



NANCY S. STRUEVER

*Rhetoric, Modality,
Modernity*

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Abbreviations

<i>B</i>	<i>Behemoth</i> (Hobbes)
<i>C</i>	“Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (Peirce)
<i>DCP</i>	<i>De corpore politico</i> (Hobbes)
<i>DNE</i>	“Doctrine of Necessity Examined” (Peirce)
<i>FB</i>	“Fixation of Beliefs” (Peirce)
<i>HI</i>	<i>Hegel’s Idealism</i> (Pippin)
<i>HMIC</i>	“How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (Peirce)
<i>HN</i>	<i>Human Nature</i> (Hobbes)
<i>IM</i>	<i>Idealism as Modernity</i> (Pippin)
<i>IO</i>	<i>Institutio oratoria</i> (Quintilian)
<i>KK</i>	<i>Knowledge and the Known</i> (Hintikka)
<i>L</i>	<i>Leviathan</i> (Hobbes)
<i>LM</i>	“The Law of Mind” (Peirce)
<i>MPP</i>	<i>Modernism as Philosophical Problem</i> (Pippin)
<i>NPF</i>	<i>Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future</i> (Porter)
<i>NS</i>	<i>New Science</i> (Vico)
<i>PhG</i>	<i>Phänomenologie des Geistes</i> (Hegel)
<i>PW</i>	<i>Plausible Worlds</i> (Hintikka)

R *Rhetoric* (Aristotle)

RN “Reply to the Necessitarians” (Peirce)

Introduction: The Classical Background

This essay considers rhetoric as, simply, a kind of inquiry, and argues the importance of a specific investigative interest, simultaneously basic, pervasive, and elusive—modality. “Modal rhetorics” need to be juxtaposed to modal logics. Rhetorical interests, tasks, performances—all are informed by the press of possibility, the discrimination of the actual, the response to necessity and contingency. And rhetoric as hermeneutic, as a specific, traditional contribution to understanding civil interests, tasks, performances, carried in texts, signs, deeply engages modality as primary quality of civil experience. Modal logics may define structures of validity, inferential sequences; modal rhetorics deal in patterns of use. My interest is in mode as color or valence, regarded as of the utmost importance to issues of political capacity and action.

Briefly, I am assuming that in civil inquiry the opposition philosophical/rhetorical inquiry is of intrinsic interest; that an inquiry’s allegiance to a particular modality defines its most basic strategies; and that the mechanics of representing a modal allegiance generate a refined, perspicuous account of investigative goals. The Classical, and archetypical “contest of faculties,” rhetoric vs. philosophy, originated, and persisted, not simply as a rivalry of pedagogic practices and academic interests, but as a conflict of claims and counter-claims concerning morality, truth, and utility in inquiry, an opposition that resurfaces in attenuated or exaggerated form throughout pre-modernity, and, I shall argue, informs, still, the issues of morality, truth, and utility in Modernist political investigations.

Yet, the history of rhetoric describes its interests as carried in a most dishevelled rhetorical tradition, a very large body of practical manuals and theoretical expositions, containing “a very loose, indeed, ramshackle collection of discursive problems and solutions, all stained—dyed, to use Montaigne’s metaphor—by a discursive pessimism: by the heavy constraints of negative definitions of the nature of human discursive capacity, and of the relation of discursive to cognitive capacity; by the embodiment of discursive practice in a matrix of communicative needs; and by the close relationship of communicative need to political possibility.”¹ And, rhetoric’s consuming interest in possibility, thus modality, is key, not simply to the Classical opposition of rhetoric and philosophy as an originary defining moment in inquiry, distinguishing oppositional beliefs and procedures, but key as well to the issue of “modernizing.” In discriminating rhetoric’s engrossment with possibility, it specifies rhetoric’s peculiar civil capacities, and makes a case as well for rhetoric’s remarkable capacity for renewal, for “modernizing,” the reinvention of its civil strategies in response to novel civil affairs. As corollary, the history of philosophy describes the positives and negatives of philosophy’s allegiance to systemic necessity, and its capacity for systemic renewal, with its modal commitment to necessitarian truth. Still, the opposition should work, not as an exhaustive binary opposition, not as an insoluble antinomy, but as a vivifying argument about values and procedures, giving rise to novelty and careful correction. “Modernizing” rhetoric is mapping the current possibilities of investigative innovation and critique in the civil operations rhetoric properly regards as its domain. And, as we shall see, “the massive presence of contingency” Robert Pippin attributes to the high culture of Modernity requires the modern investigators’ zealous canvassing of possibilities, a devotion to range of response.

