

Polite Oratory: Hume's Conception of Rhetoric

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April 2006

Presented At:
The 2006 Canadian Political Science
Association Annual Conference

York University
Toronto, Ontario
June 1-3, 2006

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There is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions. The most trivial question escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision. Disputes are multiply'd, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are manag'd with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain. Amidst all this bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gain'd by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army.¹

David Hume has been cast in many different roles: Philosopher, The Great Infidel, Historian, *Le Bon David*, Sceptic, Man of Letters. Consequently, the significance of his work has been understood in many ways. However, to date, Hume's contributions to the study of rhetoric appear to have been almost entirely overlooked. This omission is somewhat surprising given Hume's central concerns with faction and fanaticism, forces that rely heavily on the power of rhetoric. Hume's concerns with faction and fanaticism led him to explore two related questions: First, what should be done about the fact that most people in the public sphere are, if not deaf to reason, at least easily distracted from it? And second, how should societies counter those who would take advantage of this fact of human nature? In pursuing these two questions, Hume developed a distinction between low and high rhetoric, between the manipulative rhetoric of the fanatics and the factional leaders and a good form of rhetoric that I term accurate, just, and polite. This high form of rhetoric combines Hume's philosophy of just reasoning with stylistic aspects of ancient rhetoric and eighteenth century standards of politeness. It is a distinctive conception of rhetoric that holds important insights for stealing the thunder of the zealots, the "trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army."² Understanding how Hume's conception of rhetoric is rooted in his philosophical, historical, and political writings is important for understanding the full scope of his political philosophy.

Reason, Rhetoric, and Belief

While many commentators have argued that Hume's "political philosophy follows from and is firmly grounded in his general conception of the mind,"³ his texts actually support the opposite interpretation. As Jennifer Herdt argues, "Hume's epistemological concerns are not just secondary to practical and moral affairs... , they are actually driven by his concerns about the threat posed by religious belief and practice to the peace and prosperity of society."⁴ Hume saw his age as a battleground on which the forces philosophy faced off against the forces of unreflective superstition and enthusiasm.⁵ Superstitious beliefs⁶ were often championed by factions, which Hume saw "as the principal danger" to British society.⁷ So, in his own words, Hume spent his life wantonly exposing himself to "the rage of both civil and religious factions."⁸

In Book 1 of the *Treatise*, Hume develops the philosophy of mind that is a central component of his challenge to superstitious belief. It is here also that his interest in rhetoric first becomes apparent. Hume's treatment of belief, as a feeling of the mind, establishes an intimate connection between belief and rhetoric. His famous assertion that "reason is and ought only to be slave to the passions"⁹ inverts the classical hierarchy that placed reason and philosophy above the passions and rhetoric, and opens the door for the "noble art"¹⁰ of rhetoric, as Hume terms it, to assume a privileged place alongside his philosophy.

In Hume's system, a belief is "a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression."¹¹ Beliefs, for Hume, arise simply from the mind's tendency to associate ideas and consist "not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind... which distinguishes the ideas of judgment from the fictions of the imagination."¹² Hume calls this feeling "a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*."¹³ Immediately, the affinities between rhetorical persuasion and Hume's theory of belief begin to emerge, as one of the primary objectives of any rhetorical production is to enliven ideas.

In Book 1 of the *Treatise*, Hume is concerned with explaining causal beliefs. As we experience a cause and its effect together more and more often, their relation begins to feel *right* in our mind. The two ideas come to feel as though they belong together. It is this feeling that leads us to infer the existence of the cause or the effect from the presence of the other. This process is, for Hume, judgment or reasoning. While he obviously does not understand judgment to be an entirely passive function, Hume also does not understand it to be the autonomous faculty that many other thinkers do. For Hume, "all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation."¹⁴

