Part I

Theoretical approaches to language and politics
Rhetoric as a civic art from antiquity to the beginning of modernity

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Introduction

Language is essential to politics as politics exercises its power of making decisions and influencing citizens through language. The ancient Greeks started a tradition of the study of language focused on this power of influencing civic life under the field of ‘rhetoric’.

When thinking about ‘rhetoric’ currently, we are often confronted with negative connotations. As the ‘intellectual art or study of persuasion’, intimately connected with oratory as ‘verbal communication with the intent to persuade’ (Worthington 1994, p. viii), rhetoric is often perceived as a field of study leading to the acquisition of skills to unethically deceive people. Within this connotation, rhetoric is also considered to be the study of how to support both sides of an argument and, thus, how to give credit to whatever is in the best interests of the speaker, regardless of its truth (Parker 1972).

If mastering the art of rhetoric can lead to the power to greatly harm people by unjustly using the strategies of language, Aristotle was keen to underline that, without knowledge of persuasion, it is not easy to convince an audience of good, constructive, or true ideas. Audiences will not be able to evaluate claims and standpoints in the correct way if such points are not presented and supported persuasively (Aristotle’s Rhetoric A 1, 1355a, pp. 20–23, Bodëüs 1992). This is why, despite the ‘dark side’ of rhetoric, the study of persuasion is a key source of empowerment for those citizens who have vital interests and core values to defend (Vickers 1989, preface and pp. 1–80). Rhetoric is a discipline of study that leads to personal growth and, in politics, it is a laboratory for developing democratic processes (Ober 1994; Lunsford et al. 2009, p. 290). Thus, since Greek antiquity, rhetoric has focused on what counts as an argument of quality, on how to recognise fallacious arguments and, overall, on how to use language in order to persuade people to act upon beneficial ideas (see, for instance, Aristotle’s Rhetoric B 23). To use concepts from the modern theory of argumentation, there was a tradition beginning in classical Greece concerned with the study of the relationship between reasonableness and effectiveness in argumentation (i.e. on the use of appropriate reasons to support a point of view while, at the same time, aiming for effectiveness) (van Eemeren 2010). Rhetoric developed as a discipline that deals with the...
requirements and characteristics of persuasive discourse and, as such, flourished as a key discipline in the education system (Milanese 1989).

The objective of this chapter is to examine the development of rhetoric as the study of language in the context of politics from antiquity to the beginning of modernity. More specifically, it examines the way in which the principal classical authors dealt with rhetoric in light of its power ‘to cultivate citizens’ (Glenn & Carcasson 2010) in both thinking and speaking and, from there, to impact civic life.

Rhetoric in Ancient Greece

The Sophists and Isocrates

The rise of rhetoric as a discipline of study in Ancient Greece can be seen as a recognition of the importance of language in political society. Historically, the origin of the art of speaking is said to be found in the second quarter of the fifth century BC in the newly established democracy of Syracuse. Citizens’ effective participation in political debate required that there be an exchange of opinions to enable them to make good and wise decisions on issues of social interest (Kennedy 1963; Cole 1991). Skillful oratory played an instrumental role for power in Athenian society (Ober 1994); it was a precondition for political success as well as a form of self-defence.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that, in the second half of the fifth century BC, the teaching of persuasion became a key business, especially for the itinerant professional teachers known as the Sophists. The most famous of these teachers were Protagoras (490–420 BC), Gorgias (485–380 BC) and Prodicus (465–395 BC). The Sophists made rhetoric the core of their education programme as, in their view, the acquisition of rhetorical skills and of competence in using rhetorical devices was the best equipment for fulfilling any political ambition (Guthrie 1971; Kerferd 1981).

Protagoras stressed that every argument has two contradictory sides, both of which could well be argued. In his teaching, Gorgias specifically focused on how to lead souls (psychagogia) by using figures of speech and working on stylistic elements. He also focused on the so-called art of the propitious moment (kairós) as the ability to say the right thing at the right time. For this purpose, students were taught to memorise specific speeches that they could use at any time so they were always ready with an appropriate response (Rubinelli 2009, pp. 43–72).

The Sophists elevated rhetoric to an autonomous discipline, the study of which was essential for personal empowerment. However, rhetoric was taught as being detached from personal qualities such as justice, respect and honesty, and this evident limitation did not go unnoticed from an ethical point of view.