The description of rhetoric as inquiry should employ, in my view, the Peircian pragmatic approach, advocated in his “Fixation of Beliefs” and his “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”; where he claims the investigative core is the set of beliefs that generate the habits of action in inquiry.² Inquiry is simply “the struggle to attain a state of belief” (FB, 247); the sole motive of thought is to produce beliefs . . . ; “the essence of belief is the establishment of habit [rule of action]” (HMIC, 213). Peirce’s linkage of beliefs and habits gives us a formula marked by modesty and, happily, “rhetoricalness.” The modesty, or radical inclusiveness, is of use to the consideration of inquiry in general, while the rhetorical values resonate with rhetoric’s topical concerns: its engagement with a community’s be-

liefs, shared opinions (*endoxa*), and with rhetoric's inveterate habits of activity, persuasion as practice and goal.

He offers a narrative of investigative process as continuous, "possibly" open-ended, with the goal of truth, or the desired definition of reality, as something the community "settles down to" (RN, 555), "in the long run" (C, 239). It is essentially in motion, moving from doubt, not as original position, as the skeptic's hyperbolic doubt, but as "irritant," to fixation, (temporary) stabilizing of belief. The process is "only that of valid inference," but, "every sort of modification of consciousness—Attention, Sensation, Understanding—is an inference" (C, 233); the entire range of consciousness is "a sign resulting from inference" (C, 240). It is a process autochthonous, simple, practical, possible. The identity of a habit is how it may lead us to act, "not only under such circumstances as are likely to arise, but under such as might *possibly* occur"; "there is no meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a *possible* difference of practice" (HMIC, 263); "the meaning of a thought" indeed, as always to be represented, as representable in future thoughts, is "*virtual*" (C, 227, my emphasis).

But, as well, it is a process engaging an astonishingly dishevelled array of elements. Consider the tedious inclusiveness of his list of pertinent factors: not simply beliefs, ideas, signs, but "habits" as a complex rubric of rules and dispositions; feelings, emotions, sensations; also, thoughts as feelings, ideas as "living feelings" (LM, 549); feeling as "mental quality of a material sign" (C, 240); consciousness as material quality, or reduced to material sign (C, 240); belief as "stadium of mental action" (HMIC, 263)—all must be located, assigned value in process, an activity turgid, stained by uncertainty, a process cluttered by demands for (investigative) action. "Impure" inquiry, in short.³

Peircian modesty, impurity, also single out rhetorical competences, and, in effect, make a case for the perspicacity of rhetorical inquiry. Rhetorical competence is vested, primarily, in the Quintilianesque appeal to the strong affect of passions, *pathos*, and the softer emotions, *ethos*. Peirce's messy inclusiveness includes affect as element: but note the double structure of affect—affect as feeling, emotion, disposition is a vital constituent of the inquiry process; but also, in "The Law of Mind" he stipulates affect as "affectability," simple interference, with affected, affecting calling to mind the rhetorical concern with communicative production/reception. Affects as motions, versions of feeling, invest habit as an "affective bond" (LM, 551); the Peircian notion of Idea, notes its intrinsic quality as living feeling, notes the energy with which it affects other Ideas, and its tendency

to bring along other Ideas (LM, 549). Then, inquiry for Peirce is, basically, rhetorically motivated: “the soul and meaning of thought . . . can never be made to direct itself to anything but the production of belief” (HMIC, 263), to deeply committed persuasion (the rhetorical *facit fidem*), in short. For, inquiry is, only, shared; “the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual only, but in the community” (FB, 250), for the community as the locus of investigative action is crucial as “beyond the vagaries of you and me” (C, 239).

