THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT

from ancient Greece to the early Modern Age

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Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is entirely my own work.

Rob Wiseman
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ABSTRACT

The field of communication is highly fragmented. There are half-a-dozen major competing schools; dozens of incompatible theories; no agreed research methods; and poor connection between research, practice and policy. Although theorists recognise fragmentation is a problem and agree that it must be resolved, they do not agree on its causes—ontological, methodological, or institutional—nor how the problem might be overcome.

This thesis argues that sources of our present confusion have been misdiagnosed. The problems are not, in the first place, conceptual. Disagreement in the scope and practice of communication are symptoms of the problem; not its causes. This thesis argues that the main source of incoherence lies in the unregarded development of ideas about communication over the last 2,500 years.

Far from being a single idea of communication in Western thought, there are three very different traditions that have existed and competed throughout Western history. Each tradition exists for different reasons, has an entirely different scope and purpose, and is made up of ideas from different categories (factual claims, value claims, and plans of action). In their development however, all three interacted and concepts were transferred between them, giving the appearance of a single unbroken tradition.

My thesis describes the core concepts of each tradition, the sources and development of these concepts, the reasons for their evolution, the interactions and borrowings between the three traditions, and what these concepts have committed the field to—particularly in its attachments to other fields such as psychology, linguistics, law and politics.

The first tradition is the idea of communication as transference, which seeks to explain what happens when people speak and listen to one another. The main sources of this tradition have been everyday explanation of human physiology, although in the last four hundred years, these have been supplemented with scientific theories concerning physical nature. Everyday metaphors used in ancient Greece and Rome show a fully formed but implicit model which treated communication as breathing words out of one person and into another. This model became more complex with the appearance of ideas concerning the mind, soul and language. This model in turn provided the basis for many key Western beliefs about thought and consciousness, which were later incorporated into medieval theories of speech. This model persisted until the seventeenth century, when physiology was displaced by mechanics, and the tradition was split into physical and symbolic transference. In contemporary theory, this tradition dominates the other two traditions, and is
represented in mass communication studies, ‘message-driven’ and transmission models, behavioural and cognitive psychology, cybernetics, and information processing.

The second tradition is organised around the idea of communication as making order. In particular, it treats communicating as the way in which communities are formed, regulated and advanced. This tradition has been heavily influenced by political theory and jurisprudence throughout its history, also becoming intertwined with theories of creation in Platonism and medieval Christian theology. This view of communication began to decline in the early Modern Age with the Protestant Reformation and the rise of liberal democracies and the physical sciences. These undermined belief in an intrinsic social order by emphasising human beings as individuals rather than social creatures. Today this tradition is most apparent in structuralism, French semiotics, aspects of descriptive grammar, social psychology, cultural theory, and some critical theory.

The third tradition sees communication as a matter of applying techniques. From the earliest times, these techniques were divided into a prominent collection concerned with speaking and arguing (rhetoric and dialectic) and a diffuse and specialised group concerned with reading (grammar and legal interpretation—extended to biblical exegesis in the third century AD). The latter interpretative tradition evolved concepts of meaning and symbols, although they were later grafted onto communication-as-transmission. Both branches of the tradition were dormant throughout the early Middle Ages, but were revived by the Humanists in the Renaissance. During the dispute between philosophers and rhetoricians in the sixteenth century, communication-as-technique was stripped of anything to do with the material presented and was left only with style and presentation—the origins of the contemporary division of substance and style, thought and word. This division ultimately denied communication any claims to essence, substance, or ontology. The rise of Protestantism and the natural sciences contributed to the decline in rhetoric, and the transformation of dialectic from a spoken art into formal, mental reasoning divorced from communication. Today, the main representatives of this tradition are journalism, design, and the plain language movement—although rhetoric, hermeneutics and critical theory still find a place in Western universities.

The thesis concludes by exposing contradictions between the three traditions, attachments and accretions they have acquired in their development, and how these are manifested in the current fragmentation of the field. Finally, I consider what might be salvaged from the history of ideas about communication, upon which a new unified tradition might be built.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE INITIAL PROBLEM

When I first came to study communication, after training in mathematics then working in public relations for several years, I had what academics in the field politely describe as a ‘commonsense’ view of what communication is—commonsense, that is, in the way that it is ‘commonsense’ that the world is flat. As a novitiate to my new discipline, I was quickly disabused of such follies. This, naturally, prompted me to ask the question “What, then, is communication?” Unfortunately, I did not get what I felt was a clear-cut answer.

Looking back, I now see that an incomplete answer was inevitable. The field is badly fragmented. This is not simply a matter that the field has numerous specialisations—all of the social sciences and humanities experience that¹. Our field experiences an altogether more severe problem that it cannot agree how to answer even basic questions about its subject: what is communication? what does communicating involve? what can people do to communicate well? Indeed, it is so fragmented that its members do not even agree where the fracture lines are and what their causes are.

Some authors point to methodological and epistemological conflicts as the source of our current divided state. Dervin for instance points to polarities commonly blamed for divisions in the field “universalist vs. contextualist theories, administrative vs. critical research, quantitative vs. qualitative approaches, the micro vs. the macro, the theoretic vs. the

¹ Lang & Lang, 1993. “Even the most cursory glance at course title, papers read at meetings, or publication lists reveals an astounding lack of unity. ... [Older social sciences, such as] political science, anthropology and sociology are still plagued by a similar, if less problematic, diversity. As a late arrival (except for rhetoric) in the groves of academe, communication is still in the process of carving out a niche for itself. In the process it has by necessity, drawn on other social sciences as well as the humanities and several relevant professional fields ... However we see no reason to cut the umbilical cord to those [many] parents by seeking for a separate ‘disciplinary’ identity or, as some would have it, a specific communication paradigm to organize and integrate the existing body of what passes for substantiated knowledge” (p92). The variety is particularly striking in the collection edited by Dervin et al 1989.
applied, feminist vs. non-feminist”² (she adds, all of these “are symptoms, not the disease. They are shallow indications of something more fundamental.”) Other writers argue that the problem lies not with the lack of knowledge about communication, but basic disagreements in the nature of communication: an ontological problem not an epistemological one³. Arguments over ontology fall into three groups:

1. The claim that the nature of communication is merely a subspecies of the realities addressed by other fields, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology or linguistics. There is no reality to communication, no essence, no substance; communication can be understood entirely within the metaphysical assumptions of other disciplines.

2. Contrary to the first position, the claim that the metaphysics of other disciplines cannot account for the nature of communication. The basic units of communication are incompatible with those of other disciplines. For example, while psychology locates reality in the mind, any theory or observations based on this assumption are unable to account for communication which takes place between minds. Similarly, sociology’s fundamental unit is the social group, but this is the wrong scale to explain specific interactions between individuals, such as in ordinary conversations.

3. Rejecting the traditional philosophical notions of reality, foundations, essence, substances and metaphysics, and celebrating communication—long regarded as a derivative of other fields and their metaphysics—as the field that possesses no essence or foundations; the exemplar of the post-modern discipline⁴.

Disputes over the ontology of communication are exacerbated by the fact that most senior academics come from outside the field⁵. Even before the idea of a discipline of communication emerged, aspects of human communication had been discussed in many other fields, including linguistics, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, literary theory and criticism, art theory, and mathematics. But the conclusions these disciplines reached were mostly by-products of their own investigations, and rested on the assumptions of those fields. The result was and remains a kaleidoscope of fragmentary and often incompatible views. Easily the most prevalent view—one I must have been told at least a hundred times in the time I wrote this thesis—is that communication is nothing more that psychology plus signal transmission.

Other authors locate our current fragmentation in the disjointed origins of the field within universities. Delia writes that the study of communication has never had a single

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² Dervin 1993, p45
⁴ This is a summary of the three responses identified by Shepherd 1993, pp83–91.
⁵ Beninger 1993, p19.
intellectual source or ever been a unified activity. This is reflected in the more or less simultaneous appearance of four major schools in the 1950s and 1960s: systems theory in the United States and Britain; cultural studies in Britain; structuralism and semiotics in France; and media studies in Canada and the United States. The field has appropriated numerous other topics since. In 1999, Craig identified seven major ‘traditions’ in communication theory: rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, social-psychological, socio-cultural, and critical—although even within these there are divisions. He says elsewhere of the field’s growth:

Communication theory, having germinated in the groves of academe in the late 1940’s, grew like a weed by sinking roots into every intellectual tradition or trend in any way related to communication. Ideas from physical science and engineering, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy were absorbed and reinterpreted as theories of communication. While continuing to grow in this fashion, the subject even now has not yet matured as a coherent body of thought. Unlike rhetorical theory, communication theory has not grown historically forward, out of its traditions, but, in a sense, historically backward, by retrospectively appropriating a series of traditions ...

In 1994, Levy and Gurevitch, editors of the Journal of Communication commented, “to oversimplify (but only a little), we see the field of communication scholarship as roughly a two-and-a-half modal distribution: one part hard-edged behavioural science; one part interpretative study; and a third, far smaller, dash of communication policy studies”. To this growing muddle within universities must be added the results offering an increasing range of professional courses—such as journalism, public relations, graphic design, information design, marketing and advertising—bringing many professions’ traditions and rules-of-thumb to the academic world.

Another group of writers announce that the field has undergone a paradigm shift in the last thirty years—from what Krippendorff refers to as an objective, empirical, instrumentalist...

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6 Delia 1987
7 Craig 1999, p199. Krippendorff 1993 lists six everyday notions that communication theory has been built upon—the container metaphor, conduit metaphor, control metaphor, war metaphor, and dance-ritual metaphor. Sless 1985 divides pre-1980s communication theory into theories that assume transmission and sharing, although Shensky 1998—reflecting on Sless’ distinction—argues that they are simply different aspects of the same thing.
8 Meyerowitz 1993 points to the division of media studies into three, largely-isolated groups built around three distinct organisational metaphors: media-as-conduits, media-as-languages and media-as-environments. The result, he says, is that “we have no common understanding of what the subject matter of [media studies] is” (p55).
9 Craig 2001
10 Levy & Gurevitch 1993, p5
‘message-driven’ model some kind of social constructivist approach\textsuperscript{11}. On this interpretation, our present disarray simply represents the aftermath of such a transition, as adherents of the previous paradigm persist in their old beliefs and contest the newer rival.

In short, communication theory is in much the same state as sociology was a century ago: each new theory is accompanied by an affirmation of its allegiances and an attack on other candidates for discipline status, but overall a discipline of communication is yet to emerge. Student textbooks are a perfect example of this: most introduce just one of the many rival theories or models; a few discuss two or three (there have been a few attempts to summarise all of the major theories, but these require entire books in themselves, and they do not necessarily do anything to resolve conflict\textsuperscript{12}).

Turning aside from theory, there is the gulf between theorists, researchers and practitioners. Senior academics rarely have any professional experience as writers, editors, designers, marketeers, journalists, or advertisers. And the training of many important communication ‘trades’—such as graphic design or journalism—often involves no systematic theory beyond experience and commonsense. Having worked in both research and the professions, my experience has been that academics routinely misunderstand the intent, constraints and sophistication of the older communication professions, and professionals have little use for theory or research, except as a quarry for data or a supply of ready-made polemics.

All in all, the field is a mess. Theory lacks coherence, and is ill-connected to practice. Practice is ill-informed by theory, or is actively hindered by what is described as theory. There is little agreed purpose amongst those engaged with problems of communication, or even an agreement about the problems to be solved. Theorists are fractured into several incompatible schools—if their allegiance is not with another discipline altogether. The enormous range of models and theories defies synthesis. In the absence of viable alternatives, old assumptions are allowed to blunder on, despite repeated critiques and demonstrations of their failure.

\textsuperscript{11} Krippendorff 1993. Also in this group are Sless 1985 and Shrensky 1998. Krippendorff (1993) identifies three versions of constructivists. \textsuperscript{[1]} trivial constructivism which “maintains a belief in an observer-independent reality relative to which constructions by the media and by ordinary people could be compared and verified.” \textsuperscript{[2]} social constructionism, which emerges from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein and the natural language philosophers, and argues that all social phenomena can be explained by reference to language. \textsuperscript{[3]} radical constructivism in which “internal and external reality is omnipresent but not knowable without constructive participation by its observers.”

\textsuperscript{12} For instance, McQuail and Windahl describe some of the main models in Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communications (first edition 1981, second edition 1992), but they do not explain either the reasons for the variety, nor make any attempt to resolve obvious inconsistencies and contradictions between them.
TRADITIONS AND THE NATURE OF IDEAS

As I began to study what different groups meant by ‘communication’, I came to feel that, although our crisis is manifested in mismatch between theory and practice, methodological disputes, rivalries between schools, the gulf between theorists and professionals, and the lack of coherent metaphysics, these are not the sources of our confused, unproductive state—they are consequences of it. Our chaos has been mischaracterised. Despite the variety of models and theories, people in the field still appear to believe that they are all talking about the same thing when they speak of communication—as though we are the blind men of the fable who encounter an elephant; each grasping the trunk, or the ear, or the leg or the tail, and describing different aspects of the one object\textsuperscript{13}. One aim of this thesis is to show that there is no elephant: our blind men have lain hold of several different beasts. One of the chief claims of this thesis—which I believe is original to it—is that the reason we cannot give a coherent account of communication is because the field has three major distinct traditions: communication-as-transmission, communication-as-order, and communication-as-technique\textsuperscript{14}.

The three traditions

I will describe the modern versions of each tradition in Chapters 2, 6 and 10. This section is only an outline to provide some initial bearings.

Communication-as-transmission explains communication as a process of transferring something—usually thoughts or feelings, but also information and ideas—from one person to another. Transmission may run in one direction (transference), or backwards and forwards between people (exchange). Both exchange and transference are achieved by words or symbols which act as containers for thoughts and feelings. This tradition has been the most pervasive of beliefs about communication in the Modern Age; it is also the most prevalent in contemporary textbooks.

Communication-as-order takes its inspiration from the order in communities. In this tradition, communication is understood as the process by which communities are formed, maintained and developed—although for most of Western history, this was understood as a

\textsuperscript{13} Dervin, 1993, p46

\textsuperscript{14} Historically, alongside the three major traditions concerning communication, there have also been a number of minor traditions. Appendix 2 describes communication in oral cultures—cultures that do not use writing or any visual analogue of speech. One important description of communication in such cultures is a metaphor based on spinning. I have discussed the Roman version of this briefly in Appendix 6.
subspecies of the way that nature, the mind or the human soul are ordered. Some of the beliefs in this tradition are factual, mostly observations of human nature and social history, but the bulk of ideas that form this tradition are about how communities should be ordered and how people ought to behave within society. These are not factual claims; they are moral, ethical, political, and legal standards.

As well as beliefs about society, this tradition embraces many claims about language. Language is one of the most important things that people in a community have in common—it is no coincidence that the names of most languages are identical to the communities that use them (the English speak English; the French speak French, and so on). A consequence of the association between language and community is that many modern theories of language share striking similarities with older ideas about community. For example, the rules of grammar are treated as standards akin to those regulating social behaviour, rather than as factual claims.

The last tradition, communication-as-technique, makes no claims about what communication is or ought to be—it is not a theory, at least not in the sense that it explains what communication is. Rather, it consists of systematic collections of rules and methods that collectively claim, “act in these ways and you will communicate.” Historically, this tradition has two distinct branches. One begins with rules on how to compose speeches and letters, usually with the aim of persuading: the art of rhetoric. Its main representatives today are journalism and craft-based communication professions such as graphic design and advertising. The other branch was originally concerned with interpreting legal and religious documents (interpreting what people say verbally was not regarded as a problem until the twentieth century). From these interpretative rules grew the subjects of grammar and linguistics. The concern throughout this strand has been the structure and meaning of language.

In practice, all three traditions of communication have often been at play simultaneously. For example, during the Renaissance, meaning, which was originally a problem of textual interpretation, was incorporated into communication-as-transmission, so that today textbooks blithely write “communication is the way that meaning is transferred from one person to another”, so bringing together two traditions in the one definition.

Traditions

By tradition I mean an argument carried on over time. In this thesis, my focus is on traditions that have endured for millennia.

A tradition is defined and redefined, created and recreated, through two types of argument. First, there are ‘external arguments’ between those ‘inside’ the tradition who accept the premises and conclusions of the tradition, and those ‘outside’ that do not. And second, then
there are ‘internal’ arguments, in which adherents reinterpret and re-express what they believe, propelling the tradition forwards. The internal and external debates should not be thought of as equivalent to constructive and destructive forces. Internal debates may produce internal dissent, which may render the whole argument incoherent (and so end the tradition) or produce two or more successor traditions. As well as being destructive, external criticism can also serve to bind supporters to an argument, giving them a sense of unity and purpose.

Adherents of a tradition support a constellation of ideas or practices. As well as explicit statements and claims, a tradition also includes beliefs about the way the argument is to be conducted; what inferences and deductions are valid; what constitutes acceptable evidence or examples; and what assumptions other claims rest upon. For instance, in physics, the tradition of Newtonian mechanics rests on notions of invariant mass, time and space. It assumes the capacity of mathematics to describe physical phenomena, and the validity of empirical observation. Its core stated assumptions are summarised in Newton’s Law of Gravitation and the Three Laws of Motion, from which physicists derive a host of other claims about the physical universe.

Traditions are not limited to science and philosophy: politics, art and fashion all show the same attributes of traditions, although at their core are value claims rather than factual claims. For instance, when the United States’ Declaration of Independence states, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, it is not describing the factual state of any political organisation that has ever existed, but the world as it ought to be (in the view of its authors and supporters). Arguments and evidence in such traditions are necessarily different from the mathematical reasoning of physicists. Nonetheless, the dynamics of traditions are to be found in both politics and science.

Traditions are not the same things as ‘schools of thought’ or social institutions. Institutions may abandon ideas, and ideas may outlast institutions. In the case of the contemporary field of communication, no school accepts the assumptions of just one tradition—most have an assortment of all three—which is why parts of each look superficially similar to the others, but at other points they diverge.

A tradition is more than a collection of ideas as they appear at a given time. To warrant the term ‘tradition’, the ideas and their relationship must remain recognisably coherent over long periods. In Craig’s list of major groupings in communication theory—rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, social-psychological, socio-cultural, and critical—only rhetoric and literary criticism can claim longevity above a century. In the practical

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15 Craig 1999, p199.
arts, journalism goes back to the seventeenth century, and typography to the late fifteenth. By contrast, my concern in this thesis is with traditions that have lasted over two millennia.

Ideen

Although we tend to think of ideas as mental concepts, in this thesis I will be concerned with ideas that survive far beyond the lifespan of any individual mind. Ideas in this sense are not private items within a mind, but public statements. They may take the form of sentence fragments, popular idiomatic expressions, propositions, chains of reasoning, or entire theories. They may also be non-linguistic: artistic motifs, religious icons, stock theatrical characters (although I have not drawn on these in this thesis).

I do not want ‘ideas’ to be understood as though they were atoms: some kind of indivisible units of knowledge or speech. An idea is not a natural unit. Ideas are created and used by a community for some function, and their form reflects their use. Ideas may be simple: a figure of speech or an observation; they may be complex, such as ‘freedom of the press’ or ‘the German Romantic movement’. What defines a statement as a ‘public idea’ is:

1. it is stable in time—that is, it is used in recognisably similar ways, in recognisably similar situations, at different times, with continual use between people that use the idea preserve it whole, without reducing it to smaller components.

People may link together a number of ideas into a larger structure: a ‘constellation’. These constellations are almost invariably less stable than their components: a community may retain individual ideas for hundreds of years, but may group and regroup them in many different ways. For instance, most contemporary governments would claim to be democratic, respect the rule of law, permit a free press, and separate their legislature from their judiciary, but there are not only clear differences between the way that governments in our time use the term, there have also been clear changes since they first defined themselves as democratic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

To warrant the term ‘tradition’, ideas and constellations need to be stable for long periods. This however does not mean that they will be totally unvarying. People may take the same words in their mouths, but the world they live in and their needs change, and so the ways they use the ideas and their purposes in using them may also change—showing some similarities with the past but some novelties also. ‘Constellations’ of ideas are particularly fluid. For instance, in the first four centuries AD, the Church’s definition of what exactly a Christian believed in—a constellation of dozens of ideas—underwent substantial changes, but the individual claims about God, Jesus, Mary and so on proved remarkably enduring. One important aim of this thesis is to show how ideas about communication have changed over time—both the ‘unit’ ideas and the ‘constellations’ of ideas.
Most of the ideas I will deal with were never made as philosophically defendable or coherent theses. They are the habits of ordinary speech that people have daily used, usually without reflection. I have usually referred to them as beliefs, notions, views or hopes. Only where they have been advanced and defended by philosophers or theologians or politicians have I called them theories, doctrine or policies. (For want of a better term, I have occasionally referred to constellations of unexamined ideas as ‘implicit models’, although ‘model’ would normally be used to refer to a deliberate construction.)

Types of ideas

It might seem that conflicts between the three traditions in communication could be resolved if one group of ideas could be shown to be a more accurate representation of reality, or more comprehensive in its claims and conclusions than the other two. Unfortunately, the characters of each tradition do not permit this.

The core beliefs of each tradition—transmission, order and technique—belong to different categories of ideas. First there are factual claims about what communication is and what happens when people communicate. What characterises factual claims is that they can be judged against the world they claim to represent and judged true or false. As I will show, all of the main claims of communication-as-transmission fall into this category.

Second, there are beliefs derived from how people have thought communities should be ordered. These are values, not factual claims. They are not beliefs about how the world is, but how it ought to be. While factual claims are based on some reality, value claims concerning communities rest on values, ideals, standards and expectations. Standards, such as laws, ethics, and morals, which aim to regulate people’s behaviour and interactions with others are all ideas of this kind, and form the basis for communication-as-order.

Third, there are plans of action. Ideas of this type include recipes, architects’ blueprints and military strategies. They are not factual (in the sense that they do not correspond to things), and they are not values (although they may express artistic or political values). Rather, they direct human activity. The rules of communication-as-technique belong mostly of this category of ideas.¹⁶

¹⁶ There are other categories of ideas beyond facts, values and plans. One that has become increasingly important in communication during the last century have been ideas as experience. In ideas about communication, it is most apparent in the idea that cinema, drama and music provoke emotion, empathy and sympathy through character and narrative. In academe, this category of ideas is studied by phenomenology and the search for ‘authentic’ experience of others in communication. In recent years, this concept has been link...
None of the traditions of communication is made up entirely of one sort of idea or another, although each tradition is dominated by one category. To take an analogy from architecture, the architect's plan will rest on facts (the strength of materials, the laws of gravity) and will be directed by some aesthetic and cultural standards. Nonetheless, an architect's blueprints belong, at core, to the category of plans, not facts or values. Possessing factual knowledge or aesthetic sense will not, by themselves, see a building constructed.

How traditions develop

Traditions comprised of different types of ideas develop in different ways—just as political, technological and scientific revolutions all have quite different characters. Where a tradition comprises a cluster of factual claims, each individual claim tends to be consistent with the others and they all corroborate one another. The tradition usually does not contain contradictory claims, and it is not normally possible to generate conflicting claims within the assumptions and conventions of the tradition (not easily, at least). Scientific, mathematical and philosophical theories belong to this kind of tradition. Where factual claims do come into conflict within a tradition—usually through the introduction of new facts or observations from outside—one of four things may happen:

1. aberrant claims may be rejected
2. the tradition may be revised to accommodate the new claims
3. the tradition may split to form two new traditions or sub-traditions, each of which is internally consistent, but which are in conflict with one another
4. in the worst case, the entire tradition may collapse, unable to expel the new claims, but unable to accommodate them either.

Traditions made up of values evolve differently. In particular, the rule of self-contradiction does not apply, although usually members of such traditions avoid too many disputes. An

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with the idea of communication-as-dialogue, chiefly inspired by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Buber.

17 At a general level, the reasons for change in traditions comprised of different types of ideas remain unanalysed, although important work has been done within each category. The first major examination of the way factual traditions evolved was Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, although there have been numerous modifications of his theory since then. I am not aware of any comparable general theories that explain the development of traditions concerned with values or plans, although of course there are many histories of change within specific disciplines: politics, law, military strategy, architecture, military strategy and moral philosophy.

18 Scientific traditions that have collapsed include Ptolemaic cosmology, Aristotelian physics, and phlogiston chemistry.
example of how conflicting ideas can coexist within the one tradition of this type is in the concept of ‘fairness’ central to Australian life. Australians use ‘fairness’ in at least three mutually incompatible ways. In one sense, fairness consists in treating everyone equally. Contests are fair if each competitor is treated under the same circumstances. In a second sense, people are treated fairly if those make the greatest contribution to some enterprise derive the greatest benefit from it. For instance, it is fair that hardworking employees are paid more than lazy workers. In a third sense, being fair involves treating people according to their needs and abilities. For instance, it is not fair for the rich to claim social security benefits because they do not need them, whereas the poor and the disadvantaged are entitled to them in proportion to their need. The strict equality of the first view of fairness is at odds with the division of goods of the other two. Despite the contradictions between these different senses, fairness remains an important concept in Australian society, and is unlikely to collapse for lack of consistency.

Several factors cause traditions to shift direction. Since a tradition is a kind of discussion, but carried on over many years, the reasons that traditions change are akin to those that ordinary conversations take new directions: people’s attention shifts, new facts come to light, circumstances change, peoples’ needs change, new participants enter with new contributions and capacities, earlier issues become less important, people lose interest, people forget what has been said, the capacity to remember complex arguments is lost. But a tradition that changes for these reasons merely drifts or changes fashion. Resolving the fragmentation that afflicts our field requires more than the aimless adoption of new ideas: it needs progress.

PROGRESS

The first claim of this thesis is that the field of communication contains three major traditions, each composed of ideas from different categories. The second claim—which is the reason that the first is important—is that the field cannot progress from its current state without acknowledging and resolving the demands posed by these traditions. By this I do not mean that it is impossible for people in the field to propose new theories. Indeed, in the last forty years, new descriptions, models and theories have proliferated—to be variously attacked, defended, revised and (usually) abandoned. One reason the field is in its current mess is because theorists have been all too willing to propose new models and theories, when it is far from clear what is wrong with the old ones. Progress requires activity of quite a different kind.

Craig (1993, p26) writes—I believe correctly—“even as we do more theory, we become (collectively, if not individually) less certain of exactly what we are doing or should be doing”.

...continued on next page
Four criteria for progress

Progress requires more than novelty or the displacement of old ideas with new ones, otherwise it would amount to nothing more than changing fashion. Motion is not progress unless there is an objective. Progress involves at least four factors:

1. A tradition that progresses builds on what has gone before, whether they are facts, theories, predictions, values, or plans. Older ideas may be discarded or modified, but there is always continuity—parts of the past are retained. Without continuity, one tradition dies and a new, unrelated one appears that denies or ignores the value of what has gone before.

2. Where early stages of the tradition experience disagreements that cannot be resolved, later stages can explain both the reasons for dispute and why the tradition was unable to resolve it with the resources available at the time. So progress also implies an increasing ability to detect error and understand intellectual limitations.

3. Later stages in a tradition are conceptually richer, and provide increasingly detailed descriptions and explanations, allowing members of the tradition to better direct their research and practice.

4. As participants refine what their goal is, they will be able to conceive of what the tradition would look like once completed. This provides the tradition with its ultimate goal: its completed state. In this completed state, the field will be able to explain all of its findings and be able to act with complete certainty of the outcomes. (In practice, a tradition may never be completed: later generations may redirect the goals of earlier generations. But this does not prevent those earlier generations being able to enunciate what they understand the completed field might look like, as understood at that time.)

When I look at the proliferation of communication theories and models since the 1950s, I am reminded of the increasingly desperate attempts of Renaissance astronomers to rescue the increasingly unworkable Ptolemaic cosmology. Ptolemy’s model of the universe proposed that the Earth lay at the centre of the universe and the planets orbited around it. Each planet moved on a perfectly circular path (called a deferent) centred on the Earth; and all of the planets except the Sun and the Moon moved around a small circle (called an epicycle) which was centred on the deferent. This model was meant to explain the complex observed motion of the planets. But faced with increasingly accurate observations, Renaissance mathematicians were constantly forced to add further elaborations to account for discrepancies. The result was a bewildering and ever-changing system so complex few could understand it and upon which there was little agreement. The system eventually collapsed under the combined advances of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton, which rested on a radically different assumption: that the Sun—not the Earth—lay at the centre of an unbounded universe. In communication, we have a similar process: new textbooks propose apparently new models, which on inspection usually involve nothing more than a rearrangement of old ideas—leaving us no closer to understanding communication.

Here I am adapting the factors identified by MacIntyre 1988, pp79–80.
An example of progress: the Periodic Table of chemical elements

To illustrate the lack of progress in our field, it is illuminating to compare it with one of the great acts of progress in science: the development of the Periodic Table of chemical elements.

By the mid-nineteenth century, chemists had amassed a huge collection of facts about chemical processes and substances. They knew how to produce over two thousand chemical substances, and had reliable descriptions of their colours, states, tastes, densities, electrical conductivity, valencies, and their reactions in acids, alkalis, water and alcohol.

Since Antiquity, philosophers and scientists had speculated that all physical substances were formed through the combination of a small number of ‘elements’, each with its own particular qualities or properties. However, just what these elements might be and how they might be recognised was disputed. For instance, chemists had known since 1785 that water—long believed to be an element—could be decomposed into two substances, hydrogen and oxygen. They also knew that both of these could combine with many other substances, such as carbon, nitrogen, and sulphur. But it was far from clear whether any of these substances could be further decomposed by some, as yet undiscovered method. That is, there was no way to decide whether they were elements or compounds.

In 1789, the French chemist Lavoisier produced a list of thirty-three substances which defied all efforts at decomposition, which he claimed were elements. Yet there seemed to be no overall pattern amongst Lavoisier’s ‘elements’. Some were metals such as iron, gold and copper; others like sulphur and carbon were solid but entirely unmetallic; some were gases; one—mercury—was a liquid at room temperature but otherwise behaved like a metal21. The chemists knew that they differed in weight, and could be ordered from lightest to heaviest—although this did not appear to explain anything. By 1852, chemists knew that chemicals differed in their capacity to combine with others (valance). Amongst the diversity of chemical properties however, there were also striking similarities: the salts of potassium, sodium and rubidium for instance all had similar properties. By the 1840s, chemists recognised that, when those substances believed to be elements were ordered by weight, some properties appeared to be repeated in every eighth element (although there were anomalies). For instance, the halogens (fluorine, chlorine, bromine and iodine) had many similar properties. But there was no overall pattern. While the chemists amassed an ever-increasing number of facts, there was no way of organising them in a way that explained anything or allowed chemists to make significant predictions. Nor did these facts provide chemists with a method for distinguishing chemical elements from chemical compounds. In short, despite the

21 Lavoisier also included in his list ‘light’ and ‘caloric’, although unlike the other elements, they had no weight or material substance. Two of the twenty-nine other substances, magnesia and lime, later proved to be compounds.
the development of ideas about communication in European thought

burgeoning number of facts, the chemists had no way to decide what was significant and what not—and hence no way to judge whether their activity amounted to progress.

A solution to the problem was proposed in 1869 by the Russian scientist Mendeleyev. He arranged the elements like cards in a game of patience. They were laid out in order of increasing weight—just as cards in patience are ordered from the kings down to the aces. But he also ordered the elements by their valency—just as cards in patience are also organised by their suit (hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs). The properties of the elements, Mendeleyev said, were periodic; elements with similar properties were grouped together in his table of elements. Mendeleyev also noted anomalies—gaps in the Table. He claimed that these corresponded to elements that had yet to be discovered and, using the Table, he predicted their properties. Within ten years, two new elements were discovered, matching the properties that Mendeleyev had predicted. Since then, another fifty-odd chemicals have been identified and fitted within the Periodic Table.

Mendeleyev's Periodic Table imposed order not only on the elements but on almost all physical chemistry and remains central to contemporary chemistry. It allowed chemists to greatly extend the predictive power of their science: by knowing the behaviour of a particular element's compounds, they could predict the behaviour of compounds formed from related elements—their weight, colour, density, melting point, and so on. The Periodic Table also gave scientists their first clues about radioactivity and the nature of atoms. Mendeleyev's Table displays all four characteristics of progress.

First, Mendeleyev built on findings of earlier chemists. He did not break the tradition to establish a new one; rather he gave new order to what was already known. This is not to say that it confirmed all of the previous findings—indeed, using his Table, Mendeleyev predicted (correctly) that measurements of some chemical properties were incorrect.

Second, Mendeleyev's Table could help explain why earlier chemists had disagreed on fundamental points, and why they were unable to resolve their conflicts with the intellectual resources they possessed. For instance, three of Laviosier's elements were light, caloric (heat) and phlogiston (a substance believed to be given off in combustion). Although by the 1830s, chemists had excluded all three, they had no general rule for determining whether a substance was or was not an element. After Mendeleyev, a candidate for element status had to have a place within the Table, and possess properties that were consistent with those of

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22 When the first new element, gallium, was discovered after Mendeleyev published his Table, its specific gravity did not agree with Mendeleyev's prediction, although the other properties matched. The Russian retorted that the specimen was impure and demanded the properties be retested with a more refined sample; the later results confirmed Mendeleyev's predictions.
other known chemical elements. More generally, progress was reflected in the chemists’ increasing ability to detect error and understand their limitations.

Third, progress implies that later stages in a tradition are conceptually richer, provide increasingly detailed descriptions and explanations, and help adherents better direct their research and practice. Mendeleyev’s Table contained several gaps, which he proposed corresponded to undiscovered elements. Using the Table, he predicted their properties—which were confirmed when the missing elements were discovered. Mendeleyev’s work both explained the nature and order of the chemical elements. It also provided chemists with a method to organise their knowledge about thousands of chemical compounds, helping them identify gaps and inconsistencies, so pointing to fruitful areas for investigation.

Fourth and finally, progress means that, as participants in a tradition refine what their goal is, they will be able to conceive of what the tradition would look like when it is completed. In this completed state, the field will be able to explain all its findings and act with complete certainty of the outcomes. In the case of chemistry, Mendeleyev gave chemists a vision of what a completed theory of chemistry would look like—the completed Periodic Table, with all the elements discovered, and all their chemical properties accounted for.23

The lack of progress in the field of communication

When compared with chemistry, the field of communication as a whole has not advanced (there has been progress within individual specialisations in the last forty years, but at the expense of further incompatibility within the larger field). It has proved incapable of resolving the conflicts between the demands of its different traditions. Although the field devours new ideas—its scope has ballooned in the last fifty years to incorporate semiotics, cultural studies, media analysis, interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, journalism, graphic design, and information design amongst many other specialisations—it has proved incapable of digesting them. This is not to say that synthesis has not been attempted: in 1991, Berger suggested a framework for organising the field, but when publicly challenged that his framework did not encompass the subject studied in universities under the rubric of communication, he responded that “no discipline could possibly embrace the entire range of academic interest in information and communication.” The unlikeliness of a single tradition

23 Mendeleyev’s Table did not prove to be the final word in chemistry. Investigations into radioactivity showed that many chemical elements were not immutable as the chemists had assumed they were. In the early twentieth century, physicists proposed that the chemical elements were composed of more fundamental particles.

was echoed shortly afterwards by O’Keefe, who recommended tolerance of diversity rather than theoretical unity as the field’s best option:

There is little justification for the continuing search for a unifying theoretical consensus. Even if there were frameworks available with the requisite broad-based appeal (and ... there are not), the field is better served by promoting theoretical and methodological tolerance and disciplinary cohesion.\footnote{O’Keefe, 1993, p81}

Dervin sees the field caught between “tolerance (a comfortable acceptance of theoretical pluralism) and dissent (ideological and methodological contests)”\footnote{Dervin 1993, p45}—although she archly adds that “what we have is dissent mythologised as tolerance”. Between these two groups, are a handful trying to establish fruitful dialogue between the field’s many factions\footnote{For example, Craig 1999 and Babrow 1993}. In practice, the field shows few signs of open conflict because most people have withdrawn into their own hermetic areas of interest, ignoring what happens outside (the distance between universities and practitioners is an excellent example of this mutual indifference). It is striking that people from different parts of the field rarely quote one another’s work\footnote{Berger 1992, p103; O’Keefe 1993 “Studies of citation patterns ... provide persuasive evidence that scholars in interpersonal and mass communication draw on different intellectual sources and seldom cite one another—they function as discrete intellectual traditions.” (p75)}. Tolerance amounts to claiming that neither the differences between groups in the field nor the results of those belonging to other groups are important—although by extension, this means that no ideas about communication are important, or at least they are not important enough to demand the attention and support of others.