In the treatise Against the Sophists, Isocrates (436–338 BC) condemned the main principles behind the educational programme of the Sophists. He portrayed rhetoric as ‘that endowment of our human nature which raises us above mere animality and enables us to live the civilised life’ (Norlin 1928, p. ix). There is no absolute truth on which human beings can base their judgement; nevertheless, human beings can be reliable judges and so not entirely susceptible to manipulation through speech (Balla 2004). Through pioneering ideas that were most successful in the Roman rhetorical tradition, Isocrates conceived the ideal orator as a person not only skilful in the art of speaking, but also gifted in history, culture, science and, ultimately, morality. It was this notion that led to Isocrates being known today as the father of ‘liberal education’ (Corbett 1989; Benoit 1991).
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Plato

Isocrates looked at rhetoric as a practical skill to be coupled with education. But, in the same period as Isocrates, this constructive idea of rhetoric was strongly rejected by Plato (436–338 BC) who, at an early stage in his career, condemned rhetoric as simply being the expression of a decline of values in society (Wardy 1996; Ryan 1979; Cole 1991). For Plato, a competence in rhetoric was all about appearing to know things and flattering the audience through skilful usage of the language. In Gorgias (464b–465d), Plato presented a remarkable analogy when comparing rhetoric and justice with cookery and medicine: medicine and justice aim towards the good, cookery and rhetoric aim towards pleasure. Thus, within the educational model presented in the Republic, rhetoric does not hold a position. For Plato, what is important to those individuals who will guide the city are disciplines including music, gymnastics, mathematics and dialectic (Republic 521d–541b).

Yet, Plato could not avoid admitting that oratory is an important component of human communication. Thus, later in his career, he reflected on whether there could be a way to think about rhetoric more constructively. In the second half of the Phaedrus, Plato re-evaluated the possibility that rhetoric could be a real art by pointing out that it is not speaking or writing that are shameful per se, but that what is bad is when people engage in them shamefully (Phaedrus 258d, pp. 4–5). Indeed, Plato recognises that rhetoric is the primary way ‘of leading the soul by means of speech’ (Phaedrus 261a, 8). As such, it can to be used to enhance society for the good, provided that it is assisted by a rigorous study of nature, of psychology and of argumentation techniques (Phaedrus, pp. 269e–272b).

Overall, it is clear that for Plato, rhetoric should be subordinated to philosophy, as it is philosophy that offers the knowledge and moral virtues necessary to use rhetoric for the benefit of the city.

Aristotle

Plato never wrote a handbook of rhetoric. It was only his pupil Aristotle (384–322 BC) who, in the Rhetoric, pioneered that which Plato had left unexamined.

For Aristotle, rhetoric, as the counterpart of dialectic, can enable speakers to strengthen their ability to construct sound arguments (Rhetoric A 1, 1355a, pp. 20–33) (Rubinelli 2009, pp. 50–58).

In the Rhetoric, Aristotle gave clear indications of what students had to learn. They had to be trained in the discovery of ‘artistic’ arguments (Rhetoric A 2, 1355b, pp. 35–39) that result from a reflection on the speaker, the audience and the topic. Orators can design their arguments by playing on the character of the speaker (the ethos), by disposing the listener in some way (with attention to pathos) and by playing on the rational appeal (the logos) with induction and deduction (Rhetoric A 2, 1356a, pp. 1–4).

Aristotle considered the rational appeal to be particularly important in shaping persuasive speeches. To teach students this task, he introduced in the Rhetoric the method of argumentation presented in his Topics, which instructs students how to build arguments by reflecting on the formal aspects of argumentation (Rubinelli 2009, pp. 59–90).

To increase students’ knowledge of emotions is one target of rhetorical education, and that is why, in the Rhetoric, Aristotle presented the first systematic discussion of human psychology. In Book 2 of the Rhetoric he analysed 15 emotions, including anger/mildness, love/friendship, pity and envy (Wisse 1989). As for the other role of the speaker, Aristotle
emphasised the value of ethical appeal. When speakers gain trust and admiration, they increase their credibility (Rhetoric 2, pp. 12–17).

In Book 3 of the Rhetoric, Aristotle addressed the issue of style as another topic in which students must be trained and enquired what a good prose style comprises. Aristotle recognised the importance of the actual delivery of a speech in terms of its linguistic format. (Rhetoric 3, pp. 1–19).