The description employs as well the compact narrative of Martin Heidegger’s SS1924 lectures on Aristotle’s rhetoric: *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*. This is a revisionary account of Hellenic thought, designed, perhaps, to make a place for Heidegger in the history of philosophy. Here Heidegger proposes rhetoric as the “originary” discipline of the original argument, the rich political discussion that transpired in the discourse of the assemblies, the courts, and the oratory of the games: the Greeks “lived in oratory.”⁴ Where Klaus Dockhorn stipulates rhetoric as the second, the alternate *Bildungsweg* of antiquity, Heidegger asserts that rhetoric was the first chronologically, and that logic, which structures the monologic discourse ascertaining scientific truths, and dialectic, the discipline of the dialogue on the principles of inquiry, are late and derived.⁵

Then, Heidegger also claims that rhetoric is not an autonomous linguistic *techne*, but transpires solely inside politics. Thus in Aristotle: being is essentially “being-with-others” (*Miteinandersein*), and language, the distinctive human capacity, as address to others, is basic to life as political, the *zoē praktikē meta logou* (127, 105). Or, to adapt the perspective of Michel Meyer: rhetoric as negotiating distances between language-users, organizes politics as the discursive negotiation of differences of civil import.⁶ The concern of rhetoric with discursive alterations, with effects on others, with persuasion, deemed a weakness by philosophers, must be redefined as a strength. This informs, I suggest, Josiah Ober’s claim that we must not look to Greek philosophy for insight into Greek politics, but rather to the evidence provided by oratorical practice, primarily of the 4th century. Greek philosophical work of critique and retrospective justification does not transpire within the authentic political experience, and carries a-political or anti-political motives.⁷

Aristotle, as the great theorist of rhetoric, as well as of philosophy, helps us a great deal. But the rhetorical as political is the central issue. Rhetoric suffers from, must respond to its initial definition by philosophy—primarily in the Platonic dialogues (*Gorgias*, *Sophist*)—as a Sophistic practice

(professionally political?): defined pejoratively, it is true, by a “Sophist.” The contentious definition was as a discipline which opposed philosophy: rhetoric as relativist, an argumentative competence in finding possible arguments on either side, *in utramque partem*, confronting philosophy’s search for necessary truths. Here rhetoric most certainly had to function as inquiry; there is no way one can develop techniques of persuasion without theorizing basic processes of appeal and reception.

The Classical history of educational formations narrates the enduring contests, defeats, and successes of the two hegemonous disciplinary matrices: the contesting of claims of necessity, the accusations of relativism, the attributions of truth and of use. The rhetorical tradition certainly carries the weight of Sophistic speculation on communicative needs and limits as posing the elemental political problems. Even the simple lists of figures, or most basic accounts of argumentative tactics are informed by heavy, fraught assumptions. Thus the Classical, pre-modern manuals and pedagogic practices transmit, even in attenuated form, the pessimism and excitement of Sophistic contentions; indeed, technical excellence can modify schoolroom simplicity, expand insight.⁸ But if pessimism, then possibility. Sophistic/rhetorical speculation is a continuous engagement with the reciprocal definition of impossibility/possibility in civil affairs. The shifting boundaries of the impossible provide the opportunities for political ingenuity in response, for a constant exercise in arbitration of possible capacity and act.

There is, then, a very thick history of rhetoric as an alternate formation and oppositional investigative initiative. It seems perverse to argue that there is a larger, encompassing, and archetypically philosophical concern which invests rhetoric with much of its interest and power as inquiry. Negotiating practical life deals in the larger issues of political motive, circumstance, consequence, of, in short, what is, what has to be, what could be. The most inclusive inquiry rubrics are those of modality: necessity, contingency, actuality, possibility. But there is more. Modality is, of course, a defining element of Aristotle’s logic; thus, the true is predicated as necessary. In J. Hintikka’s account the primitive, basic nature of modality interests is authenticated by the connections with the foundational model of physical structure in the structure of motion; motion is defined as moving from potential to actualization. The key terms are *dunamis* (potential, power), *kinesis* (movement, partial realization), and *energeia* (complete actualization). It is the link between potential (*dunamis*) and possibility (*endeichomenon*) that is significant for us. Hintikka argued that Aristotle explores modalities

in order to disentangle himself from the determinism, self-inflicted, of some of the major necessitarian initiatives of his rationalist system. In his distinction between partial and complete actualization, Aristotle has an opening to “unrealized possibilities” as modifying systemic necessity. Modality, in short, operates in the complete Aristotelian program, not simply the logical/ontological one. Hintikka also claims that Aristotle did not succeed in disentangling himself; the failure, I would suggest, stems in part from an unresolved tension between philosophy’s necessitarian theses, and rhetoric’s anti-necessitarian practices. This is, perhaps, another justification of Ober’s claim for the political insights of a rhetorical proclivity.⁹