The inability of the field either to synthesise its existing ideas or cope with dissent, can be explained by the existence of the three unrecognised traditions of ideas, drawn from different categories. These provide us—thinkers, researchers and practitioners—with three sets of incompatible assumptions and beliefs from which to reason and take action. Each tradition has different assumptions about what communication is, different evidence of what constitutes good or bad communication, different domains from which evidence can be drawn, different processes by which conclusions are drawn, and different standards of argument. People in our field are unable to make rational choices between options, because they have no agreed standards against which to make judgements. They cannot even agree on a program that might help them establish standards in order to make such choices; indeed, they do not even agree whether standards are necessary. So, progress requires the establishment of a single account of communication, which would form the standard
against which individual claims and practices could be assessed. Logic suggests three ways to achieve this:

[1] a synthesis of all three that somehow retains the diversity of existing ideas but resolves existing conflicts

[2] one tradition must somehow suppress or defeat the other two, or

[3] all three must be removed and a new tradition established. (My own view is that none of the current traditions is viable, but that individual claims and beliefs are of value and could be salvaged, to be incorporated into a new tradition.)

The first option has been tried and failed. As this thesis will show, the history of ideas about communication is littered with such efforts—some deliberate, some unintentional—to combine the different traditions and build a unified system. None has actually solved the problem of fragmentation, and all have only ever proved to be a temporary balancing act. Assimilation assumes that all ideas belong to the one category (usually factual claims), which is simply untrue. Where this assumption has been overlooked, the resulting synthesis contains internal tensions that it cannot resolve using its own resources. The other result of attempts to synthesise such a diverse range of ideas—and preserve all of them regardless of whether they are compatible or not—is usually a system too inflexible to accommodate new ideas and which collapses fairly quickly. (The failure of the Scholastic political philosophy to reconcile its diverse sources and form a lasting synthesis—an attempt I will discuss in Chapter 9—should warn us of the problems that lie in trying to incorporate all ideas about communication in a single ‘super-theory’ without first understanding and resolving the conflicts between them.)

The second and third options involve the defeat of at least two of the existing traditions and all their current variants. If a tradition is to be discontinued on rational grounds, then its ideas and their organisation have to be invalidated, either internally or externally. However, because the core ideas of each tradition of communication belong to different categories, each is unable to defeat the others using its own resources—any more than political claims like “all men are created equal” can be defeated on factual grounds. So it is not possible for one tradition to be invalidated externally by another. Consequently, the only rational way to defeat a tradition is to invalidate it from within: show that factual claims are untrue, expose value claims that its adherents do not support, or demonstrate that its practices are

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29 Resolving conflicts involves appealing to some standard. However, when a tradition contains ideas of two different categories, and those ideas are in conflict, there is no single standard with which decisions may be made. Value claims for instance cannot rationally reject by appealing to factual standards. For example, the claim “all men are created equal” is obviously in conflict with the factual observation that people are not in fact ever entirely equal—to appeal to factual standards on such an issue would be inappropriate. More generally, it is not possible to resolve conflicts between two categories by appealing to the assumptions of only one.
This thesis provides the material needed by the field to mount critiques of each tradition. An important goal is to present a clear view of four things:

1. the individual ‘units’—ideas, beliefs, assumptions—which each tradition is built upon
2. how these ‘units’ have been grouped together into ‘constellations’ of ideas—theories, models, paradigms, systems, legends and the like
3. how particular ideas came to be associated with others—and in particular, how ideas originating in one tradition came to be adopted by others
4. how connections arose between beliefs about communication and beliefs held in other fields, which buttressed each of three traditions and prevented change.

Providing this evidence forms the bulk of this thesis. It is, at core, a history of the ideas that people have held about communication. Along the way, I also illustrate how each tradition concerning communication came to be connected to other great Western ideas—especially about mind, society, law and personality.

A HISTORY OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

To someone outside the field, a proposal to write a history of ideas may not seem particularly novel: most other disciplines have well-documented histories, including many of the fields that lay claim to the domain of communication—including philosophy, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and semiotics. But when I began to research this thesis ten years ago, I was astonished to find this was not true of communication. With the exception of rhetoric, the field is strikingly non-historical. Since I began, a few books on the history of ideas about communication have appeared, although they take a different approach to the one I have used here, and do not distinguish between the field’s major traditions.

In Theorizing communication (1996), Schiller places the origins of communication studies in nineteenth century criticisms of capitalism and the spread of telegraph lines in America around the same time. Schiller’s scope is chiefly Anglo-American and focuses on the link

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A program of reconstruction is obviously more than an intellectual exercise. Universities, governments and industry, along with professional communicators and researchers, have invested heavily in current assumptions about communication. They present formidable resistance to change. Championing a new tradition is as much political as intellectual. But at the moment, there is no genuine alternative to champion. My concern in this thesis is to help develop that; the politicking can come once there is something to say.
between communication and community. By contrast, in *The invention of communication* (1996), Mattelart regards communication as a French creation, locating its origins in the building of France’s river canals and military fortifications in the seventeenth century (in his search for obscure origins, Mattelart somehow overlooks influential and explicit contributions such as Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding* of 1690). Mattelart’s conception of communication is rather different from Schiller’s: his definition covers “avenues of communication, networks of long distance transmission, and the means of symbolic exchange, such as world fairs, high culture, religion, language and of course the media”\(^{31}\). Peters’ *Speaking into the air: a history of the idea of communication* (1999) is both the broadest in scope and takes the longest historical view—it includes discussion of several pre-Modern texts, including Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the New Testament. But, like Mattelart, Peters locates the main origins of communication in developments since the seventeenth century: events before then occupy less than one fifth of his book. Unlike the other two authors, he acknowledges the confused state of the field, commenting that the term ‘communication “exists as a sort of ill formed, undifferentiated conceptual germ plasm”\(^{32}\). In recognition of this, he gives a number of definitions: imparting, transferring, exchanging, or interacting symbolically. (Although all but the last are derived from communication-as-transmission, his exploration is more wide-ranging than his definition.)

None of the three defines communication as broadly as I have in this thesis, or indeed as the field commonly uses the term. All three say little on rhetoric, dialectic and grammar, which together comprised the formal arts of communication until the seventeenth century. The primary concern of all three is with developments since the Enlightenment, and with theories and arguments—not on the ancient and everyday beliefs upon which contemporary theories of communication were built.

A moment’s reflection should tell us that people speculated about communication well before the seventeenth century—if for no other reason than that the word ‘communication’ appears long before\(^{33}\). Communicating is a fundamental human activity. People spend a

\(^{31}\) Mattelart 1996, pxiiv

\(^{32}\) Peters 1999, p6

\(^{33}\) The earliest use of ‘communication’ in English that I know of is by the English printer Caxton (c.1422–c.1491), in a comment on the regional variations of English, “For in these days every man that is in any reputacyon in his countre, wyll utter his commynycyon and maters in suche maners & termes that fewe men shall understande theym.” (In McCrum, Cran and McNeil 1986, p86). The term communication itself appears to originate with Cicero, in his translation of the Greek rhetorical term *anakoinōsis*, a figure of speech in which an orator would turn to their audience and mimic their involvement in the enquiry. Cicero occasionally used the term in his letters to mean communication in its current sense of ‘speaking’, but this usage remained rare in Latin. As I will show in Chapters 9 and 13, for most of the intervening time, the term ‘communication’ was used in Christian thought to refer to...
lot of every day doing it, and it is impossible to participate in any society or social group
without communicating. It is an activity that both fascinates and eludes. In every age,
people have delighted in wordplay, in storytelling, in conversation or the silent speech of
thought. People have long been aware of the consequences of communication failure—in
misunderstandings, disputes and, in the worst cases, in civil disorder. Since Antiquity, the
ability to use language has been regarded as one of the key distinctions between humans
and animals. But although virtually every human being can speak, they can spend decades
becoming adept; few ever feel that they master it. Two thousand years ago, the Roman
statesman Cicero remarked that any age only sees one or two truly great orators, and
speech-making was an art far surpassing all others in difficulty. Nonetheless, people have
always known that influence and prestige go to those that can communicate well. Seen this
way, communication in some form or other has been a constant concern to people
(although they may not have discussed it in the same terms that we do now). Not
surprisingly, people have speculated about it, described it, and sought to control it for at
least as long as we have written records in the West. So the claim that ideas about
communication only appeared in the seventeenth century really has no foundation. Beliefs
about communication long precede this time—indeed, one aim of this thesis is to show that
the bulk of our modern, everyday beliefs about communication were firmly in place by the
Enlightenment and that developments since then are either variations on a theme or else
the province of academics.

As a fundamental human activity, we should also expect that ideas and beliefs about
communication should be in plain view throughout history. Demonstrating this is another
goal of this thesis. There is no need to search out obscure origins—although, like beliefs
about other fundamental human activities, we can expect many ramifications, some
obscure. Mattelart’s claim that communication evolved from beliefs about transportation
in seventeenth century France is a good example: the metaphor of transportation had
been incorporated into the tradition of communication-as-transmission even in Roman
times. But, as I will show in Chapter 15, this tradition of communication long pre-dated its
association with transportation: transport is simply an illustration of how communication in
this tradition works; it is not the source of this tradition.

humanity’s relationship with God in the act of communion—and had little to do with
speech.

Cicero De Oratore 1:2:6–8, 1:20:94
Mattelart 1996, pp6–17
THE AIMS OF THIS THESIS AND SOME BOUNDARIES

To summarise, the aims of this thesis are:

[1] to demonstrate that there are three major traditions concerning communication in Western thought, since the earliest times

[2] to describe each tradition—both their ‘unit ideas’ and how these were formed into ‘constellations of belief’

[3] to show how each of the three traditions developed historically and, in particular, how they evolved into their Modern variants

[4] to show that our main ideas about communication were in place by the Enlightenment, and modern communication theory has until recently consisted largely of variations on old themes—they are far from new ways of thinking

[5] to illustrate how the development of these traditions historically can account for the current fragmentation of the field

[6] to discuss how each tradition interacted with the others, incorporating some of their features, and what the implications of this cross-fertilisation were

[7] to illustrate where these traditions are related to ideas in other fields and disciplines—such as psychology, politics, journalism and philosophy—and how parts of each have been incorporated into the ‘constellation’ of communication.

The first three sections of this thesis are devoted to each of the three traditions in turn: communication-as-transmission (Chapters 2–5); communication-as-order (Chapters 6–9), and communication-as-technique (Chapters 10–12). The final section (Chapters 13–15), explores how the ancient and medieval traditions were taken up in the early Modern Age to provide the basic architecture for explaining communication.

My aim is not an exhaustive history of ideas about communication—that would take decades to complete satisfactorily (and would be far larger than my university’s regulations permit in a doctoral thesis). Rather, this thesis is intended as a broad survey of the three traditions and their development, along with some discussion on where major intellectual problems lie, and the sources of these problems. I am keenly aware that within all of the following fifteen chapters are complexities and contradictions that space has not permitted me to deal with (although some points I have mentioned in footnotes and appendices). The areas covered in each chapter deserve—and in some cases have—whole books in their own right. My goal in this thesis has been to describe the highways of our territory, and leave aside the many meanderings, by-ways and cul-de-sacs that fill the history of ideas about communication. However, because all three traditions borrow from one another, the story of their development must cross and recross the same terrain a number of times, seeing the world from a different perspective each time.
Finally, I need to mark off some of the things that I do not mean by ‘communication’.

[1] This is not a history of the discipline of communication. The discipline—or the hope of a discipline—appeared in the late 1960s, centuries after Modern assumptions and beliefs about communication had become well-established in popular belief.

[2] This is not a history of how people actually communicated, only their beliefs about communication, whether implicit or explicit. Focussing on what people actually do can produce misleading conclusions. For instance, Plato’s philosophy is written in the form of dialogues, which might suggest he supported the idea that communication is dialogue. As I will discuss in Chapters 7 and 11, this is not the case, and where he did turn to problems related to communication, he had quite different ideas.

[3] This is not a history of communication technologies—writing, printing, telegraph, radio, television, internet and suchlike. Apart from there already being many of these, it also mistakes the infrastructure of communication for the nature of communication: while people may use a telephone in order to communicate, communicating consists of rather more than just using the telephone or some other piece of technology.

[4] This is not a history of communication media—journalism, advertising, mass communication, broadcasting and so on. With the exception of rhetoric, writing and print-making, none of our contemporary media or professions existed before the early Modern period.

[5] This is not a history of communication policies—such as licensing, ownership, and censorship—although they occasionally enter into this story. (Attempts like Plato’s ban on poets, the Church’s burning of Gutenberg’s Bibles, and the licensing of publishers provide interesting evidence of peoples’ beliefs about communication.)

[6] This is not a study of the culture of different communities. The idea of different cultures (as opposed to different nationalities or races) only appears in the nineteenth century, well after the last developments I will discuss.

[7] This is only marginally a history of language and its study. Language, like technology, is something that we use in order to communicate; it is not identical to communication. In any case, there are many good histories of linguistics and grammar, to which I will not presume to add.

Appendix 1 provides some notes on the methods that I used to analyse the different types of ideas in each tradition, along with the reasons for my selection of historical sources.
THE FIRST TRADITION

COMMUNICATION AS TRANSMISSION

2. COMMUNICATION-AS-TRANSMISSION

3. METAPHORS CONCERNING SPEECH IN HOMER

4. METAPHORS CONCERNING SPEECH IN ANCIENT GREECE

5. ROMAN METAPHORS FOR SPEECH
CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNICATION AS TRANSMISSION

ABSTRACT There are two basic variations on the idea of communication-as-transmission in the Western tradition. The first, the ‘transmission model’ much reproduced in textbooks over the last fifty years, describes human communication in terms of electromagnetic signal transmission. The second—more pervasive but largely ignored until recently by textbook writers—is the ‘conduit metaphor’: a vast collection of everyday expressions that collectively treat communication as the bodily passage of thoughts and feelings from one person to another, either within ‘channels’ or else ‘contained’ in words.

WARREN WEAVER AND THE TRANSMISSION MODEL

In 1948, the mathematician Claude Shannon published twenty-nine theorems in the Bell System Technical Journal, establishing the mathematical field of information theory. While Shannon initially envisaged his theorems in relation to electrical transmission (telephone lines) and electromagnetic transmission (radio waves), in principle the same mathematics can be applied to the transmission of any material object or wave through physical space.

One of Shannon’s most important conceptual contributions was to develop a model to describe the physical process of signal transmission. Earlier mathematicians had developed models for different aspects of the process, but even collectively, these did not yet constitute a complete description of signal transmission. Shannon summarised his model in a now-famous diagram (next page).

In Shannon’s model, the ‘information source’ produces ‘messages’ (just as in Morse code, a person produces a sequence of dots and dashes). These are then transformed by the transmitter (which Shannon conceived as a radio transmitter or telephone handpiece) into a ‘signal’ (a series of either electromagnetic or electric pulses), which may then be transmitted through space. In their transmission, these ‘signals’ may suffer some
The receiver receives the transmitted signal in a process inverse to that in the transmitter, and transforms the received signal back into a ‘message’ of some kind (although not necessarily one that is identical to the sender’s original message). Although Shannon’s immediate concern in his twenty-nine theorems was to measure the amount of distortion in various types of transmission (channels), he was contributing to a larger mathematical program concerned with developing ‘codes’ which could be used for ‘encoding’ messages so that, after they had been transmitted through space, they could be checked for distortion and any necessary corrections made—thus preserving the sender’s original message.

Put this briefly, and using these terms, there might seem to be an obvious parallel with ordinary human communication. And indeed, the parallels were quickly drawn.

... let us take a homely message, uncomplicated by radar, telegraph wires, or any technical equipment. A mother calls to her small boy, “Come here!” The mother’s brain is the source, the message is the two words, the transmitter is the mother’s vocal chords, the channel is the air which conducts the sound waves, and the receiving mechanism is the child’s ear. The destination is the child’s brain, where the message is decoded and evaluated for appropriate action. Appropriate action in the circumstances may be, of course, to move as rapidly as possible in the opposite direction. ‘Noise’ can come from a passing plane, a playmate’s shout, or a corner of the garage which deflects the signal.¹

The person responsible for applying Shannon’s model to human communication was the mathematician–administrator, Warren Weaver. In 1949, when Shannon’s article was republished in an expanded form as the Mathematical Theory of Communication, Weaver

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¹ The term ‘noise’ used by Shannon comes from early radio, where random background electromagnetic activity—such as from sunspots—sounds like a hiss or noise when heard on a radio receiver.

² Chase 1955, p17
supplied four bracketing interpretative chapters. Weaver was in no doubt of the applicability of Shannon’s work beyond its original scope.

... it is suggested that ... the engineering theory treated by Shannon, though ostensibly applicable to level A [technical] problems, actually is helpful and suggestive for the level B and C problems [semantics and effectiveness].

Furthermore, while he felt that, while some adjustments might be needed to Shannon’s model, there was nonetheless no essential difference between electromagnetic signal transmission and human communication.

... it is almost certainly true that a consideration of communication levels B and C [semantics and effectiveness] will require additions to the schematic diagram, but it seems equally likely that what is required are minor additions, and no real revision.

Weaver’s mention of Shannon’s diagram here is revealing. Weaver’s contribution is most unusual for a one-time mathematician. His chapters are entirely non-mathematical, and he makes no reference to Shannon’s twenty-nine theorems—the core of the book—much less make use of them. In short, Weaver abandons both mathematical problems and rigour. For instance, Weaver is simply wrong when he says that Shannon’s work can be applied to semantics—there is simply no way of applying Shannon’s stochastic thermodynamics to the problem of meaning.

Communication theorists ever since have relied on Weavers’ reinterpretation of Shannon’s diagram, rather than Shannon’s mathematics. For instance, the influential analyst of mass communication, Denis McQuail, glosses over the problem in his summary of mass communication models, saying “We will not discuss here the mathematical aspects of Shannon’s work.” Shannon’s work however is entirely mathematical: his diagram was no more than an organisational tool. What Weaver and succeeding acolytes took from Shannon, and what has been reproduced in unnumbered textbooks since, were Shannon’s diagram and a few technical terms—nothing else.

The problems created by Weaver and his successors can perhaps best be understood by looking at the way they interpreted Shannon’s terminology. Like an explorer mapping unknown territory, Shannon needed to name landmarks so that he could explain to others what he had found—just as any scientist or mathematician needs to. And like most other scientists and mathematicians before him, many of Shannon’s technical terms were drawn from ordinary English. In his mathematics however, he used them in rather different ways (just as the physicist’s definition of flavour, charm and strangeness differ from their ordinary

3 Weaver, in Shannon and Weaver 1949, p24
4 Weaver, in Shannon and Weaver 1949, p26
5 McQuail and Windahl 1981, p12
English uses.) ‘Code’ in Shannon’s technical sense means simply a set of choices. For instance a code can be constructed using a number of switches, in which each switch may be either ‘on’ or ‘off’. The code based on a single switch would be a set containing two elements: {‘on’, ‘off’}; two switches produces a code with four elements: {‘on-on’, ‘on-off’, ‘off-on’, ‘off-off’}. A ‘message’ is just one element of a set—it is simply a state of the code—and has no meaning itself (Shannon does not touch on meaning). For instance, ‘on-off’ is a ‘message’ in the code of two switches. ‘Information’ in Shannon’s sense is a mathematical measure of the organisation in a ‘message’. A code made using ten independent switches, which can express 10^24 messages has more ‘information’ than a code made using only one light switch, which can be used to create only 2 messages. In transmission, a message may be affected by interference, and one element in a message may be replaced by another—an ‘on’ turned into an ‘off’ for instance. If a message is distorted this way, there is an increase in disorder, which Shannon’s describes as a decrease in ‘information’—which he defines as inversely proportional to entropy (the mathematical measure of disorder).

Shannon realised the problems with the words he had selected, particularly ‘information’, and warned that they were being used in a special sense, not to be confused with their ordinary meanings. “In particular, information must not be confused with meaning.”

Social scientists though, following Weaver, took the words in their everyday, non-technical sense. Relying principally on Shannon’s diagram, they also incorporated other terms occurring in Shannon’s model into the jargon now familiar to communication students: people have become ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’; languages are ‘codes’; using language, whether in speech or writing is referred to as ‘encoding or decoding’.

Almost from the outset, Shannon opposed Weaver’s interpretation, describing it as mistaken and of no fundamental significance. The damage was done however. To his increasing discomfort, Shannon found himself regularly cited—although rarely understood—by social scientists in support of the new model of communication. The diagram above still regularly appears in student textbooks as the ‘Shannon and Weaver model’.

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6 In Shrensky 1997, Chapter 2. My thanks to Ruth Shrensky for bringing Shannon’s criticisms to my attention. She quotes Campbell (1982), saying “…Shannon, uneasy at the aura of glamour which had grown up around the subject [information theory] and uncomfortable about the bandwagon of publicity it had set in motion, took to print in 1956 to warn that information theory ‘has perhaps ballooned to an importance beyond its actual accomplishments’.” She also quotes Tribus (1979) “In 1961 Shannon, in a private conversation, made it quite clear to me that he considered applications of his work to problems outside [information theory] to be suspect and he did not attach fundamental significance to them”.

26 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
Since Weaver, there have been many models proposed to refine the early ‘transmission models’ of human communication. One of the earliest variations was the inclusion of ‘feedback’ by DeFleur. His model has all of the elements of Shannon and Weaver’s model, but he duplicated it and linked the two parts back-to-back to explain the ‘two-way’ nature of ordinary human communication. Osgood retained all of the basic elements of the Shannon and Weaver model, but re-arranged them to emphasise that the process of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ took place ‘within’ one person, so that while they might be logically separated as steps, they could not be separated in their location. He also wanted to get people to think of human communication as ‘circular’ in nature, not ‘one-way’ or ‘two-way’. Schramm’s model, used in the analysis of mass media, widens the factors at play in mass communication to include, at the sender’s end, the people that own, manage and run media organisations, along with those staff and professions that influence the structure and organisation of broadcasts. Other authors have included the influence of ‘context’ and ‘environment’ in the creation, transmission and reception of messages. Others again have tried to show the sense that communication takes place over time, and is an ongoing process rather than a once-off engagement.

Despite the many variations, there are a number of common elements to all of these models, as Sless shows, of which the most fundamental is, “they break up the process into three domains: all of the activities or processes which go towards the making of messages, the domain of the message itself, and the domain of the receiver of the message.”

7  McQuail and Windahl 1981 give many detailed examples, and provide more historical development.
8  ‘Feedback’ is, of course, a term derived from electrical feedback systems used by radio engineers, and reflects the ongoing use of ‘transmission’ metaphors to explain human communication.
9  DeFleur 1966
10 Osgood and Schramm 1954
11 Schramm 1973
12 Sless 1986, p12
THE CONDUIT METAPHOR

The second Modern form of communication-as-transmission was first systematically described twenty-five years ago by the linguist, Michael Reddy, in his now-classic article, The Conduit Metaphor. Reddy looked at the ways people talked about communication and analysed expressions they typically used. He found that the bulk of everyday English expressions were consistent with a framework he dubbed the ‘conduit metaphor’. The main part of the framework has four basic parts, which imply:

[1] language functions as a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another. Some expressions consistent with this part of the metaphor are:

It’s hard to get that idea across to him. I gave you that idea. Your reasons came through to us. You’ve presented us with some unfamiliar ideas. Language transfers meaning.

[2] in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words

It difficult to put my ideas into words. Try to pack more thoughts into fewer words. You can’t simply stuff ideas into a sentence any old way. The meaning is right there in the words.

[3] words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others.

His words carry little meaning. The introduction has a great deal of thought-content. Your words seem hollow. The sentence is without meaning. The idea is buried in terribly dense paragraphs. The letter was full of significance. The poem is bursting with ecstasy.

[4] in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings from words.

I have to struggle to get any meaning at all out of the sentence. Get this idea into your head. John says he can’t find your idea anywhere in the passage. The implications jump off the page.

There is a variation on the third part of the framework, says Reddy, which “overlooks words as containers and allows ideas and feelings to flow, unfettered and completely disembodied, in a kind of ambient space between human heads.” This may be, he suggests, because we are peripherally aware that words don’t actually have ‘insides’.

There are striking similarities between Reddy’s ‘conduit metaphor’ and the post-Shannon ‘transmission model’. The following table summarises most of the key parallels between the

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13 Reddy 1979
14 Examples based on Reddy 1979 and Lakoff and Johnson 1980
15 Reddy 1993, p170

28 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
two. If ideas, meanings and feelings are objects, and linguistic expressions are containers, then in communicating:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CONDUIT METAPHOR</strong></th>
<th><strong>TRANSMISSION MODEL</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a speaker</td>
<td>sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puts ideas (objects)</td>
<td>messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into words (containers)</td>
<td>encoding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and sends them</td>
<td>transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a conduit or through ‘ambient space’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a hearer</td>
<td>receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who takes the idea (object)</td>
<td>receiving signals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the words (containers)</td>
<td>decoding signals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both imply transference from one person to another. Both imply messages have an objective existence independent of human speakers or listeners. Both imply that the message ‘received’ was the message ‘sent’ (unless there was some ‘distortion’ in the transfer), which in turn implies that error-free communication is the norm. Both assume that on ‘receiving’ a message, the receiver will understand it. In both, the sender is active; the receiver passive. Both ignore interpretation, the context and history of communication, the subject being ‘communicated’, and the experience and skill of those involved.

There are several crucial differences between the conduit metaphor and the transmission model. Most importantly, in the conduit metaphor, ideas, thoughts or feelings are transferred physically between people; in the transmission model, some kind of physical symbol of thoughts and feelings is transferred—thus avoiding one of the chief problems of the conduit metaphor: how mental or emotional ‘stuff’ passes through the physical space between people or is ‘contained’ in words. The transmission model has an inverse problem: it assumes that the message transmitted corresponds unambiguously with ideas in peoples’ heads, but just how symbols have this extraordinary property of standing unambiguously for objects usually goes unexplained.

At first glance, it might be tempting to think that the conduit metaphor is an outgrowth of the transmission model. But the metaphor is enormous and extraordinarily pervasive. Reddy reports it accounts for approximately seventy per cent of the expressions we use to talk about communicating, and is rendered even more influential for the lack of any comparable or coherent rival. “Practically speaking, if you try to avoid all obvious conduit metaphor expressions in your usage, you are nearly struck dumb when communication becomes the topic”\(^{16}\). A metaphoric framework of this scale and complexity does not develop, completely unnoticed, in a mere thirty years. Indeed, as I will show in this thesis, it did not develop in thirty years; three thousand years may be closer the mark.

\(^{16}\) Reddy 1993, p178
It is very easy to find conduit metaphor examples from well before the twentieth century. In Chapters 3–5 and Appendices 3–6 and 8, I have repeated Reddy’s analysis with Ancient and early Modern texts, to show that expressions like those making up the Conduit Metaphor have been in use for as long as written records have existed in the Western tradition. The age and scale of conceptual systems like the conduit metaphor suggests that, far from being an offshoot of Weaver’s model, the reverse is more likely to be true—that the transmission model is a variant on the conduit metaphor and its various precursors. Reddy suggests precisely this: when Weaver adapted Shannon’s mathematical theory to human communication, he was lead astray by the Conduit Metaphor:

Weaver, it seems, could not hold [Shannon’s mathematical] theory clearly in mind when he spoke of human communication, and used conduit metaphor expressions almost constantly. “How precisely,” he asked, “do the transmitted symbols convey the desired meaning?” Or he compared two “messages, one heavily loaded with meaning and the other of which is pure nonsense” ... Weaver hedges significantly when he describes the action of the transmitter. It “changes” he says, “the message into the signal” [italics Weaver’s]. Really this is a strange description. A code is a relationship between two distinct systems. It does not “change” anything into anything else. It merely preserves in the second system the pattern or organisation present in the first. Marks or sounds are not transmuted into electronic pulses. Nor are thoughts and emotions magically metamorphosed into words. Again, this is conduit-metaphor thinking.17

Weaver was far from the only person to be influenced by the conduit metaphor. Another influential contemporary, who drew heavily on the conduit metaphor was Harold Lasswell. He summarised the process of communication in what is now known as the Lasswell Formula: “Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?”18 The appearance of the three part model (speaker, message, listener: “who says what ... to whom”) and the appearance of the word ‘channels’ (implying transference) indicate the influence of the conduit model. The addition of effects reflects Lasswell’s interests, and makes explicit a causality that is often implicit in other transmission models19. Students textbooks—always

17 Reddy 1993, p183
18 Lasswell 1948
19 Lasswell was a political scientist and, during the Second World War, was director of ‘war communications research’ (read, ‘propaganda’) at the US Library of Congress. Not surprisingly, he was critically interested in the outcomes of communicating, particularly in cases where there was no direct contact between ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’. The appearance of effects also reflects the vogue that behaviourist stimulus–response models enjoyed in American psychology at that time. Behaviourism was a rapidly expanding part of psychology, and particularly influential amongst the ‘aspiring’ social sciences. Lasswell himself worked at the Washington School of Psychiatry before the Second World War, and would have been familiar with behaviourist theory.
a useful indication of prevailing orthodoxies—routinely present versions of the transmission model that show the pervasive influence of the conduit metaphor.

There are several implications of saying that the use of the Conduit Metaphor (or its predecessors) was decisive in the appearance and form of the transmission model and assured its dominance early in the history of communication research. First, the fact that the transmission model was adopted so swiftly by so many implies that the Conduit Metaphor was so pervasive that that it went unnoticed, unquestioned and unanalysed. Second, the metaphor must be enormously flexible, to be able to embrace all of the variants of the transmission models that have been proposed since Lasswell and Weaver. Third, for the transmission models to have been woven so seamlessly with behaviourist psychology, positivist science, mathematical physics, and empiricist philosophy implies that the conduit metaphor must be a stratum of thought consistent with all of these, and more generally, part of the basic worldview of the modern West—part of its core set of assumptions about how the world is and operates. As I will show as I map out the broad development of communication-as-transmission, all three are true.

To conclude: let me summarise the features of communication-as-transmission so that we can recognise them when they appear\(^20\).

1. ‘senders’ or speakers have thoughts and feelings
2. ‘receivers’, audiences, or listeners are the goal of the sender’s thoughts and feelings
3. a message, with an independent, objective existence
4. communication ‘starts’ in one person and ‘ends’ in another: sometimes in the mind, at other times in the body (such as ‘inside’ a person’s head)
5. either (a) words and messages have ‘insides’ that may ‘contain’ meanings or emotions, or else be empty of them, or (b) words and messages are symbols of ideas in the sender’s mind
6. messages or symbols pass, ‘flow’ or are transferred from one person to another, either through space or via ‘channels’ or ‘conduits’
7. in ‘transmission’, words, symbols, meaning or sense may become distorted
8. what is sent may be thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, impressions, experience—almost anything ‘in’ mind that is not direct sensory experience

\(^{20}\) Not all elements will appear in every variation. Rather, what we will find are collections of similarities, like similarities between individual members of a family—some members may have a nose in common, others the eyes or teeth, which mark them as members of the family, but overall, there may be no single feature shared by every member of the clan. It may also be of course that some feature, such as the existence of a ‘speaker’ or ‘audience’, is also shared by individuals that are not members of the family as well. What we are looking for is not an ‘essence’ that is shared by every member of the family and no other individual, but rather a number of separate similarities which link all together.
whether it is words or thoughts being sent is often ambiguous
what ‘receivers’ understand is exactly what speakers intend they understand, unless distorted in ‘transmission’
perfect understanding—or replication of the original idea—is the norm
an absence of interpretation, context, experience
implied causation—messages affect receivers, making them either reconstruct the senders thoughts and feelings, or else act as the sender desires.
CHAPTER THREE

METAPHORS CONCERNING SPEECH IN HOMER

ABSTRACT The oldest version of communication-as-transmission is built from metaphors on breath and the organs of speech: speech is breath; breath emerges from the speaker’s lungs; communication takes place when the speaker places their words in the lungs of the listener. The situation is complicated by the use of the same organs and metaphors in what we today call emotion, thought and mind. Explanations of communication and speech are intertwined with—and possibly the source of—our ideas about the mind.

The oldest texts in the Western tradition large enough for detailed analysis are the Iliad and the Odyssey. Neither, of course, is a text on communication. But we can glean from them how the archaic Greeks understood communication by looking at the ways in which Homeric poets described speaking, how people used it and were affected by it, as well as at the metaphors they used to explain it. In this chapter, I have used examples from the longer and older of the two, the Iliad, except where the Odyssey provides clearer examples.

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1 Internal evidence suggests that the Iliad and the Odyssey date from around the early eighth century BC. They were preserved in oral recitation and, according to Greek tradition, were first transcribed around 600 BC in Athens, although the earliest surviving papyri and quotations from classical authors suggest there were many variations on both tales.

2 The Iliad and the Odyssey are not products of poets in the modern sense, but of oral bards, aoidoi. A key feature of oral poetry is that it is not memorised verbatim but, in each performance, the poem is constructed anew—literally ‘re-told’—out of a vast stock of stock phrases and themes. This stock is not the possession of any individual: to be preserved over the long periods we know these poems survived, the aoidoi had to draw on the language and idioms of the communities they lived in, and be intelligible to those communities: an unintelligible bard was unlikely to survive, much less be regarded as a genius as Homer was. Consequently, we can take the description of communication presented in the Homeric poems to be representative not only of the individual bards from whom the Iliad and the Odyssey were first transcribed, but also of the wider Greek-speaking communities of the eighth to sixth centuries BC. Appendix 2 discusses the characteristics of oral memory and the oral communities that it was used in.

3 There is a limit to the amount of ‘gleaning’ the Iliad and the Odyssey can survive before being distorted from their true nature as tales describing the siege of Troy and the journey of continued on next page...
We need to be aware, when looking at Homer, that the conceptual world of the archaic Greeks is very different from our own. In particular, there was not really a category for ‘mental stuff’: no words that translate naturally as ‘mind’, ‘thought’, ‘thinking’, ‘idea’ or ‘concept’. Emotional life is also curiously limited from our perspective. While there are terms for immediate feelings, such as anger, delight, rage, hate, joy, and lust, there are no corresponding abstract terms, such as ‘sadness’ or ‘anticipation’. Everything we describe as ‘mental’ and most of what we call ‘emotional’, the *Iliad* describes physiologically: either as sensations and hypostases, or by relating them to organs of the body. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the important organs and physiological sensations are, in order of frequency:

1. *thumos*
2. *phrenes*, usually plural, but occasionally singular, *phrēn*
3. *kradīē*, which is equivalent to the heart
4. *kēr*, heart
5. *ētor*
6. *noos*
7. *psukhē*.