Overall, Aristotle is recognised as having made the greatest contribution to rhetorical theory in the sense that he offered a theory of persuasive speech communication that could train and reinforce the skills of students. He developed this theory by reflecting on the fact that rhetoric was indeed used to influence events in the city and also on the evidence that there was a lack of theoretical insight in the current teaching of rhetoric (Rhetoric 1–3) (Grimaldi 1972, pp. 60–66). He was aware that rhetoric is morally free and that, as such, it can be used or abused. Nevertheless, he was optimistic enough to believe that empowering citizens in terms of their persuasion skills would have offered a valuable tool with which to transmit the best ideas for human progress.

**Rhetoric in Ancient Rome**

The ability to design and deliver persuasive speeches was perceived as a precondition for success in the popular assemblies and the Roman senate (Kennedy 1972, pp. 23–37; Bonner 1998). Rome was, at the time, based on a form of democratic oligarchy where several hundred men in the senate would each need the skill to present their points of view to gain the approval of the audience, as well as to influence the passing or vetoing of various laws and legislation (Crook 1967). One priority in rhetorical training in the Roman context focused on teaching students how to successfully plead a case.

The two Roman thinkers who most influenced the development of rhetoric as an educational discipline, namely Cicero (106–43 BC) and Quintilian (35–96 AD), were themselves highly competent lawyers.

**Cicero**

Thanks to the status of his father, an equestrian knight, Cicero received the best education in philosophy, history and rhetoric through classes with famous Greek teachers. At the age of 15, he wrote *De inventione*, which, together with the contemporary anonymous work known as *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, represent the first extant treatises of Roman rhetoric. Cicero’s early interest in rhetoric was influenced by the idea that eloquence is one of the most important traits for a man who contends on behalf of his country (Powell & Paterson 2004). Indeed, as he explained at the beginning of *De inventione*, the ability to deliver persuasive speeches facilitated the use of wisdom in settling many important issues for cities. Rhetoric was, thus, for the young Cicero, an element of political science.

As the title *De inventione* underlines, the rhetorical training to empower citizens focused on the elaboration of a speech known as *inventio*, concerned with the ‘discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible’ (*De inventio* I, 9). Within the context of *inventio*, Cicero, by following ideas already discussed in the Greek tradition, proposed an extended version of the distinction of the parts of a speech, namely: the introduction [*exordium*], the beginning of the discourse; the narration [*narratio*] of the events that occurred, or that might have occurred; the division [*divisio or partitio*], about what is agreed upon and what is a matter of controversy; the proof [*confirmatio*], as the
presentation of arguments; the refutation [refutatio] of the adversaries’ arguments; and the conclusion [conclusio] of the discourse (De inventione I, 9). According to the above categories, speakers were taught how to create a successful oration by reflecting on the construction of a speech according to certain specific tasks.

In his later work, Cicero himself further refined his conceptualisation of the art of rhetoric. During his studies, he reflected upon what the ideal role and education of an orator should have been. In 55 BC, he composed a dialogue entitled De Oratore where he presented the idea that rhetoric has to be joined by philosophy (I, 3, 9) and by an overall knowledge of humanity, culture and society (Narducci 1994, pp. 5–82).

Orators must possess the acumen of dialecticians, the mind of philosophers, an almost poetical expression, the memory of lawyers, the voice of tragic actors and the gestures of the most advanced actor (De Oratore I, 28, 128). All of these characteristics must be mastered to the highest degree (De Oratore III, 20, 76). These principles were further explained and supported in the Brutus, Cicero’s treatise on the history of Roman oratory, and in the Orator, his last work on rhetoric.

On a more operational level, in De Oratore, Cicero echoed the Aristotelian motto of ethos, logos and pathos as representing in practice the main qualities of a skilful orator. As he expressed through the character of the orator Antonius, there are three main functions of the orator: to gain the sympathy of the audience, to demonstrate what is true and to stir emotions (De Oratore II, pp. 114–115). These functions of the orator’s mission have been transmitted through the ages as the officia oratoris.

Overall, Cicero attempted to rebase the discipline of rhetoric in its more fundamental theoretical foundation in response to a practical orientation codified in the post-Aristotelian schools of rhetoric. In so doing, he attempted to develop a model of the perfect orator in the format of an almost ideal one.