For, the proper, practical home of modal inquiry is rhetoric. Heidegger’s urtext, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, states, first, that the task of rhetoric is to “theorize” the “possible means of persuasion,” *tó endechómenon pithanón*, then, that the domain of rhetoric (and dialectic) is the probable, and that it considers, in light of its negotiating task, only that “which could be otherwise.”¹⁰ And, political deliberation is about policy; it concerns the future, and thus a primary *topos*, line of argument, is the Possible, *tò dunatòn*, and Impossible (*R*, 1392a 6–8; cf. 1391b 27–29). Thus rhetoric’s modal proclivity: a supremely tentative project, it seeks possible arguments for possible effect in possible situations. In the *Rhetoric* we find the first, and perhaps most powerful case for the primitive nature of rhetorical modal interests. *Rhetoric II* represents a strong appropriation of the psychology of the *De anima*; the *De anima* in turn, if we regard it as a “general introductory course on the science of biology,” explicates the basic structure of Aristotelian life sciences as the structure of motion; P. Aubenque speaks of *Rhetoric II* as Aristotle’s “fully rhetorised psychology.”¹¹ The excitement here, and it does seem like excitement, is the fit between Aristotle’s most basic structure of process and the pertinence of modality issues to defining investigative and performative priorities; the linkage between potential and possibility becomes the engine for exploration of a range of life capacities and actions. Rhetoric performs in a strange domain of motivated possibilities, all needed in some civil scheme, all imbued with value colorations: attributions of purpose, cause, destiny, praise, blame, all embedded in scenarios of realization. Geoffrey Hawthorn, as a historian/social scientist of, primarily, international politics, argues in his *Plausible Worlds* the heuristic value of Hintikka’s “possible worlds” (alternate states of affairs or courses of events) for mapping, locating the actual world. In brief, counterfactuals illumine in explanation; the job of the inquirer is to place actuality in a range of possibilities.¹² Beyond this, rhetoric connects the

explanatory and the programmatic, the understanding of the actual political past and the suggestion of political possibilities of the future. Rhetoric both defines and *poses* possibilities, both finds and creates, energises possibilities. But this task raises more issues; the modal notions must be considered in their relation to each other, but also to the elements of chance, coincidence, and to the hypothesis of determinism, a determinism that would undermine rhetoric's obligations to use and to response, and also to the obtrusive presence of categories of time, truth, change.¹³ Political-rhetorical inquiry uses modality to assert, modify, deny, contest activity as political, as negotiating community, to place events in a narrative of governance, to gloss, to give conceptual clarity to potency and act as compatible, or not, with the political. There is a deep compatibility between the very specific analytic techniques rhetoric must develop to fulfill the demands of persuasion, the core political functions, and the very general commitment to the modality of possibility as the domain of rhetorical duty. There is a beneficial interactivity of modal proclivity and analytic habits that energises; it is profoundly non-dismissive.

Rhetoric has both the theoretical insouciance and the technical analytic instruments to describe the possibilities that map actuality; (the "actual," of course, is "possible"). For actuality, as any historian will admit, is counter-intuitively difficult of access, often remote from the inquirer's vocabulary, not responsive to flat-footed philosophical defining initiatives. Thus, consider the reductions of exotic insights to a *lingua franca* of moralisms: "common sense" as shared commitment reduced to personal accomplishment. Philosophical programs of developing political wisdom, political prudence, can seem bookish, their normative ambition as only commentary. It is a contrarian approach, utilizing the intricated Aristotelian modal interest and "rhetorised" psychology that distinguishes, I shall argue, Thomas Hobbes' innovations. Once again, to return to the Peircian initiative that focuses on beliefs generating habits of action in inquiry: the archetypical contest of faculties produce archetypical intrications of premises and practices; modal beliefs complicate practices. We notice the proclivity for possibility as domain of operation for rhetoric sponsoring habitual rhetorical practices, and the rhetorical practices in turn reacting against any dogged pursuit of necessity.