For the most part, Hume believed that the feeling of the mind that he called belief would arise from the experience of habit and custom. In fact, he goes so far as to assert that "all belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv'd *solely* from that origin" [emphasis added].¹⁵ But Hume also allows that eloquence can infuse ideas with the liveliness and vivaciousness that is belief. Only eloquence and education can take the place of experience in this regard. Eloquence, however, has the added potential to actually exceed the influence of experience. Hume writes that it is "difficult for us to withhold our assent from what is painted out to us in all the colours of eloquence; and the vivacity produc'd by the fancy is in many cases *greater* than that which arises from custom and experience" [emphasis added].¹⁶ This greater vivacity explains Hume's claim that

nothing is more capable of infusing any passion into the mind, than eloquence, by which objects are represented in their strongest and most lively colours. We might of ourselves acknowledge, that such an object is valuable and such another odious; but till an orator excites the imagination, and gives force to these ideas, they may have but a feeble influence either on the will or the affections.¹⁷

This realization about the power of eloquence helps to explain why people are so often either deaf to reason or easily distracted from it. As Hume comments sarcastically in the *Natural History of Religion*, "to oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be, that the

whole is greater than a part, that two and three makes five; is pretending to stop the ocean with a bullrush.”¹⁸

Hume’s challenge to the supremacy of reason has been, and continues to be discussed extensively. Far less discussion has been devoted to the consequences of that challenge for our understanding of rhetoric. Rather than accept the Platonic hierarchy that defined rhetoric as nothing more than a form of flattery that was far inferior to reason and philosophy, Hume responded to his realization about the power of eloquence by seeking to distinguish good from bad rhetoric. Bad or low rhetoric was the sort used by preachers and enthusiasts to whip fanatics into a frenzy, or to persuade ordinary people to reject human reason and even morality as fallacious guides, and to deliver themselves “over, blindly, and without reserve, to the supposed illapses of the spirit, and to inspiration from above.”¹⁹ Zeal, which Hume described as “the most absurd of prejudices masqued with reason, the most criminal of passions covered with the appearance of duty,”²⁰ was often fomented through bad or low rhetoric. On the other hand, rhetoric could be employed toward much greater ends. And when it was, Hume saw it as a “noble art.”²¹ He argues that, in its most perfect form, oratory is “rapid harmony, exactly adjusted to the sense: It is vehement reasoning, without any appearance of art: It is disdain, anger, boldness, freedom, involved in a continued stream of argument.”²²

The Key Distinction in Hume’s Treatment of Rhetoric

Hume’s discussions of rhetoric are scattered throughout his writings and do not always appear consistent. Those seeking to understand his position on rhetoric face the difficulty that Hume denigrates rhetoric in some passages of his writings while celebrating it in others. He expresses a clear attraction to the orations of Demosthenes which, of all human productions, he terms “the models, which approach the nearest to perfection.”²³ And yet, Hume clearly thought that some forms of rhetoric could be used to manipulate or dupe people into adopting unsound and dangerous beliefs. Of the parliamentarians opposing Charles I, Hume writes that “one furious enthusiast was able, by his active industry, to surmount the indolent efforts of many sober and reasonable antagonists,” and so “seize the minds of the ignorant multitude.”²⁴ “No weakness of human nature,” Hume writes, “is more universal and conspicuous than what we commonly call CREDULITY, or a too easy faith in the testimony of others.”²⁵ And the rhetoric of zealots often exploits this weakness.

Hume’s most developed argument on rhetoric appears in his essay “Of Eloquence.” But even in this short essay, Hume appears to express very inconsistent views. He laments the decline of ancient eloquence but then seems to argue both that his contemporaries ought *and* ought not to attempt to rekindle it. In trying to make sense of the essay, Adam Potkay, borrowing a phrase from the *Natural History of Religion*, writes that “the whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery.”²⁶ He refers to the ambiguous status of rhetoric in eighteenth century Britain as an explanation for the contradictions in, what he terms, Hume’s “acutely perplexed essay.” Hume’s ideas are conflicted, according to Potkay, because “politically, eloquence aligned with virtue, but philosophically it derived from error; and socially, it was beyond the pale.”²⁷

Rather than read the essay as “acutely perplexed,” however, I believe that we should read it as highlighting some of the complexities in Hume’s treatment of rhetoric.