Quintilian

The battle of Actium (31 BC) signalled the end of the Roman republic and the beginning of the Empire under Octavian. In this period, the teaching of a special form of exercise called declamation became the real passion of rhetorical schools. In the basic form of declamation, the student was given a set of hypothetical circumstances and had to support one of these hypotheses as in a genuine judicial or deliberative context (Heath 1995; Kennedy 1994).

The practice of declamation spread widely among the private schools of rhetoric. Yet, this spread gave rise to a rather arid and artificial declamatory style, resulting in the increasing use of short sentences, forced metaphors and ready-made arguments. These changes, seen as a corruption of the Ciceronian standards, provoked the reaction of rhetoricians, among whom Quintilian was considered to be the greatest teacher of rhetoric in Rome (Gwynn 1926). Asked by his friends to write a treatise to re-evaluate rhetoric as a discipline, in 93 AD Quintilian began writing the first of the 12 books of Institutio oratoria, which is usually translated as The Education of the Orator.

The title reflects Quintilian’s desire to explain the ideal course of study through which to became a perfect orator ‘who will be not only an eloquent speaker but a political leader and moral spokesman for Roman society’ (Kennedy 1972, p. 509). For Quintilian, the orator should be vir bonus dicendi peritus (a good man skilled in speaking) (Institutio oratoria, XII, 1).

The first book of the Institutio oratoria is devoted to those things that take place prior to the work of rhetoricians, namely the earliest training at home and study in a grammar school.
The core of the *Institutio* is a discussion of rhetoric. Quintilian explained all the traditional phases of elaboration and parts of a speech by adding some elements not found in other Latin treatises. For example, he included a book devoted to how an orator can obtain ideas and expressions by reading and writing. For this purpose, he explained what a student should read in Greek and Latin. In another section, the focus is on the theory of ‘imitation’ (*mimesis* in Greek). As defined by the historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century AD), imitation is ‘an activity of the soul moved toward admiration of what seems fine’ (Kennedy 1994, p. 78). In Quintilian’s book, speakers are invited to imitate the techniques of a classical writer in order to understand the special qualities of writers and learn how to acquire their skills.

Within his educational programme, all forms of knowledge were important, although speaking, writing and reading were the best skills to obtain. Quintilian perceived education as the tool to create an upstanding citizen; within the field of education, oratory was considered majestic as it was the best gift from the gods to man (Book XII), and it is precisely because of their reasoning and speaking skills that human beings achieve superiority over animals (Book II).

**The Roman Empire**

The influence of Quintilian’s enterprise was significant at an educational level. Because of it, rhetoric became a key component in the general curricula in all public professions. Under the Roman Empire, however, despite Quintilian’s enterprise, the general understanding of rhetoric changed significantly. The Empire started to impose constraints of freedom of thought and expression. Juridical rhetoric started to lose its power because of the professionalisation of the procedures in the law courts. Knowledge of the law became more important as judges became less tolerant of rhetorical style (Kennedy 1972, pp. 100–150).

Rhetoric as a whole became increasingly identified with what classical rhetoricians, such as Aristotle and Cicero, had regarded as but one of its parts (indeed, one of its less important parts), namely *elocutio* (or stylistic expression).

Historical changes also affected the social considerations of rhetoric. Beginning in the last third of the second century, the East and West of the Roman Empire started to have distinct governments with the consequence that, by the fourth century, there were two empires with different languages (Greek and Latin). The Eastern schools of rhetoric were still active until the reign of Justinian (527–65 AD). The basic rhetorical textbook was the *Hermogenic corpus*, a series of handbooks of exercises under the name of the Greek rhetorician Hermogenes (late second century AD) (Heath 1995). But teachers of rhetoric were no longer paid for public services. Some schools of rhetoric continued to exist, but even they were eventually replaced by the study of rhetoric in some monasteries. In the West, schools of rhetoric continued their activity through the fourth century. Then, Rome was sacked and devastated by the Visigoths in 410, and the year 476 marked the political end of the Western Empire.

**Rhetoric in the Middle Ages**

The medieval take on classical rhetoric began in the fourth century BC. There, amid a climate of historical turbulence, there were some remarkable attempts to revive an interest in the art of rhetoric. Yet, rhetoric was not directly linked to the politics of cities, it did not have a civic function, and so its status somehow declined. Rhetoric no longer played a central role
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in education and was instead in competition with grammar (the study of style and language composition) and dialectic (the study of argumentation) (McKeon 1941).