There is, of course, a parallel, yet distinct, Roman rhetorical development. By addressing the modality issue, it is possible to reconstruct the relation between Greek and Roman rhetoric, and modify our appreciation of the effective contributions of the entire Classical rhetorical tradition to civil

research habits. It is worth considering that the Latin rhetorical tradition is, in the long run, not only thicker, and more accessible than the Greek, but as more diverse, uneven, is more influential in shaping the Classical heritage of political-rhetorical modal proclivity.¹⁴ And, in particular, the extraordinary usefulness of the rich tradition of Latin manuals and pedagogy for political inquiry lies in the vital connection they describe between rhetorical and legal practice.¹⁵ The rich specificity of the practices embedded in legal as well as rhetorical texts pushes back against abstract political formulations to deal with the quotidian possibilities, the texture of forensic argumentative life: habits shape beliefs. Rhetorical capacity here is responsive, engaged, strengthened by formula and formulaic court proceedings. The manuals dispense rhetorical techniques for finding the right kind of argument and evidence for legal contest. The means, the expedients for civil action are both discovered and used inside the practice. And, rhetorical-legal invention, the determining of the *status, causa* of a specific case functions in a domain of alternate, possible scenarios in the practical world of claim and counter claim, in the formulaic processes of private-public law. The process of inventing and developing arguments for specific formulaic practices requires ingenuity in formulating possible cause and possible effect. Thus in the Ciceronian texts—the manuals, the oratorical treatises, the epistolary memoirs—the accounts of the relations between jurisconsult, master of legal texts, and orator, performer in the public arena, illumine actual Roman institutional changes in office and process, and thus creation of civil possibility. For Quintilian, the loss in imperial times of political practice motivates his rich exploration of the possibilities of legal practice as surrogate. And in Early Modernity Giambattista Vico's brilliance lies in his remarkable investment in Roman legal process as revelatory of the vagaries and strategies of Roman political reality.

The Peircian formula clarifies the relation between Hellenic and Roman rhetoric, not as polemical, reduced to the invidious contrast of original/derivation, but as comparative investigative moments, versions that develop the belief in, proclivity for possibility by different strategic choices, habits. And thus the ingenious parallel versions of Greek and Roman initiatives of Hobbes and Vico: in Hobbes' use of an Aristotelian rhetorised psychology, and Vico's employment of Roman rhetorical-legal hermeneutic. And, as we shall see, the distressing absence of this Hobbesian and Vichian presence in Modernist rhetorical political inquiry is balanced by the possibility, perhaps not unwitting, of reiterations of modal beliefs and rhetorical habits in the political criticism of Walter Benjamin.

The Modernity of Early Modernity

Indeed, the resort to Vico, and to Hobbes, is essential to my account of modernizing civil inquiry. I am making a case for the modernity of Early Modernity. Hobbes and Vico are secessionist thinkers, seceding from the normative, moralistic, prescriptive program of Classical political philosophy, repudiating the terms and arguments that dominated medieval and Renaissance as well as ancient thought, jettisoning the dubious transcendental assumptions underpinning its moralistic speculation. My case for the modernity of Early Modernity has its own rather baroque—appropriately baroque—modal implications. Hobbes and Vico most certainly retrieve Classical rhetorical assumptions and operations that contest philosophical assumptions and operations. But while their work can be read as an actualization of the Aristotelian rhetorical possibilities, their work remains, on the whole, simply possibility in modernist inquiry. It is a modernism inadequately represented, still, in the 19th- and 20th-century retrievals of rhetoric; the inadequate representation, of course, justifies what will be my very heavy investment in describing Hobbesian and Vichian work.

It is important to recognize that Hobbes and Vico do not function within the dominant academic domains—philosophical or rhetorical—of the period, domains structured by Christianised Classical philosophical motives, zeal; domains with a great deal less fluidity than the confused dynamics of the formula “Republic of Letters” would suggest. It is piquant:

Vico's career as university professor of rhetoric in Naples most certainly accounts for his familiarity with rhetorical beliefs and habits of action, but his career as rhetorician is occluded by his dominating, and failed, ambition to become professor of law.¹ And, academic rhetoric is itself gradually occluded in the period. A prominent theme of the history of rhetoric is the displacement of rhetoric by literature and criticism in 19th- and 20th-century academic organization. But this displacement is rooted in an earlier displacement; rhetoric was rendered unfashionable by the double initiative of Enlightenment philosophy and Enlightenment science; their identity as "modern" may be in question, but their ambition for systematicity, and at least crypto-necessitarianism, not. For the dominant Enlightenment investigations, rhetoric lacked explanatory power.