In this chapter, I have focussed on the two most frequent terms, *thumos* and the *phrenes*, because together they cover almost all aspects of communication in Homer. Their functions however are not limited to communication. In particular they relate to the development of what would later become understood as emotion, mind and thought—all of which became highly problematic in the later history of ideas about communication. Consequently, in this chapter, I discuss the entire system of concepts concerning *thumos* and the *phrenes* within which ideas about communication developed. This chapter begins with a summary of what their physiological roles were in Homer, then describes how what we understand as emotional and mental life is explained metaphorically using these terms. At the end, I have reconstructed the system of communication-as-transmission implicit in Homer.

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4 From the Homeric *noos* evolved the important, but quite different term of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, *nous*, mind.
5 *Psukhē* evolved into the important term for soul and mind of the Greek philosophers, which usually appears spelt *psyche* in English texts.
THUMOS AND THE PHRENES

The most commonly mentioned organs in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the *phrenes* (or sometimes *prapides*). They appear directly 180 times in the *Iliad* and in a number of derived terms, such as *metaphrenes*.

As most translators note, *phrenes* is difficult to render in English, and even the Greeks of the classical age found it perplexing. After Hippocrates and the establishment of systematic medicine in the early fourth century BC, the term *phrenes* acquired a specialised medical sense meaning ‘midriff’ or ‘diaphragm’. This is how Plato uses the word in the *Timaeus*⁶, and most translators do likewise when the organ is being described. But usually this does not make sense in Homer. For instance, the *phrenes* are plural⁷, which the midriff and diaphragm clearly are not. They are described as *melainai*, ‘blackish’ or ‘dark-coloured’⁸, whereas the diaphragm is pink. The *phrenes* are repeatedly described as being ‘filled up with’ *thumos* and *menos*, and *thumos* being ‘contained in’ or ‘moving within’ the *phrenes*⁹, which implies that they have some space within them—hardly a characteristic of a thin muscular sheet. Furthermore, the *phrenes* are said to ‘shut in the heart’¹⁰ or to surround it at the front. Homer repeatedly points to the *phrenes* being in the chest, not the abdomen¹¹. Even the most elementary understanding of anatomy would not confuse the position of the diaphragm this badly. Another useful source of information about the nature of the *phrenes* are the descriptions of battle wounds in the *Iliad*. When Patroklos pulls his spear out of Sarpedon’s chest, the *phrenes* came out with it¹²; not what would happen if a spear was thrust to the diaphragm, firmly attached to the ribs as it is. Nor would we expect the diaphragm to be damaged as the result of a chest wound. Wounds to the liver do not entail any mention of damage to the far more important *phrenes*¹³, yet if the *phrenes* is the diaphragm or midriff, it must have been pierced by sword or spear. Soldiers stabbed between the shoulder-blades are said to have been pierced ‘in the *metaphrenes*’, literally ‘behind the *phrenes*’¹⁴; an odd term if the *phrenes* means ‘diaphragm’.

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⁶ Plato *Timaeus* 70a
⁷ The singular *phrēn* is used very occasionally, but for metrical reasons only.
⁸ *Iliad* 1:103, 17:499, 17:573
⁹ *Iliad* 8:202, 9:458
¹⁰ *Iliad* 16:481
¹¹ *Iliad* 10:9, 16:503
¹² *Iliad* 16:503
¹³ *Iliad* 20:470
¹⁴ *Iliad* 2:265, 5:40
Onians\textsuperscript{15} presents a powerful argument that, in Homer, the *phrenes* were the lungs. This would amply explain their position in the chest, in front of or surrounding the heart\textsuperscript{16}; their ‘dark’ grey-blue colour; their hollow nature; and the fact that they are not damaged in abdominal wounds but are in chest wounds.

Closely associated with the *phrenes* is *thumos*. *Thumos* is the most important of the physiological terms in Homer: it appears over 430 times in the *Iliad* alone, nearly three times as often as any other term. *Thumos* gives translators even more trouble than the *phrenes*; some describe it as ‘untranslatable’. Etymologically, it seems related to smoke and vapour\textsuperscript{18}. It is a substance frequently ‘poured’ into the *phrenes*. It is no great leap to guess that if the *phrenes* are the lungs, then *thumos* is breath. *Thumos* however also has associations with blood, is frequently hot, and is distinguished from normal air, *aēr*.

This interpretation of *thumos* as breath fits neatly with many passages in the *Iliad*. For instance, when Hector is recovering from a blow to the chest from Ajax’s stone, Apollo finds him:

\begin{quote}
...’Εκτορα δ’ ἔδιπλε, \\

ημενον, οὐδ’ ἔτι κεῖτο, νέον δ’ ἐσαξεῖρε τὸ θυμόν, \\

ἀμφὶ ἕ γιγνόσκων ἐτάρους ἄταρ ἄδη μα καὶ ἑδρὼς \\

πάντες’…
\end{quote}

...sitting now, no longer sprawled, as he gathered *thumos* back into him and recognised his companions about him. The sweat and hard breathing began to stop... \textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Onians 1954, Chapter 2. Snell (1953), Adkins (1960) and Jaynes (1976) come to much the same conclusion, although Onians’ treatment is far the most thorough. Onians also cites passages from early lyric poets and playwrights, writing before Greek scientific terminology was established, who seem to use the term *phrenes* in ways similar to Homer. Onians also lists a number of other scholars and scientists that suggest both parallel or divergent views (Onians 1954, p21).

\textsuperscript{16} The Latin equivalent, *praecordia*, preserves rather more transparently the position of this organ in front of (*praec*) the heart (*cordis*).

\textsuperscript{17} *Iliad* 1:193, 8:169, 11:411, 15:163, 16:435, 17:106, 18:15 amongst many other examples.

\textsuperscript{18} *thumia* means ‘to burn so as to produce smoke’. Onians (1954, p44–45) finds suggestive the similarity between *thumos* and words like the Latin *fumus* and the Sanscrit *dhu* (both words mean ‘smoke’). Adkins (1960, p17) feels the association of smoke to *thumos* relates more to “the hot, swirling, surging—and sometimes choking—sensations produced by feelings of anger and other violent impulses”.

\textsuperscript{19} *Iliad* 15:239–242. Unless I have noted otherwise, I have used Lattimore’s translation of the *Iliad* (1951) throughout.
In other words, he is recovering from being winded and stunned, and is getting his breath back. Similarly, when Odysseus revives from near drowning, his *thumos* returns to his *phrenes*.²⁰

It would be a mistake however to believe that *thumos* and *phrenes* are identical to our modern English words *breath* and *lungs*. In our modern age, we see our lungs as parts of an integrated whole we call a ‘body’. In Homer, there is neither a term for, nor concept of, the body as a whole; all we see is an aggregate of organs and limbs. All of the organs are autonomous of the character to some extent and some, like the *phrenes* and *thumos*, are quite independent, credited with agency of their own. (This lack of cohesion will be crucial for explaining thought in Homer.)

**THE FUNCTION OF THUMOS AND PHRENES IN HOMER**

*Thumos* as life substance

Most of the time in the *Iliad*, the *phrenes* or *thumos* do not refer to organs of the body. Rather, they are the basis for metaphors of a great number of activities. For instance, when someone dies, their *thumos* ‘flies’ from their limbs or bones:

> ὁ δὲ Ἐπίκλες ὀφτασκεν ἔπιον
> ἔγχει δὲ Πήδαιον οὖσαν ἔπιον
> ἐγχεὶ δεξίων ὀμον. ὁ δὲ ἐβραχε θυμόν ἄποθον,
> καὶ δὲ πέσα ἐν κονίῃ σι μακρόν, ἀπὸ δὲ ἔπιστοι θυμός.

[hit by a stone] Epikles dropped like a diver from the high bastion, and the *thumos* left his bones.²¹

...but the spear fixed in the right shoulder of Pedaros the horse, who screamed as he blew his *thumos* away, and went down in the noise in the dust, and the *thumos* flitted from him.²²

*Thumos*, literally interpreted as ‘breath’, obviously is not a property of bones or limbs. But used metaphorically to mean ‘life’, ‘spirit’, or ‘life–activity’, then it makes sense to talk of *thumos* going out of a person or an animal as they die and their limbs cease to move.

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²⁰ Odyssey 5:456–458

²¹ Iliad 12:385–386

²² Iliad 16:467–469. See also Iliad 23:880, 12:386 and 16:743
Breathing is an obvious sign of life, so it should not be surprising that people let breath stand for ‘life’ or attribute to it the properties that animate otherwise inert flesh\(^\text{23}\). Modern English has a few metaphorical expressions consistent with the idea of life ending when breathing stops: “He breathed his last”, “She gasped out her life”, “With her last breath...” or simply “He’s stopped breathing”. It is metaphors on \textit{thumos} and the \textit{phrenes} that are the key to understanding how people communicate in Homer.

**Emotion and feelings**

Emotion in the \textit{Iliad} is described quite differently from the way we talk about it today. We usually think of emotions as internal events which are prior to, and the cause of, ‘displays’ of emotions. When we say “I cried because I was sad” or “I laughed because I was happy”, we imply the emotion ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ preceded and precipitated the outward sign, ‘laughing’ or ‘crying’. By contrast, people in Homer have no ‘insides’ where emotions can reside\(^\text{24}\). There is only laughing, crying, and so on. They are not the signs of emotion—they are the emotion. For instance, at the beginning of the last book of the \textit{Iliad}, Achilles mourns for the dead Patroclus:

... nor did sleep who subdues all come over him, but he tossed and turned from one side to the other ... he let fall the swelling tears, lying sometimes on his side, sometimes on his back, now again prone on his face; then he would stand upright, and pace turning in distraction along the beach of the sea...  

This is not grief as an internal event, but a description of what someone looking on would see. Nonetheless, we are left in no doubt about how Achilles feels as he tosses and turns in his bed, weeps, and paces the beach. This is the way that people’s grief, rage, fear and envy are usually described in Homer—as what can be seen from the perspective of an onlooker.

Idomeneus describes the characteristics of cowards and brave men:

the skin of the coward changes colour one way and another, 
and the heart inside him has no control to make him sit steady, 
but he shifts his weight from one foot to another, then settles firmly on both feet, and the heart inside his chest pounds violent 
as he thinks of the death spirits ['seeks death gods'], and his teeth chatter together.

\(^{23}\) Our word \textit{spirit} has \textit{spiro}, meaning ‘breath’, as its etymological root. The other obvious sign of life is warmth. We find \textit{thumos} described as hot and so is presumably responsible for the body’s heat.

\(^{24}\) Jaynes 1976, particularly pp257–281

\(^{25}\) \textit{Iliad} 24:4–6, 9–12
but the brave man’s skin will not change colour, nor is he too much frightened.  

There are times in the *Iliad* when the perspective shifts to describe the feelings that characters themselves experience. When this happens though, what we are given is a description of the physical sensations—‘feelings’ in the most literal sense. Sometimes we still explain emotional states this way in modern English. An actor with stage-fright may say “I feel sick” rather than “I am frightened”. Some other expressions we have for describing fear are:

- A *hair-raising* flight.
- A *stomach-churning* experience.
- I had *butterflies in my stomach*.
- The film gave me *goosebumps*.
- He makes my *skin crawl*.
- He broke out in a *cold sweat*.
- I went *weak at the knees*.

Modern English has hundreds of similar expressions, particularly for strong feelings like fear. We describe what we ‘feel’ without naming an emotion. Describing the physical sensations—‘feelings’—is the normal way in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of describing what we would call ‘emotions’, although both poems do use a few terms for strong emotions such as fear, anger, fury, and grief.

In Homer, there is also an association made between the feeling and the organ where the feeling is experienced. The organs are frequently said to be responsible for the feeling or are the source of it. There are many examples in modern English of this type of association. The most important organ associated with the feelings in English is, of course, the heart.

- His *heart* leapt. Her *heart* sank. His *heart* swelled with pride. He’s her sweet-*heart*.
- She’s *heart*-broken. He’s hard-*hearted*. She’s *heartless*.

**Thumos, phrenes and emotion**

In Homer, the *phrenes* take the leading role in what we call emotional life. For instance, when Agamemnon weeps with fear, the picture in the *Iliad* is physiological, not emotional:

> ὅς πικάν’ ἐν στήθεσαν ἄνεστενάχις’ Ἀγάμεμνον
> νεώθεν ἐξ κραδής, προμένοντο δὲ οἱ φρένες ἐντός.

In close succession came the cries in his breast ... from the heart, and his *phrenes* quivered within him.  

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26 *Iliad* 13:279–285. Lattimore has translated *kēras oimenōi* as “thinks of the death spirits”, but *menos* in Homer is physical strength or a wish experienced as physical desire; it is not mental.

Sailors, shipwrecked in a storm, feel terror as a weak, shaking feeling inside the abdomen and chest:

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...τρομέοναι δὲ τε φρένα ναῦται
dειδιότες τυπθὸν γὰρ ὑπὲκ θανάτου φερόνται:
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...the phren of the seamen are shaken with fear, as they are carried only a little way out of death’s reach.\(^{28}\)

When someone has just been told bad news, the phrenes feel pain:

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ὠς φάτο, τόν δ᾿ ἄχος ὁξὺ κατὰ φρένα τύψε βαθεῖαν
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She spoke, and a sharp pain smote him in his deep phrēn.\(^{29}\)

The phrenes are also where people feel pride:

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ὠς Αἰνεία Ὑμιὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γεγήθει,
ὠς ἵδε λαὸν ἐθνὸς ἐπισπόμενον ἐστὶν αὐτῷ ...
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...when the sheep follow the lead-ram as they leave the pasture to drink, and make proud the phrenes of the shepherd...\(^{30}\)

More often, the phrenes are not merely the site of feelings. Homer repeatedly speaks of the phrenes being ‘filled up’ with strength (menos) or anger (kholos)\(^{31}\).

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μένεος δὲ μέγα φρένες ἀμφὶ μέλαιναι
πίπλαντ’ ...
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[...and among them stood up Agamemnon raging], the phrenes within filled black to the brim with anger...\(^{32}\)

Given the close association of thumos with the phrenes, we might expect similar expressions linking thumos with feelings. We do, and far more commonly than with the phrenes. Just as the phrenes of the sailors were shaken in their phrenes when they were afraid, Odysseus clears corpses out of the way of a chariot so that the horses will “not be shaken within [their

\(^{28}\) Iliad 15:627–628

\(^{29}\) Iliad 19:125. See also Iliad 1:362, 8:124 and 22:43

\(^{30}\) Iliad 13:491–493

\(^{31}\) Physiologically, people in deep rage or exercising all their strength take large, deep breaths, filling their lungs with oxygen to fuel the exertion. The flush of oxygen is also associated with a release of adrenalin, causing a rush of energy and strength. It is easy to see how people could feel as though they were being ‘filled up’ with strength through the lungs.

\(^{32}\) Iliad 1:101–104. Describing rage as ‘black’ or ‘dark’, melainai, may be from association with the lungs which are usually either splotched with dark patches or else completely black.
thumos], at stepping on dead men.”

Like the phrenes, the thumos may also be ‘filled’ with anger or hate.

Just as the thumos is related to the breath, so breath in turn is used to refer to a person’s emotional state. Different emotional states are associated with different breathing patterns: in rage breathing is rough, fast and shallow; when people are calm, their breathing is deep, slow and regular. Different breathing cycles are quite easy to see, so it is not surprising that people associate different types of breathing with a person’s (imputed) emotional state. Modern English has many expressions associating breath and different ways of breathing with emotion:

She caught her breath with surprise. He panted with lust. She gasped in horror. We held our breaths in suspense. You can all breathe more easily when the exam is over. There was a sigh of relief. The audience yawned with boredom.

Although the treatment of thumos and phrenes in describing emotion is often parallel in Homer, they are not entirely interchangeable. In particular, thumos is far more independent of a person than are their phrenes, and often has agency of its own. Sometimes thumos is the instigator of action or emotion, and the character themselves seems little more than an onlooker. For instance below, it is not Ajax but his thumos that wants to fight:

καὶ δ’ ἐμoi αὐτὸ δὴ μὴ σπέσησαι φίλοισι
μᾶλλον ἑφορμάται πολεμίζειν ἢδὲ μέχρεσθαι
mine own thumos also within my breast is the more eager to war and do battle...

Similarly, it is not Aeneas, but his thumos that is glad:

ὁς Αἰνεία θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γεγήθει,
ὡς ἢδὲ λαῶν ἐπισπάται ἐπισπάται ἐξαι ἀυτῶ
even so the thumos of Aeneas was glad in his breast when he saw the throng of his host.

33 Iliad 10:491-493
34 Jaynes brings together statistics on the breathing cycle of people in various mental, emotional, and physical states such as the time spent breathing in as a ratio of the total breathing cycle. "This is about 16 percent in speech, 23 percent in laughter, 30 percent in active mental work, 43 percent when at rest, 60 percent or more in excitement, 71 percent in subjects imagining a wonderful or surprising situation, and 75 percent in sudden fright.” (Jaynes 1976, p264)
35 These expressions are different from Homeric metaphors, because in each case the emotion or feeling (surprise, lust, horror, expectation, relief, boredom) causes the particular type of breathing. That is, there is a separation drawn between the two. In Homer, all we have is the description of breathing. People in Homer do not ‘sigh with relief’—they just ‘breathe easier’.
36 Iliad 13:73-74
We can summarise all of these expressions with three metaphors:

1. THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE THE ORGANS THAT FEEL
2. THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE WHERE PEOPLE FEEL
3. FEELING IS BREATHING (although obviously, not all kinds of feeling involve breathing, and not every kind of breathing involves a feeling.)

THE HOMERIC CONCEPT OF MIND AND THOUGHT

Mind

In the examples above, the phrenes and thumos might appear to behave somewhat like what we call ‘the mind’, and thumos also like ‘thought’ or ‘thoughts’. Here is another apparently consistent example, where Agamemnon praises a captured girl above his wife, Clytemnestra:

ἐπεὶ οὗ ἐθέν ἐστι χερείων,
οὐ δέμας οὐδὲ φυήν, οὕτ άρ φρένας οὔτε τι ἔργα.

...for she is in no way inferior,
nor in build, nor stature, nor phrenes, nor in accomplishment.38

Phrenes translated as ‘lungs’ here makes no sense, but in the context, it would translate well as ‘wits’ or ‘intelligence’. Elsewhere in Homer, the phrenes and thumos may also take delight listening to music or speeches.

Μυρμιδόνων δ’ ἐπὶ τε κλαυσάς καὶ νῆας ἱκέσθην,
τὸν δ’ ἐξών φρένα τερπόμενον φόρμιγγα λιγεύν ...

Now they came beside the shelter and ships of the Myrmidons,
and there found Achilles delighting his phrenes in a lyre... 39

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and there found Achilles delighting his phrenes in a lyre... 39

Ως εἰπὼν ὠτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμόν ἐκάστου.

So he spoke, and stirred the thumos and strength in each man.40

More unusually, the phrenes may also take delight in sight: an unusual activity, it might seem, for the lungs.

37 Iliad 13:494–495. See also Iliad 14:156.
38 Iliad 1:114–115
39 Iliad 9:185–186. For another example of music delighting the phrenes, see Iliad 1:472–474.
40 Iliad 15:500
When he had satisfied his phrenes with looking at the intricate armour...⁴¹

When he had satisfied his phrenes with looking at the intricate armour...

I shall stay here upon the fold of Olympus still, watching, to please my phrenes.⁴²

There are many examples of the phrenes knowing and perceiving things. When Hector becomes separated from the other Trojans in battle, it is not he but his phrenes that recognises this:

"Εκτωρ δ’ ἐγνώ ἥσιν ἐνὶ φρεσί φώνησέν τε"  

And Hector knew the truth within his phrenes.⁴³

Or when Achilles recognises the disguised King Priam, he says:

καὶ δὲ σε γιγνώσκω, Πρίαμε, φρεσίν, οὐδὲ με λήθεις  

I know you, Priam, in my phrenes.⁴⁴

Thumos may also be involved in knowing and seeing, either in conjunction with the phrenes, or by itself.

εὖ γὰρ ἐγὼ τόδε οἶδα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμὸν  

I know this thing well in my phrenes and my thumos knows it.⁴⁵

Memory too is a function of speaking, and hence of thumos and the phrenes.⁴⁶ After reciting a list of warriors’ names, Homer finishes by saying:

τῶν δ’ ἄλλων τίς κεν ἦσι φρεσίν οὐνόματ’ εἴποι  

But what man could tell forth from his phrenes the names of others.⁴⁷

In understanding the role of the phrenes and thumos, we need to avoid an anachronism. In these examples, the phrenes and thumos may appear to be equivalent to ‘the mind’ or

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⁴¹ Iliad 19:19  
⁴² Iliad 20:23. For further examples of the phrenes and sight, see Iliad 9:186 and 19:172–174.  
⁴³ Iliad 22:296  
⁴⁴ Iliad 24:563. For similar formulas where the phrenes knows, see Iliad 1:333, 5:406, 6:447 and 21:61  
⁴⁵ Iliad 4:163  
⁴⁶ The association of memory with speech is a normal one in oral communities. See Appendix 2 for a discussion.  
⁴⁷ Iliad 17:260
‘mental activity’, but the concept of ‘mind’ is a much later one, for which there is no parallel in Homer. The phrenes are not ‘the mind’, although they are where a person feels. Nor is thumos ‘the mind’ or ‘thought’ or any kind of ‘mental stuff’. We have to understand each of the examples above as primarily a physical experience in some part of the body.

Thinking

Just as there is no ‘mind’ or ‘mental stuff’ in Homer, characters in the Iliad do not appear to be conscious of thinking. They do not deliberate privately; they do not make conscious choices; they do not reason with themselves. This is not to say that Homer’s characters are thoughtless or automatons, but rather that what we understand as ‘thinking’ is treated quite differently.

To understand how Homer deals with thought, we have to shed several modern assumptions. To do this, I need to construct several anachronistic metaphors, that do not occur in Homer, but which will help explain the concepts used in the poems.

In the previous section, I showed that a person’s thumos and phrenes could be delighted in speech or music or sights, as well as be the site of strong feelings, such as anger or hate or lust. In Homer, there is no significant difference in the treatment between what we would

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48 Jaynes (1976), Snell (1953), Adkins (1960)

49 This might appear impossible in some of the examples, such as where sight is experienced in the chest. However, while it is physically impossible, it is nonetheless quite plausible that people did genuinely experience this sensation. Compare this situation to the modern location of the mind, where most modern people ‘feel’ themselves thinking ‘inside’ their head. At a physical level, this is just as impossible as experiencing sight in the chest, because there are no nerves inside the cranium capable of physical stimulation. What appears to happen in both cases is that people experience what they expect to experience.

There are many parallel examples in abnormal psychology, particularly on the mechanisms involved in neuroses. There is a large body of psychological research into ‘suggestion’, when a person experiences what they expect to experience. For instance, a hypochondriac who suspects they are suffering a disease may experience all of the symptoms of a disease they tell themselves they are suffering from. Neurotic reactions do not have to be under the person’s conscious control. For instance, asthmatics, told that they are going to inhale a large dose of allergens, can produce all of the physiological reactions, down to the production of histamines, even when they actually inhale a placebo. In relation to the ‘feeling’ of ourselves being ‘in’ our heads, there are well documented psychiatric conditions where a person complains that their head, chest or abdomen ‘feels’ empty—an interesting phenomenon as the head, chest and belly are the places where most cultures locate what we would understand as ‘the mind’ or ‘the soul’.
see as ‘emotional’ and ‘intellectual’ activities. If the two domains are treated the same, and if we were discussing metaphors in modern English, then we might expect three metaphors for thinking which parallel those I discussed earlier for feeling:

1. THINKING IS BREATHING
2. THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE WHERE PEOPLE THINK
3. THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE ORGANS THAT THINK

From a modern point of view, all three appear absurd. We associate thinking with the brain not the lungs, and breath and breathing have no connection with thinking. There are no expressions in ordinary modern English consistent with any of these metaphors. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* however, there are many expressions that we can understand as consistent with all three metaphors (remembering that ‘thinking’ does not occur literally in Homer, and that this is an exercise to help us understand, not a literal rendering.)

Expressions consistent with the THINKING IS BREATHING metaphor are rare. But we can understand it as a concatenation of two others; both of which appear commonly:

4. SPEAKING IS BREATHING
5. THINKING IS SPEAKING.

**Speaking is breathing**

The first metaphor, SPEAKING IS BREATHING, is obvious: speaking *always* involves breathing; it is impossible to speak without exhaling. So it would be perfectly natural to conceive of one in terms of the other. In modern English, we have many expressions implying just this:

We’re just *gasbagging*. He’s full of *hot air*. Don’t *breathe* a word. She yelled at the top of her *lungs*. The speaker was long-*winded*. Save your *breath*. He *choked* on his words.

In Homer, one word used for the verb ‘to speak’ is *aïsthein*, meaning more literally ‘to breathe’ or ‘to wheeze’.

\[
\text{Αἰσθεῖν} \varepsilon \iota \iota \upsilon \omicron \pi \
\]

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\]

The hero [Achilles] spoke like this and bent [persuaded] the *phrenes* of his brother, since he urged [aisima] wisely. And Menelaos obeyed him...

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50 *Aïsthein* is related to the Latin words *asthma* ‘gasp, wheeze’ and *aspere* ‘to breathe’, and the Sanskrit *asmi*, ‘to breathe’.

51 *Iliad* 7:120
Adjectives of speech are also another useful insight into how the metaphor speaking is breathing is used in Homer. *Pepnuein*, meaning ‘to breathe’, is often used in the context of knowledge or wisdom being breathed into or out of a person. So, for instance, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope’s strategy to avoid her unwelcome suitors is breathed into her:

φάρος μὲν μοι πρῶτον ἐνέπνευσε φρεσὶ δαίμον,
στησάμενη μὲγαν ἰστόν

Some god breathed into my *phrenes* to set up a great loom and weave a robe.

Onians translates the root *pneō* as ‘‘I breathe’. …[but] it means not merely ‘I have received breath’ and so ‘I have breath’ but also something like ‘I have intelligence, wisdom’… wisdom is ‘breathed into’ a man. *Pepneusthai*, usually translated ‘thoughtful’ or ‘wise’, is the stock epithet for several characters. A related adjective, *pepneumenos*, ‘wise’ or ‘prudent’, can also be applied to someone’s speech.

παῖδὸς γὰρ μυθὸν πεπνυμένον ἐνθέτο θυμῷ.

Penelope put the *pepnumenon* words of her son into her *thumos*.

An alternative Homer uses for *pepnumenos* is to say someone has *phrenes euthlas*, or ‘good *phrenes*’, which again links breath with speech.

Thinking is speaking

The second metaphor, thinking is speaking, would arise easily in a culture without writing, such as the one the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are composed in. Imagine people in such a community trying to decide whether a person is wise or not. In the *Iliad*, there are basically three tests by which a person is judged: by the excellence of their advice, by how well they handle themselves in debates and councils, and the extent to which they can persuade others. For a culture without a term for (or apparently concept of) ‘thinking’, what could be more natural than to treat wisdom as good speaking?

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52 There are other interpretations on the use of *pepnuien* amongst different translators. Onians however devotes considerable space, supported by dozens of examples, to show that it must relate to the activity of breathing, and options offered by other translators make neither etymological nor contextual sense. See Onians 1954, pp56–59, for this complex argument.

53 *Odyssey* 19:138–139 (translated by Murray)

54 Onians 1954, p58–59

55 *Odyssey* 1:361

56 *Iliad* 17:470
It is a naive recognition of the importance of words in thinking ... We today may regard [words] as sounds or auditory images, symbols, but it was natural to identify them with the breath with which they were uttered.  

But it is not only the activity of what we would call ‘thinking’ that is described in terms of speech: so are ‘thoughts’. In the following example, the jealous Hera has found out that Zeus and the goddess Thetis have been conspiring together, and she demands to know what he is up to:

“τίς δὴ αὖ τοι, δολομῆτα, θεῶν συμφράσκασαι βουλᾶς;
αἰεὶ τοι φῆλον ἐστὶν ἐμὲ ἀπονόσφιν ἑόντα
κρυπταία φρονεόντα δικαζόμενα. οὐδὲ τί πώ μοι
πρόφρων πέταλος εἰπεῖν ἐπος ὃτι νοήμης. ”
Τὴν δ’ ἠμεῖρετ ἐπειτὰ πατήρ ἄνδρον τε θεῶν τε-
“‘Ἡμι, μὴ δὴ πάντας ἑμοὺς ἐπέλεησε νῦνος
εἰδήσειν χαλεποῖ τοι ἔσοντ’ ἁλόχω περ ἔνυσθ.
ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν κ’ ἐπεικὲς ἐκονύμεν, οὐ τὶς ἐπειτὰ
οὔτε θεῶν πρότερος τὸν γ’ εἰσεῖται οὔτ’ ἀνθρώπον.”
“Treacherous one, what god has been planning counsels with you?
Always it is dear to your phrenes in my absence to think of
secret things and decide on them. Never have you patience
frankly to speak forth to me the thing you purpose.”
Then to her the father of gods and men made answer:
“Hera, do not go on hoping that you will hear all my
thoughts, since these will be too hard for you, though you are my wife.
Any thought that is right for you to listen to, no one
neither man nor any immortal shall hear it before you. ...”

In this translation, Lattimore—a modern translator writing for modern English readers with
modern expectations—has naturally used words ‘think’ and ‘thoughts’. But in Homeric
Greek, the entire scene is cast in terms of speech. The expression “hear my thoughts”
indicates that what Lattimore has translated as ‘thoughts’ can be spoken. The words that
Lattimore has translated as ‘thought’—muthos and epos—are not properly mental terms,
but related to speaking also: muthos is the source of our word myth; epos the source of epic.
In Homeric Greek they mean roughly, ‘speech’, ‘spoken words’ or ‘that which is uttered’;
the related verb eipein means broadly ‘to speak’ or ‘to utter’. So the phrase emous epielpeo
muthous eiđesin translates more literally as “Hear all of my words”. Similarly, epieikes
akouemen ou τις epieita would be more closely rendered “words that are right for you to

57 Onians 1954, p14
58 iliad 1:541–548
hear.” (To make one more anachronistic metaphor: what we see here is a metaphor, THOUGHTS ARE WORDS, which is consistent with the metaphor THINKING IS SPEAKING.)

Even when Zeus will not say what he is ‘thinking’, his muthoi are not ‘mental things’ with an existence in the mind before they are uttered in speech—the way modern thinkers conceive of thoughts. They exist simply as words that have not been said, ‘trapped within the phrenes’. This image appears several times elsewhere in Homer. For instance, when Achilles says how he hates liars:

I detest the man, who hides one thing in [his] phrenes, and speaks forth another.\(^59\)

The logic of the metaphor allows us to make complete sense of this concept. To cast the metaphors in modern English: if THOUGHTS ARE WORDS, and WORDS ARE BREATH, and in speech words are breathed out of the phrenes, then an ‘unsaid thought’ (as we might call it) is for Homer an ‘unsaid word’, and thus an ‘unbreathed word’. And if a breath has not been breathed out, then it must still be within the phrenes.

This cycle of metaphors brings us closer to understanding the other metaphors I suggested at the beginning of this section: THUMOS AND PHERENES ARE THE ORGANS THAT THINK and THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE WHERE PEOPLE THINK. But we can also see how both need modifying. While the phrenes are certainly where muthoi and epoi come from, we cannot move directly to the metaphor that people think in their phrenes or thumos—or even create words in them. The problem of whether and how people deliberate remains.

**Deliberation and reflection**

If we make the same assumptions about physiology as Homer, then the metaphors on breath and speaking discussed above will explain all aspects of what we call ‘thinking’ as we observe it in other people—after all, what we call thinking we actually impute to other people: all we actually observe are their actions and what they say. But they will not do to explain our personal experience of thinking. Nowadays, we treat thinking as an ‘internal’ experience, in which we make decisions in the ‘privacy of our own mind’. There is no parallel in Homer. People do not have ‘minds’ with ‘insides’ in which they may ‘think privately’\(^60\). While the thumos and phrenes—where muthoi and epoi come from—may be said to be ‘filled up’, there is no implication in the Iliad that they are ever ‘empty’ or have space within them.

\(^59\) Iliad 9:312–313

\(^60\) Jaynes 1976, pp259–272. There are a handful of exceptions where people do hold things ‘inside’, but literary evidence suggests that they are later additions to the poems.
There is a second impediment to reflective thought in Homer. I noted earlier that the Homeric Greeks do not describe the human body as a unit, a whole, but rather as an aggregate of limbs and organs. Without a notion of a unified, integrated body, it seems impossible that the physiologically-minded Homeric Greeks could conceive of a unified self—and scholars agree that there is no self in Homer\(^61\). Consequently, there would be no way that Homeric Greeks could conceive of ‘thinking to my self’. But rather than apparently prohibiting the idea of self-thinking, this lack of integration may be the key to how the archaic Greeks understood decision-making.

Imagine someone trying to work out the solution to some problem. Now, a person who is unsure about what to do, trying to reach a decision, is someone in search of wise advice. As we have seen, the source of wisdom—which is understood as a type of speech—was the phrenes, and by association, thumos. Because the Homeric Greeks apparently conceived of both the phrenes and thumos as autonomous agents like another person, a character might ask them for advice in the same way that they might discuss the problem with another person. This is precisely how deep reflection is described in Homer: as debating with the phrenes or thumos. When Menelaos is unsure what to do:

\[
\text{ὀχθήσας δ' ἔφα εἶπε πρὸς ὄν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν}
\]

deeply disturbed, he spoke with his own great-hearted thumos.\(^{62}\)

And in case we should have any doubts that it is his thumos he is addressing, rather than him simply ‘talking to himself’, he asks:

\[
\text{ἄλλα τί ἐγείρα ταῦτα φίλος διελέειαθο θυμός}
\]

Yet still, why does the thumos within me debate on these things?\(^{63}\)

When Zeus watches Hektor putting on Achilles' armour, the god does not ‘think to himself’ that Hector is going to die, but rather:

\[
\text{κινήσας ῥα κάρη προτὶ ὄν μυθήσατο θυμόν χινήσας ρα κάρη προτὶ ὄν μυθήσατο θυμόν}
\]

“α δελ’, οὐδὲ τί τοι θλάτατος καταθήμιος ἐστιν, ἄς δὴ τοι σχεδόν εἶσπ.”

he stirred his head and spoke to his own thumos, "ah poor wretch! There is no thought ['no place'] of death in your thumos now, and yet death stands close beside you..."\(^{64}\)

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\(^{61}\) See Snell 1953, p6

\(^{62}\) Iliad 17:90

\(^{63}\) Iliad 17: 97. Homer uses precisely the same expressions when Agenor and Hector work out what to do (Iliad 21:552 and 22:98), and when they both ask why their thumos is debating (Iliad 21:562 and 22:122).
There are many occasions where someone ponders different courses of action with their phrenes, or their thumos, or both. There are also expressions where someone “breathes in two ways”, which might be consistent with the metaphor—analogous to the situation when we say “I am in two minds about...”. Other types of self-reflective thought, such as believing and holding opinions, are also described in terms of speech. For instance, Zeus sends Agamemnon a false dream, so that the king “thought that on that very day he would take Priam’s city.” The word Lattimore translates as ‘thought’, phê, means literally ‘said’. Similarly, when Hektor says he “thought to destroy the ships and all the Achaens”, the root of the word translated ‘thought’, ephamên, is related to phê.