What is missing from Potkay's assessment is a recognition of Hume's distinction between high and low rhetoric. In the period after Charles' beheading, Hume writes, the zealots had no means "besides cant and low rhetoric" to recommend their views to others.²⁸ Hume is very careful to identify this rhetoric as low. This was not the rhetoric of Demosthenes. It was the low rhetoric of the fanatics. Understanding that Hume wrote about two very different forms of rhetoric certainly helps to explain some of the tensions in "Of Eloquence." It also provides the starting point for our understanding of Hume's conception of rhetoric.

Hume's writings suggest a high form of rhetoric, an accurate, just, and polite rhetoric, that could counter the cant and low rhetoric of the fanatics. Stylistically, Hume's high rhetoric borrows from ancient eloquence and is characterized by elegance, clarity, simplicity, and ease. But high rhetoric is not merely stylish oratory. Hume argues that if an orator's rhetoric "be not elegant, his observations uncommon, his sense strong and masculine, he will in vain boast his nature and simplicity. He may be correct; but he never will be agreeable."²⁹ For Hume, to be "correct" is to present an argument that is grounded in the experimental method. The character of the orator also greatly affects the agreeableness of their oration. Hume argues that our suspicions are raised by any matter of fact presented by a speaker of "a doubtful character."³⁰ High rhetoric, therefore, consists in arguments grounded in the experimental method that are presented in a clear and elegant style by an orator of good character. Each of these three criteria is agreeable to the mind and Hume's conception of rhetoric points toward the potential of their combined influence and appeal. I will now briefly discuss each in turn.

Rhetoric, Error, and Sound Ideas

As Potkay notes, rhetoric has often been associated with error. Hume too maintains that lively ideas can "confound" our judgment.³¹ In the *Treatise*, Hume writes that "there is always something more forcible and real" in the actions of an imagination moved by a customary conjunction with a present impression than in those of an imagination moved by "the fervours of poetry and eloquence."³² He also writes that the "the vigour of conception, which fictions receive from poetry and eloquence, is a circumstance merely accidental, of which every idea is equally susceptible; and that, such fictions are connected with nothing that is real."³³ However, though these passages might appear to some as Hume's equation of rhetoric with error, it would be a mistake to read them in this way. These passages are simply expressions of Hume's Aristotelian view that rhetoric can be used for good or for ill. "Belief," Hume writes, "must please the imagination by means of the force and vivacity which attends it; since every idea, which has force and vivacity, is found to be agreeable to that faculty."³⁴ In writing of the vigour of conception arising from eloquence as a "circumstance merely accidental," Hume is simply making the case that rhetoric can be used to enliven sound as well as unsound ideas. Were sound ideas necessarily more lively than unsound ideas, fanatics and zealots would pose no danger at all. It is precisely because people are generally deaf to reason that accurate reasoning can be only one part of Hume's conception of high rhetoric.

Sound ideas, for Hume, are those grounded in his empiricism and proceeding from his experimental method. The unsound ideas about which he was most concerned are inaccurate perceptions of interest that could lead people to act immorally or against

the good of their society. The rhetoric of religious enthusiasts takes advantage of two features of human nature in particular that lead people to develop inaccurate perceptions of their interests. The first is the quality that “leads us to prefer whatever is present to the distant and remote, and makes us desire objects more according to their situation than their intrinsic value.”³⁵ No other quality, Hume writes, causes more fatal errors in our conduct. The second feature of human nature that religious enthusiasts prey upon is the “usual propensity of mankind towards the marvelous.” Hume writes that “though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.”³⁶

Hume’s discussions of misrepresented interests suggest a major distinction between his conceptions of high and low rhetoric. Hume argues that eloquence should rightfully be directed toward the public good. Looking back to ancient Athens, he argues that eloquence was given its fullest scope when directed toward affairs of state and the liberty, happiness and honour of the republic.³⁷ The cant and low rhetoric of fanatics often target the regular features of human nature that lead people to misperceive their individual interests. Hume clearly suggests that it is only when the audience members are manipulated into accepting such misrepresentations of their own interests that they become inclined to act on the basis of the fanatics’ arguments in ways that are clearly contrary to the liberty, happiness, and honour of their country. Low rhetoric is, therefore, manipulative because it leads people to act against their true best interests by acting against the common good.

