

LOCKE'S ESSAY AND THE RHETORIC OF SCIENCE

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PETER WALMSLEY. *Locke's Essay and the Rhetoric of Science*. Bucknell University Press, 2003. 199 pp. ISBN: 0-8387-5543-7. \$43.00 (hardback).

The history of rhetorical argumentation is a much neglected and abused area of study. In modern academic parlance, 'rhetoric' is often associated with nefarious motives and intentional misrepresentations of evidence. However, this perception masks a tremendously influential tradition that began in classical times and still continues to be influential today (particularly in the field of law). Building on the works of classical authors, rhetoric was an integral subject of the medieval trivium. As has been convincingly shown by Brian Vickers' *In Defence of Rhetoric* (1988), Anthony Grafton's *Defenders of the Text* (1991) and Quentin Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (1996), Renaissance and Early Modern intellectuals recalibrated the medieval conception of rhetoric (mainly by ignoring the Scholastic adherence to Aristotle's *Treatise on Rhetoric*) and revived the works of ancient orators like Cicero and Quintilian. In some cases, rhetorical modes of arrangement affected axiomatic reason and taxonomies of natural history; a situation that has been investigated in Paolo Rossi's *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* (1966) and Ann Blair's *The Theater of Nature* (1997).

It is precisely this tradition of scholarship that *Locke's Essay and the Rhetoric of Science* seems to have missed. Instead, its presentation of rhetoric is more influenced by definitions set forth by several canonical works in sociology of scientific knowledge, especially Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (1985) and Steven Shapin's *A Social History of Truth* (1994). Yet even these authors at least acknowledge the influence of classical rhetoric. Despite this link, Walmsley misses the woods for the trees by honing in on diffidentism, metaphorical language, analogical ambiguities and simplistic narratives. In reality these stylistic practices

were merely tools used within the three larger genres of composition (*judicial, deliberative* and *epideictic*) that remained unaddressed in *Locke's Essay*. Nor do we hear about the five elements of rhetorical arrangement (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria* and *pronuntiatio*) and or its six different formats (*exordium, narratio, partitio, confirmatio, refutatio* and *conclusio*). Granted, these categories were employed differently throughout Europe at this time, but they were most definitely used on a frequent basis. It therefore seems quite odd that the presence of such a strong tradition is not even mentioned in a book interested in the rhetorical foundations of Locke's *Essay*.

Throughout the book, Walmsley also avers that analogy and metaphor are compositional tools that are inherently rhetorical. This is a bit perplexing, since Locke and other authors of the early modern period were quite interested in using analogies and metaphors that did not appeal to the emotions. This is why Locke's understanding of metaphor was linked to larger problems associated with the ambiguous and flippant use of language. As E. J. Lowe has shown in *Locke on Human Understanding* (1995), Locke's thoughts on language were often guided by his interest in the interaction between words, ideas and signs. Yet when treating Locke's use of metaphor, Walmsley does not address these crucial concerns. Nor does he touch on how the synonymical and metonymical aspects of Locke's writings governed the *Essay's* use of words that today would be understood as metaphors.

Locke's Essay's treatment of 'analogical induction' is also puzzling. Walmsley's use of this term suggests that Locke felt both analogy and induction were somehow inextricably linked under a larger rhetorical rubric. However, this picture does not square with Locke's own use of the terms throughout the *Essay*, or with their use by those who subscribed to the New Philosophy promoted by Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and other members of the Royal Society of London. This point was addressed several years back in Lorraine Daston's *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (1988). She showed that Newton and several of his followers defined the terms in the following manner: 'Induction progressed horizontally, by collecting instances of the same type into eventual generalization; analogy worked vertically, extrapolating the results of inductions at one level to the unobserved phenomena at another' (p. 244). The work of Daston and other scholars on this subject suggests that Walmsley's portrayal of Locke's analogical induction does not fit with what is known about his contemporaries.

On the whole, *Locke's Essay* is pleasantly written and will be interesting to those who are unfamiliar with the history of science. It has a good number of illustrations and one of its main subtexts is that Locke was a keen natural historian whose methods of collecting data mirrored those of Robert Boyle. Walmsley also makes some perceptive points on the process by which examples taken from the natural world served to strengthen the plausibility of seventeenth-century philosophical arguments. Yet for those more familiar with the empirical epistemology that undergirded Enlightenment conceptions of evidence and experimentation, this book will only reconfirm other research that has already been done in the field.

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