Nobody thinks to themselves in the Iliad; everyone speaks to their thumos or phrenes. So despite appearing an odd concept to us, the metaphor reflecting is speaking with the phrenes or thumos does provide a coherent framework for explaining reflective thought. Not that much reflection goes on in the Iliad. Mostly, ‘thoughts’ come from outside the person themselves—either from a god, or from their phrenes or thumos.

There are of course times when people do not know how they came up with a solution, they just know what to do. In these cases, the thumos is the source of the solution, or demands something be done or said. (The phrenes are rarely the source of this kind of independent advice—presumably reflecting the fact that thumos is more independent than the phrenes, and so a more plausible source for ‘outside’ advice.)

The primary references are:
- Iliad 17:200–202. See also Iliad 17:441–442. There is no word in the original Greek corresponding to ‘think’. The phrase might be expressed more literally as “death does not stand in your thumos”.
- Iliad 10:506, 14:20, 21:137, 24:680
- Iliad 2:37
- Onians 1954, p13
- Iliad 8:498
- Iliad 1:54–55
Listen to me, you Trojans and strong-greaved Acheans, while I speak what the thumos within my breast urges...\textsuperscript{72}

To summarise, much of what we understand as thinking and reflecting in Homer can be understood part of a single consistent system organised around the speaking.\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{enumerate}
\item SPEAKING IS BREATHING
\item WISDOM IS GOOD SPEAKING
\item WISE PEOPLE HAVE GOOD WORDS
\item THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE THE SOURCE OF WORDS
\item WISE PEOPLE HAVE GOOD PHRENES
\item THUMOS AND THE PHRENES ARE INDEPENDENT AGENTS
\item SOLVING PROBLEMS IS DEBATING WITH OTHERS
\item SOLVING PROBLEMS IS SPEAKING TO ONE’S THUMOS OR PHRENES
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Iliad} 7:67–68, and also \textit{Iliad} 8:5–6

\textsuperscript{73} In this discussion, it might seem that I have overlooked the most obvious candidate term for the metaphorical grounding of ‘mind’, psukhē—or psyche as it usually rendered. In fact, this is a relatively infrequent term in the \textit{Iliad}; only 33 appearances compared to 430 for thumos. More importantly, while it is associated with the head—the modern site for the mind—in Homer it is not associated with ‘thinking’ or ‘feelings’ of any kind. It only appears in passages relating to someone’s death, when it leaves the body in a manner similar to thumos (for instance, \textit{Iliad} 16:855–856). It seems to be a ‘life–stuff’, but unlike thumos it is related to reproduction, not breathing (See Chapter 4, and also Onians 1954, p93–122 for his interpretation). Later sources and modern Greek dictionaries relate psukhē to breathing, but this interpretation dates from the classical period, after thumos and psukhē had been merged.

A more important omission might be noos, which is related to sight. It appears 50 times in the \textit{Iliad}. In classical Greek, noos or nous is the most important word related to mind. The related verb came to mean ‘to know’ in much the same way as we say ‘I see’ when we mean ‘I understand’. For instance, when Zeus sends Agamemnon a false dream, the king is left “believing in his thumos things that would not be accomplished.” (\textit{Iliad} 2:37). The word in this passage that Lattimore translates as ‘believing’ is phroneonta, whose root is related to seeing, \textit{vēnine}, which related to noos. In the Odyssey, when Kalypso asks Hermes why he has visited her, she says to him, “tell me all your thought \textit{[phronéeis]}” (\textit{Odyssey} 5:89) which might be better rendered, “tell me all you see [or ‘observe’]”. Noos can be the subject of thumos and the phrenes (For instance, \textit{Iliad} 15:128). There are examples where seeing–understanding seems located in the phrenes. The reverse however is never true—thumos is never in the noos.
A DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNICATION

With these metaphors relating speaking, breathing, feeling and deciding, we are now in a position to understand how communication is implicitly structured in Homer.

Speaking happens when when words (muthoi, epoi) are breathed (aïsthai) or blown (epnei) out of the phrenes. Listening is simply the reverse process. For instance, when Nestor calls to Achilles, sleeping in his hut:

...τὸν δ’ αἴφα περὶ φρένας ἠλυθ’ ἱοῆ, ἑκ δ’ ἠλθε κλαίης καὶ σφεας πρὸς μύθον ἔεπε

Quickly the sound [breath] came inside [Achilles’] phrenes and [waking] he went forth from the hut.

Communication takes place when one person breathes their words into the phrenes of another—just as in the examples earlier, a god or goddess may place an ‘idea’ in someone’s phrenes. An expression that appears repeatedly is:

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐπέω, σὺ δ’ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλεο ἅηαν;

... put away in your phrenes this other thing I tell you...

'Zeι πάτερ ἄργυρειμαν, ἕπος τί τοι ἐν φρεσί θήσαι

Father Zeus of the shining bolt, I will tell you a message [word] and put it in your phrenes.

Persuasion can also be explained as the influence of one person’s words on the phrenes of another. When Achilles tries to dissuade his brother from fighting Hektor, he speaks to him at length:

'Ως εἰπὼν ἔτρεψεν ἄδελφειοῦ φρένας ἥρως, αἴήμα παρειπών

The hero spoke like this and bent the phrenes of his brother since he urged [breathed] justice.

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74 The ears are not mentioned in relation to listening in either the Iliad or Odyssey so there is no explicit mention made of how words enter into the listener.

75 Iliad 10:139–140, translated by Onians 1954, p69

76 Iliad 1:54–55

77 Iliad 1:297, 4:39, and many other places.

78 Iliad 19:121

So he spoke, and stirred the *thumos* and strength in each man.\(^{80}\)

There are obvious similarities between this model and the basic parts of modern communication-as-transmission I discussed in the last chapter: the presence of a ‘sender’ and a ‘receiver’, and the passage of words physically—bodily—from one person to another. It is also worth noting that the modern conduit metaphor makes no more distinction between the passage of thoughts and emotions than Homer does.

But there is an important difference between this ancient ‘Homeric model’ and the modern transmission model. In the transmission model, there is a ‘message’ with an existence outside of any person reading or speaking it. There is no corresponding portion in the Homeric model. In Homer, words are never separate from a person. If we think of words as breath-from-the-*phrenes*, the reason for this is obvious: there can be no speaking separate from the person that speaks them, nor breath without someone to breathe it\(^{81}\). The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are told from the perspective of a world where all communication is spoken. How the message comes to be seen as independent of both speakers and hearers, I will discuss in the next chapter.

We have no other Greek texts from before the fifth century BC large enough to check how widespread this model is, but as I will show in the next chapter, a very similar description in widespread use during the fifth century BC. However, when we compare the basic physiological architecture of the Homeric model with the beliefs of other cultures of the same period, there are many similarities\(^{82}\). Together, this suggests that some variation of communication-as-transmission is one of the most basic explanations of human communication, and would help to explain why it remains so pervasive.

One final observation: in Homer we find a complete if simple description of human communication. It is not an explicit theory, but an aspect of a larger, integrated set of beliefs about the make-up of the human body, the way it functions, and the life-substances supposed to animate it. What we do *not* find in Homer is a theory of mind. The organs that

\(^{80}\) *Iliad* 15:500

\(^{81}\) There is one minor exception to this lack of separation between speakers and their words. Homer repeatedly uses the expression ‘winged words’. Exactly what he means is unclear, but the favoured theories are either a metaphor on arrows fletched with feathers, or a metaphor of bird in flight. In either case however, the idea of words ‘flying’ between one person and another is preserved.

\(^{82}\) A full comparison of Homer with contemporary poets lies outside the scope of this thesis, but in Appendix 4 I have summarised Hebrew, Indian and Chinese beliefs from around the same time as the Homeric epics were being sung.
eventually evolve into the mind and the soul in classical Greek thought—*thumos* and *phrenes*—are primarily associated with speech and breath, not cognition and reflection. What we understand as ‘thinking’ is dealt with largely in terms of speaking, debating and persuading, and are subject to the organs of breathing and speech. In Homer, what we would call ‘mind’ is largely dependent upon speech and communication—completely the opposite of the mainstream modern view, which gives priority to the mind. How the positions were reversed, and the consequences for our modern views of communication, I will trace out through Chapters 4, 5, and 16.
CHAPTER FOUR

METAPHORS FOR SPEECH IN CLASSICAL GREECE

ABSTRACT   By the fourth century BC, communication-as-transmission was still implicitly understood as the bodily transference of speech from one person to another, as in Homer. However, many key terms upon which the ‘Homeric model’ was based had disappeared, swallowed up by more complex systems of metaphors, based on other organs and bodily functions. As in Homer, these metaphors did not only explain communication: they also shaped developing concepts of mind, soul thought, and consciousness. All assumed that communication is transference. These metaphors were not only used in literature, but also became the basis for early scientific explanations of human behaviour. Most importantly, they are apparent in Aristotle’s explanation of the soul and perception, and so became a permanent part of Western ideas about communication and its relationship with thought.

THE DECLINE IN THUMOS AND THE PHRENES

In Homer, *thumos* and the *phrenes* are the most common of the organs and hypostates. But between the seventh and fourth centuries BC, the two largely drop out of use. The two graphs on the next page show their declining use by major Greek authors. Each shows the number of appearances of *phrenes* and *thumos* per ten thousand words of text graphed against the years in which each author lived (represented by the black bars). While the decline in the use of the term *phrenes* is clear, the decline in *thumos* is not so direct, although there is an obvious decrease from the time of Homer to the classical writers.

Each graph shows the number of appearances of each word. What is not visible are the shifting senses of each term. By the mid-fourth century, *thumos* had lost all associations with breath, although it could still be used to mean ‘life’ or more usually ‘emotion’. At the same time, *phrenes* had been reduced by Hippocrates to a technical term meaning
‘diaphragm’ or ‘midriff’. In classical Greek, the two terms used in connection with thought, perception and consciousness were *psukhē* and *nous*, both of which are rare in Homer and have quite different meanings. By the time of Plato and Aristotle, the Greeks

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1 The Classical Greeks used the word *prapides* for ‘lungs’, a term used occasionally in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* also.
used terms derived from them to cover most of the non-physical associations that \textit{thumos} and the \textit{phrenes} had in Homer, as well as adding a great number of refinements and distinctions.

To explain the significance of the excerpts that form the bulk of this chapter, I will first sketch out how the \textit{psukhē} acquired the ‘mental’ senses of \textit{thumos} and the \textit{phrenes}, then give more detailed examples and discussion of the development.

Although \textit{psukhē} is usually used to refer to ‘soul’ or ‘life’, the Liddell–Scott dictionary also gives ‘blow’ as an alternative meaning. This relationship with breath is supported by essentially one source, Homer\textsuperscript{2}. The relation of \textit{psukhē} with breath in Homer is not straightforward. There are certainly occasional passages in the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey} where the \textit{psukhē} is breathed out at death or when someone becomes unconscious, just as \textit{thumos} is\textsuperscript{3}. But there are many more passages also where \textit{psukhē} is used alongside \textit{thumos} in a way that suggests contrast, not repetition or emphasis\textsuperscript{4}. Furthermore, the souls of the dead, \textit{psukhai}, do not have breath or breath-intelligence. Nor is the Homeric \textit{psukhē} located in either the \textit{phrenes} or chest, nor does it have anything to do with life-processes like perceiving, thinking, or even acting in any way. On the other hand, at death \textit{psukhē} passes out of the body and goes down into Hades, whereas the \textit{thumos} is destroyed. So while \textit{psukhē} may equate to some ‘soul’, it does not appear to be the same as the breath-soul, \textit{thumos}.

Apart from breath, there is another obvious ‘life substance’ produced by the body: semen. It is so powerful that it has the power to create life, as children. Based on its appearance, the ancient Greeks (and other cultures) appear to have associated semen with the cerebrospinal fluid—and hence with the head\textsuperscript{5}. In archaic Greece, the \textit{psukhē} was associated both with the head\textsuperscript{6} and with procreation: which points to a function as a ‘spermatic–soul’\textsuperscript{7}. This explains why the head, with which the \textit{psukhē} is closely associated, has a unique

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Apparently-related terms like \textit{psukhēin}, ‘to blow’, may actually be later derivations, created after the \textit{psukhē} was merged with \textit{thumos}.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} For instance \textit{Iliad} 22.417, 5.696, \textit{Odyssey} 11.220ff
  \item \textsuperscript{4} For instance \textit{Iliad} 11.333, \textit{Odyssey} 21.154
  \item \textsuperscript{5} For example, the early scientist and physiognomist Alcmaeon of Croton (fl. 520) said that the brain is the source of seed, \textit{sperma}. (Diels Fragment A13). The myth of Athena being born from the head of Zeus is consistent with the cranium being the source of semen and, by association, of children.
  \item \textsuperscript{6} Comparing, for example \textit{Iliad} 1.3 and 11.55. See Onians 1954, pp93–122 for a discussion of the relationship between \textit{psukhē}, head and procreation.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Aristotle says that a person’s \textit{psukhē} is contributed by their father, and that a woman cannot contribute it (\textit{The generation of animals} 737a30), which would be consistent with the Greek belief that women had no \textit{psukhē}-soul, although men did.
\end{itemize}
status. As in many other ancient cultures, the Greeks considered it holy in a way unlike any other part of the body\(^8\)—with the exception of the genitals. Also, for the Greeks, the head was, in some sense, the person\(^9\). In short, the early Greeks believed that people had not one but two ‘life-principles’ or ‘souls’: the breath-soul \(\text{thumos}\) and the procreative-soul \(\text{psukhē}\).

In the centuries after Homer, the metaphors on \(\text{phrenes}\) and \(\text{thumos}\) used to describe and explain thought, perception and consciousness become more numerous and complex. But they also became less-concretely grounded in breath and lungs. As the function of the two life-substances \(\text{thumos}\) and \(\text{psukhē}\) became more abstract, so they became more easily confused\(^10\)—and by the fourth century BC, the term \(\text{psukhē}\) covered all of the functions of \(\text{thumos}\).

The extent to which \(\text{psukhē}\) had taken over the roles of \(\text{thumos}\) and \(\text{phrenes}\) by the Classical period can be seen in Plato’s myth in \textit{Timaeus} describing the creation of souls and bodies, which preserves many ancient Greek traditions. The soul, \(\text{psukhē}\), is placed in the head\(^11\). It consists of \(\text{sperma}\), ‘seed’, generated out of the ‘marrow’ within the cranium, \(\text{egkephalos}\) (which usually means ‘brain’ but is obviously derived from \(\text{en+kephalos}\), ‘in-head’). This ‘seed’ is enclosed in the cranium and vertebrae\(^12\), and flows out of the spinal column in procreation\(^13\). In procreation the \(\text{sperma}\) “passes from the head along the neck

\(^8\) For example, \textit{Iliad} 17:240, 18:82, 22:338. There were strict prohibitions against mutilating the head or eating the brain. A person suffers when their head is dishonoured. In the \textit{Iliad}, Zeus refuses to protect the head of the dead Hektor as it is dragged seven times around Troy by Achilles in his chariot (\textit{Iliad} 22:40ff, See also \textit{Odyssey} 22:463, 19:91). This belief in the sacredness of the head persisted throughout the classical period. Four hundred years after Homer, Plato treats the head as divine (\textit{Timaeus}, 69ff). Five hundred years later again, the pseudo-Aristotelian author of the \textit{Problema} asks “Why do we regard sneezing as divine, but not coughing or running in the nose? Is it because it comes from the most divine part of us, namely, the head?” (\textit{Problema} 962a).

\(^9\) Achilles seeks revenge on Hektor for the death of his ‘dear head’, Patroklus (\textit{Iliad} 18:114). Later, Priam comes with a ‘ransom for Hektor’s head’, which Achilles accepts, although both characters plainly mean the entire body of the dead hero (\textit{Iliad} 24:276, 579–581). Where we would recognise a person and greet them, Homeric characters recognise the head: Agamemnon greets Teukros as \(\text{philē kephalē}\), ‘friendly head’ (\textit{Iliad} 8:281).

\(^10\) Even in Homer, \(\text{thumos}\) and \(\text{psukhē}\) are not kept completely distinct, and occasionally one may be used for the functions of the other. For instance, \(\text{thumos}\) can be sent off to Hades (\textit{Iliad} 7:131), and the \(\text{psukhē}\), not the \(\text{thumos}\), may be breathed out when fainting (\textit{Iliad} 22:417ff).

\(^11\) Plato \textit{Timaeus} 44, 69

\(^12\) Plato \textit{Timaeus} 74

\(^13\) Plato \textit{Timaeus} 86
and through the back [spine]” and out through the phallus\textsuperscript{14}. While this is largely consistent with the Homeric \textit{psykhē}, Plato goes on to say:

\ldots the seed having life, and becoming endowed with respiration, produces in that part of it in which it respires a lively desire of emission.\textsuperscript{15}

Here \textit{psykhē} takes the part of the Homeric \textit{thumos} and \textit{phrenes}: respiration and activity. In Homer, will and desire, when associated with breathing, were a function of the \textit{thumos}. And what Plato calls “that part of [the body] in which it respires” was traditionally the \textit{phrenes}. Plato goes on to describe the effects of the unsated \textit{sperma} in both men and women. In the case of women:

the animal within them [the womb] is desirous of procreating children, and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and, by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity, causing all varieties of disease\textsuperscript{16}.

In this example, Plato obviously regarded breath as essential to thought as well as life, and believed that depriving the body of breath caused madness: a dysfunction of the mind. But for Plato, breath and intelligence were now subject to the \textit{psykhē}: all the roles played by \textit{thumos} had been integrated into it.

While aspects of the \textit{thumos–phrenes} ‘mind’ are preserved, the Homeric functions of the organs are greatly changed. While Plato recognises that the heat still ‘throbs’ and ‘leaps’ with suspense or anger, the lungs’ role is simply to cool the empassioned heart\textsuperscript{17}. In Plato, the brain takes over as the seat of reason and intelligence (\textit{nous}). The chest still retains some of its traditional associations. In Homer, the spermatic \textit{psykhē} in the head was immortal whereas the breath-\textit{thumos} in the \textit{phrenes} was not: Plato retains the same basic division, locating the immortal parts of the soul in the head and the mortal in the body. (He divides the mortal soul into two parts: the appetites in the belly, and the nobler emotions such as bravery and ambition in the chest.)

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Plato \textit{Timaeus} 91. Plato describes the process of procreation entirely from the male point of view. Women are something of an afterthought.
\item[15] Plato \textit{Timaeus} 91
\item[16] Plato \textit{Timaeus} 91, my italics. This description of the behaviour of the womb (\textit{hysteresis}) Plato takes from Hippocrates. It is, incidentally, the origin of our word \textit{hysteria}, a condition caused by the wandering womb. Hippocrates’ cure for this form of madness was for women to have children.
\item[17] The lungs are “set … round the heart like a cushion, so that when passion was at its height, the heart would beat against something yielding” (Plato \textit{Timaeus} 71).
\end{footnotes}
Plato’s creation myth in *Timaeus* presents the complete integration of the *thumos* and *phrenes* into the *psukhē*, along with the appearance of aspects of functions entirely absent in Homer, such as a self-aware mind and a rational intelligence (*nous*).

As I will show in the remainder of this chapter, *psukhē* was not only given the mental and spiritual functions of *thumos* and the *phrenes*, but it also incorporated their roles in communication-as-transmission. Just as in Homer, the way that the later Greeks thought about communication was decisive in how they understood the nature of mind and thought. And it is them that we need to explore in order to grasp communication-as-transmission in Classical Greece.

**METAPHORS ON SPEECH IN CLASSICAL GREEK LITERATURE**

Rare indeed are the literary fragments from the seventh and sixth centuries BC. We have virtually no complete works, and we rely heavily on quotations from later classical authors for what text we do have. They offer tantalising glimpses, suggesting that maybe the Homeric model continued to be used by the newly literate poets, but the record is simply too disjointed and too conjectural to draw any conclusions safely.

The most reliable extended texts that predate the philosophers of the fifth century BC are the playwrights Aeschylus (525–426 BC), Sophocles (496–406 BC) and Euripides (c.480–405 BC), Aristophanes (c.448–388 BC) and the poet Pindar (c.522–c.432 BC). Here I want to focus on the tragic playwrights: each presents us with a clear picture that the basic architecture of the ‘Homeric model’ still existed, although the details were no longer those of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

For the earliest of the three, Aeschylus (525–426 BC), the *phrenes*, *thumos* and chest are where people feel rage, shame and grief, make decisions and take thought. But the emotional and intellectual world of Aeschylus is much more complex than in Homer, and he gives both *phrenes* and *thumos* a much wider range of meanings and associations: for instance, he uses *thumomantis* for ‘spoken oracles’; *phroneis* for ‘know’ and *phrona* for ‘wisdom’. He describes soldiers before battle whose “iron-*phrened* *thumos* breathed flaming

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18 Appendix 5 presents some fragments from three poets in the period between Homer and the Classical period: Sappho, Pindar and Simonides.

19 Aeschylus *Eumenides* 840ff

20 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes*, 967

21 Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes* 24ff

22 Aeschylus *Eumenides* 17

23 For example, Aeschylus *The Persian Women* 224
which implies *thumos* has moved from its earlier sense of ‘breath’ closer to something like ‘spirits’. In each case, the terms *phrenes* and *thumos* were being used much more abstractly than in Homer, and that correspondingly the connections with the human body and its functions were increasingly weak. Both *thumos* and *phrenes* begin to take on the disembodied sense of ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ of later classical philosophy.

In Aeschylus “speech comes through the chest [Ἀσθένος]” or else from the *phrenes*.

I weep, I moan, my shrill strains come from my very *phrenes* in unfeignedness.  

The city shall find no fault with a messenger, old in years, but with youth in his [well-tongued *phrenes*].

It is also still possible to breathe (πνεῦ) emotions and thoughts out of the *phrenes*. For instance, in *The Libation Bearers*, Justice “breathes deadly wrath”, and Apollo blows a wrathful dream. Metaphors on breathing still play an important part in emotional activity, and are still deeply embedded in the logic of the dramatic action. The following example comes at the height of *Eumenides*, where the Furies cry out against the judgement of Athena, who has banished them to the underworld:

24 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 51–53. My translation. Smyth’s translation runs “no note of lamentation was on their lips, for there breathed in them a spirit of iron resolve, glowing with valour...” More familiar to English speakers perhaps, but less faithful to the original.

25 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 563

26 Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes*, 873–874

27 Aeschylus *Suppliant Maidens* 774–775. Smyth (1922) translates the last phrase as “youth in his heart and on his tongue”, but *eugłōsphrenē* translates better as ‘well-tongued phrēn’.

28 Aeschylus *The Libation Bearers* 951

29 Aeschylus *The Libation Bearers* 34
I suffer, ill-used! *Pheu*! I, of ancient wisdom, [forced] to live beneath the earth. *Pheu*! Dishonoured and defiled! I cry out [blow] with all force and wrath. Oh! Oh! *Pheu*! Pain steals under my ribs. See my passion [*thumos*] Mother Night!  

The shame and rage of the Furies is one of immediate visceral hurt (*pathein*), felt as bodily pain in the chest (literally the ribs, *pleuras*). Spirit (*thumos*), pain and speech are intimately connected. The Furies’ passion (*thumon*) is not only felt internally but breathes (*pneo*) with all force and wrath (*menos apanta te koton*) against Athena, and cries out “*Pheu!*”—an untranslatable cry of grief and pain, which is related to *phè*, the root of many words meaning ‘say’ or ‘cry’.

Words and passions may not only be breathed or blown out of a person’s *phrenes*, but also from one person to another. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra explains how Apollo was “breathing ardent love for me”  

31

Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1206

32

Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1235–1236

33

Aeschylus *The Libation Bearers* 55–58

34

Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 24–27

30

Aeschylus *Eumenides* 837ff, my translation. Smyth (1922) gives, in rather more modern and less literal English “Oh to be treated thus, oh shame! I, sage in ancient wisdom, to dwell beneath the earth dishonoured (oh shame!) and detested! My spirit pants with fury and utter rage. Oh, oh, the shame of it! What anguish steals into my breast! O mother Night, give ear to my passion!”

31

Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1206

32

Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1235–1236

33

Aeschylus *The Libation Bearers* 55–58

34

Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 24–27
In short, the structure of communication in Aeschylus is similar to the ‘Homeric model’. Speech has its origins in the chest, even if it is not the phrenes or thumos, from where it is breathed from one person to another. There are obvious developments though. There are additions such as the lips (stoma) and tongue (glosa), and as I noted above, the words thumos and phrenes take on much wider and less immediately physical meanings. In particular, thinking is less intimately connected with the organs of speech, but is more generally and less concretely located in the chest.

Both Sophocles (496–406 BC) and Euripides (c.480–405 BC) clearly draw on variants of this model also, although they both use thumos and phrenes less often than Aeschylus. Both still have feelings, thinking and the ‘spirit’ centred in the chest or phrenes from where they are breathed out by one person and taken in by another. Euripides clearly understands thumos in its double sense as feelings and breath when he has a charioteer describe horses wild with fear:

\[\text{...they snarled and outbreathed thumos from their nostrils, tossing high their manes.}\]

As in Aeschylus and Homer, feelings are breathed out by people. For instance, after Eotekeles has raged at his mother, Jocasta, she retorts:

\[\text{Check fierce look and passion’s [thumos’] stormy breath [blowing]}\]

If we understand that emotion has an airy vaporous form as thumos, and its seat is in the phrenes within the chest, then we can understand why Hercules cries, after learning that he killed his wife and children in madness:  

\[\text{aiai! stenagmos gar me periballei nephos: “Alas a cloud of moaning [from the chest, stenagmos] gathers around me”}\]

But the strict division of thumos and phrenes is blurred by all three playwrights. As in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides may use thumos to mean ‘emotion’. And the word

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35 For instance, Sophocles Oedipus Tyrannos 153
36 Euripides Rhesus 785–786
37 Euripides Phoenician Women 454. See also Bacchanals 620, where thumos as fury is breathed out (thumon ekpneōn), or the Madness of Hercules 1211, “refrain from the furious lion’s mood [spirit]!” (katasthethe leontos agrion thumon)
38 Euripides Madness of Hercules, 1140
phrenes has gained many connotations via the functions associated with speaking: being wise, prophesying, and discerning. In Ajax, when Tecuessa wants to know what Ajax is thinking, she asks, “What is in your phrenes?”39 to which he responds, “sôphronein kalon” by which he means something like “don’t ask” or “don’t be curious”, but more literally translates as “be properly discreet” or “be rightly minded”—sôphroneō being derived from phrenes, via phronesis.

The phrenes or the chest still remain the goal of spoken words. When Sophocles’ Odysseus hears Athena, he says “how clearly … those accents strike my ear and thrill my phrenes”40. The phrenes are also the site of the emotions, and their cause, although as in Homer, it can be hard to tell thinking and feeling apart41.

The inflections upon the model vary between the three playwrights. But all three use what is recognisably the one model with only stylistic differences between them. The immediate physical grounding for the metaphors of the ‘Homeric model’ in organs and actions is increasingly weak though.

**METAPHORS ON SPEECH IN EARLY SCIENCE**

The pre-Socratic natural philosophers

It is not only literary figures that preserve and develop the ‘Homeric model’. There are fragments from the early natural philosophers that suggest similar origins for their theories of mind, perception, and soul in metaphors on breath and the lungs.

The poet Theognis (fl.544–541 BC), says “In men of understanding, the eyes and tongue and ears and mind (noos) grow in the midst of their breasts”42. This is consistent with the Homeric idea of perception and consciousness being located in the phrenes—for instance, when Achilles recognises the disguised Priam: “I know you, Priam, in my phrenes”43. As I also noted in the previous chapter, in Homer noos can be located in the phrenes44.

39 Sophocles Ajax 585. A more literal translation might be: “at what time will your phrenes act?”
40 Sophocles Ajax, 1124
41 For instance, Sophocles Ajax 613, Oedipus Tyrannos 727
42 Onians 1954, p70
43 Iliad 24:563
44 For instance, Iliad 15:128
Heraclitus (fl.500 BC), taught that there was a divine Law (logos) of the universe, and that people become intelligent by drawing in the divine logos through in-breathing. Logos is normally used to mean ‘speech’ or, in later Greek, ‘thought’. Through its association with breath, it is coherent with the metaphor to talk of ‘breathing in divine logos’—just as in Homer, listening is implicitly identified with taking speech (as breath) into the phrenes.

Anaximenes of Miletus (died c.500 BC) taught that the basic form of the soul, psukhē, along with all matter, was air. “Our soul being air, holds us together, so do breath [pneuma] and air [aēr]”—a claim consistent with the merging of thumos-breath-soul with psukhē-procreative-soul. Working in the fifth century BC, Diogenes of Apollonia extended the claim, teaching that “men and animals live by means of Air, which they breathe in, and this for them is both Soil (life) [psukhē] and Intelligence [noos] ... and if this leaves from (them), Intelligence also leaves them”.

Like Homer and Theogenis, Diogenes locates noos in the chest or the region of the heart.

Half a century later again, the philosopher Empedocles (fl.450 BC) wrote On Nature, in which he sought to explain both physical and spiritual subjects in terms of a small number of elements: earth, air, fire, water, love, and hate. In this poem, he says the heart “is the place where is found for the most part what men call Thought [noēma]; for the blood round the heart is Thought in mankind”.

Note, Empedocles says ‘round the heart’ (perikardion), not ‘in the heart’. The major organ containing blood ‘around the heart’, are the lungs. In a later passage he urges people to remember what they were taught by impressing what they hear on their minds (prapidessin)—both Homer and classical writers use prapides to mean ‘lungs’.

The pre-Socratic natural philosophers’ most important influence on the later development of science was in the integration of their claims into the philosophy Aristotle.

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45 Diels Fragment A16
46 Freeman, Fragment 2
47 Freeman, Fragment 4
48 Onians 1954, p32
49 Freeman Fragment 105, Diels Fragment B105
50 Plato and his followers rejected all mechanical explanations of the mind, intellect and the soul. There is no ‘scientific’ discussion of hearing or perception generally anywhere in Plato’s dialogues. The Stoics and Epicureans incorporated many pre-Socratic scientific claims into their own philosophy, but this had little influence on beliefs about the human body after the end of the Antiquity in the fifth century AD.
In his discussions on the functioning of animals, Aristotle (384–322 BC) perpetuated many traditional Greek beliefs about hearing, mind, and perception. For Aristotle, the source of speech was the area around the heart (although not the lungs as such). Once words were spoken, they impacted upon the listener’s ear, causing the air inside the ear and skull to resonate. Since, says Aristotle, the process of hearing is the inverse of the process of speaking, the passage of sound ends in the chest. The reverberation in the ear and skull passes downwards: “[through] the passage of the hearing … [which] ends at the place where the innate *spiritus* causes in some animals the pulsation of the heart and in others respiration.” Aristotle is emphatic that the heart is the organ responsible for all sensation, and rejects the brain on many grounds. (In particular, he says that hearing has nothing to do with the brain, because there is no connection from the ear to the brain, whereas...
there is a connection between the ear and the roof of the mouth—the Eustachian tube—which then leads to the chest. He also remarks that deafness is a “congestion of the lungs”.

So, while Aristotle uses no metaphors on thumos or the phrenes to explain speaking and hearing, and he explicitly denies that the lungs are the site of the psukhē, his description of hearing builds implicitly upon the concepts used by previous generations. In particular:

1. speaking is out-breathing
2. hearing is the inverse of speaking
3. hearing involves at least the air passages, even if not the lungs directly, and
4. both the source and goal of speech is located in the chest.

Aristotle does not develop an explicit theory of communication—although he makes remarks on speech in most of his works. Aristotle’s most influential contribution to the historical development of communication-as-transmission is in his discussion On the Soul. This book represents an enormous shift from the Homeric world. In Homer, what we would today understand as mind and thought is explained in terms of speech. In On the Soul, Aristotle gives the psukhē priority, and speech is rendered dependant upon it. Also, the psukhē is totally immaterial for Aristotle, dependant on no organ of the body, although it is centred in the chest around the heart. Nonetheless, Aristotle’s analysis of the psukhē is an elaboration on—not a break with—the ancient traditions I have discussed in this chapter and the last. The result was that all of the requirements for communication-as-transmission were incorporated into his theories of mind and soul. To grasp the framework he established, it is simplest to consider it in two parts: how the psukhē perceives and how the psukhē creates speech.

Aristotle’s theory of perception is part of his analysis of the soul, which is in turn grounded in his metaphysics. So it is with his metaphysics of soul we must begin. For Aristotle, the soul is the form of a natural body: its essence. To explain the relationship between form and matter in natural creatures, Aristotle begins by comparing the whole body first with an axe, and then with an eye. The essence of an axe is ‘cutting’. Take away the property of ‘cutting’ from an axe, and it will no longer be an axe. Similarly, the essence of an eye is ‘sight’. The physical eye itself is the material object necessary for seeing—but while it has the potential for seeing, it does not, of itself, see. If ‘seeing’—the essence of the eye—is removed, the material object that remains is no longer an eye, except in name (it is no more a real eye than the ‘eye’ of a statue or a portrait). Aristotle says that axes and eyes though are not

56 Aristotle The history of animals §1:11, 492a19
57 Aristotle The generation of animals 962b32
natural bodies. By this he means that they do not have the power to set themselves in motion: to set their potential for cutting and seeing in motion to actually cut or see. That is, they lack the power of cutting and seeing. More generally, like all non-natural bodies, they do not have the power of actualisation. According to Aristotle, this power of actualisation is the soul (ψυχή) of a natural body. An animal or a person is the sum of the body and their ψυχή—that is, material potential and the power to actualise that potential.

Aristotle goes on to say that the ψυχή has a number of different functions in plants and animals, and that different living things have different powers of the soul. All living things—plants and animals—have the power of nutrition. But only animals have the power of sensation and appetite—the power to know pain, pleasure, desire and fear. Some animals also have the power of locomotion. For our purposes, the two most important powers of the soul are the power of sensory perception (which humans share with all animals) and the power of thought (which human beings alone have).

Aristotle says that all five senses operate in basically the same way, although the object of each is different. A sense functions by taking on the form of the thing that its perceives, but not the matter. He compares this process with “the way in which a piece of wax takes on the impress of a signet ring without the iron or gold; we say that what produces the impression is a signet of bronze or gold, but its particular metallic constitution makes no difference.” In perception the organ creates an image of what is being sensed, which has the same form as the object but with none of the matter. If we see something white, the eye forms an image of the ‘whiteness’, but does not become white itself.

Aristotle repeatedly emphasises that the senses themselves are never in error: if a white object is placed before our eyes, our eye must see whiteness; if we place honey on our tongues, we must taste sweetness. The only source of error in perception says Aristotle, is in the operation of the imagination or the reason. The mind takes perceptions from the senses and acts on them, combining and contrasting them, or abstracting from them. But everything that is in the mind is previously in the senses: “the soul never thinks without an image.”

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58 Aristotle On the soul §2:1, 412b9–25
59 Aristotle also says that God or “another order like man or superior to him” also has the power of thinking (On the Soul §2:3, 414b20), but elsewhere he is ambivalent about whether such a being genuinely exists.
60 Aristotle On the soul §2:12, 424a17–24
61 Aristotle On the soul §3:3, 428a10, 428b11, 428b17
62 Aristotle On the soul §3:8, 432a6f
In discussing perception and the operation of the mind, Aristotle repeatedly uses the metaphor of a wax tablet—the most common writing surface in ancient Greece. In sensory perception, the organs of sense take the form of what is sensed in the way that wax takes the form of a signet ring pressed into it. “What [the mind] thinks must be in it just as characters be said to be on a [wax] writing tablet on which yet nothing actually stands written: this is exactly what happens with the mind.” Ideas in the mind themselves are *eidon*: images or pictures. This metaphor is a momentous one, because it marks the transition from understanding the operation of the mind in terms of speech to one based on writing and images.