Augustine of Hippo

It is with Augustine of Hippo, also known as St Augustine (354–430 BC), that the art of persuasion nevertheless receives some importance as a powerful tool to support the spread of Christianity (Murphy 1981, pp. 43–89).

At the time of Augustine, the Church was challenged by heresies, such as those of the Manichaean and Pelagians. Although the sophistic abuses of rhetoric were condemned, the discipline was valued for its prominent role in empowering future apologists. Thus, in *De doctrina Christiana* (I, 1.1) Augustine claimed that the two things necessary for appropriately dealing with the Scriptures are ‘a way of discovering’ (*modus inveniendi*) what people should understand, and ‘a way of expressing to others’ (*modus proferendi*).

Later in the treatise, he echoed ideas from the classical tradition when claiming that an empty flow of eloquence is dangerous, as fluency can give the impression that someone ‘speaks with truth’ (*De doctrina Christiana* IV, 5.8). Thus, defenders of authentic truth cannot stay unarmed if they want to have an effect (*De doctrina Christiana* IV, 2.3). The man who possesses the truth is not necessarily able to communicate it; rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of the Scriptures have to go together, and a training in rhetoric is thus important to strengthen the individual’s own expression and counteract potential negative influences.

Martianus Capella

About the same time that Augustine was completing *De doctrina Christiana*, Martianus Capella framed the role of rhetoric in his masterpiece, *On the wedding of philology and Mercury and of the seven liberal arts*, considered as fundamental in the history of education. Martianus Capella proposed to write an encyclopaedia of the liberal culture of the time. There, rhetoric was mentioned in the theory of education called *trivium* (the three roads) after logic and grammar. These disciplines were considered preparatory for the *quadrivium*, comprising arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The quadrivium was the educational entry point for the serious study of philosophy and theology (Stahl 1965).

The definition and order of the disciplines of the *trivium* testify to the different approach to rhetoric, compared to the breadth assigned to it in the classical Greek and Roman ages. In a context where logic was presented as the art of thinking, and grammar as the art of combining symbols to express thoughts, rhetoric was related to the application of language to persuade an audience. Within such a framework, the discipline was progressively reduced to a body of rules mainly derived from those found in Cicero’s *De inventione*, as the other main classical works on the subject were unknown in this period of the Middle Ages (Murphy 1981).

Boethius

It was Boethius (480–524 AD), the leading statesman-orator at the Ostrogothic Court, who further reinforced the idea of rhetoric having a different status from the classical discipline and its educational canons.

Boethius was among the major characters responsible for the transmission of Aristotle’s logical works to the medieval West (Stump 1988).
Although Boethius was not particularly interested in rhetoric, in his treatise on logic known as *De Differentiis Topicis* he framed a conceptualisation of rhetoric where he subordinated it to dialectic. Rhetoric was no longer perceived as a civil science; it cannot generate knowledge and it is not interrelated with philosophy. Aristotle saw the educational value of rhetoric in the fact that he conceived it as being parallel to dialectic. Cicero theorised that dialectic is even subordinate to rhetoric. In *De Differentiis Topicis* Book IV, Boethius made rhetoric an appendage of dialectic: dialectic has a philosophical breadth as it deals with theses, that is, general discussion about universal issues (for instance, should man marry?); rhetoric deals with hypothesis, that is, questions that involve individual circumstances (for instance, should Cato marry?) (Stump 1989).

**Thomas Aquinas**

This treatment of rhetoric as being separate from dialectics and, moreover, from a civil output was further supported by Thomas Aquinas, also known as St Thomas (1225–1274), who made a clear statement that rhetoric essentially deals with conjectural probability; it has nothing to do with demonstrative proof. It has an inferior epistemological status to dialectic and so might only be of value for dealing with the business affairs of human beings through its persuasive power (Smith 2012, pp. 172–175; Barilli 1989, pp. 46–48).

**Towards modernity**

**Sixteenth century**

Renaissance rhetoric was characterised by the discovery of important manuscripts of classical rhetoric, such as Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, the entire Ciceronian corpus and the work of Quintilian. The availability of texts from the classical traditions favoured a revival and reorientation of rhetoric that, after an epistemological decline in the Middle Ages, regained popularity as a field of study. Indeed, in the early Renaissance, rhetoric was again perceived in light of Cicero’s ideal that the discipline was the force of human society. From this, rhetoric again held a privileged position in education (Mack 2011a).