And, certainly, no simple Classical source and influence model works. Rather, what is recaptured by Hobbes' and Vico's investigational habits is not so much Sophistic doctrine as a strong Sophistic antagonism to philosophy's habit of generating moralisms that please and help no one except the promulgator. Hobbesian psychology, as we shall see, has strong affinities of beliefs and habits with those of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; and, perhaps more so than Aristotle's inquiry, it is permeated by a "sophisticated" pessimism. It expresses a simple opposition to philosophical moral optimism as trivializing the civil imperatives of the more important issues confronting communities. Yes, it would be nice for politics to be moral. No, it is not a real possibility in most of real time. The most we can hope for, according to Hobbes, is a range of community functions that achieve the peace as justice that allows inventions, arts, cultural innovations, surprises. And Vico's pessimism is expressed in his investment in irony as explanatory thesis of great power: civility as unintended consequence. All of this, I am arguing, is rhetorical in tone: and all easily effaced, elided.

But what tone of voice do they use? I suppose one could ask—what logical tone of voice? What is the "reality," existence, they attribute to their key elements? Their ambitions are modal to the core: an accomplishment of Hobbes and Vico is to renegotiate modalities. The Hobbesian and Vichian secession can, perhaps, be redescribed as having a simple, basic, and specifically modal dimension: they proffer *more* civil possibilities. In the collection *Reforging the Chain of Being*, J. Hintikka gives his fullest account of what he regards as the pertinent intellectual historical context for modality inquiry. Here he argues that what Arthur Lovejoy claims as the central metaphysical notion for pre-Modern intellectual history, the Principle of Plenitude—that all genuine possibilities will be real-

ized at some point in time—informs most, or the most important Western speculative initiatives. He then claims that “the widening of the realm of possibilities is one of the most interesting overall features in the history of Western thought,” and was a development initiated in the late Middle Ages, and certainly, a prominent feature of intellectual history in the Renaissance and Early Modernity, a feature both parallel to and intricately with the moments studied under the rubrics of “Scientific Revolution” and “17th-century Rational Philosophy,” the work, in short, of figures such as Bruno, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, and Leibniz, figures fascinated by “the relative richness or poverty of the universe,” by “what more or less hidden possibilities there perhaps lurk waiting to be realized.”² Hintikka of course argues the importance of Leibniz’s work on possible worlds and his theory of compossibility; Leibniz’s theorization of our actual world as the richest, most plentiful, *best* possible world is simply a *façon de parler* of this quantitative shift. Or, “widening of possibilities” is one way of defining a quantitative surge in critical, revisionary investigative interests in Early Modernity, and another way of characterizing Hobbesian and Vichian “secessionary” developments in civil inquiry. And, I seem to be contending, Hobbes and Vico’s rhetorical (or anti-philosophical) habits of action in inquiry nourish the investigational shift as an increase in political speculative fervor, inventiveness. To be sure, the extreme generality of Hintikka’s claim for an epoch of widening of possibilities daunts, but this, too, can be redescribed with useful specificity. And, of course, the quantitative shift is at once a qualitative one: Hintikka’s “possible worlds” semantic theory argues that the considering of possibility is itself an initiative engaged in confronting the nature of necessity, contingency, chance.

Hobbes’ Leviathan is not going to happen. Vichian myth is both history and fiction, speaking of actuality and possibility as meshed. And where do we locate in history the three Vichian stages—the ages of gods, heroes, and men? Both Hobbes and Vico—and here one must look again at Hobbes’ texts—repudiate a straightforward, single voice, normative in ambition, prescriptive in motive, claiming moral necessity. It is a subtle secession: asserting contingency, modifying political agency and virtue, suggesting ranges of possible political scenarios, both past and present.

Hintikka, of course, argues for a gradual widening of what was thought possible in science, philosophy, pseudo-science, theology, perhaps; a widening that offers a range of, perhaps at times only of, possibilities. But the high cultural context of Hobbes and Vico is saturated with Classical dilemmas; there are major confrontations phrased in modalities informing, even

dominating, many of the texts of late Renaissance and Early Modern culture. Think, for example, of the string of ethical fables in Valla's *De libero arbitrio*, in Leibniz's *Théodicée III*, and Kant's *Nova dilucidatio*. All the fables (with an inner, formal connection, indeed), all the plots offer portrayals of free will embedded in matrices of systemic necessity: theological; theological and moral; metaphysical and moral—all making almost amusing, almost despairing claims for moral potential. It is this endless, unfruitful modal debate Hobbes and Vico, mostly, evade.