Aristotle also explains the creation of speech using the metaphor of a wax writing tablet. I noted above that Aristotle says that speaking and hearing are inverse functions. In perception (such as hearing), an object impresses its form into the senses and the *psukhē*, creating an image or *idea*. In speaking, the *psukhē* creates a physical object—a sound—that has the form of the idea in the mind.

Voice … is the impact of the inbreathed air against the ‘windpipe’, and the agent that produces the impact is the soul resident in [the region surrounding the heart] … [But] not every sound … made by an animal is voice …; what produces the impact must have soul in it and must be accompanied by an act of imagination, for voice is a sound with a meaning, and not merely the result of any impact of the breath as in coughing.

Later generations took this passage to mean that in speaking, the soul ‘struck’ the air with sense—that is, stamped with a form that is intelligible to the ear, just as a signet ring stamps wax with a form intelligible to the eye. The late Latin grammarians, who had great influence in the Middle Ages, used the idea of ‘impacted breath’ to explain the origins of speech. From the perspective of later history, the two most important were Donatus (c.350 AD) and Priscian (c.500 AD), who explicitly drew on a tradition that stretched back to Aristotle. In his *Art of Grammar*, Donatus says, “voice is air that has been struck [ictus] and that can be perceived by the hearing, as long as it lasts.” (Vox est aer ictus sensibilis)

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63 Aristotle *On the soul* 429b30–32.
64 Aristotle appears to have been heavily influenced in this description by contemporary beliefs that memory consisted in the impressions left in the wax tablet once impressed by signet rings. It is a metaphor he himself uses in his own treatise *On memory and reminiscence*. I have discussed ancient models of memory, and their relationship to theories of perception, in Appendix 3.
65 Plato had used the metaphor of a wax tablet in *Theatetus*.
66 Aristotle *On the soul* §2:8, 420b27–421a1, italics in translation
67 Robins 1967, p31 & 52
auditu, quantum in ipso est). Priscian says voice is, “a very small quantity of air that has been struck” (aerem tenuissimum ictum) 68.

Aristotle’s discussion of the psukhē makes clear that he regards speech as dependant on the mind. Speech begins and ends with the psukhē. He opens *On Interpretation* saying, “spoken words are the symbols of mental experience.” 69 Aristotle is certainly not the first to say this, but he was certainly influential. Western psychology begins with *De Anima*, and the dominance of the ‘interior’ soul over the external word has been retained in beliefs about communication ever since.

From Aristotle’s discussion of perception and speech, we can reconstruct an Aristotelian version of communication-as-transmission—although Aristotle himself never did so explicitly, and one would not be constructed for fifteen hundred years after his death.

1. the psukhē is in the chest
2. the psukhē has ideas (which are derived from the senses)
3. in speaking, the psukhē ‘stamps’ air with the form of the idea to create an intelligible sound
4. the sound passes through the air to the listener
5. the listener’s ears take the form of the sound, creating an image of it—an idea
6. the psukhē knows this idea.

Aristotle’s theory of perception guarantees that the listener has the same idea as the speaker. If two different people observe one object, they will both have the same sense impressions and, unless their reasoning is faulty, both will have the same ideas. And because speech is simply air stamped with the form of an idea, then the form of sound perceived by the hearer’s psukhē is the same as the idea stamped on the air by the speaker’s psukhē. Consequently, there is a direct correspondence between their minds. People can fail to understand one another for two reasons, according to Aristotle: because they use different languages and because their reasoning is faulty.

Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolise, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. 70

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68 Donawerth 1984, p16
69 *Aristotle On interpretation* §1, 16a4
70 *Aristotle On interpretation* §1, 16a6–9
Between the sixth and fourth centuries BC, the basic physiological grounding of the Homeric model was slowly transformed, becoming more diffuse and less concretely grounded in human anatomy and physical experience, adopting new terms that divorced it from its origins in breath and speech. But because it remained the dominant linguistic resource for the Greeks to draw on when they talked about speech and thinking, not surprisingly it was incorporated, probably quite unknowingly, into the philosophy of the early natural sciences—eventually to be subsumed and sublimated in Aristotle’s philosophy.

Aristotle did not explicitly set out a theory of communication, but his philosophy created the potential for communication-as-transmission within the framework of his metaphysics and psychology. While he had only limited influence in the ancient world, his works dominated medieval thought from the twelfth century. Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas incorporated large parts of *On the soul* in their own philosophy, placing it in an unassailable position at the heart of Western learning. As I will show in Chapter 15, it was on the basis of Aristotle’s psychology that the first explicit model of communication-as-transmission was built in the thirteenth century.
CHAPTER FIVE

METaphORS FOR SPEECH IN ANCIENT ROME

ABSTRACT  As in Greece, everyday Roman explanations of communication were based on metaphors grounded in human physiology. Speech began in the speaker’s chest, from where it was ejected as words, transferred between people, and finally grasped or taken in by the listener. The Roman metaphors are almost entirely conventional. More than in Greece, communication has lost its immediate grounding in bodily processes. In Rome, it becomes transference between people.

Although Greece presents us with the oldest version of communication-as-transmission in Europe, the West’s heritage is primarily Roman, not Greek¹. The bulk of terms English speakers use to talk about communication are derived from Latin²: report, publish, publicise, inform, diffuse, disseminate, narrate, notify, announce, advise, mention, contact, instruct, disclose, confess, admit, transmit, contact, convey, describe, narrate, imply, correspond, impart, interpret, confide, record, intelligence, message, notice, document, missive, information, memorandum, verbal, audience, and of course, communicate and communication. The list of Latin terms above also suggests that many have their origins in metaphors from outside communication: the root of report is the same as transport; conference is related to transfer; convey and vehicle are linked.

¹ After the decline in Roman power in the West from the fourth century AD, contact with the Greek-speaking East was largely lost. With little reason to learn the language, the ability to read Greek texts was lost in the West except amongst a handful of scholars and Church diplomats. For over a thousand years after the demise of the Western Empire, it was primarily Latin texts that medieval scholars and Renaissance Humanists sought to preserve, recover and study. The ideals of the Roman res publica, not the Greek democracies, were the inspiration of the quattrocento Italian city-states, the American Republic, and the democracies of modern Europe. Throughout the Middle Ages, the influence of Cicero exceeded that of both Plato and Aristotle. The language of law, administration, religion, philosophy and science in Western Europe was Latin well into the Modern Age.

² Very little English terminology derives from Greek except technical and grammatical terms: the few exceptions include dialogue, glossary, topic, and lexicon. We use more Anglo-Saxon terms than Greek ones: talk, say, tell, speak, write, read, word and understand. The importance of these words also outranks their numerical frequency, as they are used to deal with the most basic and common aspects of communicating.
Like the Greek version of communication-as-transmission, the roots of Roman descriptions appear to have originated in a larger set of beliefs about the human body and how it functioned. We know little about Roman ideas before the third century BC, as we have few earlier records. But what we can see from after that time suggests a similar path of development. For our purposes, we can treat Roman beliefs about those organs and their roles in speaking and thinking as being broadly the same as those of the Greeks.

The Roman counterpart of psukhē was the genius. Psukhē and genius were both treated as a life substance that survived death. Both were located in the head, and in the case of the genius, specifically in the forehead. Both were associated with generation and procreation.\footnote{We still use a few terms drawn from procreation to describe mental activity: ‘a fertile mind’, ‘a mental conception’, ‘to conceive of an idea’, ‘a creative imagination’, ‘brain child’.

Genius shares the same root as generation, progeny, gender, genitalia, and genus. Almost every culture of ancient Europe saw the head as intimately connected with generation and child-getting. Like the spermatic psukhē, most cultures appeared to liken the grey-white brain matter and the cerebrospinal fluid with sperm. Many cultures had legends about children being born directly from the head of a man—such as Athena’s birth from the head of Zeus. We still refer to the ‘head’ of the family—literally that person from whom all later generations are ‘generated’. There are a large number of words in ancient European languages, based on the root √gene, that link head, procreation and knowledge.

Genius—intelligence is related to gnosis, know, and ken. Genius—procreation is related to gonad, kin, and kinder. Also related are the knees—genu in Latin, gonu in Greek. They contain large pools of fluid which, like the cerebrospinal fluid, the ancients may have associated with semen. Several ancient cultures have stories of children being born from the knees, along with the head. This association of head and knees may, incidentally, explain the origin of the skull-and-crossbones—what could be a better symbol of death than the head and knees completely dried of their life fluids?

The brain, cerebrum, is related to the Latin cereo or creo, meaning ‘I beget’, as well as to Ceres, the goddess of fertility and particularly grain—hence our word ‘cereal’. The word semen itself of course means ‘a seed’ or ‘a seedling’. Genius is also related to the Greek gonos, ‘seed’—the source of the modern English gonad.

Most ancient cultures also treated things that grew out of the head—horns, hair, chin—as aspects of fertility and manhood. So, for instance, cere is related etymologically with the Greek keras, the Latin cornu, and the German Hirn: all words for ‘horn’—which was believed to grow out of the brain matter—and hence related to seed and fertility. The hair, and particularly the beard, was also seen as an aspect of virility—presumably because the ancients saw men begin to grow beards when they become sexually active. Hair also grows from the chin of men. Chin is related to √gene as well as the Germanic kin and kinder, ‘family’ and ‘children’. Many ancient cultures have injunctions against men cutting hair and beards—witness Samson’s loss of strength when Delilah cut off his hair.}
Rather more active in mental life than *genius* was the *animus*, the Roman principle of consciousness, which had much in common with *thumos*. It was located in the chest (*pectoris*), and specifically in the heart (*cor*) and the lungs (*praecordia*). There is an obvious parallel between the *phrenes* and *praecordia*, although by the time of the earliest surviving Latin writings, the *praecordia*, like the *phrenes*, had lost most of its association with consciousness: its functions were assigned to the *cor*.

Closely related to the *animus* is *anima*, the ‘substance’ of life, which was related to wind and blowing. From *animus* and *anima* come our words *animate*, *animal*, and *animation*—all terms that still link movement with life and, to an extent, breathing. The term *spiritus*, the root of our word ‘spirit’, originally meant ‘breath’ or ‘breeze’.

Like the Greeks, the Romans used expressions implying that words originated in the *praecordia* or chest generally. “When I bring forth any verse out of my *praecordia*” (*ex praecordiis ecfero*) says the poet Lucilius. Vergil says that victory “slips in” to men’s understanding as a “faint rumoured breath” (*tenuis famae perlabitur aura*). The term that the Romans used for the ears, *aures*, is related to the word for ‘sound’, ‘breath’ and ‘wind’, *aura*, suggesting an early belief that words were ‘breathed into’ a person. Lucretius says that, in speaking:

> When … we press out these voices from the inmost parts of our body, and send them forth straight through the mouth, the quickly moving tongue … joints and moulds the sounds, and the shaping of the lips does its part in giving them form … [Then there is a] race from start to finish … [at the end of which, words come] creeping into the ears they have struck with the body of their sense.

4. The *cor* probably derives its role in consciousness and intelligence from its proximity to the lungs, just as in Greece the chest and specifically the area around the heart (*perikradia*) became the site of consciousness once the immediate physiological associations between *phrenes*, *thumos* and life–activity were weakened. Like *thumos*, the heart is also hot and active.

5. The substance of the Greek soul was *pneuma*, breath, which is related to the verb, ‘to blow’, *pnein*.

6. Related to *spiritus* are our mental words *inspire*, *aspire*, and *conspire*. *Inspire* would mean literally ‘to breathe in’, and presumably is related to the way the Greeks saw their poets inspired, as a god breathed into their *phrenes*. The Latin *aspiro* means ‘to blow at’ someone or something. *Conspire* means originally ‘to breathe together’, where breathing is equated with speaking.

7. Vergil *Aenid* 7:656. The passage is an adaptation of *Iliad* 2:483–487

8. From Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 4:524ff and 4:549ff. Although in this passage, Lucretius is giving the Epicurean ‘atomic’ theory of speech, the basic process is structurally the same as ordinary Roman views about speaking.
But like the Greeks from the fifth century BC, the Romans from the second century BC no longer saw an immediate physiological grounding of communication in the *cor, praeordia, animus, anima,* and *genius.* Communication had become more abstract. By the first century BC, while many of the terms used in metaphors on breath and body were still in use, connections with the body were often entirely absent.

The following passage from Cicero (106–43 BC) sums up the way that Romans of the time usually talked about the process of communicating:

> *Nihil est autem tam volucre, quod maledictum; nihil facilius *emittitur*, nihil citius *excipitur*, nihil latius *dissipatur.*

> Nothing is so fast [literally, ‘flying’] as slander: nothing is put out [said] so easily; nothing is caught [by the ear] so quickly; nothing is spread about so widely.  

There are obvious parallels with the Greek model of the previous two chapters, but the physiology is gone; the metaphors are conventional, not grounded in the bodily processes of talking and listening. This three-part system is the way Romans normally talked about communication. In the following three sections of this chapter, I discuss each of these three parts—emitting, transferring and catching.

**THE FIRST STEP: ‘EJECTING’ FROM THE SPEAKER**

In the passage I quoted above, Cicero uses the verb *emittere* to mean ‘to say’. But it usually means ‘to send out’ or ‘to let out’ some object. What Cicero clearly means though is ‘to send out [words]’. The origin of this metaphor is almost certainly physical: the idea of ‘speech breathed out of the *praecordia*’ became transformed metaphorically into ‘words emitted from the *animus*’. But by the first century BC, when Cicero is writing, the early construction of this metaphor was quite forgotten, and *emittere* was simply a conventional verb, meaning ‘to say’.

> *semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum*

> Once put out [spoken], words fly [away] irrevocably.  

9  
10  
Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 23:57
In some places I have altered translations of others or given my own. In each case, my reason has been to highlight the metaphor in Latin by using an idiomatic expression in English. Because Latin and English are very different languages, some of the translations are less...
Emittere could also mean ‘to send out’ or ‘to publish’ a book:

\[ \text{librum de arte alearum ludendi} \]

He published a book on the subject of dice. ¹¹

The root of emittere is mittere, an important word I will return to in the next section. It means broadly ‘to send’ or ‘to throw’, and is the basis of many metaphors, although only some are connected with communication. Mittere, or its perfect form misi, is the root of our word missile, and Romans lawyers would sometimes refer to speeches as ‘javelins’ and ‘arrows’ which they ‘hurled’ at their opponents.

\[ \text{cum illud facietum dictum emissum haerere debeat, quam cogitari potuisse videatur.} \]

…the shafts of wit has to be sped and hit its mark, with no palpable pause for thought.¹²

Almost synonymous with emittere are the closely related words jacere, jactere, eicere, and inicere (the last two terms are derived from e-jacere and in-jacere). The first two mean, almost interchangeably, ‘to throw’ or ‘to cast [out]’—like the English word, eject. The second two terms are more abstract, meaning not only to ‘throw out’ but also ‘to put out, over, under [or] into’. As with mittere, all are used as metaphors on speech ‘sent out’ of the mouth or animus, or hurled as missiles.

\[ \text{muito plura praesens audivit, quam in absentem jacta erant} \]

…[when the accused appeared] he heard much more than had been hurled at him in his absence..¹³

As a metaphor on speech though, each of these four words has quite distinct senses. For instance, jactere usually means ‘to discuss’ or ‘to say’.

\[ \text{Quae res sicut eo anno sermonibus magis passim hominum jactata quam in publicoullo concilio est...} \]

This action was widely discussed that year in private conversations without being made the subject of any public deliberations.¹⁴

than perfect renderings—in which case I have given the version published in the Loeb series in the footnotes.

¹¹ Suetonius Claudius 33. Also si quod aliquid dignum nostro nomine emittere ingemiscamus… “Even if I ever put out something worthy of my name, I have a sigh [at the thought of it].” (Cicero Letters to his Friends 7:33, translated by Williams with minor change by me.)

¹² Cicero De Oratore 2:54:219

¹³ Livy History of Rome 43:8.2 translated by Foster et al with minor changes by me.

¹⁴ Livy History of Rome 8:29:2 translated by Foster et al with minor changes by me.

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Jactere can also be used to mean ‘to boast’ or ‘to brag’—for instance Quintilian says he did not want “to advertise his style” (jactandi ingenii gratia) in his textbook on oratory. By contrast, when used in relation to speech, jacere and inicere almost always mean ‘to hint’, ‘to suggest’ or ‘to mention’. (The Romans did not have a specific term for ‘hint’—where we ‘toss out hints’, the Romans just ‘tossed out’.)

*Bruto cum saepe injecissem de ὁμιλουμένοις non perinde atque ego putaram adripere visus est.*

Though I frequently tossed out [hints] to Brutus about our sailing together, he didn’t seem to catch the suggestion as eagerly as I had expected.16

*Sed illud, quid sit, scire cupio, quod jacis obscure...* But I am anxious to know the meaning of that dark hint [jactis] of yours...17

Another group of terms the Romans used to describe the emergence of words from the animus was organised around fundare ‘to pour’, effundere ‘to pour out’, and effluere ‘to flow out’.18

*effundi vobis omnia, quae sentiebam*  
I have poured out for you all my ideas.19

*At istud column accrusionis tuae, Mithridates, posteaquam biduum retentus testis a nobis effudit quae voluit omnia, repressus, convictus fractusque discessit.*  
But the high point of your prosecution, Mithradites, after we had detained him two days as a witness, poured out everything and departed—censured, convicted, a broken man.20

A word with similar meanings is ingerere, which usually means ‘to carry’, ‘to pour’ or ‘to throw’ into a place, but in relation to words, it means to ‘pour out’ words—usually a great volume of them:

*vocis verborumque quantum voletis ingerent*  
Resounding words will pour out as much as you please.21

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15 Quintilian *Institutio* 3:1:3.
16 Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 16:5:3 translated by Winstedt with minor changes by me. Also *cum mihi in sermone injecisset, se velle, Asiam visere.* “He threw out [the hint] to me in the course of conversation that he would like to see Asia” (Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 12:16:2 translated by Williams with minor change by me.).
17 Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 27:4 translated by Winstedt with minor change by me.
18 These words parallel Greek expressions where people were thought to ‘pour’ their speech into the ears of others. For instance, Plato *Phaedrus* 235, *Republic* 411, *Theaetetus* 206d.
19 Cicero *De Oratore* 1:34:fin.
20 Cicero *Pro Flacco* 17:41 translated by Lord with minor changes by me.

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A third way the Romans talked was in terms of ‘putting out’ words or subjects, or ‘placing them before others’. The main words used were expromere ‘to bring out’ or ‘to show’ and exponere ‘to place out’.

hoc primum ex te, de quo modo exposuit Antonius, quid sentias, quaerimus
what, we want to know first, is your opinion of what Antonius has placed [before us] just now?

Quae quonium in senatu inlustrata, patefacta, comperta sunt per me, vobis iam exponam breviter
Since I have disclosed, made clear, and fully recounted these events in the Senate, I will briefly place all before you...

THE SECOND STEP: ‘TRANSFERRING’ BETWEEN PEOPLE

Except for jacere and jactere, all of the terms in the last section were made up of a root plus some prefix: e+mittere, in+jacere, e+jacere, e+fundare, in+gerere, ex+ponere, ex+promere.

This way of constructing words gives Latin enormous flexibility for describing different aspects of a process while maintaining a single metaphor to organise the process consistently. A root-word like fluere, ‘to flow’, has a whole family of associated words: influere, effluere, interfluere, superfluere, many of which the Romans used to point to different moments when people spoke and listened. In talking, a person might be said ‘to pour out’ (effluere) their words, or ‘to pour’ what they say ‘into’ another (influere). Speech is said ‘to flow between’ people (interfluere). And if a speaker tries to include too much in what they ‘pour out’, it may cause their speech ‘to overflow’ (superfluere)—and we still describe irrelevant material as ‘superfluous’.

In the Roman version of communication-as-transmission, the root words of many terms refer to the transferences between people: their derivations describe words passing out of or into people. The most important root word is mittere. Its basic meaning is ‘to send off’ or ‘to dispatch’, but was used in many contexts so its meaning became very generally ‘to send’.

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21 Livy History of Rome 3:68:4 translated by Foster et al with minor changes by me.
22 From exponere we have our word exposition, and from promere we derive promote.
23 Cicero De Oratore 1:22:102, my translation. Sutton gives “What we ask you to tell us first is your opinion of the view Antonius advanced just now”.
24 Cicero in Catilinam 3:1:3 translated by Lord with minor changes by me.
25 Mittere is also the source of a huge number of derivatives. Many are recognisable in Modern English with meanings almost unchanged—including permittere, submittere, emittere, admittere, transmittere, intermittere and remittere. [Incidentally, transmittere is never used continued on next page...
When used about communication, *mittere* implies things being sent from one person to another:

> tu me hoc tibi mandasse existmas, ut mihi vadimonia dilata et Chresti compilationem *mitteres*

How could you [think] I asked you to *send* me [news] of the postponement of trials and Chrestus’s robberies?\(^{26}\)

*Curius misi, ut medico honos haberetur*

I am *sending* [instructions to] Curio that your doctor should be given an honorarium.\(^{27}\)

Another important word used to describe transference between people is *ferre*, ‘to carry’.\(^{28}\) *Ferre* is often used synonymously with ‘to say’ or ‘to report’.

> homo omnium in dicendo, ut *ferebant*, acerrimus et cupiosissimus

[Metrodorus was] a man who exceeded all others, it was *said*, in energetic and copious speech.\(^{29}\)

Like *mittere*, the addition of prefixes to *ferre* gave the Romans a wide range of terms to describe particular aspects of transmission, although few survive in modern English: *deferre* ‘to carry away’, *adferre* or *afferre* ‘to carry to’, *referre* ‘to carry back’, *inferre* ‘to carry in’, *conferre* ‘to carry jointly’, and *transferre* ‘to carry across’\(^{30}\).

> calamitas tanta fuit, ut eam non ex proelio nuntius, sed ex sermone rumor *adferret*

This disaster was so great [that news of it] did not come from the battle by messenger but was *carried in* by hearsay and conversation.\(^{31}\)

> nam iam dui propter hiemis magnitudinem nihil novi ad nos *adferbatur*

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\(^{26}\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 2:8:1, my translation. Williams gives “Do you suppose that I meant you to send me an account of gladiatorial matches, of postponements of trials, of robberies by Chrestus?”

\(^{27}\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 16:9:3 translated by Williams with minor changes by me.

\(^{28}\) *Ferre* is the source of our word *ferry*, and is the root for *transfer*, *confer*, *infer*, *defer*, and *refer*.

\(^{29}\) Cicero *De Oratore* 1:11:45 my translation.

\(^{30}\) *Transferre* only had a restricted use in connection with language, being used to mean ‘to copy [writing]’ or ‘to translate’.

\(^{31}\) Cicero *De Imperio Cn. Pompei* 9:25 my translation. Yonge gives: “Allow me, in this place, O Romans . . . to pass over our disaster, which was so great that it came to Lucius Lucullus’s ears, not by means of messenger dispatched from the scene of action, but through the report of common conversation.”
because of the severity of the winter, nothing new [no news] has been carried in to us.\footnote{Cicero \textit{Letters to his Friends} 2:14, my translation. Shuckburgh gives: “Owing to the severity [of the winter], it is now a long time since any news has found its way to us.”}

A near synonym for \textit{ferre}, \textit{gerere}, is used in a similar way. But surprisingly, very few other words in Latin which normally mean ‘to carry’ or ‘to transport’ are used to describe the transference from one person to another—and certainly not whole families of words. \textit{Vehere} and \textit{vectare}, which both mean broadly ‘to carry’ are not used at all\footnote{Vehere is the root of vex and, via convenerate, convey. Vectare is the root of invective.}. The only variant of \textit{portare}, ‘to bear’ or ‘to carry along’, to be given a connection with speech is \textit{reportare}, meaning ‘to carry [news] back’.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Suspensi Eurypylum scitantem oracula Phoebi mittimus, isque adytis haec tristia dicta reportat}
\end{quote}

With anxious fear we sent Eurypulus to ask Apollo’s word; and from the shrine he brings the sorrowful commandment home\footnote{Vergil \textit{Aenid} 2:114–115. See also 7:284–285}.

\textit{Tradere}, ‘to hand over’ or ‘to deliver’ is used to mean ‘to recount’ or ‘to narrate’, usually to posterity\footnote{As well as being the source of our word \textit{trade}, \textit{tradere} is closely related to \textit{tradition}, meaning literally, ‘what is handed down [to later generations]’.

\textit{Hic meus quae tradentur non difficulter accipiet, quaedam etiam interrogabit}

My [ideal student] will receive instruction with no difficulty and will even ask some questions.

\begin{quote}
...inter Romanos Latinosque, qui eius pugnae memoriam posteris \textit{tradiderunt}...
\end{quote}

The Latin and Roman historians who left an account of the battle...

\textit{Tradere} is also used in teaching, where it means ‘to deliver’ a lesson or lecture. A teacher is literally one who ‘delivers’ doctrines, and a student (\textit{tradentur}) is the one they are ‘delivered’ to.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Hic meus quae \textit{tradentur} non difficulter accipiet, quaedam etiam interrogabit}
\end{quote}

My [ideal student] will receive instruction with no difficulty and will even ask some questions.\footnote{Livy \textit{History of Rome} 8:10:8. Also nec Aristidi fuga, qui unus omnium justissimus fuisset \textit{traditur}. “[this Aristides, who was banished] was said to have been the greatest of all men” (Cicero \textit{Pro Sestio} 67:141)}
The Romans used only a small range of terms to describe the transfer from one person to another. Why this is so we cannot be sure, although we can speculate. In the first century BC, most of the words above are used in connection with writing or with reports from distant places and times. Possibly this is because, for all the sophistication of Rome at that time, extensive travel and widespread use of portable writing were relatively new to Rome—its foreign conquests and imperial expansion had only really begun in the century before. The concerns of most people would have been to do with local affairs. Most communication would still have taken place face-to-face and consequently people would have talked about it as such. As I showed in Chapter 2, people in Homeric Greece thought of words passing directly from one person to another with no perceptible delay between ‘emitting and ‘receiving’. It was only with considerable experience of the use of writing—with words produced at one time and not heard until long after—that the whole culture would have begun to think of words being separated from those that speak or write them.

The words that the Romans make most use to refer to transference between people, *ferre* and *mittere*, were very flexible and abstract verbs, used in a huge range of contexts. Any metaphor based on them would not have been striking, but quite a generalised, abstract way of implying ‘get across’.

Taken all together, this suggests that the concept of ‘transferring’ from one person to another was relatively new to Rome in the first centuries BC and AD, and the Romans had not developed a large terminology to refer to it. They relied on a few highly generalised terms to imply ‘passing’ or ‘carrying’ to extend the basic model dating from times before extensive writing and travel were familiar to the Romans.

**THE THIRD STEP: ‘GRASPING’ OR ‘TAKING IN’ WHAT IS SAID**

If the Romans used few terms to describe transference between people then, by contrast, they had a huge number to describe the way that speech either ‘entered in’ or was ‘caught’ by the ears.

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38 The roots of *ferre* in particular are widespread in all Indo-European cultures. Parallel roots include Sanscrit *bhar*— ‘to carry’, *bharas* ‘burden’; Greek *pher*ō ‘to bear’; Gothic *bar*, *baire* ‘to bear’ and ‘to produce’ (from which we get the English word *bairn*, ‘child’); Anglo-Saxon *beran* (from which we derive *bear* and *birth*). It is a very basic concept and not surprisingly, the term was used in a huge number of ways, often abstract.
Another inflection on *mittere, admittere*, meaning ‘to carry in’, was used to describe the entry of words ‘in’ through the ears.

> pacis cum tyranno mentionem *admittere* auribus non fuisse
> any hint of peace with the tyrant he would never have *admitted in his ears*.\(^{39}\)

> His igitur velut fomentis, si quid erit asperum, praemolliemus, quo facilius aures judicum, quae post dicturi erimus, *admittant*.
> We will therefore use [these statements] as a poultice to soften the harder [parts of our speech] so that the ears of the jury will *take in* more easily what we say.\(^{40}\)

Just as words were said ‘to pour out’ (*effluere*) of a speaker, they were also believed ‘to pour in’ (*infundere*) to the listeners’ *animus* through the ears (*aures*):

> nihil ex illius animo quod semel esset *infusum* umquam *effluere* potuisse
> nothing that had once been *poured in* [introduced into] his *animus* had ever been able to *flow out* again.\(^{41}\)

Related to the concept of ‘pouring’ was the word *libare*. Although its root sense is ‘to take a little from [a thing]’, it was usually used to mean ‘to pour out’ or ‘to pour in’.\(^{42}\) *Libare* could also mean ‘to take extracts’ from books or ‘to learn superficially’.

> sed, omnibus unum in locum coactis scriptoribus, quod quisque commodissime praecepere videbatur excerptismus et ex variis ingeniis excellentissima quaeque *libavimus*.
> but after bringing together in the one place all of the writings [on oratory] I carefully excerpted the most suitable precepts and so *drew out* the best from many minds.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{39}\) Livy *History of Rome* 34:49:1, my translation. Foster *et al* give: “He would never have listened to any suggestion of peace with the tyrant”

\(^{40}\) Quintilian *Institutio* 4:3:10 my translation. Butler gives: “We shall therefore employ such utterances as emollients to soften the harder elements of our speech, in order that the ears of the jury may be more ready to take in what we have to say…”

\(^{41}\) That is, he could not forget what he saw or learned. Cicero *De Oratore* 2:74:300 translated by Sutton with minor changes by me. Also consistent is ...*non infundere in aures tuas orationem sed in animo videantur inscribere* ”[When listening to your client’s instructions or your opponent’s speech, your task is] not to *pour* [what they say] in your ears but to inscribe it carefully on your *animus*” (Cicero *De Oratore* 2:87:355 translated by Sutton with minor changes by me.)

\(^{42}\) Hence a sacrificial offering of a small amount of wine is still called a ‘libation’.

\(^{43}\) Cicero *De Inventione* 2:2:4 my translation based on Hubbell. Hubbell gives: “but after collecting all the works on the subject [of oratory] I excerpted what seemed like the most suitable precepts from each, and so culled the flower of many minds.”
Most of these terms—admittere, influere, libare—are passive: speech enters in whether the person wants them to or not. But more often the Romans thought of listening as active: people ‘caught’ hold of what was said or ‘grasped’ what the speaker said. One important family of words used to describe hearing this way was based on prehendere, ‘to grasp’ or ‘to lay hold of’. Initially prehendere was used purely physically, but was extended metaphorically to mean ‘to hold [with the eye]’ or ‘to grasp [with the mind]’, as in:

...in adverso vero atque inopi sunt
prehendere quae possis oculorum lumine operto,
         innumerabilia...

in love that is unhappy and helpless, evils there are that you see with your eyes shut, innumerable.44

The various derivatives of prehendere—apprehendere, comprehendere, deprehendere—are often all ambiguous about exactly what is being ‘grasped’: a physical object, a sight or sound, an argument or speech, or an understanding.

quidquid ego apprehenderam statim accusator extorquebat e manibus
...whatever [excuse] I grasped, the prosecutor immediately wrested out of my hands.45

Pertractare enim, quomodo aut pro falsis aut etiam pro injustis aliquando dicatur, non est inutile, vel propter hoc solum, ut ea facilius et deprehendamus et refellamus.
Studying, for instance, how to speak for lies and injustice is not useless, if for one reason [only]: it will help us grasp and defeat them more easily.46

The term from this family most often used in connection with communication—comprehendere—can refer equally to what is ‘held’ by a book, a speech, or the soul and the mind.

In alio vero libro, in quo breviter comprehensa sententia
There is another book which holds a summary of his thought.47

44 Lucretius De Rerum Natura 4:1143ff.
45 Cicero Pro Cluentio 19:52 translated by Hodge with minor changes by me.
46 Quintilian Institutio 12:1:34 my translation. Butler gives: “For it is by no means useless to consider how at times we should speak in defence of falsehood and even injustice, if only for this reason, that such an investigation will enable us to detect and defeat them with greater ease”.
47 Cicero De Finibus 2:7:20. Also (Cato) verbis luce lentioribus et pluribus rem eandem comprehenderat. "[Cato’s speech] comprised [held] the matter more lucidly and fully". (Cicero Letters to Atticus 12:2:1)
qualis animus sit vacans copore, intellegere et cogitatione comprehendere
[many thinkers are unable] to understand or grasp the conception of the nature of the animus without body.48

Related to the idea of ‘grasping’ is the verb attingere, meaning ‘to lay hands on’ or, by extension, ‘to touch’ or ‘to come into contact with’. It is a term occasionally used to mean ‘to mention’.

Praeturae juris dictio ... non attingitur
His administration of justice as a praetor ... is not touched on.49

The most important term to describe this aspect of communication is legere, the word the Romans used to mean ‘to read’, but which otherwise usually meant ‘to collect’ or ‘to gather’.

didici, vidi, scripta legi ...
an I have learned, all I have seen, all I have gathered from books...50

ex tuas litteras lego ...
I gather from your letter...

While the Romans originally used the word legere metaphorically, they soon forgot its former meanings. Legere came to be the conventional word for ‘read’. In Rome, as in Greece, reading was usually done aloud, and only in moments of great stress or secrecy might a person read to themselves silently51. So legere is also often used to mean ‘to read aloud’.

qui cum convocatis auditoribus legeret eis magnum illud novistis volumen suum.
When reading that long and well known poem before an assembled audience... 52

48 Cicero Tusculan Disputations 1:22:50. Also ei qui omnes animo virtutes penitos comprehendisset omnia quae faceret. “[The man] whose animus inwardly grasps every virtue, could do everything [he chooses]” (Cicero Pro Balbo 1:3)


50 Cicero Pro Cn. Plancio 39-94 my translation. Watts gives: “All my knowledge, all my experience, all my reading…”

51 From this habit of reading texts aloud, we get our word lecture, ‘a speech’ and lectern, ‘a stand to hold books for reading’.

52 Cicero Brutus 191. Also consistent is Epistulam tuam, ... conscidi innocentem; nihil enim habebat, quod non vel in contione recte legi posset. “Your letter ... I have torn up, though it did not deserve such a fate; for it contained nothing that might not have been quite properly read out, even at a public meeting.” (Cicero Letters to his Friends 7:18:4.)
What the ear and eye ‘gathered’ by reading, the mind (animus) was later able ‘to bring together’ (colligere) and ponder. Ligare, ‘to bind’, is closely related, in both sense and etymology, to legere.

When I look at the injuries [suffered by] our republic, and bring together in my animus the ancient calamities [that fell on] great cities, I see no little part of the trouble was brought in by men whose advice was persuasive [because of their oratory].

The way that the Romans began to use physical activities to describe metaphorically the operation of the animus is also apparent in the use of another family of words: excipere, accipere, and concipere. Although the root of these terms, cipio, had fallen out of use by the first century BC, all the derivatives were still concerned with aspects of ‘taking’: excipere ‘to take out’ or ‘to draw out’; accipere ‘to take in’ or ‘to receive’ ‘to get’; concipere ‘to bring together’ or ‘to unite’ (concipere is virtually synonymous with colligere). Excipere is another word used, metaphorically, to mean ‘to listen’ or ‘to take in with the ear’.

Assensu populi excepta vox consils...

The consul’s words were received with approval...

At eo tempore ipso Nicaeam Ephesumque mittebat qui rumores Africanos exciperent et celeriter ad se referrent...

But it is alleged that at the very same time he was sending men to Nicea and Ephesus to pick up rumours from Africa and report them promptly to him.