Hume’s belief that rhetoric ought to promote the common good grounds his claim that the people rather than the philosophers are the best judges of rhetoric. It is the people, he writes, “who in all matters of common reason and eloquence are found so infallible a tribunal.”³⁸ When an orator in ancient Greece would make a speech, Hume argues, “the lowest vulgar of ATHENS were his sovereigns, and the arbiters of his eloquence.”³⁹ At first glance, it seems that Hume is overstating his case somewhat. The people *are* fallible given Hume’s own assertion about human credulity. And, of course, the people are susceptible to low rhetoric. Were they not, the problems of faction and fanaticism would likely be greatly mitigated. However, the susceptibility of the people to low rhetoric does not preclude the possibility that they will find another form of rhetoric even more persuasive. For Hume, this high form of rhetoric would combine elements of ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical style, a polite orator, and Hume’s accurate reasoning.

The Style of Accurate, Just, and Polite Rhetoric

The oratorical style of accurate, just, and polite rhetoric appeals to the compulsion to make judgments that Hume identified as a key feature of human nature. Hume argues that “nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel.”⁴⁰ Because rhetoric takes the place of experience in the formation of beliefs, it has to appeal to the imagination as a primary sense impression. Effective rhetoric will “inflame the audience, so as to make them accompany the speaker in such violent passions, and such elevated conceptions: And to conceal, under a torrent of eloquence, the artifice, by which all this is effectuated.”⁴¹ The greater the audience members’ awareness of the artifice in an orator’s rhetoric, the less natural will be the

persuasive force of the orator, and therefore, the less powerful will be the effect of words on the passions.

Rhetoric is inherently artificial. Although it takes the place of experience, rhetoric is unlike experience in that it is always a matter of conscious presentation. If that artifice is front and centre in the minds of the audience members, the rhetoric will never take the place of experience in the process of belief formation. It can only do so if ideas are presented to the audience's imagination in such a way that the orator minimises the differences between these beliefs and those that are copies of the impressions of experience. In addition, the orator must conceal the artifice through which he or she evokes particular passions in the audience because the evidence of that artifice would hinder the sympathy through which those passions are conveyed. In many ways, Hume's mention of concealing the artifice by which rhetoric stimulates a passion in the members of the audience echoes Joseph Addison's definition of fine writing that Hume so much admired – it “consists of sentiments, which are natural, without being obvious.”⁴²

According to Hume, an orator seeking to convey sentiments that are natural without being obvious must avoid three rhetorical flaws. Firstly, Hume warns against excessive ornamentation. He writes that “uncommon expressions, strong flashes of wit, pointed similies, and epigrammatic turns, especially when they recur too frequently, are a disfigurement, rather than any embellishment of discourse.”⁴³ This critique of excessive ornamentation is very much in step with the polite style of writers such as Addison. Hume's critique is not, however, a universal prohibition against the use of rhetorical figures. Rather, it is an argument for the careful selection of such figures. Hume argues that effective oratory requires that rhetorical figures match the scale of their subject.

Secondly, Hume argues that orators should ensure that their speeches are easily pronounced and presented. He writes that any words or sentences that are difficult to pronounce “affect the mind with a painful sentiment, and render the style harsh and disagreeable.”⁴⁴ When we hear wordy or awkwardly composed orations we experience, through sympathy, the unease, which the delivery of the oration gives to the speaker. Consequently, speeches that are difficult to pronounce and present do not please the imagination.

Finally, Hume warns against the delivery of orations that lack unity or simplicity. Referring to the ancient Greeks, Hume writes that “the genius of poets and orators, as might naturally be expected, was distinguished by an amiable simplicity.”⁴⁵ In contrast to the ancient Greeks, Hume presents Oliver Cromwell, to whom he ascribes a “tiresome, dark, unintelligible elocution” and whom he classes among those who, “though they see their object clearly and distinctly in general; yet, when they come to unfold its parts by discourse or writing, lose that luminous conception, which they had before attained.”⁴⁶

