

Rhetoric and Early Modern Politics

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In Europe from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, it was more or less taken for granted by learned elites that rhetoric had great political significance, and indeed this period is the second era of European history (the first being that of the Roman republic, from the third century B.C.E. onwards) in which a proficiency in rhetoric was widely considered to be a prerequisite for a political career. Like its medieval predecessor, early modern rhetoric was essentially classical, but from the late fourteenth century onwards its social and political application was expanded and transformed. The agents of this transformation, with whom this chapter will be centrally concerned, were the humanists of the Italian and Northern European Renaissance, scholars and pedagogues whose project to revive the literature and learning of classical culture had Latin eloquence at its core.

A classical conception of the utility of rhetorical persuasion to political deliberation and governance is a commonplace of early modern rhetorical treatises and textbooks (e.g. Agricola [1515] 1539: 5–6; Melanchthon 1519: 9–10; Rainolde 1563: 1r–v). As in antiquity, however, the role of rhetoric in politics was contentious for political philosophers and historians, who postulated the detrimental as well as beneficial aspects of eloquence in both republics and monarchies. After a summary of the late-medieval Italian background from which the humanistic conception of political rhetoric emerged, I shall address the ways in which rhetoric was theorized as an element of republican and monarchical politics and, in general terms, relate its *fortuna* to some of the fundamental developments in early modern political thought.

<1> Rhetoric in the Italian City-States

The importance of rhetoric to Renaissance humanism was established in modern scholarship on the Italian city-states by the work of Paul Oskar Kristeller (1961: 92–119; 1979: 228–51). According to Kristeller, the majority of Italian humanists were professional rhetoricians, who practiced rhetoric as secretaries of princes or cities, or taught it in universities and schools. The humanist study of rhetoric originated in part from the medieval arts of letter and prose composition, the *ars dictaminis* and *artes dictandi*, practiced throughout the peninsula, where *dictatores* had performed important legal and political roles—composing documents and letters as notaries, secretaries, and chancellors in the service of princes, popes, and cities. Teachers of *dictamen* also produced treatises and commentaries expounding an art that condensed the principles of classical rhetoric, principally of the forensic and deliberative *genera*, and applied them to administration and government.

Following the displacement of ruling elites by elective systems of government in the majority of the Italian city-states in the course of the twelfth century, the teaching of dictaminal rhetoric became tailored to a participatory and conciliar form of politics in which verbal debate and persuasive speech had an important role. At the same time, the exemplary topics and models propagated by the *ars dictaminis* came to incorporate the concerns of self-governing city communes, which were organized around the values of independence, liberty, and civic virtue. Training in dictaminal rhetoric became training in republican politics, practically and ideologically, and it acquired special significance when, in the later thirteenth century, systems of self-government came under pressure from chronic internal factionalism and the spread of hereditary *signori* across Italy (Skinner 1978, 1: 23–35).

Gradually, the abridgements of classical rhetorical theory propagated by the Italian *ars dictaminis* were supplanted by humanistic treatises and commentaries that engaged closely with Roman rhetorical works, especially those of Cicero (an early example is Antonio Loschi's *Inquisitio in XI orationes Ciceronis* [c. 1395]). In the course of the fourteenth century, however,

the progressive conversion of the Italian communes into principates—or, in the case of republics like Florence, socially restricted oligarchies—meant that when the classicizing influence of humanism was fully brought to bear on rhetoric, the political context for the *imitatio* of Roman culture had changed decisively. Adapting to civil life in principalities, early humanist rhetorical theory was primarily literary and philosophical, expressing a Ciceronian preoccupation with the moral status of the orator and focusing upon epideictic for ceremonial occasions.

Yet the political dimension of classical rhetoric would not be submerged for long. In 1402, the Venetian humanist Pierpaolo Vergerio criticized the sidelining of deliberative rhetoric by “princes and lords who “want an opinion explained in few words and arguments brought nakedly into council” ([1402] 2002: 24–5). A little later, the Greek humanist George of Trebizond presented a Ciceronian vision of rhetoric as *civilis scientia* to train the leaders of the Venetian republic, where eloquence in the Senate and Great Council would be indispensable ([1433/4] 1538: 1–5; Monfasani 1976: 260, 294–5). Similarly, although Quattrocento Florence was effectively an oligarchy dominated by local elites, to humanist eyes its magistracies, councils, and consultative meetings made it an appropriate setting for civically orientated rhetoric. In humanistic writing based in both republics we witness the extension of classical rhetoric, in all three *genera*, into political discourse, and substantial meditations upon the nature and role of civil eloquence.