The word concipere though is far more often connected with the animus than with the ears. quid mirim si in auspiciis ... imbecilli animo superstitione ista concipiant? What wonder if in auspices ... weak minds took hold of superstitious practices?

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53 Both legere and ligare are related to the Greek word logos, a word which originally meant ‘word’ or ‘speech’, but which the Greeks later extended to cover also ‘thought’, ‘reason’ and ‘mind’.

54 Cicero De Invenzione 1:1:1 my translation. Hubbell gives: “When I run over the troubles in our commonwealth, and run over in my mind the ancient misfortunes of mighty cities, I see that no little part of the disasters was brought on by men of eloquence”.

55 Livy History of Rome 8:6:7. Also consistent is Ad has excipiendas voces speculator ... misses... “When a spy, sent from the party of Perseus to catch remarks [was captured, he was roughly handled...]” (Livy History of Rome 40:7:4)

56 Cicero Pro Rege Deiotaro 9:25.

57 Cicero Divinatione 2:39:81 translated by Falconer with minor changes by me.
quod non solum vitia concipiunt ipsi, sed ea infundunt in civitatem.

[...men of the upper class who do wrong are especially dangerous to the State] because they not only take in vicious practices themselves but they pour them into the ordinary citizens.\(^8\)

**THE EFFECTS ON THE ANIMUS**

Metaphors on ‘carrying’ or ‘bearing’ news or speech ‘flowing’ from one person to another would lead us to expect that the *animus* of the receiving person would become ‘filled up’. And we find Latin expressions saying precisely this. One word that the Romans usually used in this context is *plere*, ‘to fill’ and its derivatives, *implere* and *replere*:

\[
\ldots \text{licit carpentum, et colligentem undique, repleri justa juris civilis scientia.}
\]

...a man may, by culling even at random and gathering from every quarter, become filled with a tolerable knowledge of the common law.\(^59\)

In cases though where words are ‘hurled’ rather than merely ‘poured’, the metaphor would suggest a rather more severe response in the *animus*. And this is indeed the case: the Romans say that the *animus* was ‘shocked’ or ‘struck’—metaphors on the words *percutere* or *percussio*, ‘to strike’.

*percussisti me de oratione prolata*\(^60\)

[Your news that] my speech has been published is a blow.

*audivi ex Gratio, Romae esse hominem, et fuisse assiduum: percussit animum.*

I hear from Gratius ... that the man is in Rome and has been all along. It struck my animus [as suspicious].\(^61\)

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\(^58\) Cicero *De Legibus* 3:14:32 my translation based on Keyes. He gives: “[Men of the upper class that do wrong are especially dangerous to the State], because they indulge not only in vicious practices themselves, but they also infect the whole commonwealth with their vices.”

\(^59\) Cicero *De Oratore*, 1:42:191 translated by Sutton.

\(^60\) Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 3:12:1. In the same collection of letter is *repente percussus est atrocissimis litteris in quibus scriptum erat, fundum Herulanensem a Q. Fabio fratre proscriptum esse.* “He was suddenly hit [shocked] by a most terrible letter, in which was written that land at Herculaneum had been advertised for sale by his brother Q. Fadius.” (*Cicero Letters to his Friends* 9:25:3 translated by Williams with minor changes by me.)

\(^61\) Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 4:8:1 translated by Winstedt with minor changes by me.
Otherwise, the *animus* may be ‘moved’ by what people say, although the verb that the Romans normally used was *commovere*, rather than *movere* which meant, metaphorically, ‘to think’.

\[ \textit{vidi enim vos in hoc nomine, cum testis dicerat, commoveri} \]

I saw you were moved by what the witness said on this point.\(^6\)

**WORDS THAT MAY BE FULL OR EMPTY**

By the first century AD, we begin to see expressions used that come to dominate the modern Conduit Metaphor. While the Romans do not talk of language functioning as a ‘conduit’ (*ductus*, *canalis*), they do talk of words ‘flowing out’ of one person, ‘between people’, and ‘into’ the ears of listeners. They also began to talk as though what is said may be ‘full’ or ‘empty’, which leaves the way open for them to ‘contain’ things.

\[ \textit{sed tu hoc nobis da, Scaevola, et perfice, ut Crassus haec, quae coarctavit, et peranguste refersit in oratione sua, dilatet nobis atque explicet}. \]

Pray do us this kindness, Scaevola; prevail on Crassus to amplify and explain for our benefit what has been compressed into so small and narrow a compass in the remarks he has just made.\(^6\)

The critical word in here is *referitus*. In its earliest uses, it meant ‘crammed, full to bursting’, although clearly here what is ‘stuffed’ is hardly a physical object.

Rather rarer are expressions implying that what is spoken may be ‘empty’, *inanis*, although Cicero does describe a madman as one whose words are a “vain [hollow] thundering of

\[ \textit{Quod si tantam vim rerum maximarum arte rhetoricici illi doctores complecterentur quaerebat cur de prooemis et de epilogis et di huiusmodi nugis (sic enim appellabat) referiti essent eorum libri; de civitate in statuendis de scribendis legibus de aequitate de justitia de fide de fragendis cupiditatibus de conformandis hominum moribus littera in eorum libris nulla inveniretur?} \]

“If these great teachers of rhetoric included in their course this formidable array of really important subjects, why was it, he asked, that their textbooks were full to overflowing with directions about exordiums, perorations, and rubbish of this kind—for so he dubbed them—whereas about the right ordering of states, and the drawing up of laws, about equity, justice, and integrity, about the control of the passions, and the training of the characters of men not a single syllable could be found in all their writings” (Cicero *De Oratore* 1:19:86 translated by Blakiston, pp198–199. Sutton gives “their books were stuffed full of maxims”).

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\(^6\) Cicero *Verrine Orations* 2:4:56 §125, my translation. Greenwood gives: “I notice, gentlemen, that you were much interested by the evidence of a witness on this point.”

\(^6\) Cicero *De Oratore*, 1:35:163 translated by Blakiston, pp220–221. In the same dialogue appears *Quod si tantam vim rerum maximarum arte sua rhetoricici illi doctores complecterentur quaerebat cur de prooemis et de epilogis et di huiusmodi nugis (sic enim appellabat) referiti essent eorum libri; de civitate in statuendis de scribendis legibus de aequitate de justitia de fide de fragendis cupiditatibus de conformandis hominum moribus littera in eorum libris nulla inveniretur?* “If these great teachers of rhetoric included in their course this formidable array of really important subjects, why was it, he asked, that their textbooks were full to overflowing with directions about exordiums, perorations, and rubbish of this kind—for so he dubbed them—whereas about the right ordering of states, and the drawing up of laws, about equity, justice, and integrity, about the control of the passions, and the training of the characters of men not a single syllable could be found in all their writings” (Cicero *De Oratore* 1:19:86 translated by Blakiston, pp198–199. Sutton gives “their books were stuffed full of maxims”).
words without thought or knowledge” (verborum ... sonitus inanis nulla subjecta sententia, nel scientia).

[Without study] our powers of speaking extempore will give us nothing but an empty flow of words springing from the lips and not the brain.

But whether ‘full’ or ‘empty’, the metaphor implies that human speech has an ‘inside’ or some hollow space that may be ‘filled’. Consistent with this idea is the use of the verb, depromere, ‘to fetch out’ or ‘to bring forth [from a container]’. It was usually used when asking someone to ‘produce’ speech—a metaphor consistent with the model of speech understood as breath from the preacordia.

"Illa deprome nobis unde afferas, quae saepissime tractas semperque divinitus”
"Depromam equidem, inquit, …”
"Produce [say] for us the sources of what you so often handle and always in inspired fashion. …”
"I will certainly produce them…”

The same metaphor on depromere is also occasionally applied to books and letters:

...quod vox et gestus subito sumi et aliunde arripi non potest; juris utilitas ad quamque causum, quamvis repente, vel a peritis, vel de libris depromi potest!

...whereas voice and action are not things that can be picked up in a moment or borrowed for the occasion, a workable knowledge of the law for any particular case can always be got at the shortest notice either from lawyers or the law-books.

The transfer of human characteristics to books is far from complete though: for instance, I cannot find a single, clear example of books being described as having ‘insides’—although there are many ambiguous examples such as ‘in your letter’ (in tuas litteris) or ‘in the book’ (in libro).

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64 Quintilian Institutio. 10:3:2
65 Cicero De Oratore, 2:29.127 translated by Sutton.
66 Cicero De Oratore, 1:59:252 translated by Blakiston, p249. Sutton uses: “may be fetched, as hurriedly as you please, from experts or textbooks”.
67 If these two expressions are permitted, then we also need to include their complements, ex tuas litteris and ex libro, ‘from your letter’ and ‘from the book’. Ex here would imply a process of taking or extracting something from the text.
WHAT IS SENT

What did the Romans think was being ‘thrown’, ‘ejected’, ‘sent’, ‘placed’, ‘caught’ and ‘grasped’? If we were discussing modern English, not Latin, it would be ideas, thoughts, memories, emotions—almost anything ‘in’ the mind or experience can be ‘transmitted’ from one person to another: we say, “Your feelings came through to us”, “I passed on your thoughts”, “We get the idea”, and so on.

For the Romans, what was ‘sent out’ was occasionally speech understood physically as breath. It pours out of the mouth like water from a jug.

> qui volunt exclamatione magius, num satis habent latera, fauce, linguam intendere, e quibus elicere vocem et fundi videmus?

> When men want to shout louder it is not enough, is it, to intensify the efforts of sides and throat and tongue from which we see the voice drawn out and poured forth?\(^{68}\)

As the Romans, like the Greeks, began to move away from the immediate physical connection between words and breath, so speech came to ‘pour out of’ or be ‘poured into’ a person—and ‘pouring’ came to be one of the conventional terms used to refer to speaking.

> quam valde ille reditu vel potius reversione mea, laetatus effundit illa omnia quae tacuerat!

> with what great rejoicing at my return (or rather my turning back) did he pour out all that he had previously not said!\(^{69}\)

In time, speaking itself comes to be treated as ‘sending’ out—to speak is ‘to send’, ‘to throw’, ‘to hurl’:

> semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum

> Once put out [spoken], words fly irrevocably.\(^{70}\)

Often though, what is ‘thrown’, ‘poured’ or ‘placed’ goes unsaid by the Romans. To illustrate this point, below are five examples, all of which I have used already. In each case, the word I have bracketed in the translation—what in English would be the object transferred—does not have a counterpart in the Latin text. (We have to include it in the

\(^{68}\) Cicero Tusculan Disputations 2:24:56 translated by King with minor changes by me.

\(^{69}\) Cicero Letters to Atticus 16:7:5, my translation. Shuckburg gives: “With what transports of delight at my return, or rather my abandonment of the journey, did he pour out all that he had repressed before!”

\(^{70}\) Horace Epistles 1:18:71.
English translation, otherwise the sentence makes little sense to us, used as we are to the conventions of Modern English.)

*Sed illud, quid sit, scire cupio, quod jactis obscure...*

But I am anxious to know the meaning of that dark *jactis* [hint] of yours...\(^7\)

*tu me hoc tibi mandasse existmas, ut mihi vadimonia dilata et Chresti compilationem mitteres.*

How could you [think] I asked you to send me [news] of the postponement of trials and Chrestus’s robberies?\(^7\)

*Curio misi, ut medico honos haberetur.*

I am sending [instructions to] Curio that your doctor should be given an honorarium.\(^7\)

*nam iam dui propter hiemis magnitudinem nihil novi ad nos adferebatur.*

because of the severity of the winter, nothing new [no news] has been carried in to us.\(^7\)

*quidquid ego apprehenderam statim accusator extorquebat e manibus* ...

...whatever [excuse] I grasped, the prosecutor immediately wrested out of my hands.\(^7\)

In Latin, these sentences are a little like the following in English, which use verbs implying transference but have no explicit objects upon which they act.

She opened up to the counsellor. It is hard to get through to him. That was a loaded question. I am cramming for the exam.

Such expressions are unusual in English; they appear to be normal in Latin. The Romans of the first century had an extensive, flexible but largely conventional idiom, obviously drawn from the metaphor of transference, to deal with communication. The linguistic resources were apparently quite adequate for their needs, for the Romans apparently felt little need to alter their basic metaphors—or extend them to explain what was being transferred.

One group of things that was never ‘sent’ were thoughts and feelings. An important reason for this was that the Romans did not treat ‘ideas’, ‘thoughts’, ‘feelings’ and suchlike as pseudo-physical objects, fit to be carried here and there. For instance, while the Romans had many terms around the idea of ‘thinking’—*cognosco, cogito, sapientia, intelligentia, intellego, ratio, scio, scientia*—they did not reify the products of their thinking. The outcome of reflection is not an object, ‘an idea’ or ‘a thought’. For instance, *cogitatum*, the noun

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\(^7\) Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 27.4.

\(^7\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 2:8.1.

\(^7\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 16:9:3.

\(^7\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 2:14.

\(^7\) Cicero *Pro Cluentio* 19:52.
derived from *cogitere*, ‘to think’, is more akin to the sense of ‘thought’ in “The thought of Plato covered all parts of philosophy” rather than “I have had a thought”.

In part, the reason that the Romans do not reify thinking is because most of the Roman terms that we translate as ‘thinking’ are closer to ‘skill’ or ‘practice’ than to ‘intellectual activity’; there is a sense of activity or ability which modern cogitation lacks. For instance, *sapientia* is more ‘good sense’, ‘prudence’ or ‘wisdom’ rather than ‘a thought’. There is relatively little ‘mental’ or ‘private experience’—with two major exceptions: *intellego* and *intellectus*. Both words are based on the idea of ‘interior speech’: *intellectus* comes from *inter+lectio* ‘I speak within’; *intellego* comes from *inter+lego* ‘I grasp within’ or ‘I hear within’. Latin terms associate with the mind can be loosely divided into those concerned with practical action or skill, and those concerned with speaking, whether internal or external (hence the close relationship of *ratio* and *oratio*). Much that we might expect to go on ‘inside’ the *animus* or *genius*, the Romans treated as public or communal.²⁶

Unlike modern thinkers, the Romans did not regard thought as somehow in opposition to speech. Indeed, the two are quite close: *ratio* is related to *oratio*. Thought is not immaterial; like speech, thought had substance, *anima*. The distinction that the Romans did make though is between *verba* and *res*—‘words’ on one hand and ‘things’, ‘matter’ or ‘substance’ on the other. *Res* was not mental. For instance *res publica* is literally ‘the public interest’, the term the Romans used for their system of government; *res divinae*, or ‘divine matters’ covered much of what we would call religion; *res militaris* refers to military affairs. In speaking, the *animus* cogitated upon *res*, then expresses itself with words.

*We conceive ideas [res] before we speak them.*²⁸

*In the natural course of things, we conceive things [rei] in our animus before we express them...*²⁹

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²⁶ A surprising number of activities we would think of as mental the Romans saw as public or social. *Consilium* is usually translated ‘wisdom’, but it is much more closely related to ‘consulting’ than it is to ‘thinking’. Our word *cognition* derives from *co+gno*, meaning ‘to know together’ or ‘to be wise together’; *conscience* and *consciousness* come from *con+scio*, meaning ‘to know jointly’. In Roman law, a ‘fact’ was only something that was publicly known; what an individual knew was not admissible as factual evidence. *Sentient* is related to Latin terms for speech like ‘opinion’, ‘judgement’, ‘sentence’ as well as the words for ‘feeling’ or ‘sensation’. Most of the words translated as ‘thought’ or ‘intelligence’—*sapientia, prudentia, gnarus*—have more to do with being skilled or crafty than they do with intellectual, reflective thought and ratiocination. *Ignoro*, from which we get the word ‘ignorance’, means ‘to make a mistake’ rather than the more intellectual ‘lack knowledge’.

²⁷ The Greeks used *logos* for both reasoning and speaking.

²⁸ *concipere res quam enuntire. Quintilian Institutio* 1:10:4ff.
In speaking, res is not ‘transmuted’ into verba. Rather, the animus ‘expresses’ itself in a process covered by a metaphor on exprimere. Originally, exprimere meant ‘to squeeze’ or ‘to wring out’ physically, as in “to wring water out of a cloth”. It derives from premere, which meant mostly ‘to exert a steady or continuous force’. From ‘to squeeze’, exprimere was extended to mean ‘to stamp’, from the way in which designs were stamped on coins. This use was in turn broadened to mean ‘to make a likeness of, reproduce, copy’ (for instance, in sculpture it meant ‘to portray, depict’). From this sense, exprimere came to be applied to speaking and writing, as in ‘to reproduce in another language, portray, reproduce’.

In this way, words ‘express’ what the animus or the genius feels or thinks: making a likeness in speech.

Hoc enim uno praestamus vel maxime feris, quod colloquimur inter nos, et quod exprimere dicendo sensa possimus.

…the one point in which we have in our greatest advantage over the brute creation is that we hold converse with one another, and can reproduce our thought in word.

exprimenda enim sunt et ponenda ante oculos ea quae videantur et verisimilia, quod est proprium narrationis…

For [a spoken jest] must describe, and present to the mind’s eye, such things as bear the semblance of truth, this being the peculiar function of narrative.

THE ROMAN SYSTEM OF METAPHORS

I have not covered all of the terms the Romans used that are consistent with the basic metaphor, although I have included the important ones. The Latin system of metaphors clearly originated within the same basic physiological architecture as the Homeric Greeks—speech as breath (aura) is breathed out of one person and into the ears (aures) of another. Occasionally, the poets treated speech as breath, with its source in the lungs or

79 Ut vero natura prius est concipere animo res quam enuntiare... Quintilian Institutio 9:1:19. Also “Only let your habitual practice in writing and speaking be to make the thoughts end up with the words” (Cicero De Oratore 3:49:91).

80 In this sense, exprimere is also used to mean ‘to translate’ as in cur in gravissimus rebus non dialectet eos sermo patrius, cum videm fabellas Latinas ud verbum e Graecis exprimessas no inuiti legant. “Why should [some Romans] dislike their native tongue for serious and important subjects, when they are quite willing to read Latin plays translated word for word from the Greek.” (Cicero De Finibus, 1:2:4, translated by Rackham)

81 Cicero, De Oratore 1:8:32 translated by Sutton. Blakiston gives: “the power of expressing our feelings in words.”

chest (*praecordia, pectoris*), but such expressions are unusual in the Latin sources we have from the second century BC onwards. Ordinary Romans appear to have either forgotten or ignored earlier associations with breath and human physiology. The process of communication implied in the language they used is far more abstract, and is beginning to accommodate things such as writing which have no physiological counterpart. Nonetheless, the Romans continued to use a large number of terms implying that communication was a process of transference—although they often do not state directly what is being transferred.

Communication-as-transmission begins in the *animus*, or occasionally in the *genius*, as they cogitate on *res*. What they think or feel (*cogitatio, sententia*) is then ‘expressed’ as speech, *verba*.

Speech is ‘emitted’ from the *animus* in the chest, and passes out through the mouth, where it may be shaped by tongue, lips and teeth. Various ways of sending out words are covered by *emittere* (‘to send out’, and hence ‘to speak’ or ‘to declare’), *effluere* and *effundere* (‘to flow out’, and so ‘to speak [fluidly]’), *jactere, jacere, inicere*, and *enicere* (‘to toss out [in passing]’, and hence ‘to hint’ or ‘to suggest’) and *exponere* (‘to place out’).

What a person does in speaking is ‘to send out’ words (*mittere, ferre, gerere*), or ‘to hand them on’ to others (*tradere*). They are also said ‘to flow’ (*fluere*) from one person to another. It is also possible ‘to carry back’ news (*reportere*).

The Romans treat hearing in two distinct ways—depending on whether the speaker or listener is seen to be active. When the speaker is the active party, they may be said ‘to pour in’ (*influere, infundere*) to the listener’s ears, or more generally ‘to send [words] in’ (*admittere*) to the listener. But if the hearer is thought of as actively listening to what is said, rather than passively receiving it, then to listen is ‘to grasp’, ‘to lay hold of’ (*prehendere, attingere*) or ‘to take in’ (*excipere*) what is said. To read is ‘to collect’ (*legere*) what is written.

The effects on the hearer or reader or their *animus* depends in part on how things were ‘sent’. If the speaker ‘poured’ their words into the ears of another, then the listener may be filled (*replieri*). If the speaker is forceful, the listener may be ‘struck’, ‘hit’ or ‘shocked’ (*percussio, percutio*) by what is said.

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83 Apart from this system of metaphors implying communication is transference, there are two other metaphors used by the Romans to explain communicating: one based on dress and adornment, and the other based on weaving. I have described both in Appendix 6. They are minor compared with communication-as-transmission. Appendix 6 includes a comparison of the frequency of metaphoric expressions consistent with each in Latin.
CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNICATION-AS-TRANSMISSION

I have had two major aims in the last three chapters: first, to sketch out the ways that the Greeks and Romans talked about communication in terms of transference; and second, to show how these ways of talking came about—as people constructed metaphors. This final section summarises the consequences of this ancient process for modern beliefs about communication, and the consequences of rejecting the idea of communication-as-transmission.

By the time of the Roman Empire, the Greek and Roman models showed most of the characteristics of the modern transmission models. To illustrate the point, I have reproduced from Chapter 2 the list of features characteristic of modern models. Communication-as-transmission has:

[A] ‘senders’, speakers
[B] ‘receivers’, audiences, or listeners
[C] a message, with an objective existence, independent of people
[D] communication ‘starts’ in one person and ‘ends’ in another: sometimes in the mind, at other times in the body (such as ‘inside’ a person’s head)
[E] either (a) words and messages have ‘insides’ that may ‘contain’ meanings or emotions, or else be empty of them, or (b) words and messages are symbols of ideas in the sender’s mind
[F] messages or symbols pass, ‘flow’ or are transferred from one person to another, either through space or via ‘channels’ or ‘conduits’
[G] in ‘transmission’, the meaning of messages may be distorted
[H] what is sent may be thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions, impressions, experience—almost anything ‘in’ mind that is not direct sensory experience
[I] whether it is words or thoughts being sent is often ambiguous
[J] what ‘receivers’ understand is exactly what speakers intend they understand, unless distorted in ‘transmission’
[K] perfect understanding is the norm
[L] interpretation, context, history and experience are absent
[M] causation is implied.

Communication-as-transmission begins by identifying speech with breath. Just as breath comes out of the lungs, so does speech: the lungs become the source of speech in Greece and Rome and, in the process, become metamorphosed into something rather more than ‘lungs’. In most ancient models, speech as breath is believed to enter into the listener’s metamorphosed lungs, via the ears and windpipe (hence the Roman term aures, ‘ears’, comes from aura, ‘breath’ or ‘breeze’). Listening is presumed to be the inverse of speaking,
which explains, thought the Greek philosophers, how it is that we understand what is said to us.

Speaking provides the model for thinking. The two activities were still very close only two thousand years ago: the Greeks used logos to refer to reason, mind, spirit, intelligence, word and speech; the Romans used ratio for reason and oratio for speech. By association, the source of speech, the metaphorized lungs, came to be the site and organ of thought—eventually developing into the modern mind and soul. That thinking is conceived of as speaking helps explain why, even now, transmission models are deeply ambiguous on whether it is thoughts or words that are transmitted.

The grounding of human communication in breath and the human body explains why communication-as-transmission has communication ‘starting’ and ‘ending’ inside people—speech as breath starts in one person’s lungs and is presumed to end up in the lungs of another. The initial identification of both speech and the substance of thought with breath also explains why communication came to be seen as a process of pseudo-physical transference from one person ‘to’ another. Even as the model became more and more abstract, and did not refer to what was ‘sent’ (as in the Latin model), as long as the basic expressions drew on language also used for physical transference, there would always remain the implication that what was being transferred was physical.

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84 I have to emphasise that the ancients literally, genuinely experienced themselves in their chests, just as we ‘feel’ ourselves perceiving and thinking ‘in’ our heads. In both cases, people presumably experience what they tell themselves they should experience—the experience is not ‘natural’ (It is physically impossible to feel anything ‘inside’ the head: there are no sensory nerves.) Case studies in abnormal psychology show that this is perfectly possible. One personal piece of evidence: after several months of working on this problem, trying to think my way into these ancient ways of thinking, I began to feel myself inside my chest, not my head, as though eyes and thoughts had suddenly been transplanted to my heart. The experience only passed when I turned to other things, but it illustrates how people, living in a culture that constantly talked about consciousness in this way, could easily have experienced it.

85 Most of the ancient world believed that communication began and ended in the region in or around the heart (perikradion, phrenes, sternon, stethos, kēr, cor, praecordia, pectoris) rather than the head and brain as we do now. The appearance of the head in communication is due largely to Plato’s influence, as he incorporated Greek beliefs about the psukhē and its location of the psukhē into his philosophy. Although Galen and the Alexandrian surgeons had conclusively demonstrated that nerves that sensed pain ran to the brain not the heart, the heart was not displaced from its role in mental and emotional life until the mid-seventeenth century, after Harvey showed that the heart was no more than a muscular pump.
Treating communication as physical transference also explains why the ancients believed that what was heard was the same as what was said [j]. From here, it is only a short step to the belief that perfect understanding was therefore not merely possible, but normal [k].

The idea of communication consisting of three basic units—[a] speaker, [b] audience and [c] message—developed in Greece from the seventh century BC and in Rome from about the fourth century BC. Such a model only appeared with the widespread use of writing: cultures without writing, that relied purely on the spoken word, did not separate the speaker from what they spoke. The manifestly solid written text, which may be separated from its author, provided the metaphorical grounding for a ‘message’ with an existence independent of any human being [c]. The two-part Homeric model was expanded to the three-part model of classical Greece and Rome.

In the ‘Roman model’, there is even a hint that words may have ‘insides’ [e], although exactly why is unclear. Most probably, the idea arises through extending beliefs about people to book-rolls and writing. By the fourth century BC, people saw themselves as having an ‘inside’, within which they thought and out of which speech came. Words however also came from book-rolls. This may have suggested that books (and by association, words) had insides, like people.

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86 Communication-as-transmission first developed in communities which were predominantly or exclusively oral, in which communication would have taken place face-to-face. In this environment, people can easily note and correct the understandings of those they are talking with. This process is so normal, and people become so skilled at managing it as soon as they learn to speak, that they are largely unconscious of the constant process of correction and negotiation. Misunderstanding is always happening, but we can usually correct it on the spot before it becomes a problem. Misunderstanding only becomes obvious with writing, when writers are not present to correct the misinterpretations that people make of what they write—a point first made by Plato in *Phaedrus*. This situation was only becoming familiar to the Romans in the first century BC, and so not surprisingly the Latin model, which is drawn from everyday expressions, has little to say about understanding or interpretation. A few Greek and Roman authors do discuss interpretation—Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian—but they are isolated individuals whose views were not widespread. In any case, their focus is almost exclusively on written documents in legal cases, not ordinary everyday speech. See Chapter Thirteen for a discussion.

87 Classical writers certainly talk of the ‘inner mansions’ of the soul; Augustine for instance refers to it as a vast storeroom. But the idea of an inner space appears to be, in part, a development of the physiological–speech model. Speech is said to ‘pour out’ and ‘pour into’ people; in Homer, rage, strength and hate were poured ‘into’ a person’s thumos or phrenes by the gods; liars were said to ‘hide’ true words within their phrenes. All point to a ‘space’ ‘inside’ people where words, feelings and thoughts originate and subsist.
The use of metaphors on ‘flow’ in both Greece and Rome left open the way for metaphors on canals, channels and conduits [6]—and eventually the modern conduit metaphor88. Like the ancient models, the modern Conduit Metaphor makes little distinction about what exactly is transmitted: thoughts, ideas, facts, information, feelings, emotions [9].

There are a few differences between the ancient beliefs and modern views. First, thinking and the action of the soul were understood largely in physical terms (even if the ‘official’ philosophical position was that body and soul were in opposition: see Chapter 7). For the ancients, the substance of thought was physical and was still rooted in breath: *pneuma*, *spiritus*, *anima*. Second, there is no causation implied in the ancient texts, although there is a very clear sequence of events that takes place when someone speaks (causation only becomes a pressing concern under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophers). Third, there is no concept of ‘noise’ in the ancient models which may ‘distort’ a message in ‘transmission’. Fourth, apart from the implications of Aristotle’s philosophy—which were not made explicit in beliefs about communication until the thirteenth century AD—there was no concept that what was transferred was only a symbol of what was in the speaker’s mind, not the contents of the mind themselves. These however are minor differences when set alongside the commonalities between ancient and modern beliefs.

Implications for the nature of thinking

Although I have focussed on communication in the last three chapters, there are obvious implications for thinking and mind. If we take the ancient texts at face value, then in the early first millennium BC, the Homeric Greeks were not consciously aware of thinking. All they were aware of were decisions and directions, which they ascribed to external agents: gods, *thumos* or *phrenes*. On very rare occasions, there is primitive reflective thinking of a sort: but a Homeric warrior unsure about what to do does not ‘think to him-self’, he debates with his *thumos*. People are aware of this process of arriving at a decision in the same way they are aware of speech—because it is speech. Over time, people became more familiar with ‘speaking to themselves’. They also learnt how to ‘speak’ without actually moving their mouths, although they still ‘heard’ what they said ‘inside’ their *thumos* or *phrenes* or *animus*, or wherever it was they saw words coming from and going to. Plato certainly saw thinking as an inner spoken monologue, as have most philosophers that

88 See Chapter Sixteen for the development of the conduit metaphor in the late-seventeenth century.
discussed the question afterwards\textsuperscript{89}. It is possibly in this sense that Cicero writes, on receiving a library that “my house has acquired, as it were, a mind [\textit{animus}]”.\textsuperscript{90}

We should not think that this process of ‘speaking internally’ is fully developed even now. Two thousand years on, we still treat expressions like “He thought to himself...” and “He said to himself...” as virtually interchangeable. People still routinely talk aloud to themselves as they work through extended chains of thought. In literature, it is still conventional to represent what a character thinks as unspoken speech.

There is an immediate parallel to this process in the way that people have learnt to read silently. We know that the ancients usually read aloud (although they could read silently if necessary\textsuperscript{91}). In 400AD, Augustine writes with astonishment that Ambrose, bishop of Milan, had the extraordinary ability of being able to read to himself only with his lips\textsuperscript{92}. That Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric and a product of the great schools of Carthage suggests Ambrose’s ability was rare indeed. During the Middle Ages, people learnt to read first by murmuring, then later by whispering and finally by subvocalising—moving the lips, mouth and larynx but without using the vocal chords\textsuperscript{93}. Even after 1800, it was believed that young women could experience dizzy spells and bad behaviour and eventually madness by reading novels silently\textsuperscript{94}—which implies that reading out loud was still not the norm for many people two hundred years ago. Children of course still learn to sound out letters and then words before they learn to read silently, a process that takes some years. Silent reading appears to be a matter of learning to ‘speak’ the words without using the vocal apparatus. In precisely the same way, conscious thinking may simply be the same process applied to the invention of spoken speech rather than reading a fixed written text\textsuperscript{95}.

\textsuperscript{89} See Chapter Sixteen for a discussion of thought-as-speech in the Middle Ages and early Modern Age.

\textsuperscript{90} Cicero, \textit{Letters to Atticus} 4:8:2

\textsuperscript{91} The now classic paper on silent reading in antiquity is by Knox (1968), who shows that there were cases when people read and could not be heard by others. See also Balogh 1927, Hendrickson 1929, and Turner 1952.

\textsuperscript{92} Augustine \textit{Confessions} 8:12

\textsuperscript{93} Clanchy 1979, Saenger 1982

\textsuperscript{94} For instance, Paterson 1987

\textsuperscript{95} There are obvious parallels between thinking as ‘speaking without sound’ and envisaging and insight as ‘seeing without sight’—the capacity of the mind to summon up the experience of physical stimulus (sound and sight) without the immediate stimulus. While this idea involves rejecting conscious thought as a mental activity, this is quite different from the now-defunct school of psychology, behaviourism, which rejects the whole concept of mind. What I have suggested above—and I emphasise \textit{suggested}—is that people have a substratum of
If large parts of our rational, conscious thought processes genuinely consist of little more than speaking to ourselves without using our mouths, then many of the philosophical problems around the relationship between thought and speech simply disappear. For instance, the Whorf Hypothesis—the claim that all higher thought processes are dependant on language, and that the world that people experience and perceive changes with language—becomes self-evidently true, and furthermore, we have an entirely rational explanation for it.

Historically, beliefs about communication preceded—must have preceded—beliefs about thinking. The modern habit of treating communication as dependant on thought is exposed for what it is: a modern habit.

Developments in communication-as-transmission after Rome

I am not going to trace out the development of communication-as-transmission based on physiology between the establishment of the Roman Empire and the present. Greek and Roman writers, orators and philosophers used the language that collectively made up the ancient models. Their literary output would be at the centre of Western scholarship and literature for fifteen hundred years after the decline of Rome in the West. So long as these texts were preserved and studied by the literate, and Latin and Greek were the languages of scholars, the Greek and Roman models remained central to educated Europe’s beliefs about communication. Vernacular languages of course continued to develop. But the processes by which the models of communication first developed still operated: people would still explain communication metaphorically; they would still draw on the language of their parents, preserving what was useful and modifying what was not to meet new circumstances. The physical experience of speaking would ground communication within the basic physiological framework and prevent the model from drifting too far from its physiological roots. As I showed above, there is actually little difference between the ancient models and the modern conduit metaphor, which makes following the path between then and now somewhat unnecessary. In Appendix 8, I have summarised the model as it stood at the beginning of the Modern Age in the works of Shakespeare. Although the individual organs differ, the same basic process is apparent.

There are two major developments that take place in communication-as-transmission: the development of symbolic transference in the High Middle Ages, and the mechanisation of transmission at the beginning of the Modern Age. I will explore these in Chapter 15.
THE SECOND TRADITION

COMMUNICATION AS ORDER

6. COMMUNICATION-AS-ORDER

7. CLASSICAL BELIEFS ABOUT SOCIETY

8. EARLY CHRISTIANITY

9. THE ORDER OF THE MEDIEVAL UNIVERSE
ABSTRACT  Today, the tradition of communication-as-order is divided into two distinct parts. The first is concerned with the structures presumed to underlie language and culture, and make communication possible. In the last century, this aspect was most visible in structuralism. The second is concerned with how order in communities is established, maintained and developed. Communication in this sense is understood as the process by which communities exist.

Today, these two parts have apparently little in common. This is due largely to the way that the Modern Age—which has usually regarded human beings as autonomous individuals—has understood the origins of society in a ‘social contract’. This however is a relatively new concept. More important in most of Western history has been the idea that people are naturally social creatures, complete only within their communities. This was central to Christianity, and it is the origin of both versions of communication-as-order. Reaching its zenith in the High Middle Ages, this tradition held that to communicate was to participate in the order laid down by God for his creation—an order in which human society is only one part. This belief declined in the early Modern Age with the rise of individualism and the rejection of natural order. With this decline appeared the present gulf between the two halves of communication-as-order: speech and society, communication and community.

From the Latin, *communico*, meaning ‘I make common’, we have the etymological source of many key terms in English for talking about non-technical, non-transmission modes of communication: *communion, communicant, commune* (as both verb and noun), *communal, community, commonweal, communism*, and of course, *communication*. There are two distinct parts to the tradition though, visible in the roots of the word *communico*. It derives from *com* (joint, shared) and *munis* (civic duties or responsibilities). Modern beliefs about communication-as-order are still divided between those that regard communication as shared property or experience, and those that see communication as an ethical and social interaction—communicating in this second sense is the process by which
communities come about, are maintained and develop. The most prominent representative of communication-as-order in the past century has been structuralism and its descendants.