Desiderius Erasmus (1467–1536) was a prominent protagonist in the rediscovery of the power of rhetoric in education. In his work, *De ratione studii*, he expressed his innovative views on students’ education by claiming that the knowledge of words (learned as grammar, rhetoric and logic) is a precondition for the knowledge of things. This is because, ultimately, ideas are intelligible only by means of the words that describe them. The educational role of rhetoric in Erasmus’ framework was further reinforced by the epistemological status he accredited to the discipline. Informed by Aristotle’s ideas as found in the *Rhetoric*, for Erasmus, rhetoric had a value as an instrument for probable argumentation. While the medieval authors attributed key importance to dialectic as the science for the discovery of truth, for Erasmus and other Renaissance authors, rhetoric was the best approach to determine the probabilities of outcomes for certain issues under discussion (Nauert 2006, pp. 102–172).

Erasmus was himself the author of rhetorical tracts that aimed to disseminate his ideas. In the *Colloquies*, he used the technique of dialogical investigation where the protagonists engage in discussion to reach an agreement over the most probable solution to a certain issue (Mack 2011a, pp. 76–103).

With Petrus Ramus (1515–1572), the separation between rhetoric and dialectic became even sharper, with rhetoric favoured as a fully autonomous discipline, but rather far away
from the breadth of the classical tradition (Jasinski 2001, pp. xvii–xviii). By accusing Aristotle and Cicero of having brought confusion to the fields of dialectic and rhetoric, Ramus subdivided the two domains. He shifted to the domain of dialectic what were – in the classical tradition – the parts of rhetoric dealing with the discovery of arguments (the *inventio*) and argumentation itself (the *confirmatio* and *refutatio* in Cicero’s *De inventione*). As a consequence, he conceptualised rhetoric as the domain of style (*elocutio*) and its delivery, including the effective use of language and pronunciation (Mack 2011b). Within this framework, rhetoric became a discipline to empower students in the art of speaking well, ornately and correctly. From there, rhetoric entered into the field of literature and its stylistic parameters (Vickers 1989, p. 206).

**Seventeenth century**

Ramus’ approach to rhetoric was questioned at an early stage by Francis Bacon (1561–1626) who, although he was not a rhetorician, developed a rhetorical theory as a means of communicating scientific knowledge. Bacon perceived empowerment in rhetoric as being central to active civic life. For him, the focus of the art of rhetoric went back to the discovery and use of arguments, and he explicitly praised Aristotle for placing rhetoric between logic and moral knowledge. Bacon attributed considerable importance to argumentation, but not to dialectic *per se*, as the preferred method for the discovery of things (Vickers 1996). For Bacon, there had to be a strong connection between the knowledge derived from empirical investigation and its transfer through words. This is why he merged together what – in previous years – was distinguished under dialectic and rhetoric; he wrote about the four ‘arts intellectuall’, referring to the discovery of argument, argumentation, memory and style. Style alone is not condemnable *per se*, although Bacon recognised its value in disseminating knowledge convincingly. Yet, human knowledge may be hindered by the ‘aesthetic satisfaction’ produced by style, as it can prevent people from deepening their knowledge (Smith 2012, pp. 239–241).

However, a more sceptical account of the value of rhetoric was given by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) who was educated in the humanistic tradition (Skinner 1996). Hobbes wrote *A briefe of the art of rhetorique: Containing in substance all that Aristotle hath written in his three bookes of that subject*, and he knew the classical tradition remarkably well. Nevertheless, he was Platonic in his conviction that eloquence can destroy civil life. For Hobbes, while logic is connected to thought and wisdom, rhetoric favours a competition to win (*De cive*, pp. 154–155). When politicians are empowered with eloquence, they somewhat prevent the reaching of truth through reason, as personal interests are supported by playing on passions and emotions (*Leviathan*, p. 119, II. xvii).

In some ways, Hobbes was acutely hostile to persuasion, but in others, especially in the *Leviathan*, he showed his mastery of eloquence. Indeed, from his perspective, if science were to be promoted by people equipped with morality, and were to be based on certain and not probabilistic reasoning, eloquence could be an aid for science. In an overt disagreement with the rhetorical style praised by the Renaissance humanists, Hobbes made use of the rhetorical precepts to argue with irony against philosophical claims that he did not support.