<2> Rhetoric and Republicanism: Bruni and Machiavelli

The political thought of the Tuscan humanist Leonardo Bruni, chancellor of Florence in 1410–11 and again from 1427 until his death in 1444, has become highly controversial, mainly because of Bruni’s role in the so-called “civic humanism” seen by Hans Baron (1966) as the key to the Florentine Renaissance and the republican ideals of liberty, equality, and participation. I am not directly concerned with the plausibility of Baron’s thesis, but with the rhetorical character

of two of Bruni's epideictic speeches, the *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* and *Oratio in funere Johannis Stroze*. The first follows the *Panathenaicus* of Aelius Aristides, and applies encomiastic topics to Florence (geography, climate, architecture, etc.) to celebrate its past, present, and future glory (Bruni [1403/4] 1978: 135–75; cf. Quintilian 2001, 2: 114–15). The oration for the funeral of Nanni degli Strozzi, who died fighting for the Florentines against the Milanese, follows the model of Pericles's funeral speech in Thucydides, extolling Florence as “one of the greatest and most illustrious” of cities before turning to the career of Nanni himself ([1428] 1987: 121–7).

Two features of these speeches have become central to the historiography of Renaissance republicanism. The first is their emphasis on liberty, justice, and equality as cherished principles at the heart of the Florentine constitution. According to the *Laudatio*, the republican origins of Florence as a Roman colony, founded before the imperial destruction of liberty and when Roman virtue and power were at their peak, have made Florentines into “the greatest enemies of tyrants” and enable them to “enjoy perfect freedom” (149–51, 154). Correspondingly, the institutions of the republic produce its internal order in a Ciceronian fashion by maintaining liberty and justice, undergirded by equality before the law (168–9; cf. Cicero 1952: 180–3 and 1913: 44–7). In the oration for Strozzi, Bruni summarizes the interconnection of liberty, civic virtue, and self-government in the republic, which, in applying such values uniformly to “all the citizens,” is “egalitarian in all respects” and so has what is properly termed “a ‘popular’ constitution” ([1428] 1987: 124–5). This *oratio* also expresses a negative conception of liberty as freedom from arbitrary power (Skinner 2008), and an exclusivist critique of monarchy and aristocracy that gives legitimacy only to popular government ([1428] 1987: 125).

The second important political theme elaborated in Bruni's speeches is imperialism. Composed when the power of the Florentine republic was nearing its peak in the Italian peninsula, the *Laudatio* presents the military strength of Florence, like its Roman forbear, as a

central component of its civic greatness ([1403/4] 1978: 142, 144, 150, 155). The justification of republican imperialism in the Strozzi oration is notably more muted—appropriately in an era that witnessed the resurgence of Florence’s rivals and would soon see the triumph of the Medici—but Bruni still praises “the citizens of this present age, who have extended the city’s power even beyond what they inherited from their fathers” ([1428] 1987: 124; Hankins 2000: 145–59).

Despite the manifest republicanism of Bruni’s speeches, for some scholars their rhetorical character undermines his sincerity, and certainly he was ambitious and ideologically flexible enough also to serve the papacy and admire a condottiere prince (Siegel 1966; Hankins 1995: 318–27). But even if we view these speeches as conventional Florentine propaganda repackaged to provide ideological cement for the grip of the governing elite, this does not mean that Bruni’s rhetoric served only to provide him with eloquent cover for political careerism (cf. Siegel 1966: 25; Najemy 2000). Irrespective of their author’s intentions, the speeches testify to the potential of classical humanist rhetoric for the effective and influential expression of a republican ideology with liberty, justice, and equality, in conjunction with imperial power, at its core (Pocock 2003: 59–60, 550; Skinner 1978, 1: 103).

Bruni’s *Laudatio* and *Oratio* also exemplify the Ciceronian character of “civic humanist” rhetoric by illustrating the importance of public speech as a medium for political virtue. This is best revealed, however, by Bruni’s exertions in another epideictic form, the *Historiae Florentini populi* (written between 1415/16 and 1442 but not published until 1476). Here he shows how, in the intrinsically conflictual politics of the republic, driven by “an ancient, even primeval struggle between the nobility and the common people” ([1476] 2001–7: 349), public rhetoric has a crucially ameliorative role. Predictably in a work modelled on Livy, momentous decisions are debated by means of deliberative speeches addressed to meetings, councils, and informal gatherings of the citizen-body. When Bruni signals approval, they typically have classical tripartite structures (*exordium–narratio–peroratio*) and are delivered by