STRUCTURALISM

The origins of structuralism in Saussurean linguistics

European structuralism begins with the linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) or, more accurately, with the General Course in Linguistics (1916) published in his name after his death1. The proper study of language, says the Course, is not individual words or utterances (parole), but the system of rules, relationships and patterns that govern all possible utterances (langue). “Language [langue] is speech less speaking. It is the whole set of linguistic habits which allow an individual to understand and to be understood”2.

Saussurean linguistics is ultimately not interested in what people say, but the system that allows them to say what they do. It is not a theory of communication as such, but what makes communication possible3.

1 Saussure himself never published a word on structuralism and never used the word. His status as its ‘founding father’ rests entirely on the General Course in Linguistics (1916), published in his name by his colleagues after his death in 1913. The Course was put together from “sometimes conflicting” lecture notes taken by Saussure’s students—far from an ideal source as Saussure’s lectures changed significantly from one year to the next. Worse, Saussure’s editors themselves admit they could not verify the student’s records, as they themselves had not attended Saussure’s last and ‘definitive’ lectures. For these, they had to rely on only three sets of students’ notes. Saussure himself left few records, and “nothing—or almost nothing—... resembled his students’ notebooks.” Few scholars would expect their still-developing ideas to be accurately reflected under such circumstances. Indeed, the linguistics in the Course are positively crude when set alongside Saussure’s published work. I take seriously the editors’ caveat: “[Saussure] probably would not have authorised the publication of [the Course]”. Consequently, I have referred to the Course or ‘Saussureans’ throughout, rather than to Saussure.

2 Course 1966, p77

3 To explain how signs are used in communication, the Course reverts to a version of communication-as-transmission—although this is irrelevant for the later development of structuralism. “Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A’s brain, where mental facts (concepts) are associated with representations of the linguistic sounds (sound-images) that are used for their expression. A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely psychological phenomenon is followed by a physiological process: the brain transmits an impulse corresponding to the image to the organs used in producing sounds. Then the sound waves travel from the mouth of A to the ear of B: a purely physical
Language, say the Course, is a system of signs. Any sign is made of two parts—the sound perceived by the mind (the signifier), and the idea or meaning the sound image has (the signified) 4. Both exist only in the mind. The relationship between signifier and signified is purely arbitrary and conventional although, in a given language, there is precisely one signified for each legitimate signifier.

In structuralism, the meaning of a particular word or statement (une acte de parole) does not depend upon what it refers to (the referent). For example, the word ‘cat’ does not mean cat because it refers to the furry four-legged animal that we know as a cat. Rather, the meaning of a word is in its relationship with all other possibilities within langue, and its difference from those other possibilities5.

These differences operate at several levels. The most basic are the differences between sounds. It is not the individual sounds ‘c’, ‘a’, ‘t’—the phonetic qualities of parole—that hearers use to determine the meaning of a word ‘cat’. Rather, it lies in the difference that speakers of the particular langue recognise between each of these sounds and others in the langue (what the Course calls its ‘phonemic’ quality). For example, the difference between ‘c’ and ‘m’ is necessary for the words ‘cat’ and ‘mat’ to mean different things. Saussurean linguistics treats the phonemes—these differences that speakers distinguish—as the basic units of human speech, not individual sounds. In a similar way, speakers know the grammatical function of a word only by distinguishing it from those grammatical functions that it does not serve. For example, a simple noun is a simple noun in English because English speakers can distinguish it from a compound noun and a verb and an adjective and all other parts of grammar.

4 There is a second type of semiotics, beginning with the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), which divides signs into three—not two—parts: the sound or written symbol, the person that makes or interprets the sound or writing, and the meaning that sound or mark has for the person. This division makes it fundamentally different and irreconcilable with structuralist semiotics. Saussurean and structuralist semiotics denies the active role of people in interpretation, creating the appearance of an objective relationship between signifiers and signifieds. This was highly attractive to linguists and literary critics trying to break historical associations with ‘subjective’ literary analysis and establish their fields as areas of ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ study.

5 “Language [langue] is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of others.” (Course 1966, p114)
The meaning of particular words and phrases (parole) is generated within the language (langue), not by reference to anything external to it. *Langue* is a totally self-contained system, referring to nothing outside of itself. An analogy that is used repeatedly in the *Course* is of a game of chess. In chess, there are potentially an infinite number of games, just as there are an infinite number of *actes de parole*. In a game of chess, says the *Course*, the value that each piece has depends “on an unchangeable convention, the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move. Rules that are agreed upon once and for all exist in language too”\(^6\). Another similarity between language and chess, says the *Course*, is that the value of an individual piece in a particular game depends upon the position of all the other pieces within that game, and upon the moves permitted within the game. The value of a piece has nothing to do with its intrinsic qualities\(^7\). In the same way, the individual sounds used in speaking are unrelated to ‘meaning’; what is important are the differences from other words that hearers can perceive.

The *Course* says that langue, and its rules and oppositional pairs, are neither natural nor innate, but, like a game of chess, purely conventional: “it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by members of a community.” An individual is not free to make an utterance mean whatever they want: the linguistic system determines the meaning of an utterance, and meaning does not exist outside the system. For the same reason, an individual cannot change langue by themselves “for language is not complete in any speaker; it exists only within a collectivity”\(^8\).

**The extension of structuralism to literature**

The Saussurean ‘structural’ approach had only limited influence in linguistics. From the 1950s, structuralism became, more than anything else, a method of social and cultural analysis. Its first application outside linguistics was in literary theory, under the patronage of the Russian Formalists and, in particular, the linguist Roman Jakobsen (1896–1982). Formalism argued that what made literature ‘literary’ was not its subject matter or the author’s genius, but the form of language it took. The Formalists analysed literature to find

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\(^6\) *Course* 1966, p88

\(^7\) “If I use ivory chessman instead of wooden ones, the change has no effect on the system” (*Course* 1966, p22). As Sless (1986, p136) points out, this claim is simply untrue, as is the claim that the value of a piece depends solely on the position of all the other pieces. When a person plays a game of chess, they use the experience of how their opponent plays in order to decide their next move. Chess pieces have different values and ways of being used in the hands of different players. Sless argues that the same is true of communication—history and experience have a role, not just the structure of language.

\(^8\) *Course* 1966, p14
its essential ‘literary’ forms. Drawing on the Saussurean claim that the relationship between referent and sign—object and idea—is arbitrary, Jakobsen argued that works of literature have to be understood in terms of their own internal structures, rather than as though they referred to external objects and events.

Formalism was not entirely the same as Structuralism. While it was concerned with the form and structure of language, it did not view meaning as difference and was largely unconcerned with hunting out ‘deep’ structures that are supposed to ‘underlie’ the ‘surface’ of texts. Both structuralists and Formalists did agree however that texts were self-contained and had to be analysed, not in terms of the authors’ intents or the readers’ reactions, but entirely in terms of their internal structures. For instance, Vladimir Propp boldly reduced all folk tales to seven ‘spheres of action’ or character-types and thirty-one ‘functions’ or acts significant to the course of the story. Any particular folk tale, he said, involved the interaction of these seven character-types in a limited number of ways. Later, Greimas further abstracted Propp’s scheme, proposing six actants arranged in three binary pairs: subject and object, sender and receiver, helper and opponent. Binary oppositions like these, originating in the Course, became basic assumption of later structuralist analysis.

Lévi-Strauss and structuralist anthropology

Along with other Formalists and intellectuals, Jakobsen fled Russia after the rise of Stalin. He settled in Prague and became central to the Czech Structuralist movement. Forced again to flee with the outbreak of the Second World War, he went to America where he met the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–). They quickly developed an intellectual relationship from which much of modern structuralism evolved.

After being introduced to the Course, Lévi-Strauss asked whether the structuralist approach could be applied to non-linguistic social phenomena. He concluded that it could.

In the study of kinship problems (and no doubt the study of other problems as well), the anthropologist finds himself in a situation which formally resembles that of the structural linguist. Like phonemes, kinship terms are elements of meaning; like phonemes, they acquire meaning only if they are integrated into systems. ‘Kinship systems’ like ‘phonemic systems’ are built by the mind on the level of unconscious thought. Finally, the recurrence of kinship patterns, marriage rules, similar prescribed attitudes between certain types of relatives, and so forth, ... lead us to believe that, in the case of kinship as well as linguistics, the observable phenomena result from the

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9 Hawkes 1977, p68–69; Keaney 1994, p91
10 Eagleton 1996, p91
The development of ideas about communication in European thought

action of laws which are general but implicit ... Although they belong to another order of reality, kinship phenomena are of the same type as linguistic phenomena.\textsuperscript{11}

Lévi-Strauss claimed to have identified the underlying logic of kinship relations and resolved them into a system of binary opposites. He did the same for myth, identifying the ‘mythemes’ that, in combination and opposition with one another, formed the system within which all myths operate. Cooking too, he analysed into its basic ‘gustemes’—raw versus cooked, edible versus inedible, and so on.

Lévi-Strauss’ highly diversified anthropological researches all corroborated Saussure’s insight that the parts must be understood, not atomistically or in isolation, but within the overall signifying system as a totality. The traditional ‘term-centred’ approach which emphasised the primary importance of disparate empirical contents is replaced by what Lévi-Strauss describes as the ‘relational’ approach of structural linguistics.\textsuperscript{12}

Lévi-Strauss adapted the concepts of langue and parole for anthropological analysis, using the terms code and message (terms drawn from 1950s communication theory). Objects like myths or cooking were like messages—they were a particular combination of elements from a code, which was fixed and shared by all members of a community, but might be combined in infinitely many ways. Totemic and kinship systems, he says, were networks of communication: “codes which permit the transmission of ‘messages’”\textsuperscript{13}. Lévi-Strauss saw individual systems such as kinship, food, political ideology, marriage ritual, myth, and medicine as subunits of an overall system of culture. He conceived this as an all-embracing language, “permitting the establishment between individuals and groups, of a certain type of communication”\textsuperscript{14}. This language could be analysed ‘grammatically’ just like any other, revealing the relationships which were the ‘meaning’ of individual ‘utterances’ in it.

Lévi-Strauss believed these relationships—the binary oppositions—were inherent in the human mind. They were universal, and not the product of any particular mind. Meaning ceased to be private or individual; what could be said or thought depended on the ‘languages’ available. Cultural creations like myths were not created by individual minds; rather, they were spoken through individuals. The myth—or at least the potential for it—pre-existed the individual speaker\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{11} Lévi-Strauss 1968, p34
\textsuperscript{12} Keaney 1994, p255
\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Eagleton 1996, p90
\textsuperscript{14} Levi-Strauss 1972, p61
\textsuperscript{15} If myths were told through people, the structuralists concluded, then it follows that people do not create stories and myths, and consequently there is no such thing as an ‘author’. This ...continued on next page
From the 1950s, the structuralist method would be applied to the analysis of an increasingly wide range of subjects: politics and sexuality (Foucault), popular culture and literature (Barthes), linguistics, and to a lesser extent, anthropology and psychology. It

claim lead to the ‘decentring’ of authors in literary theory—or in more extreme versions, the ‘disappearance of the author’ or the ‘death of the author’.

Where the term ‘structuralism’ is used in communication theory, it usually refers to this largely French tradition. But the term is also applied to a strand of American linguistics. During the first half of the twentieth century, American linguistics developed largely in isolation from trends in Europe. The main imperative for early American linguists was to record the fast-vanishing Native American languages (mostly so that the Bible could be translated into Indian languages). Consequently, early American linguistic theory was largely concerned with developing field methods for recording languages that the linguist could not speak and which had never been reduced to writing. Foremost amongst the early American linguists were Franz Boas (1858–1942) and his students, Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949). All were partly concerned with the structures of the languages they were trying to describe, and with developing grammars more appropriate to them than those derived from traditional European grammar. All three have been claimed for structuralism. (Hawkes 1977, Lyons 1991)

Applying the term ‘structuralism’ to this part of American linguistics strikes me as a grab for intellectual real estate, rather than arising from a common history or conceptual outlook shared with its European namesake. Calling Sapir, along with his most famous student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, ‘structuralists’ is simply ridiculous. Both were concerned with the concrete use of the language in the world, not language as structure. While they were concerned with regularities in language—as all linguists and grammarians are—neither made the basic assumptions of the European structuralists: priority of langue over parole, meaning as difference, or the belief that language was self-contained and self-referential. Apart from being a linguist, Sapir was also an anthropologist, and published much in both fields. His concern was always the human community within which language was used, not simply the language in itself. And there is simply no way that the Whorf–Sapir Hypothesis can ever be a structuralist claim. The strong version of the hypothesis can be rendered “the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands the environment. The picture of the universe shifts from tongue to tongue” (Chase in his introduction to Whorf 1956, pvi, although this version is far balder and less cautious than anything Whorf himself said). In making this hypothesis, Whorf and Sapir show they were concerned with the inter-relationship between language and the world it is used in at the most fundamental level—never a structuralist concern.

The connection between American linguistics and structuralism is based primarily on the work of Noam Chomsky (b.1928). In his seminal Syntactic Structures (1957), he defined the aim of linguistics as basically the justification of grammars. Chomsky’s idea of a ‘grammar’ is a mathematical one, adopted from the systems theory of the 1940s—an idealised, abstract, rule-following device, something akin to Turing’s ‘black box’, Norbert Weiner’s ‘systems’ or von Neumann’s ‘machines’ which had become current amongst mathematicians in the previous decade. To evaluate a particular grammar, the products of such a device would be...

...continued on next page
would be married to Marxism (Althusser), feminist theory (Kristeva), and psychology (Lacan), and ultimately become the subject of its own critique (Derrida).

Despite the wide variety of subjects analysed, all variants were ultimately concerned with the overall system purported to ‘underlie’ individual observations, and had little to say about individual actions or utterances made by particular people. At heart, structuralist analysis involved reducing the subject to some kind of text, which could then be analysed ‘linguistically’. Structuralism sought to “rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics.”

Post-structuralism

During the 1960s, some structuralists began to question the assumptions of Saussurean linguistics, undermining the certainty and stability of meaning in classical structuralism. For instance, the Course had said that the meaning of a word lay in its difference from other words. ‘Cat’ meant cat because English speakers distinguish it from ‘bat’ and ‘can’, amongst other possible words. But speakers could only know the meaning of ‘bat’ because they could distinguish it from ‘bad’ and ‘pat’—and these in turn only had meaning because of their difference from yet other terms. This chain of differences encompassed potentially all other parts of the system. So the meaning of a particular sign could not lie in a specific set of differences, but was somehow spread throughout the entire langue.

compared with real utterances and checked for ‘fit’. Chomsky’s linguistic theory was concerned with the structures of language rather than its meanings or use.

In Syntactic Structures, Chomsky draws a distinction, basic to all his following work, between the set of sentences which could be generated by a grammar (language), and those sentences actually produced by the speakers (corpus). In his later works, these terms would become modified to be called competence (what people could produce within the grammar) and performance (what people actually say). The proper subject for linguistics, says Chomsky, is competence. Real speech, he says, is subject to factors which may render it ungrammatical—inattention, lapses of memory, or psychological failures—and linguists should ignore ungrammatical speech that results from this (unobservable) interference, in the same way that scientists disregard spurious data. While the distinction between language and corpus, or competence and performance looks like the Saussurean distinction between langue and parole, Chomsky did not encounter the General Course in Linguistics until well after he made these distinctions (Lyons 1991). Like the European structuralists, Chomsky gave priority to the abstract over the empirical. Like the Europeans, he later moved to distinguish between deep and surface structures, again giving priority to the hidden, but presumably more powerful substratum of language. Like the Europeans, he too was lead to the notion of a universal structure of language, which all human beings share.

17 Jamieson 1972, pvii
The nature of signifiers and signifieds also became problematic. If the meaning of ‘cat’ is known through its difference from ‘mat’ (amongst other sound-images), and ‘mat’ is known through its difference from ‘man’, then in the process ‘mat’ has turned from signifier to signified. And since every term is defined in an infinite chain of differences from every other term, then every term is simultaneously a signifier and signified.

Another problem was in the definition of a sign into two parts: signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept or idea). If the meaning of a term is not in the specific set of differences, then the connection between signifier and signified cannot be fixed in the way that the Course had said. Where the earlier structuralists had separated the sign from the referent, post-structuralism—as it came to be called—separated the signifier from the signified.

The post-structuralists also noted that the use of language is always a temporal process. When a person listened to another speak, the meaning of a particular word might be modified by what they heard afterwards. So the meaning of a particular statement was always suspended—comprehension only existed in hindsight, and was known only partially when spoken or read. And, as one statement may be reinterpreted in the light of earlier ones, then the meaning of any statement is permanently incomplete, as it is always open to later revision. It follows that meaning can only reach closure when language itself comes to a close and the possibility for revision ends.

Problems with origin of language in structuralism

Structuralism always struggled to explain how people learnt languages or how languages developed historically. Although the Course had discussed the issue, its conclusions were inconsistent with its assumptions. It defined the analysis of historical development out of existence in the claim that language can be studied in two ways: diachronically (the way languages develop over time\(^\text{18}\)) and synchronically (how it is as a complete system at a given point in time). Structuralism gave priority to studying signs synchronically. However, if the system of signs was complete at any time, then it could not change—it could not turn from one entirely complete set of signs into another one without, at some point, being incomplete.

Later structuralists tried to explain change by saying that, while the underlying system itself remain unchanged, at particular times some parts may be dominant and others subordinate. This allowed these aspects of language to be placed in binary opposition. Like other binary oppositions in structuralism, these might be enacted in different ways.

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\(^{18}\) The historical or ‘diachronic’ development of languages had been the focus of linguists—including Saussure—in the nineteenth century. In this respect, ‘synchronic’ structuralist linguistics presented a major break in the analysis of language.
Different enactments allowed hidden aspects of language or art or culture to come to light—or dominant aspects to become obscured over time. This, it was believed, brought diachronic development of language into the framework of synchronic analysis.

Learning language presented another problem. The Course had asserted that children assimilated language over time, but did not explain how. This violated its own basic definitions however. If the meaning of a word depended on its difference from other words, then it followed that, to understand any word, a person must have had all of the other words in the language—the word could not have had a meaning if a person lacked some part of the langue. But if the person already had all of the words in the language, then they did not need to learn it. If they needed to learn words, then they could not learn them linguistically because they did not have the langue with which to make sense of what they hear. Catch 22.

Lévi-Strauss was aware of the problem: if language was ever ‘born’ he speculated, it must have been born ‘at a stroke’\textsuperscript{19}. Chomsky—observing the speed with which children learn to speak—said that the ability to use language cannot be acquired or learned from other people. Therefore, he argued, linguistic competence must be native to individual human beings, and thus be ultimately biological in origin\textsuperscript{20}. “By studying language we may discover abstract principles that govern its structure and use, principles that are universal by biological necessity and not mere historical accident...”\textsuperscript{21}

The features of structuralism

Although structuralism and it descendants mutated rapidly—spawning post-structuralism and deconstructionism along the way—there are several characteristics and assumptions common to most versions:

\textsuperscript{19} Keaney 1994, p98

\textsuperscript{20} Some of Chomsky’s followers have extended this argument to say that language must somehow inhere within the structures of the human genes or DNA itself—a major misunderstanding of basic genetics and biology.

\textsuperscript{21} Chomsky 1970, p4. Several years later he wrote: “A human language is a system of remarkable complexity. To come to know a human language would be an extraordinary intellectual achievement for a creature not specifically designed to accomplish this task. A normal child acquires this knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training. He can then quite effortlessly make use of an intricate structure of specific rules and guiding principles to convey his thoughts and feelings to others, arousing in them novel ideas and subtle perceptions and judgements. For a conscious mind, not specifically designed for the purpose, it remains a distant goal to reconstruct and comprehend what the child has done intuitively and with minimal effort.” (Chomsky 1976, p4)
Chapter Six: Communication as Order

1. Culture and society can be regarded as, or reduced to, a ‘text’
2. Like all texts, community, culture and society are open to textual analysis
3. Social and cultural complexity can be reduced to ‘grammatical’ units, which combine in a bewildering number of ways to form the complexity we observe in society
4. Every basic unit in langue (or its analogues) naturally has a binary opposite—and it is in these differences that meaning is located
5. Language is either shared (structuralism) or potentially shared (post-structuralism) by all members of a community or language group
6. Language, literature, myth, signs, taboo, culture and society operate at two levels—langue and parole, code and message, competence and performance
7. Langue (or its analogues) is a self-contained, formal system that refers only to itself and not to the world
8. Langue (and its analogues) has priority over parole
9. Language, culture and society have a universal structure shared by all people; all observed languages, cultures and societies are variations on this archetype.

The first four of these points derive directly from structuralism’s origins in nineteenth century linguistics and, ultimately, ancient grammatical analysis. But the last half-dozen have different origins and make strong assumptions about order in society and language.

**COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY**

Structuralism shares many of its key assumptions with a domain that might seem, at first sight, entirely unrelated: Christian theology. Both posit a timeless and perfectly-formed realm (God, heaven, langue) of which our world is an imperfect image (humanity, earth, parole). In both, the ‘upper’ takes priority over the ‘lower’. The ‘upper’ is complete within itself, and does not rely on the ‘lower’ for its completeness, whereas the existence of the lower derives entirely from the ‘upper’. Both claim to be universal in scope: Christianity claims that the Word of God orders all creation; structuralism claims that langue structures all human experience. Both are concerned with dualistic opposites: in Christian thought, heaven and earth, good and evil, body and soul, God and Satan, fall and redemption, grace and damnation, free will and predestination. These parallels between structuralism and Christianity might appear coincidental—even spurious. But the connection is quite real historically. Both are based on the same body of ideas, although interpreted in sharply different ways.

Christianity provided the West with its basic concepts of community for nearly fifteen hundred years. Communication—understood as the process in which communities are formed and maintain themselves—was, for over a millennium, a matter of order. To communicate was to participate in an ordered system. Participation of a very special type
has always been central to Christian belief. In the defining statement of Christian community, Paul says:

> Just as the body is one and has many parts, but all the parts of the body, being many, are one body, so likewise in the Christ; for we were all baptised in one Spirit into one body, whether we were Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free. ... You [believers] are the body of Christ and its parts, individually.22

This mystical ‘participation’ in Christ was taken up by later generations in dozens of ways. The most important today are in the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, communion, confession, marriage, priestly orders, and extreme unction. Participation in the rites—anointing with oils, washing feet, eating communion wafers and so on—brings believers into communication with both the divine and human community. From this perspective, all sacred events and symbols are acts of communication.

If we do not normally think about Christian life as communication, that is largely due to the Reformation and the ideas and revolutions that followed it, particularly in the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon world. What we have today is mostly a battered remnant of a great medieval edifice. Medieval Christianity saw humanity as an organic whole, part of the vastly greater order of God’s creation. The structure of the Church, the hierarchy of angels, the medieval feudal order, the structure of the heavens, the order of the hells was all part of one stupendous system that provided order in society well into the Modern Age.

Such beliefs powerfully influenced Western thinkers—even avowedly atheistic thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—in their theories about communal behaviour. From Christianity, the Modern West inherited much of its terminology and categories for discussing society, along with a particular approach to communal life, a detailed set of moral precepts (reflected in law and justice), and a distinctive social order. Many of these were inherited by Modern philosophers and sociologists and became part of the assumptions of their fields—at least until travel and anthropology began to make non-Christian traditions familiar in the West23.

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22 1 Corinthians 12:12 & 27

23 Much classical sociology assumes that people within a community share in this Christian sense. In his seminal *Elementary forms of the religious life*, Émile Durkheim argues that religion is amongst the premier examples of communal life, as well as the activities required to support that life. “The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group which makes profession of adhering to them and of practising the rites connected with them; they are not merely received individually by all members of this group; they are something belonging to the group, and they make its unity. The individuals which compose it feel themselves united to each other by the simple fact that they have a common faith.” (Durkheim 1976, p43)
Christian thought established many of the intellectual habits that still influence many fields quite remote from religion. For instance:

1. belief in reality at two levels—a perfect, self-contained and changeless heaven, and a changing, error-prone and imperfect earth
2. heaven has priority over earth; the afterlife over the current life; Creator over creation
3. a thorough-going dualism—heaven-and-earth, heaven-and-hell, good-and-evil, God-and-man, and so on
4. a finely calibrated hierarchy—in heaven, Church and society
5. the aspiration of those on earth for things to be “as they are in heaven”—that the ‘lower world’ finds its completion or perfection in the ‘upper’
6. a belief in a single, unitary source of order

Structuralism shows striking parallels with these beliefs—and others I will discuss in detail in later chapters. For instance, it divides language into two realms: one self-contained and absolute (*langue*), and the other a distorted, error-prone, temporal reflection of it (*parole*). It gives priority to the timeless and complete (*langue*) over the temporal and error-prone (*parole*). It locates meaning in binary opposites or hierarchy. It too believes in a universal underlying structure.

**THE SOCIAL CONTRACT**

Popular idiom has largely lost ways of talking about communities as an ordered whole; today, the language of autonomy and the individual dominates. There are however a few, isolated expressions—linguistic fossils—which hint at older beliefs. One example is the belief in a ‘natural justice’. Another is that society possesses a ‘natural order’—as opposed to conventional laws and structures. The linking of ‘law’ and ‘order’ is a third. They are survivors from a time when people believed their communities had an inherent order. The English class system is a late example. It in turn is a diluted version of the feudal society of medieval Western Europe. As I will discuss in the following chapters, each is in turn an aspect of a far larger order which was believed to permeate both society and cosmos.

This vision of society as an ordered, unified organism is at one extremity of Western thought concerning community and communication. At the other pole is a view that rejects any natural or mystical sympathy between people. Human beings, it says, are first and foremost autonomous individuals. Society, in this tradition, is a deliberate human construct, not a natural structure—most commonly explained in the last three hundred years as the product of a ‘social contract’. This theory suggests that individuals collaborate for some purpose, sacrificing some of their individual freedoms in return for benefits they derive from living or working with others. The contract imposes mutual obligations between individuals, which may become framed as laws or ethics. The social contract is a purely
voluntary arrangement: whatever order society possesses is established—implicitly or explicitly—between all members of the community. In theory, any member of the community could withdraw at any moment.

The ‘social contract theory’ has been extended by some authors to explain the origins of society itself. Society, they say, consists of individuals that voluntarily come together for their mutual benefit, and who voluntarily observe rules for living together. With this assumption, ‘society’ consists of no more than its constituent members plus the voluntary agreement between them. It is a belief that has had advocates since Plato, but its dominance in the Modern Age owes much to the influence of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Adam Smith. The social contract theory became a commonplace in economics and moral philosophy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in its most extreme form, was summed up in Margaret Thatcher’s claim “there is no such thing as society.”

Communication and the social contract

Communication, as the process by which people live in communities with others, takes two distinct forms. Where the community is understood only as a collection of individuals cooperating to satisfy their own needs, communication need be no more than mechanical signalling between isolated individuals—a belief which dovetails neatly with the belief of communication-as-transmission. Indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter 15, the two came together in the influential philosophy of John Locke, and have remained linked ever since in the English-speaking world.

But where communication is understood not only as a means of maintaining interactions between people, but also of binding isolated individuals into an ordered community, it

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24 “Hobbes Leviathan Chapters 17–18. Locke: “Men being ... by Nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be ... subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own Consent.” (Two Treatises of Government 2:8:95). Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “Since no man has any natural authority over his fellows, and since force alone bestows no right, all legitimate authority among men must be based on covenants.” (The Social Contract 1:4)

25 “I think we’ve been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it’s the government’s job to cope with it. ’I have a problem, I’ll get a grant.’ ’I’m homeless, the government must house me.’ They’re casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There’s no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.” (Thatcher, Women’s Own magazine, 3 October 1987)
intersects with the processes involved in establishing laws and conventions, and behaving ethically, morally, legally and justly. Historically, there is a rich philosophical tradition concerning justice, ethics, politics and society which influences this view of communication—in which the sense of *munis*, joint social responsibilities, predominates over what people may share in common. Amongst many philosophers since Plato, John Dewey (1859–1952) links communication with the formation of communities:

> Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common ... are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding—likemindedness as sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another like bricks. They cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces ... Consensus demands communication.26

**Problems with the origins of society in a contract**

If structuralism had a problem explaining how linguistic structures come to be shared by people within a community, then the contractual view of communication faces the opposite problem: how people that share nothing manage to form large, complex and stable communities. The contractual theory of society obviously developed from observations about how groups—from businesses to democratic governments—are formed within society. But it is hard to see how society itself could be formed by a covenant without the pre-existing conventions of trust and contract—things which only have meaning or use within a community. The ability to negotiate a contract implies a language to negotiate with. And formation of a contract implies trust or some rational reason to observe promises, which requires a moral framework. Yet neither assumption, linguistic or moral, is consistent with the belief in innately autonomous human beings.

There are also problems in extending the assumptions of a voluntary agreement to explain the origins of language, trust and promises. For example, while an individual may be free to withdraw from a business or a political system, forgoing benefits in the process, the same is not true of language. People cannot surrender their native language as they can renounce their citizenship. They cannot voluntarily stop understanding the words spoken to them—the ‘benefit’ of words. In any case, there is simply no evidence that people ever negotiated all of the rules of language they use or voluntarily accepted them.

Less zealous social theories observe that people do share for reasons other than conscious and willing agreement. For example, Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and others

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26 Dewey 1916, p5–6
share their language with the English. They also share laws, customs, traditions and social mores by virtue of a common history. These pre-existing structures provide the bulk of the order upon which individual agreements—contracts, laws, and regulations—are based. But precisely what is shared, or how it is shared, is often unclear. What does a ‘shared language’ actually mean? A shared lexicon? Grammar? Idiom? Usage? Capacity to use particular words? A common understanding? Is sharing a prerequisite to communicating, or the result of it, or are the two simultaneous, or even identical? While structuralism explains what people shared, it fails to explain how they come to share. Social contract theories explain how they might come to share without explaining what they share.

THE SOURCES OF COMMUNICATION AS ORDER

Unlike communication-as-transmission, which consists of one fairly tight cluster of ideas in its long development, communication-as-order consists of a number of separate, interacting traditions. For most of the past fifteen hundred years, Christian belief formed the matrix within which Western ideas about societies, human nature, moral responsibility and social behaviour were worked out. Structuralism was implicitly built on many ideas that Christianity made commonplace. However, Christianity itself is an invention, launched just under two thousand years ago. It drew heavily on the pre-existing Jewish and classical beliefs about people and society and how both ought to be. Particularly important was the work of the philosophers—Platonists, Aristotelians and Stoics—and the Roman jurists.

The next three chapters deal with the main sources: classical beliefs about society, early Christianity, and the social order of the Middle Ages. Chapter 13 takes up their evolution and interaction with the other traditions concerning communication from the Renaissance to the early Modern Age. In these chapters, the word ‘communication’ will appear only rarely. Indeed, activities we normally understand as part of communication—speaking, writing, reading, and listening—were not usually connected with the idea of community before the thirteenth century. These next three chapters look at the ways that people thought their communities were established, maintained and advanced—through law, justice, ethics, virtue, politics, God, reason, nature, participation, hierarchy and subordination. It is in the actions of these that we find the concept of communication-as-order. In the following chapters, we have to keep firmly before us the idea of ‘communicating’ as the verb corresponding to the noun ‘community’.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CLASSICAL BELIEFS ABOUT SOCIETY

ABSTRACT Classical Greek views of community emerged out of a collision between two groups of ideas about the order of society. The first viewed social order as an aspect of the universal order laid down by the gods. Such a society was best when each person took their place and kept to it, giving to others what they were due in their roles. The second took the opposing view that there was no natural order. All people were individuals, with their own wants and desires. People came together for mutual benefit, establishing conventions to place limits on individual greed and the exploitation of the weak by the strong.

After the fifth century BC, philosophers attempted to resolve the conflict between ‘nature’ and ‘convention’ by synthesising them. Three enduring views of community—and hence communication—emerged: Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s politics and the Stoic’s kosmopolis. From Antiquity we have four broad views of communication as the process by which the community is established and maintained: as participating in a natural or divine order, as establishing a social contract, as an eduction in virtue, and as the practice of justice.

HOMER

Order in the Homeric world

The fundamental order of Homer’s world, ordained and maintained by Zeus, is dikē. An almost interchangeable concept in Homer is themis; a word derived from the verb, tithēmis, meaning ‘I lay down’. Themis is that which Zeus lays down for the order of the world. Dikē and themis structure both the human and the physical world. (Unlike the modern
separation of social and physical worlds, the two belong to the one category in Homer and much of later Greek thought.  

In some circumstances, *dike* and *themis* can be loosely translated as what we now call ‘the natural order of things’. The death of mortals, the tears of a wife for a dead husband, sex between men and women, love between fathers and sons, and the laws of the gods are all in the domain of *dike* and *themis*. *Dike* may also rule fate and destiny. (*Dike* though is unlike modern ‘laws of nature’: inescapable as the laws of gravity. Fate—even death—can be altered if the gods will it, and there are rare passages in Homer where people, through their exertions, can escape the fate set down by the gods.)

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1. The relationship between good social order and good order in the world is close in Homer. The *Odyssey* speaks of “some king, as a blameless and god-fearing man, and ruling as lord over many powerful people, upholds the way of good government [eudikia], and the black earth yields him barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit, his sheepflocks continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish, because of his good government [euëgesia], and his people prosper [aretod, ‘do well’] under him” (19:109–114). Here, Homer is not saying here that people that worship the gods and act rightly will be rewarded with good harvests. Rather, he implies that the two simply go together or are a part of the same thing. Good harvests and good government are part of the same order.


3. In Homer, *dike* is never used directly in connection with either fate (*moira*) or destiny (*aisa*)—although given that the term *dike* appears only rarely, this may not be significant. Nonetheless, the operation of fate and destiny follow the basic rules of *dike*. A great deal of the action in Homer is predestined, as people work out the fates allotted to them by the gods (*Iliad* 24:527f). Men have no choices: “it is the god [Zeus] who accomplishes all” (*Iliad* 19:89). Even death is described as *moira theôn*, ‘the fate of the gods’ (*Odyssey* 3:269). The gods though could alter fate if they chose to do so; indeed, in the *Iliad*, Zeus twice contemplates saving a favourite from death (*Iliad* 16:440–443 and 22:168–176). He is prevented from doing so by a warning that the other gods would resent his interference and would end up doing the same, creating disorder (*Iliad* 16:445–448 and 22:181). Destiny then is in the same category as promises—although they could be broken, they are kept for order: *dike*. Fate is thus part of the moral order—not the physical. In one important passage, the fate of an individual is agreed in the same way oaths are witnessed and promises enacted. Zeus promises Thetis, “I will look to these things that they may be accomplished. See then, I will bend my head that you may believe me. For this, among the immortal gods is the mightiest witness I can give, and nothing I do shall be vain nor revocable nor a thing unfulfilled when I bend my head in assent to it.” (*Iliad* 1:516–527).

4. *Iliad* 17:319f
More often though, dikē and themis are what Zeus lays down for the order of society—loosely what we call ‘custom’ and ‘law’. Homeric society is ordered hierarchically, with each person being allotted a role in life by fate or destiny. Although this social hierarchy is never stated directly, the Iliad and Odyssey do describe the responsibilities that people have within their roles. For instance, people are to obey the gods and offer sacrifices to them. There is to be only one king in a community. Killing royalty is evil. Servants are to fear their masters and obey them. Soldiers are to defer to their commanders for orders. Men are to behave honourably to the women they are courting. People are to be told news that affects them. People are to be provided with comfort in old age. Everyone is to offer strangers help. Promises and oaths—an important part of Homeric justice—are also linked indirectly with dikē and themis.