In the secession we note the affiliations of modal interests with rhetorical investigative skills. It is useful, I argue, to place almost equal emphasis on specific rhetorical inquiry capacities and on rhetoric's affinity for the modality of possibility as productive of political insight. Indeed, I am claiming that modal interests are so primitive, so pervasive, so enduring that they organize, arrange specific investigative techniques; the primitiveness guarantees strenuous revision or invention, either one. At the same time, rhetoric is a formation that responds to a large array of (primarily political) issues and actions and deploys a large array of tactics to meet, decorously, these issues and actions. Here the affinity to possibility colors every inquiry and response. Hobbes and Vico, as secessionists, replicate rhetorical critiques of political philosophical thinking. Rhetoric functions inside politics, yet rhetorical inquiry does not function well inside some political philosophical programs. Ober's warnings against using Classical political philosophical justifications to define Hellenic political practices warn as well against Renaissance recuperations of Classical political philosophy. Both Hobbes and Vico avail themselves of rhetorical critical moments in their new, compendious assessments of political possibilities, assessments that both undermine Classical political formulas and query narratives of civic virtue. Their "modernizing" damages irretrievably Classical political philosophy's beliefs and habits of action, with its affinity for the mode of necessity, dominated by reductive systemic notions, philosophical habits producing, somewhat exasperatingly, two very dense thematisations: first, a conventional, that is unconvincing, moralism claiming free will; and second, necessitarianism, the conventional lady and the necessitarian tiger. In sum, in so far as Hobbes and Vico investigate the basic material activities of politics—deliberation in Hobbes, the texture of legal claim and counter claim in Vico—they employ rhetorical analysis. In so far as they use rhetoric, they nourish an affinity for possibility. And thus, their inventiveness in the modality of the possible.

Hobbes and Rhetorised Psychology

I have heard him say that Aristotle was the worst teacher that ever was, the worst Politian and ethick—a country fellow that could live in the world [would be] as good; but his rhetorique and discourse of animals was rare.³

Thus John Aubrey citing Hobbes on Aristotle. Aubrey, by observing Hobbes' invidious comparison of Aristotle's political and ethical philosophy with Aristotle's rhetoric and his research on animals, focuses our attention on Hobbes' secession, his revisionary capacity. My starting point is the statement, "his rhetoric and discourse of animals was rare." The Hobbesian edge in political inquiry is a natural philosophical one, but not the hard edge of the contemporaneous physical sciences. The dominant interests of the *Leviathan*, the *De homine*, and *Human Nature* are necessarily those of the life sciences, and, in particular, of psychology; here Hobbes' speculation reflects the peculiar state of the issues in the 17th century. André Pichot maintains that there are only two major conceptions of life before the 19th century: Aristotelian continuum and Cartesian dualism; throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, there is no clearly dominant paradigm, but a profusion of theories, existing in contest and cooperation.⁴ Just so, Hobbes' psychology represents an imposition of a matrix of mechanical terms and motives on an Aristotelian continuum of faculties and actions; it is a mechanical continuum. For, Hobbes' predilection is for continuum, a unified theory, and the Aristotelian model proffers an exhaustive, systematic definition of life which asserts the soul as the principle of life in all creatures; R. Sorabji speaks of Aristotle's biological concept of the soul; G. E. R. Lloyd claims that Aristotle's psychology is the frame for his zoological program.⁵ Every argument for interspecies continuity between vegetative capacities of plants, animals, and men and between sensitive capacities of animals and men is an argument for intra-species continuity of vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual capacity. The investigations of nutritive, generative phenomena, the distinction of voluntary and involuntary motions in the body, the varied emphases on the importance and functions of sensitive capacities shared with animals requires a consideration of the elements, not rational, that interact with our specific rational capacity. Hobbes absorbs these 17th-century interests, I would argue, when he transposes Aristotle's definition of the soul as principle (*archē*) of life into his simple assertion that the soul is life (*L*, II, 674). Certainly it is the case that both the Aristotelian soul and Hobbes' human

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