patriotic citizens, such as Teddhiao d'Aldebrando Adomari or Giano della Bella, who embody prudence, eloquence, and *auctoritas*: the element of rhetorical *ethos* identified by Quintilian as essential to deliberative persuasion ([1476] 2001–7, 1: 149–59, 361–71; 2: 487–503; 3: 83–91, 243–51; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* ...2001, II: 132–3, 450–3; I: 160–1). Bruni also underlines the agonistic character of Florentine civic rhetoric by presenting pairs of opposed *orationes*, marking public speech as a medium for the controlled expression and playing out of factional conflict ([1476] 2001–7, 1: 261–77; 2: 61–1, 489–407).

Bruni's history, however, suggests that a flourishing republic requires the careful management of civic rhetoric. On the one hand, good government is dependent upon prudent counsel, which, we are told by an unidentified elderly citizen addressing the Florentine priorate in 1351, "requires . . . the widest consultation and a careful deliberation on the part of many persons," since "it is not honorable for a few to take decisions which affect many, nor is it safe for the decision-makers." For such consultation to be effective, we are told by another speaker "of old-fashioned severity," there must be "freedom in giving counsel" to enable citizens to speak their mind ([1476] 2001–7, 2: 65, 325; cf. 1: 179). But history also teaches that such liberty should be kept within the bounds of moderation. If public speech is unrestrained, prudent counsel can be shouted down, and deliberation becomes reckless. When this happened with the revolt of the Ciompi in 1378, Bruni notes, it was only the persuasive speech of the virtuous Standard-Bearer, Michele di Lando, that restrained the mob "by advice, exhortation, and chastisement" (1: 159, 3: 9–11).

The necessity of tempering political liberty and freedom of speech with moderation and prudence is expressed most powerfully in Bruni's report of the oration given by Rinaldo Gianfigliuzzi in the Palazzo Vecchio in 1399. Acknowledging the wisdom of the priors in consulting the citizen-body about the imminent threat of Milan, Gianfigliuzzi nevertheless criticizes unfettered freedom of speech and popular power, and, in terms that anticipate later

theories of “reason of state,” counterpoises the utility of closed oligarchy in times of crisis. While traditional republican procedures of conciliar deliberation and wide consultation are cumbersome, and expose wise counsellors to the risk of popular calumny, he warns, Florence’s tyrannical enemy “does not wait upon the decree of the mob or the deliberations of the people” and is likely to strike first “while we are still pondering remedies.” For Gianfigliuzzi, the republic should rein in the “excessive license” of calumnious speech and appoint “vigilant persons in the state who have the power to act without being compelled to refer every single thing to the multitude and wait upon their decree,” since “state affairs generally require swiftness and secrecy, things which are very much at odds with mass decision-making”. Ultimately, Bruni implies, restrictions upon traditional political and rhetorical freedom will be necessary to preserve the moderate liberty and prudential statesmanship vital to the continued existence of the Florentine state ([1476] 2001–7, 3: 241–51). In this history, the flourishing republic depends upon a series of delicate balancing acts which enable a number of potentially conflicting elements to coexist: between popular liberty and virtuous aristocratic leadership, freedom of speech and social dignity, prudential deliberation and swift decision-making, and consultation and secrecy.

The importance of the classical conception of civic rhetoric in Florentine republicanism is also attested by its most famous document, Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (completed in 1518/19 and published in 1531). For Machiavelli, the history of the Roman republic demonstrates the indispensability of public speech and rhetorical eloquence to the good of a state characterized by popular liberty and participation. As the behaviour of the Roman plebs in Livy’s *Ab urbe condita* illustrates, Machiavelli claims, the maintenance of social order and preservation of freedom require outlets for popular ambitions, either through deliberation in assemblies or informal protest and resistance ([1531] 1983: 114). Equally importantly, the civic eloquence that enables a wise and virtuous orator of the Ciceronian kind to

persuade an assembled multitude is a crucial tool for mitigating the dangers of popular power. While Machiavelli maintains a positive valuation of the role of the *popolo* in upholding the common good because of their intrinsic interest in upholding freedom, he admits that their opinions are fallible. But a remedy exists: “the public platform on which some man of standing can get up, appeal to the crowd, and show that it is mistaken.” Although, as Cicero states, the populace is ignorant, it is also “capable of grasping the truth and readily yields when a man, worthy of confidence, lays the truth before it” (114–17).