**Eighteenth century**

While the seventeenth-century tradition had focused more on the epistemological characteristics of rhetoric, in the eighteenth century, rhetoric received significant attention
in European formal education, from elementary to university levels. Here, the study of rhetoric was pursued with the aim of equipping students for the rhetorical analysis of literary texts and in what is nowadays known as public speaking. Students were trained in composition, in writing through the principles of imitation and of the comparison of classical authors, as well as in refining texts with elegant prose (Kennedy 1997, pp. 330–346).

In France, the masterpiece of Charles Rollin (1661–1741), Traité des etudes de la manière d’enseigner et d’étudier les Belles-Lettres, proposed an innovative system of education with entire sections on the teaching of rhetoric and the practice of eloquence. For Rollin, education was mainly aimed at forming the tastes of students; this aim was achieved by emulating those considered to be models in the field of eloquence (Warnick 1993, pp. 1–14). A study of the best examples of eloquence would, in fact, allow students to reflect on the principles of composition behind these examples.

The Rollin book was also among those works that emphasised the importance of an approach to rhetoric known as the bellettristic (from the French Belles-Lettres) movement. In the eighteenth century, neoclassical trends in the study of rhetoric, such as those promoted by John Lawson (1709–1759) and John Ward (1679–1758), were still anchored by the Greek-Roman approach to the art of persuasion. Yet, the bellettristic scholars promoted an idea of rhetoric joined to related fields, including art, poetry and history. This trend of thought was introduced into the study of rhetoric elements found in a tradition starting with Aristotle’s Poetic and those treatises that centred on the quality of style in prose, writing and artistic products generally (Kennedy 1999, pp. 259–289).

The other most successful contributions to the content of rhetoric as an educational discipline in the eighteenth century were made by Hugh Blair (1718–1800) and George Campbell (1719–1796). They were both Protestant ministers and theologians who saw in rhetoric an instrument to preach the Christian mission and to help human beings be redeemed from degeneration. In the Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, Blair explained how knowledge of rhetoric and literature is an asset for social success as it can promote virtue and moral ideals.

Campbell’s main development of rhetoric derived from overcoming what he saw as the main limitations of the classical tradition. In Book 1 of the Philosophy of Rhetoric, he introduced a psychological and behavioural flavour into the domain of rhetoric. To be skilful in persuasion, orators must adapt their discourses to the needs of the audience. These needs are four in number: understanding, imagination, passions and will. The orator has to help the audience to understand and, through imagination and passion, to convince them. In Campbell’s view, rhetoric is not only related to civic affairs, but has to be conceived as a universal theory of human communication.

The breadth of Campbell’s reflection on rhetoric was somewhat narrowed down and reshaped by Richard Whately (1787–1863). In his treatise, Elements of Rhetoric, which also falls under the genre of ecclesiastical rhetoric, Whately did not intend to make a theoretical inquiry into the nature of communication. By recalling the Aristotelian design of rhetoric as an ‘off-shoot from Logic’, he renewed the understanding of rhetoric as the art of reasoned discourse, and focused on argumentation as the essence of the discipline (Whately 1828).

**Conclusion**

This chapter, far from being an exhaustive history of rhetoric, highlights the main arguments on the link between rhetoric, as the study and use of language, and its value as an educational discipline for political life, from the classical world to the beginning of modernity.
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It is apparent from observing the conceptual developments of rhetoric through the centuries that they are rather circular; similar claims about the high or low status of the discipline, according to its relation to the rigorousness of dialectic and morality, have been discussed by different authors in different contexts. Rhetoric was hardly to be relegated to being a question of language and style, even if a captivating style was considered to be important in attracting the audience. Rhetoric advanced as a discipline by reflecting on the educational equipment of the orator, where vast knowledge, moral values and communication skills must come together to the point where the ethically good orator is almost an ideal one. When it was clear that rhetoric could be powerfully used without the capacity and the wish to think philosophically for the good of the city, then it was criticised for the nature of the empowerment it endowed upon people.

Civic life was never, and will never be, without rhetoric because the language of politics is essentially rhetorical. Thus, the issue is whether to banish rhetoric from a conceptual point of view, knowing, however, that people will still use it, or to elevate it to the rank of a key educational discipline to empower those who have constructive ideas to successfully dismantle and contrast manipulation. Overall, the authors discussed in this chapter decided to take the second route and, in one way or another, operationalised the philosophical discussions on rhetoric into usable precepts that are nowadays vital to any training in persuasion for – and beyond – politics.

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