In Hume's system, we develop beliefs because our imagination naturally associates ideas. It does so without reflection and without conscious direction. The ease with which the mind reaches its object, therefore, heavily determines the effect that any oratorical production will have on it. Hume writes that the “amiable simplicity” that characterized the great orations of the ancient Greeks “is so fitted to express the genuine movements of nature and passion, that the compositions possessed of it must ever appear valuable to the discerning part of mankind.”⁴⁷ Common judgments and opinions are characterized by a natural conception of ideas that the imagination does not feel from piecing together a confused and circuitous argument.⁴⁸ Hume argues that “the more single

and united it is to the eye,” the less effort any argument will require of the imagination to “collect all its parts, and run from them to the correlative idea, which forms the conclusion.”⁴⁹ When the mind is required to labour excessively in order to run through the course of an argument, rhetoric fails to take the place of experience in the formation of beliefs. The regular progress of the sentiments is disturbed and the “idea strikes not on us with such vivacity” as is required to significantly influence the passions and imagination.⁵⁰

Though ease of conception is central to his theory of rhetorical reception, Hume proposes a significant limitation to its utility. One of the central features of Hume’s conception of rhetoric is his argument that overly facilitating the mind’s progress through an argument – in other words, facilitating it to the point where the audience’s judgment is no longer engaged by the orator’s speech – can actually hinder the effectiveness of rhetoric. Hume writes that

‘tis certain nothing more powerfully animates any affection, than to conceal some part of its object by throwing it into a kind of shade, which at the same time that it shows enough to pre-possess us in favour of the object, leaves still some work for the imagination. Besides that obscurity is always attended with a kind of uncertainty; the effort, which the fancy makes to compleat the idea, rouzes the spirits, and gives an additional force to the passion.⁵¹

Effective rhetoric requires that the orator engage the imagination of the audience members by raising questions, not simply supplying answers. “Obscurity,” Hume writes, is indeed “painful to the mind as well as to the eye; but to bring light from obscurity, by whatever labour, must needs be delightful and rejoicing.”⁵² Effective rhetoricians must not attempt to overpower the natural determination to make judgments. They must play to it. In other words, the most effective rhetoric does not manipulate or dupe the audience members into adopting the speaker’s views. On the contrary, it stimulates the audience members to make judgments of their own.

The Arts of Conversation: Transposing Politeness Into the Realm of Rhetoric

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Hume’s high rhetoric is the place it affords to gentlemanliness or politeness. Hume’s conception of the relationship between politeness and rhetoric differed from that of many of his contemporaries. Most understood the polite virtues of simplicity and moderation in a way that was antithetical to the flair and passion of rhetorical figures. Hume, as we will see, did not. In the eighteenth century, politeness belonged to the realm of conversation. Hume suggested ways in which this feature of the egalitarian world of conversation could be exported to the stratified realm of rhetoric.

Hume’s conception of politeness was informed by the work of Anthony Ashley Cooper (the third earl of Shaftesbury). According to Lawrence Klein, Shaftesbury viewed politeness as “refinement that had submitted to the disciplines of sociability: the combination of self-confidence and unpretentiousness, the naturalness and ease, the honesty and elegance, of the fully autonomous being.”⁵³ Politeness, for Shaftesbury, was centered in discursivity.⁵⁴ As Klein writes, “the kernel of ‘politeness’ could be conveyed in the simple expression, ‘the art of pleasing in company,’ or, in a contemporary

definition, ‘a dextrous management of our Words and Actions, whereby we make other People have better Opinions of us and themselves.’”⁵⁵ Following Shaftesbury, Hume defines politeness simply as “the arts of conversation.”⁵⁶

Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* model his notion of politeness quite effectively. As opposed to the zealous wrangling and bigoted tirades that dominated the factionalized style of religious discourse against which Hume was writing, the characters in the *Dialogues* engage in a civilized and, more or less, polite conversation to explore the merits of their respective positions. Towards the end of Dialogue X, Philo, the sceptic, seems to have fully refuted Cleanthes’ defense of the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God. But rather than push his advantage and end the conversation, Philo backs off and cedes the floor to Cleanthes. “It is your turn now,” he says, “to tug the laboring oar, and to support your philosophical subtleties against the dictates of plain reason and experience.”⁵⁷ Cleanthes, the defender of the argument from design for the existence of God, is described as having an “accurate philosophical turn.”⁵⁸ As a polite individual, he is able to continue the conversation with Philo.