For Machiavelli, the good judgment and persuadability of the populace give republics advantages over principates. When speakers of “equal skill” use deliberative rhetoric in the popular assemblies of republics, “very rarely does one find the populace failing to adopt the better view,” and many examples from Roman history show that positive outcomes result when popular participation is combined with prudent and eloquent leadership. Princes, however, are notoriously subject to strong passions and easily persuaded to err. Even “a licentious and turbulent populace” can be “returned to the good path” by a prudent orator, but “there is no one to talk to a bad prince, nor is there any remedy but the sword” ([1531] 1983: 225–9, 233–4, 252–7). In fact, freedom of speech is itself partly responsible for the misguided blame of popular republics, since “of the populace anyone may speak ill without fear and openly,” whereas “of princes people speak with the utmost trepidation and the utmost reserve” (257). In principates, political rhetoric is circumscribed by the coercive necessities of monarchical power, but republics function through the medium of public speech, which, when properly institutionalized, channels the sagacity of the citizen-body and enables the state to respond effectively to the contingencies of political life.

In this republican vision, then, the common good is most reliably attained when citizens are able to discuss their interests freely and issue judgment in a public forum ([1531] 1983: 124–31); but Machiavelli was far from advocating modern “deliberative democracy” (Fontana et al.

2004). Social conflict, deception, and violence intertwine with formal, reasoned discussion in Machiavellian politics ([1531] 1983: 113–15, 131–4, 141, 229, 526–7]). Moreover the Ciceronian model of civic rhetoric is intrinsically fragile: although the people have good judgment in particulars, they are susceptible to demagoguery and manipulation by speakers with private ambition, easily deceived by “a false appearance of good,” and prone to rashness and imprudence in times of crisis. If they lack trust in a leader capable of correcting their mistakes, Machiavelli warns, “it spells ruin, and necessarily so” (126, 197–8, 200–4, 238–42, 250–1). Most importantly, the utility of the institutions that enabled the Roman citizenry to propose and deliberate over laws was radically dependent upon their collective *virtù*. Permitting every citizen to speak for or against legislative proposals “was good so long as the citizens were good,” he observes, but not when they had become “perverse,” since then “only the powerful proposed laws, and this for the sake, not of their common liberties, but to augment their own power.” If the populace is corrupt, they will prove intractable even to a prudent and eloquent orator; then, the only solution is for the leader to resort to the “extraordinary” Machiavellian methods of “force and an appeal to arms,” and in effect to transform the republic into a principate, which he can “dispose” according to his own designs (160–4).

<3> Rhetoric and Princely Government

Since Roman antiquity it has been claimed that useful political rhetoric—the deliberative kind—thrives in the participatory and contentious environment found in republics, but withers away under monarchy, which is hospitable only to epideictic (Cicero 1939: 332–3, 336–9 and 1942, 1: 456–7; Tacitus, *Dialogus de oratoribus*), a view that was often echoed by early modern commentators (Du Perron [1579] 2003: 135–6; Mulcaster 1581: 242–3; Montaigne [1595] 2007: 324–5). Humanist pedagogy, however, was designed for monarchies as well as republics. From Petrarch onwards, humanists presented themselves as advisers to princes, composing letters,

manuals of government and princely education, dialogues and treatises on monarchy, and encomia, all routinely permeated by classical rhetorical strategies tailored to the requirements of courtly discourse. Some, such as Jacques Amyot in his *Projet de l'éloquence royale* (written in the 1570s), encouraged princes to cultivate eloquence as the basis of virtuous and effective governance. The most common vehicle used by humanistic political thought about monarchy, however, was the medieval *speculum principis* genre, which humanists filled with deliberative *topoi*—the honorable, the expedient, and the necessary—to portray the virtuous prince and to discuss the role of rhetoric in prudent and free counsel.

Although formally laudatory, humanistic “mirror of princes” texts employed deliberative methods by exhorting their addressees to particular virtues or honorable courses of action, and by delivering implicit criticisms (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* : 100-1). This rhetorical strategy had been established by Seneca’s *De clementia*, which describes the text as a mirror showing the prince how he is and ought to be (1928: 356–9; Stacey 2007: 23–72). In Petrarch’s encomiastic letter of 1373 to Francesco da Carrara, the humanist makes it clear that his purpose is “to spur the prince on to greatness with the very stimulus of praise” (1978: 36); conversely, as Coluccio Salutati noted, if such praise is false, “it warns him that he has not been praised but rather told what he should do” ([1406] 1951: 68). According to Erasmus, in the preface to his panegyric of the Archduke Philip of Austria, the ostensible flattery of this literary form not only works as a “cover” for the exhortation and admonition of the prince, but also reinforces obedience to monarchical rule by encouraging his subjects to hold him in “exceedingly high regard” ([1516] 1997: 114–16).

