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The Law Most Beautiful and Best: Medical Argument and Magical Rhetoric in Plato's Laws

Randall Baldwin Clark

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How can citizens be persuaded to voluntarily obey good laws? Randall Baldwin Clark addresses this question by looking at one of the oldest works ever to pose it: Plato's Laws. The Law Most Beautiful and Best explores one of the most striking metaphors in the Laws: the suggestion that the gentle and persuasive bedside manner that characterizes rational medicine should serve as the model for political persuasion. Clark's careful reading of the Laws challenges traditional interpretations of this metaphor, emphasizing instead the way the dialogue subtly reasserts the efficacy of the magical arts. Just as the Athenian stranger treats his patients with a combination of rational and irrational therapies, so too must the philosophical reader?should he wish to preserve his city's health?be willing to avail himself of both the gentle persuasion of reasoned discourse and the enchanting coercion of irrational rhetoric. Both a close examination of the Laws and a thoughtful approach to an ageless political dilemma, The Law Most Beautiful and Best is essential reading for scholars interested in jurisprudence, classics, rhetoric, and political science.

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