The first to leave the conversation is Demea. At the end of Dialogue XI, Pamphilus observes that “Demea did not at all relish the latter part of the discourse; and he took occasion soon after, on some pretence or other, to leave the company.”⁵⁹ Demea, as the defender of the a priori argument for the existence of God, is the least polite of the characters in the *Dialogues* because of his “rigid and inflexible orthodoxy.”⁶⁰ Demea’s impoliteness ultimately impedes his ability to converse with Philo and Cleanthes so he simply slinks off. Pamphilus does not recount the end of the conversation between Cleanthes and Philo. Rather, he breaks away from it and simply states that the two “pursued not this conversation much further.”⁶¹ What is significant, however, is that they did continue it. Demea leaves the conversation before it ends because he is impolite. Cleanthes and Philo continue the conversation past the end of the *Dialogues*, demonstrating that they are polite, and thus, are capable of civilly examining disputes over which hatreds have been kindled and people have been killed.

Adam Potkay argues that “politeness is an eighteenth-century ideology in formation, intended to consolidate the members of the gentry and professional orders and to differentiate this group from a ‘vulgar’ class of labourers, servants, and ‘cits.’”⁶² However, while Hume does use the terms “gentlemen” and “politeness” to differentiate the social classes that Potkay describes, he is also interested in using these to make distinctions *within* the gentry and professional orders. His famous invocation of “the many honest gentlemen,” contrasts them not to members of any lower social classes but to the philosophers Hume calls “our founders of systems.”⁶³ And when he differentiates Demea from Philo and Cleanthes, Hume nowhere suggests that Demea is of a lower class than the other two characters. In fact, his every indication is that all three are members of the same class. However, as Klein writes, not all members of the gentry and the professional orders were “polite since ‘politeness’ [is] a criterion of *proper* behaviour.”⁶⁴

The notion of politeness makes several major contributions to Hume’s conception of rhetoric. First are the manners and decorum of politeness. These ensure that orations are respectful rather than bullish. In the world of conversation, this decorum manifests itself in the conversants’ willingness to cede the floor to one another. However, it would be a mistake to interpret this “mutual deference”⁶⁵ as acquiescence. Hume defines it as “civility.”⁶⁶ Another word would be respect. Politeness requires that conversants respect

one another, that they not treat their conversation as a blood sport. There should be no objective of winning in conversation. Rather, conversants should seek an open exchange of ideas.

The decorum of politeness translates into the realm of rhetoric as a respect for the individual reason and judgment of the audience members. In Hume's conception of rhetoric, the orator appeals to these faculties in his audience rather than seeking to overpower them. A rhetorical setting does not allow for the reciprocity of a conversational setting. However, the orator can still respect his audience members. The polite orator is not a lecturer. Through rhetoric, the orator engages with the audience members.

This engagement is closely related to the second contribution that the notion of politeness makes to Hume's conception of high rhetoric, namely sociability. In the realm of conversation, sociability is the capacity to sustain conversation with one's interlocutors. In the realm of rhetoric, it translates as the capacity to stimulate and to contribute to larger societal conversations. While the orator may not be engaged in a reciprocal conversation with his audience members, his orations become the subject matter for their conversations, both with each other and with others. The virtue of simplicity increases the quotability of the orations, thus facilitating their dissemination throughout society.

The capacity to sustain conversation is closely related to Hume's experimental method. It belies the certainty of dogmatism and, instead, promotes the type of self-conscious uncertainty that is central to Hume's epistemology. Hume argues that we can never have certainty in our knowledge of the causal relations that determine our world, but only greater and greater degrees of certainty following from repeated experiments. Similarly, the capacity to sustain conversation allows for the development of a justifiably greater and greater trust in the merits of our political judgments.

Lastly, politeness, along with its rejection of pedantry and specialized learning, contributes to the groundedness and connection with every day life that are fundamental to Hume's empiricism. As, M.A. Box writes, "the empiricist stress on experience as against ratiocination was appealingly analogous to the gentlemanly stress on worldly experience as against book-learning. Both were seen as means of keeping one's feet firmly on the ground."⁶⁷ As Annette Baier writes, Hume believed that "it is philosophy which must become worldly, not the world which must become philosophical."⁶⁸ Rather than convert the "many honest gentlemen" into philosophers, Hume wished instead to "communicate to our founders of systems, a share of [the honest gentlemen's] gross earthy mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which wou'd serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are composed."⁶⁹ Hume's conception of rhetoric is directed precisely at tempering the "fiery particles" of the zealots' rhetoric.