Humanist works on monarchy also exalted the rhetorical figure of freedom of speech (Colclough 2007), presenting it as the precondition for the frank, wise, and constant counsel required by rulers, and warning that its absence would generate one of the principal dangers to virtuous governance, namely flattery (Petrarch 1978: 36; Erasmus [1516] 1997: 54–8; Elyot

1531: 107v–108r, 154v–158v; Bacon [1624] 1985: 63–8). Some humanists, however, came to doubt the practicability and desirability of this ideal, and by extension their roles as advisors in princely courts. In *Utopia*, Thomas More dramatized the conflict between the civic duty of offering prudent and decorous counsel, and the evident futility of dispensing wisdom in corrupt courts full of flatterers ([1516] 1989: 28–38, 110–11). The most striking departure from the traditional understanding of counsel, however, was made by Machiavelli in *Il Principe*. Warning his prince that “if anyone may speak frankly to you, respect for you will soon disappear,” Machiavelli demarcates strictly between the powerful and active prince and his passive counsellors, who are excluded from anything resembling free deliberation. The prince should “should never lack advice, but should have it when he wants it, not when others want to give it” ([1513] 1988: 81–2; Stacey 2007: 302–3).

<4> Rhetoric and Absolutist Monarchy

From the later sixteenth century onwards, the traditional humanistic understanding of monarchy, which drew heavily upon classical ethics to elaborate the duties and virtues of the ruler, was gradually being displaced by absolutist theory granting him unquestionable power and preeminence. In part this was due to the spread of religious-political disorder across post-Reformation Europe, which prompted political theorists to reassess the relationship between sovereign power and its subjects drastically in favor of the former. The study of rhetoric remained central to learned humanistic culture, but the turn towards absolutism entailed a reconsideration of the political status of rhetoric, best seen in the works of two of the most influential theorists of absolutism: Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes.

For Bodin, writing *Les six livres de la république* in the midst of the French civil wars, the civic rhetoric extolled by previous generations of humanists had become a liability. “There is nothing which has greater power over souls,” he observes, “than the art of speaking well”; but

whatever the potential benefits of rhetoric, it has commonly caused factionalism and sedition—especially when orators are granted excessive freedom of speech. Particularly treacherous, for Bodin, are the preachers “of our age,” who have fomented spiritual disputes and encouraged rebellion “under the pretence of religion.” The history of political rhetoric, both ancient and modern, teaches that “a knife in the hand of a madman is scarcely as dangerous as eloquence in the mouth of a rebellious orator,” above all when religious principles are in question (1576: 509, 514–5; 1594: 764–5).

For Bodin, the potentially destabilizing power of political rhetoric should be strictly bounded, and not be permitted to encroach upon the formal preeminence of absolute sovereignty. Although eloquence is useful in dealing with the ignorant in democratic assemblies, it has no place in the senates or councils of aristocracies or monarchies, where discourse should be truthful and unadorned by rhetorical manipulation (1576: 300; cf. 514, 692). There is an unbridgeable division between advisory counsel and the command of the sovereign will; the freedom to be maintained is that of the ruler to ignore advice, which may be useful but is not indispensable (136–8, 284–5, 694; cf. Lipsius [1589] 2004: 430–3). The discourse that really counts in the Bodinian political universe—where “the principal mark of sovereign majesty and absolute power is the right to impose laws generally on all subjects without their consent”—communicates the will of the sovereign to his subjects, without interference or reply (1576: 140, 295).

The most vigorous early-modern critique of the humanistic conception of civic rhetoric is found in the works of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a humanistically trained rhetorical stylist, and translated Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* into Latin and English, yet throughout his *oeuvre* eloquence is closely associated with the subversive tendencies inherent in popular government and republican ideology. This was partly due to his close engagement with Thucydides, whose meditations on the destabilizing effects of democratic rhetoric appeared directly applicable to Civil War

