used to strengthen democracy.

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