Conclusion

Hume's treatment of rhetoric has been largely overlooked in the scholarly literature. Understanding his conception of rhetoric is, however, important for understanding the full scope of Hume's political philosophy. Hume's work was motivated by his interest in defeating the forces of faction and fanaticism. His philosophy

of mind exposed the porous foundations of superstitious beliefs. It also revealed the power of rhetoric to disseminate beliefs, both sound and superstitious. Hume was acutely aware of the dangers posed by rhetorically gifted fanatics. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, he saw these as dangers of fanaticism not rhetoric. Hume distinguished between the low cant of the fanatics and a higher form of rhetoric that could persuade people, without manipulating them, to pursue common goods. His writings suggest a complex conception of rhetoric that is rooted in his philosophy of mind and that reconciles rhetoric with the values of politeness. This reconciliation of rhetoric and politeness is the most distinguishing feature of Hume's insights for stealing the thunder of the "trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army."

¹ T Introduction.2; SBN xviii. [Each reference to the *Treatise* takes the form of T followed by the book, part, section, and paragraph from which the passage is taken, followed by a page reference in the Selby-Bigge edition (revised by Nidditch). References to the *Enquiries* take the form of EHU or EPM followed by the relevant section, part, and paragraph numbers, followed by a page reference in the third Selby-Bigge edition (revised by Nidditch). References to the *History of England* list the volume and page number in *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. Forward by William B. Todd, 6 vols. 1778 Edition; rpt. Indianapolis: Liberty, 1983. References to the *Essays* list the essay title followed by a page reference in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Ed. Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987. References to the *Natural History of Religion* give a page reference in *The Natural History of Religion*. Ed. H.E. Root, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.]

² This paper presents an overview of some of the principle arguments that I am developing in my larger project on Hume's treatment of rhetoric.

³ Whelan, Frederick G. *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985. p.6.

⁴ Herdt, Jennifer A. *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p.9.

⁵ Garrett, Don. *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. p.7.

⁶ Hume sometimes uses the terms *superstition* and *superstitious beliefs* to refer generally to unphilosophical beliefs. At other times, he uses *superstition* to refer to the teachings of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, in particular beliefs surrounding their ceremonies and other "superstitious" acts. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the terms *superstition* and *superstitious beliefs* to denote unphilosophical beliefs in general. As I am concerned with Hume's treatment of both religious and political factions and zealots, I will not here enter into a discussion of the differences between his general and specific usages of the terms.

⁷ Pocock, J.G.A. *Virtue Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p.136.

⁸ *Essays*, "My Own Life," p.XLI.

⁹ T 2.3.3; SBN 415.

¹⁰ *Essays*, "Of Eloquence," p.103.

¹¹ T 1.3.7; SBN 96.

¹² T 1.3.7; SBN 629.

¹³ T 1.3.7.7; SBN 629.

¹⁴ T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103.

¹⁵ T 1.3.8.10; SBN 102.

¹⁶ T 1.3.10.8; SBN 123.

¹⁷ T 2.3.6.7; SBN 426-7.

¹⁸ *Natural History of Religion*, p.54.

¹⁹ *Essays*, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," p.74.

²⁰ *History of England*. Vol.6. p.31.

²¹ *Essays*, "Of Eloquence," p.103.

²² *Essays*, "Of Eloquence," pp.105-6.

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- ²³ *Essays*, “Of Eloquence,” pp.105-6.
- ²⁴ *The History of England*. Vol.5. p.285.
- ²⁵ T 1.3.9.12; SBN 112.
- ²⁶ Potkay, Adam. *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. p.29.
- ²⁷ Potkay, p.73.
- ²⁸ *The History of England*. Vol.6. p.3.
- ²⁹ *Essays*, “Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing,” p.192.
- ³⁰ *EHU*. Sec. X, Part I, p.112.
- ³¹ T 1.3.9.11; SBN 112.
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