England; Hobbes would always be in agreement with the Greek historian about democracy, a form of government disparaged in *The Elements of Law* as “no more than an aristocracy of orators, interrupted sometimes with the temporary monarchy of one orator” ([1650] 1994: 120). As he writes in *De cive*, deliberation in democracies is inherently flawed, exposing the *arcana imperii* to enemies and foreigners, permitting the trumping of prudential reasoning by eloquence, preferring the opinions of the many to the wisdom of the few, and provoking factional quarrels ([1647] 1998: 119–20, 122–5). It is also, he notes in *Leviathan*, intrinsically seditious, since popular assemblies encourage those “whose interests are contrary to that of the Publique” to persuade others to adopt their views with passionate eloquence, effectively “setting . . . the Common-wealth on fire, under pretence of Counselling it” ([1651] 2012, 2: 408–10). In the same work, Hobbes extends his critique to the counsel given to monarchs, from which rhetoric must be expunged: in contrast to “the rigour of true reasoning,” deceptive or emotionally manipulative rhetorical argumentation indicates that the counsellor “seeks his own benefit” and “not [that] of him that asketh it.” Echoing Machiavelli and Bodin, he urges the ruler to receive prudent, unadorned counsel “of whom, when, and where he pleaseth,” and “with as much secrecy, as he will” (2: 288, 398–402, 546–8).

What sets Hobbes’s criticism of political rhetoric apart from those of his predecessors is its explicit psychological and epistemological underpinning. For Hobbes, rhetorical speech does not make man better, but gives him “greater possibilities,” particularly deceptions that shortcircuit the process of understanding ([1658] 1972: 39–40). Drawing on classical conceptions of logic and rhetoric, he observes that while the former creates rational civil science, the end of the latter is persuasion, not truth; it is a product of the imagination, not reasoned judgment or scientific knowledge, employs metaphorical rather than correct speech, and is based upon the fluctuating terrain of “received opinions” rather than the solid ground of “true principles.” The Ciceronian conjunction of wisdom and eloquence extolled by generations of

humanists therefore has a dangerously oxymoronic tendency ([1647] 1998: 9, 55–6, 139–40; [1650] 1994: 61–2; [1651] 2012, 2: 62, 70; 3: 1132–2; Skinner 2002, 3: 72–9, 87–141). In *De cive*, which mobilizes civil science in support of the monarchy against the parliamentary republicans, rhetoric is expelled from practical political deliberation and moral philosophy as a whole ([1647] 1998: 71–2, 123).

Hobbes admits in *Leviathan* that some form of eloquence will be required for the political implementation of rational arguments. But it must be shaped “by Education, and Discipline” to harmonize with reason and ensure that it is used “for adorning and preferring of Truth” rather than “Error” ([1651] 2012, 3: 1132–3). For Hobbes, England’s troubles have been stirred up by “seditious Presbyterian Ministers, and ambitious ignorant Orators,” who have been humanistically indoctrinated in the universities (“for the sake of Greek and Latin philosophy and eloquence”) with rebellious opinions about democracy and religion. They have then disseminated these by rhetorical sophistry, producing a subversive, anti-Ciceronian union of “*stupidity and eloquence*” ([1647] 1998: 138, 140–1, 146–7; [1650] 1994: 176–7; [1679] 2009: 252; Serjeantson 2006). His solution is a radical “Reformation of the Universities,” which by teaching the “true Polyticks” of demonstrative civil science would lead “well principled Preachers” to inculcate the principles of duty and obedience to the civil law in the masses—thereby instantiating the rhetorical adornment of truth rather than error ([1651] 2012, 3: 1097, 1140; [1679] 2009: 182–3, 199).

<5> Epilogue

Although Hobbes did not see the precepts of *Leviathan* taught in the universities, as he had hoped ([1651] 2012, 3: 1140), on the larger issues he eventually got his way. As the influence of Renaissance humanism on learned European culture declined in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so too did the political significance of classical rhetoric.

Debates about political deliberation and public speech would be central to the development of modern republicanism, but—with a few exceptions, as in the works of Rousseau—became increasingly detached from the humanist vision of civic rhetoric; the model of absolutist monarchy, likewise, gave little scope for the exercise of eloquence in politics. In the dominant strains of political thought in the Enlightenment—in the works of Baruch Spinoza, Montesquieu, David Hume, Adam Smith, and their followers—the rhetoric of antiquity belonged to an era whose direct relevance was being rapidly undermined by the advent of modern commerce, political economy, and representative government. The modern study of politics was to be grounded in natural law, and the newly formulated axioms of civil, moral, and economic science, rather than the study of Greek and Roman texts. Both classical rhetoric and politics were not to be imitated but evaluated, historically and critically. While not yet completely sidelined, they were on their way to becoming matters of antiquarian interest.

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