Dikē also sets out the prerogatives and honours, timē, due to people in their particular social station. When someone is dishonoured, themis requires that they respond. For instance, at the beginning of the Iliad, Agamemnon takes a slave girl allocated to Achilles and so offends Achilles’ timē. Achilles is required to respond—and does so by withdrawing from the war and calling on the gods to prevent a Greek victory over the Trojans until Agamemnon returns the girl.

The disruption of dikē is hubris, insolence towards either the gods or other people, offending the proper order of society. For instance, Penelope’s suitors are hubristēs because they do...
not behave as guests and suitors are meant to: they are unruly\textsuperscript{18}, greedy\textsuperscript{19}, quarrel with strangers\textsuperscript{20}, plan to murder Penelope’s son\textsuperscript{21}, and are generally violent\textsuperscript{22}.

\textit{Dikē} and \textit{themis} are used to refer to human justice and laws along with divine ones\textsuperscript{23}. But when assemblies pass laws\textsuperscript{24} and kings make decrees and judgements\textsuperscript{25}, this is the \textit{themistas} of Zeus, not a human creation\textsuperscript{26} (judges in the \textit{Iliad} carry a staff to show that their authority derives from Zeus\textsuperscript{27}). People can act contrary to \textit{dikē}, flouting the \textit{themis} of Zeus, but if they do, the gods will punish them.\textsuperscript{28}

### The Homeric values and virtues

The terms \textit{dikē} and \textit{themis} appear infrequently in Homer\textsuperscript{29}, and are usually only mentioned during disputes over what is the correct course of action to take—those moments when what \textit{dikē} requires is unclear. Far more frequent are the terms that Homeric characters use to judge others and their actions: \textit{agathos} and \textit{aretē}\textsuperscript{30}.

Mostly, a person or an action is \textit{agathos}, ‘good’, if they are judged to comply with \textit{dikē}; \textit{kakos} or ‘bad’ if not. For instance, it is \textit{agathon} to cease battles at night\textsuperscript{31}. It is not \textit{agathon

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Odyssey 4:625–627
\item \textsuperscript{19} Odyssey 1:368–371
\item \textsuperscript{20} Odyssey 16:68
\item \textsuperscript{21} Odyssey 16:409f
\item \textsuperscript{22} Odyssey 17:580–581, 17:564–565, 15:328–329, 16:418 and others
\item \textsuperscript{23} Iliad 18:507–508
\item \textsuperscript{24} Iliad 16:386–388
\item \textsuperscript{25} Iliad 9:155–156 and 18:507–508. Odyssey 11:568–571
\item \textsuperscript{26} Iliad 1:238–239. See also Odyssey 4:690–691. Good kings are said to possess 'divine dikē'. "Let there be one ruler, one king, to whom the son of devious-devising Kronos [Zeus] gives the sceptre and right of judgement [themistas] to watch over his people" (Iliad 2:202–206).
\item \textsuperscript{27} For instance, Iliad 1:238–239
\item \textsuperscript{28} Odyssey 10:73–74, Iliad 16:384–388. The gods may also send the Furies as in, for instance, Iliad 19:87f, 19:418, 15:204; Odyssey 17:475. "The blessed gods have no love for a pitiless action, but rather they reward dikēn and what men do that is lawful" (Odyssey 14:83–84)
\item \textsuperscript{29} Dikē appears 17 times; themis appears 31 times.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Agathos appears 117 times; its opposite, kakos, appears 134; aretē appears 37 times.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Iliad 7:282
\end{itemize}

120 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
for many people to rule a kingdom. Sex between men and women is agathos—unless they are unmarried. Friendship and loyalty are agathon, and it is good to be persuaded by a friend. Kindness and good intentions are also agathos. In Homer, agathos is usually used in the context of a specific and concrete evaluation; only very rarely though is agathos used in an abstract sense or as anything like a moral term.

Dikē establishes the roles that people have in life and the actions they are expected to perform in those roles. Doing what is required, and having (or developing) the skills necessary to fulfil that role, is agathos. People that are agathos possess aretē. Aretē is usually translated ‘virtue’ or ‘excellence’, although this can be misleading in Homer because aretē always refers to the ability or skills that people need to fulfil their role. In the Iliad—concerned with war—aretē usually refers to bravery in battle or skill in the use of weapons. In a few passages concerned with horse races, aretē refers to the skill of the horsemen or the mettle of the horses. In the Odyssey, aretē has a wider range of meanings, chiefly because Odysseus faces a wider range of challenges on his journey home. Unlike the Iliad, bravery in battle is mentioned only rarely, and aretē is linked with cleverness and ability in debates, as it is not in the Iliad. Although aretē usually refers to some specific skill or ability to perform some allotted task—fighting, racing, arguing, planning—it is sometimes used in a more general sense, as in “the best of men.”

32 Iliad 2:204
33 Iliad 24:130
34 Iliad 6:161, Odyssey 24:195–196, 3:266
35 Iliad 17:575–577
36 Iliad 11:788–789, 11:793
38 “…divine Zeus sometimes gives out good [agathon], or sometimes evil [kakon]; he can do anything” (Odyssey 4:236–237). Agathos is sometimes used with only a broad sense of approval—even where there is no particular evaluation against dikē being made. For instance, agathos may mean simply ‘excellent’, as in “an excellent [agathēn] meal” (Iliad 23:810). In a totally non-evaluative use of agathos, a ‘true’ child is one of ‘good blood’ (Odyssey 21:109) or of a ‘good father’ (Iliad 113–114, 21:108–109).
41 Odyssey 22:444–446, 14:211–213, 24:515
42 Odysseus says “by my aretē and counsel and my intelligence, we escaped [from the Cyclops].” (Odyssey 12:211–121). Skill in debating is mentioned in Odyssey 8:236–240.
Arete and its related terms, such as aristeuesi, are important part of a person’s social standing. Penelope is repeatedly praised for her “arete ... beauty and figure”—features which make her desirable to suitors. A man fights for his arete. By contrast, “Zeus ... takes away half of the arete from a man, once the day of slavery closes upon him.”

In Homer however, agathos, kakos, and arete have no real moral connotations as they do in later Greek: only one passage in which it has a remotely moral sense, and that a general one: “No arete from bad acts.” Fertile land, “good to feed goats and cattle” may be agathos; swift horses may possess arete. Agathos is not an assessment of skill or excellence, but rather conformity with dikē, the requirements of the gods. This fairly utilitarian system of good and bad, better and worse, excellence and virtue is the framework within which people judge between different courses of action.

Society

The social world on which the Iliad and Odyssey are based is the family. Although Homer also mentions ‘clans’ and ‘kingdoms’, both terms are related to families. ‘Clan’, or phratra, could be better translated as ‘brotherhood’, and is related to ‘father’, paier. (In its original sense, a phratra is a group born of one father or ancestor.) Homeric ‘Kingdoms’ appear to

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44 Odyssey 18:251, and also Odyssey 2:205, 24:193–195
45 Iliad 11:401f
46 Odyssey 17:322–323
47 Odyssey 8:329
48 Odyssey 13:246
49 Iliad 23:276 and 373–375
50 One exception is Odyssey 17:347 and 17:352: “Modesty in a beggar is not agathos [useful].” Agathos is rarely used in connection with skills like swordsmanship (with one exception in Iliad 21:250) or attributes like bravery in battle—the main domains of arete in the Iliad.
51 One domain in which agathos and kakos are rarely use in decision-making and evaluating options—although as I will discuss later, the reason for this is that examples of genuine decision-making are rare in Homer. One exception is the following excerpt where Odysseus decides what to do when he finds himself alone in battle. “Now Odysseus the spear-famed was left alone [in battle], nor did any of the Argives stay beside him, since fear had taken all of them. And troubled, he spoke to his own great-hearted thumos: “Ah me, what will become of me? It will be a great evil if I run, fearing their multitude, yet deadlier if I am caught alone ... Yet still, why does the thumos within me debate these things? Since I know that it is the kakoi who walk out of the fighting, but if one is to win honour [aristeuesi, ‘be excellent’) in battle, he must by all means stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another.” (Iliad 11:401-410)
be little more than the people and land dominated by a single wealthy family, *genos*\(^{52}\) (although this family is often marked off from others as belonging to nobility, often descended from the gods).

*Dikē* structures the responsibilities of people within this family-based society: children to parents, wives to husbands, servants to masters, people to kings. It is *dikas* that people who leave their families and homeland will know only sorrow\(^{53}\). People that seriously disturb the requirements of *dikē* are described as *aphrētōr*, *atheimistos* and *anestios*\(^{54}\)—‘without brotherhood, without *themis* and without home’. Lawless lands are described as *aphrētōr*\(^{55}\), and their inhabitants are ‘without *dikas* and without good *themistas*’\(^{56}\).

### Community and communication-as-order in Homer

If communication is the process by which communities are formed, maintained and developed, then in Homer it is very limited indeed. The order of society is imposed by the gods. *Dikē*, *themis* and *aretē* provide a generally consistent order that pervades all of society and the larger world\(^{57}\), specifying the roles and stations that characters have in life, and the actions appropriate to those roles. *Agathos* and *kakos* are judgements of how characters and their actions conformed with what Zeus had laid down. Those that possess the skills to perform their roles, particularly to do so excellently, possess *aretē*. To disobey *themis* was *hubristos*, an insult to the order of the gods, which would be punished by them. An extreme violation of *dikē* was to stand outside the basic units of society: home and family.

Homeric characters do not know this order as a result of learning it; they know it because they are born into it. They are prompted about how to act by *thumos*, *phrenes* or the gods—not by discussion, reason or analysis. In particular, words have almost nothing to do with the formation of communities. Even in disputes, the chief function of words is to state claims, express rage, and state what is the proper (*dikiaos*) way others should act. In a

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52 The *basileus*—usually translated as ‘king’—is the head of the *genos*, but is closer to a war-chief responsible for defence rather than a king as a head of state.

53 *Odyssey* 19:168–169

54 *Iliad* 9:63. See also *Odyssey* 9:213–215

55 *Odyssey* 9:106 and 17:360

56 *Odyssey* 9:213–215

57 Homeric characters believed that the gods might occasionally permit some specific infringement of *dikē*. For instance, in *Odyssey* 14:400–404, the suitors argue over whether to kill Telemachos or not. One says that, while killing royalty is wrong, Zeus may advise that in this case, Telemachos is to be killed, in which case it would be wrong to disobey the *themis* of the gods.
society with no concept of rational thought, there is no persuasion as such: only claim, counter-claim and the threat of force. (This is of course not to say that people in Homeric times actually behaved this way—just that they understood themselves in these terms and described their actions and words accordingly.)

Whether this portrait was true of any real society is not relevant here. What is important is that the later Greeks believed that it was, and took the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the authoritative texts on society and morality, referring to them hundreds of years after they was first written down in 600 BCE. Until the end of Antiquity, the Greeks believed in a single order that pervaded both society and physical matter—making both intelligible, rational, and providing political and moral order in society. It was the standard against political, legal and social decisions were to be measured.

**ATHENS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY BC**

The first major Greek works on politics and society were written in Athens at the end of the fifth century BCE. All were reactions to the Athens dominated by Pericles (from 460–427 BCE), either by its supporters (Thucydides, Euripides, and later Isocrates) or by those that queried what it stood for (Sophocles, Aristophanes, and later Plato). The event that made questions of politics, justice and society so urgent for these writers was the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), which pitched the two great powers and social systems of classical Greece—Athens and Sparta—into conflict. When the Athens lost the war, mostly through its own political failings, Athenian intellectuals began a searching examination of their political and social system.

There is a clear continuity between the social worlds of Homer and Periclean Athens; many of the key terms were still in use and the belief in a cosmic order continued. But there were also clear differences, most notably in the appearance of the *polis* as the primary social unit and an entirely un-Homeric way of understanding people. Implicit in these continuities and developments were two quite different views of community. Later Greek political theory of the fourth century BCE evolves out of both views and the contest between them.

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58 Athens is the only Greek *polis* of the fifth century BCE whose political and social system we understand in detail. Herodotus (c.485–425 BCE) mentions the customs of several other Greek cities in passing, and we have the poems of Tyrteus (fl.685–668 BCE) in praise of Sparta. But they are insignificant when compared with the material which survives from Athens, both in volume and influence. Aristotle did not begin to collect Greek constitutions until around 360 BCE, well after the Peloponnesian War and the changes in Greek society generally.
The Olympian tradition

Of the continuities with the Homeric social imagination, the most obvious are the continued presence of the gods and the system of values based on virtues of the warrior.

It is right to endure with resignation what the gods send, and to face one’s enemies with courage.\(^59\)

The warrior values and the social system founded on them are most apparent in descriptions of Spartan society.\(^60\) The Spartans were devoted to a military ethic, and so Spartan society was the closest of any state in classical Greece to the Homeric system.

Because of our well-ordered life we [Spartans] are both brave in war and wise in council. Brave, because self-control is based on a sense of honour, and honour is based on courage. And wise because we are not so highly educated as to look down on our laws and customs, and too rigorously trained in self-control to be able to disobey them.\(^61\)

The other great continuity with Homer is religion.\(^62\) The gods continued to be obeyed, and were still believed to guide the broad sweep of human life.\(^63\) They were consulted on important decisions, such as the founding of cities or before going to war.\(^64\) Sacrifices were made to them; oaths were sworn to them; and they routinely appear in theatre, literature and the visual arts of the fifth century BC. However, the Greeks ceased to believe that the gods manipulated individual fates, or indeed that people’s lives were entirely predetermined.\(^65\) Nor did they believe the gods sent plagues, storms and calamities as they

\(^{59}\) Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 2:64:2

\(^{60}\) Spartan society comprised a military aristocracy that dominated a semi-enslaved _helot_ (‘captive’) class, which worked the land and supported the aristocracy. Property was held in common and Spartans were forbidden all luxuries. From the age of seven, aristocratic Spartan children were taken from their parents and brought up by the state. Between seven and twenty years, the boys lived in a large school, effectively run as an army. At twenty years of age they entered military service and lived in barracks. They could marry and live at home from the age of thirty, but still had to eat in barracks.

\(^{61}\) Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 1:83:4

\(^{62}\) Herodotus reports that the greatest crime the Persians inflicted upon Athens in their invasion of 480 BC was “the burning of the temples and images of our gods.” _(The Histories_ 8:144:1)

\(^{63}\) For instance, Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 5:103:1 and 5:104:1

\(^{64}\) For instance, Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 1:118:3 and 3:92:5

\(^{65}\) The only place where fate (moira) appears regularly in the fifth century BC is the theatre. Dramatic themes however were often highly traditional and frequently depended on fate to drive action, as in the story of Oedipus or the house of Atreus.
did in Homer, or that the gods fought alongside them in battle. The gods no longer appeared to people as they did constantly in Homer (except in dreams and the theatre). In short, by the fifth century BC, the gods had retreated from the affairs of the human world—they appeared on important occasions, but were no longer omnipresent.

The nature of the order laid down by Zeus also changed. They were supplemented by human-made laws, *nomos* ('convention'), to regulate life within the growing urban centres. Although at first these laws did little more than define the penalties forbreaching *dikē*, as the cities grew and Greek society grew wealthier and more complex, *nomos* began to deal with circumstances not covered by the traditional laws. Although both *nomos* and *dikē* specified how people were or were not to act, they belonged to different categories: the unwritten laws attributed to the gods were held in higher esteem than human-made laws. It was also shameful and occasionally ‘unnatural’ (*adikēn*) to break them, whereas it was simply illegal (*anomos*) to break human-made laws. By the late fifth century BC, the term *dikē* had a restricted meaning referred exclusively to customs, laws, justice, and arbitration.

Another change was that some Homeric senses of *dikē* and *themis* were transferred to *phusis*, a term which could refer to both material and human ‘nature’ (although never ‘social nature’). The poets and historians had no doubt there was a ‘human nature’, *anthropeia phusis*, although the term was less common than it became in the following century. Reporting the atrocities following the revolution in Corcyra (426–425 BC), Thucydides says:

> With the ordinary conventions of civilised life thrown into confusion, human nature [*anthropeia phusis*], always ready to offend even where laws exist [*nomous adikein*] showed itself proudly in its true colours, as something incapable of controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice [*dikaios*], the enemy to anything superior to itself; for, if it had not been for the pernicious power of envy, men would not so have exalted vengeance above innocence, [helpfulness], and profit above justice [*mē adikein*]. Indeed, it is true that in these acts of revenge on others men take it upon themselves to begin at repealing those general laws of humanity [*anthrōpoi nomous*] which are there to give hope of salvation to all who are in distress, instead of leaving

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66 The only place where the gods directly intervened in events was literature and drama. The historian, Thucydides, by contrast reports only three occasions where people believe the gods act in the traditional Homeric way—and all three people are Spartans, a people regarded as the most old-fashioned of the Greek world. Otherwise, the world that Thucydides describes is free from belief in divine intervention. The great plague that devastated Athens and its allies he describes entirely naturalistically. He attributes unexpected failure to bad luck; never the will of the gods.

67 Thomas 1992, p68
those laws in existence, remembering that there might come a time when they, too, will be in danger and need their protection.  

Another concept of increasing importance was *kosmos*, ‘order’. In Homer, the term means little more than how physical objects were arranged. But by the fifth century BC, *kosmos* had gained a wide range of other meanings. Thucydides, Herodotus and later Plato use the term to refer to social order or government. Occasionally the term was extended to mean ‘ruler’—a person that imposed order. The philosophers also began to use *kosmos* to refer to the order of the universe. In later Greek, the word referred to the world as a whole, continuing to link social and physical natures. Terms related to *kosmos* also referred to the act of creation. Despite the loss of a single general term, the belief in a pervasive order that unified natural and social worlds remained.

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68 Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 3:84.2–3. See also Herodotus *The Histories* 2:35.2 & 2:45.3.


70 Heraclitus 30, Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1:1:11, but most often in Plato, for instance *Gorgias* 508a, *Timaeus* 27a.

71 The Greeks did not see creation as we do, making something where previously there was nothing, but rather, as rearranging and ordering. For instance, they believed that the world was not made from nothing but was formed when order was imposed on the pre-existing anarchy. A consequence is that later Greek philosophers regarded Jewish and Christian claims that their god had created the world from nothing as ridiculous.

72 Even Thucydides—a writer highly sceptical of divine intervention and a thoroughly unsuperstitious commentator—associated the increased incidence of earthquakes, eclipses, droughts, famines, plagues with the outbreak of War, implying a sympathetic link between human and natural catastrophes (*War* 1:23:3–4). He reports that the Spartan army retreated several times following earthquakes (for instance *War* 3:89:1) and, in a catastrophic decision, the Athenians decided not to withdraw their army from an indefensible position following a lunar eclipse (*War* 7:50:4). Soothsayers and diviners routinely interpreted natural events for their implications in human affairs. (Astrology—the belief that the future could be predicted from the stars or planets—did not develop in Greece until the third century BC, and was based on foreign sources (Tester 1987, pp11–29). Writing about the same time, Aristophanes said that the barbarians worship the sun and the moon, whereas the Greeks worship their gods (*Peace* 406f).)
The first development: the appearance of the _polis_

The first major departure from the Olympian tradition that orders the Homeric world is the appearance of the _polis_ or ‘city-state’. It was altogether larger and more complex than any of the social groups described in Homer. Thucydides attributes its development to the merging of smaller clans and family groups. Although initially ruled by the _aristoi_, by the mid-fifth century four distinct systems had developed: aristocracy, monarchy, democracy and tyranny—although most Greek states were either aristocracies or democracies.

Under an aristocracy, the _aristoi_ (or in practice, a wealthy few, the _oligoi_) made decisions in an Assembly; in a democracy, all citizens were eligible to take part in the Assembly. The line between aristocracy and democracy was often a matter of degree—in Athens in the fifth century BC there was constant tension between democratic and aristocratic factions.

The transfer of power and decision-making from _aristoi_ to all Athenian citizens was paralleled by the transfer of aristocratic virtues to the mass of citizens. As the belief in equality between citizens gained ground, the traditional sense of social position was eroded. Consequently, in the democracies, social order was no longer maintained exclusively by treating each person as their social position required, as in Homer, but out of obedience to laws, _nomoi_, made in the Assembly.

Another change was that ability (agathos) not _aretē_—traditionally the birthright of the _aristoi_—became the grounds for leadership: _aretē_ became democratic.

When it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class [aretēs], but the actual ability [agathon] which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the _polis_, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty.

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73 The Greeks also recognised that some people lived in clans and small communities without a formal system of government.

74 Monarchies persisted in smaller states in the north of Greece. Sparta and Crete were also nominally monarchies, still having kings, but in practice most political decisions were made in council. Plato refers to the Spartan system of government as a ‘timarchy’, a society ordered by _timē_, the warrior code of honour. (Republic 545–548). The last political system was tyranny, where a person or small group held power through force—which distinguished them from legitimate monarchies.

75 Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 2:37:1

76 Thucydides _The Peloponnesian War_ 2:37:1–2
The second development: the decision-making Assembly

In all Greek poleis, except tyrannies, most policy-making was done in the Assembly (Boule)\(^7\). This was a forum where citizens could gather, discuss and debate issues, and where decisions were usually reached by a vote\(^8\). From the sixth century BC, these councils began to specialise in the functions: the Boule proper decided on matters of policy, but in some democratic cities, separate citizen juries also began to hear legal cases\(^9\). The split in their functions was mirrored by a split in value systems. One value system operated in the law-courts and provided the standards for deciding what is just and lawful (dikaios); the other operated in the Boule was the standard against which people assessed what is useful, effective and expedient. The first was aligned with the laws of the gods; the second with laws made in the Assembly\(^8\). But despite the apparently neat division of functions and values, these two systems frequently came into conflict—particularly as assessments in both used the terminology of good and bad, agathos and kakos\(^8\), and could lead to quite different courses of action\(^8\).

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\(^7\) The Boule was an ancient institution: limited councils of the aristoi appear in Homer: receiving embassies, planning military strategy, persuading soldiers, and resolving conflicts. Later Greek states had many variations on this pattern. In the aristocracies, membership of the Boule was limited to the aristoi; in Sparta, a minimum age was also required. In the democracies like Athens however, all citizens were eligible to participate—the Greeks did not develop the Modern system of ‘representative democracy’.

\(^8\) In practice, the daily business of the Athenian government was delegated to a Council of 500, which was re-elected every year. The 500 were divided into ten, and each group of 50 presided for about a month. Other important roles, such as the presiding officer and the secretary were held only for brief periods. These high turnovers were introduced to ensure no individual could hold any position of power and undermine the democracy.

\(^9\) Athenian juries were selected by lottery, an ancient system originally introduced to ensure the most just citizens were selected to make decisions. The lot was not regarded as a random selection, as it is now. Zeus, the god of justice, also controlled the outcome of lots, and hence guided the selection for jury-members. Thus Zeus ensured that only the agathon passed judgement on their fellow citizens.

\(^8\) For instance, in deciding the fate of the rebel city, Mytilene, the Athenian Assembly was told: "This is not a law-court, where we have to consider what is dikaios; it is a political assembly, and the question is how Mytilene can be most useful to Athens." (Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 3.44.4)

\(^8\) MacIntyre explores the interaction between the two in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (1985, pp30–68), although he credits the traditional order with a philosophical rigour it probably did not possess in the eighth century BC.

\(^8\) The different courses that the two value systems could lead to is vividly illustrated in the fate of Melos. In 416BC, Athens attacked the island of Melos, which had been neutral to both Athens and Sparta. In a parley before the siege, the Melians refused to surrender to the...continued on next page
The third development: changes in human nature

The importance of the Boule to policy-making and the appearance of democratic government depend on one further distinctive change between Homer and Periclean Athens: the way people describe themselves as people and make decisions. Modern philosophers generally agree that “to be a person in the full sense, you have to be an agent with a sense of yourself as an agent, a being which can thus make plans for your life, one who holds values in virtue of which different plans seem better or worse, and who is capable of choosing between them.” If applied to Homer’s world, no human is a person. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Homeric characters had no unified sense of their own bodies, much less their own selves. They are certainly not self-aware. Although Homer’s characters have a system of values (drawn from dikē and themis), and judge actions against them as either agathos or kakos, they do not use these to decide between different courses of action.

Because Homeric characters believe that the future is predestined, there are no alternative futures to evaluate. People act because they know what is expected of them—either by themis, dikē, aretē, timē, moira or social role, or else they are prompted into action by some god or their thumos or phrenes. People do plan, but only to the extent of working out how to achieve what is expected of them; they do not decide on their goals.

By contrast, the late fifth century BC is distinctly closer to Modern ways of thinking about people. Characters are fully self-aware and quite capable of planning for the future. They understand themselves as vastly freer agents than Homeric characters. Although they believe the gods influence their lives, there is no longer a sense that fate binds every single person. Indeed, people are not only free, they are also quite aware of their own interests.

Athenians because they regarded it as dishonourable. The Athenians argued that the Melians should not decide between war and peace with Athens on the basis of honour and the traditional system of justice, but on what was in their interests (avoiding battle and saving their city). Each resulted in totally different courses of action. “You seem to forget that if one follows one’s self-interest one wants to be safe, whereas the path of justice [dikaios] and honour involves one in danger.” (Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 5.107.1)

The Melians responded that the Athenians should act on their own advice: it was in the Athenians’ interests not to attack Melos—other neutral cities would see Athenian toleration and remain neutral, whereas if Athens attacked, the neutral cities would become Athens’ enemies. The Athenians ignored the Melians’ call for both justice and this more sophisticated appeal to Athenian self-interest. After a siege of six months, Melos surrendered; all its adult males were killed, and its women and children sold into slavery. It turned out that the Melians were correct in their appeal: it was not in the interests of Athens to destroy them. Ten years later, after Sparta had defeated Athens, the Athenians feared they would suffer the fate of Melos, and argued that it was both just and in the interests of Sparta to spare them. Sparta agreed, and Athens survived.

Taylor, 1985, p257. This definition is a development of Kant’s formulation “A person is a subject whose actions are capable of imputation.”
(Self interest is a major theme in Thucydides’ account of Athens’ failure.) But, by the fifth century BC, people’s decisions, as they are portrayed in both literature and histories, were complicated by the appearance of the second value system, which competed with the ancient system of values. Agathos and kakos still correspond to good and bad, but judgements became moral as well as functional. People still feel obliged to act in accordance with dikē, but they may be distracted or misled by the dictates of the newly apparent set of human laws.

The choice between the Olympian tradition and the newer self-interested tradition was further complicated by the changing nature of knowledge upon which people could make decisions. In the old tradition, people relied on their knowledge of tradition, (gnōmē), of what themis and dikē required of them. By the fifth century BC however, Greek thinkers had begun to research human nature and society, learning what was effective in ruling and persuading people, and employing empeiria (knowledge from experience) to develop practical rules for using this knowledge. However, what happened to be an effective method might not be the same as what gnōmē dictated was the right way of acting.

The way people made decisions also evolved between the portraits of Homer and Thucydides, and the change has important implications for later communication theory. The only decisions that people make in the Iliad and the Odyssey concern how outcomes were to be achieved. Homeric characters know what they are going to do and what is to be achieved. How they know it is either unstated or results from being instructed by some god, or by their thumos or phrenes. All people have to do, once they know what is required of them, is work out how to achieve it.

People in the fifth century BC are shown making decisions in an entirely different way. People know what is agathos (right or good) for a person like them to do and, given their circumstances, they plan how to act accordingly. But people in the fifth century have to decide between different options and different actions which might both be agathos. This conflict, or even the potential for conflict, hardly exists in Homer.

As the dramatists of the fifth century BC describe people, individuals making personal decisions for themselves usually know what is proper—people are rarely at a loss for what to

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84 This approach to making decisions is quite different from modern beliefs about decision-making, which presume that people have desires or wants they wish to fulfil. Modern decision-making is thus about choosing between these, then working out how to fulfil them. But desires and wants are personal; in Greece, what is right or good is defined by custom or law, and is what a person is expected to do by their community.
Public decisions though, where the whole polis has to decide how to act, involves a process of deciding between the rights or goods held by different people. As with personal decision-making, people presenting policies to the Assembly are not in doubt about what is right or good for the city to do. In Thucydides, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, people do not debate these assumptions—only whether they are relevant to a case or not.

The Olympian and conventional views in the fifth century BC

By the fifth century BC, Greek beliefs about society are far more familiar to us than Homer’s world. Our Modern world preserves many of the institutions—and conflicts—that the Greeks of the fifth century knew.

On the side of nature was the ‘Olympian tradition’. Its claimed that there is a law (dike) or an order (kosmou) to the universe, laid down by Zeus. Society, as part of the universe, is subject to this law of nature (phusis). People are born into, grow up in and live in this ordered society—a person without society is literally unnatural. The order of society establishes the roles and responsibilities that people have to one another. Human beings should live in society, obey the laws laid down by the gods, accept their place, accept the role allotted to them, do their best to meet the requirements of that role, and give to others what is due to them in their roles. Individual happiness in such a world consists in each person knowing and accepting their place, fulfilling their responsibilities to others, and complying with the natural law. Decisions concerning the community were to be made by the aristoi because they alone possessed the arete to decide what is good, agathos, for the polis. Their decisions were based on gnōmē, the knowledge of what tradition and dike required of people. Communication-as-community in this sense means simply treating

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85 There are no examples of individual decision making in Herodotus or Thucydides, only speeches in the Assembly. Consequently, our descriptions of personal decision-making have to come from the poets—chiefly works written for the theatre.

86 For instance, when the Athenians tried to persuade the Melians to avoid a siege and submit to Athens, they say: “This [would be] no fair fight, with honour [andragathia] on one side and shame on the other. It is rather a question of saving your lives and not resisting those who are far too strong for you.” (Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 5:101:1). Here the Athenians acknowledge that the Melians might fight for the traditional values, what is good for men, andragathia, and they do not dispute that wars might be fought for such reasons. What they reject is the Melian assumption that is it an appropriate basis upon which to make decisions—they believe the Melians should decide whether to surrender to Athens on the basis of their self-interest and not what is considered honourable. (At no point in this particular debate does either side mention what each city might want or desire—unlike Modern decision-making, wants are apparently not a valid starting point for political decisions.)
people as they are due in their roles—a definition which makes communication identical with justice, *dikaiosunē*.

By the fifth century BC this tradition was opposed by the belief that society and all human institutions were simply conventions (*nomoi*). It began by claiming that all people are individuals, and desires, interests and goals. Happiness consists in satisfying those wants and desires. Adherents of this tradition observed that some goals may not be achieved individually and claimed that, in prehistory, individuals had come together voluntarily to achieve collectively what they could not do alone. This was the origin of society: a ‘social contract’. However, in such a society, some people will be more effective at getting what they want—or forcing others to get it for them. So, this society has a hierarchy: from strongest to weakest. Moreover, because supporters of this tradition agree that people have a right to pursue their own happiness, it is right that people that are less effective at achieving happiness should be subject to those that are more effective—and hence, the weak should be subject to the strong. However, as the strong are not all powerful—the strong need the weak to achieve their goals—they need to place some curbs on their own behaviour and allow the weak some freedoms if they are to secure the assistance of the weak. These agreements are the first laws in society. But the strong will only permit the weak such laws as are necessary to secure their own ends; if the strong were to find a more effective way of achieving their goals without the weak, they would abolish the laws of society. Laws are an acknowledgment that the strong are not all-powerful and cannot act with impunity. Such laws as society has are only a convention (*nomos*) which may be changed if the people that make them choose to do so. In this view, there are no absolute laws such as the Olympian tradition claimed; social order was a product of human effort alone and hence may display infinite variety (this found confirmation in the reports of travellers like Herodotus: far from there being a single divine law, there are only a variety of customs and beliefs which each community believed was right.) Decisions in this *polis* were made on the basis of how effective they would be at satisfying the needs, wants and desires of individuals or the *polis*. Such decisions were assessed on *empieria*, the knowledge gained from experience. To be a good person in this view of a community is to be effective at winning power and influence, through either strength or skill, in order to satisfy one’s own wishes.
The following table summarises the key claims and differences between the two traditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phusis</th>
<th>nomos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assumes the kosmos has a divine order; people are part of this order</td>
<td>people are individuals; people have desires, wishes and personal goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>society society is an aspect of the cosmic order; people are naturally social creatures; each person has a place and a role in society</td>
<td>society is a voluntary contract (nomos) between individuals established for mutual benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values it is agathos for people to act according to their role in society and keep to their place</td>
<td>it is agathos for people to satisfy their desires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtues a person’s arete consists in doing what their role requires of them; the best (aristoi) excel in arete</td>
<td>a person’s arete consists in possessing the strength and ability needed to satisfy their desires and achieve their goals; the best (aristoi) are the most effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>law dikē is the order of nature (phusis) or the laws laid down by the gods (themis)</td>
<td>laws are conventions (nomoi) established by people in order to allow them to achieve their goals and satisfy their desires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>justice dikaiosunē consist in complying with the divine order (dikē), remaining in the place allotted in society, and giving to others what they are due in their role.</td>
<td>dikaiosunē consists in the weak being subject to the strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order social order is part of nature (phusis)</td>
<td>social order is established through convention (nomos)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two traditions are quite different several other in fundamental ways, beyond the specific claims they make. For instance, the ‘Olympian’ tradition focuses primarily on claims about what people should do—they are statements of values and policy: people should obey the law, should obey the gods, should keep to their place, should behave virtuously. It locates human life within the operation of the kosmos, and its ultimate scope is universal. Many of the demands in this tradition rest on assertions that are metaphysical—the existence of a divine law or a cosmic order, and the claim that human beings are naturally social creatures. The second, rival tradition consists of a mixture of factual claims derived from experience, along with beliefs about effective methods to achieve happiness. Entirely absent are metaphysical claims, or connections between people and the larger universe. It builds upon a different domain of knowledge: experience and observation. People, its adherents claim, tend to obey the law because they have found that
it is the most effective way of achieving their goals and securing happiness. Unlike the Olympian tradition, this is not a static tradition. People contest with one another to achieve their goals and satisfy their needs. They also gain experience: developing new goals, learning new ways of achieving those goals, and finding more effective ways of organising society and its laws. Unlike the Olympian tradition, this tradition is open to improvement based on rational analysis and evidence.

The two traditions are in conflict at every key point. As the ancient Greeks found, the contest between them cannot be resolved or completed—it is not possible to reject the claims of one using the assumptions of the other. The conflict between nomos (convention) and phusis (nature) was never resolved in the ancient world. As I will show in the remainder of this chapter, what happened in political philosophy was that each tradition tried to assimilate the ideas of the other. The history of ancient social thought is the interaction between these two groups of ideas, as people tried to find some arrangement that satisfied the demands and assumptions of both. (In practice, the Greek solution was rhetoric, the art of persuasion, which they regarded as neutral to both phusis and nomos, and I have discussed how it was deployed at the end of this chapter. Rhetoric however is not properly a part of communication-as-community, and I have discussed it and related arts separately in Chapter 11.)

The developments in Greek social thought brought about conflicts between the old and new systems of law, justice and values. These disputes are broadly of three types:

1. conflicts between beliefs about individuals and the polis
2. conflicts between the polis and traditional order
3. conflicts between the new beliefs about individuals and what the traditional order required of people.

These problems varied from city to city. Sparta retained many of the values those of the warrior—honour, courage, obedience, steadfastness. It did not experience the fractious politics or the social novelties the Athenians delighted in. Sparta was regarded by contemporaries as the most traditional of Greeks societies, and consequently the conflict of old and new orders was experienced least there. However, despite being an inspiration to the Romans, their system of government had almost no influence on later political and social thought. The Greek contribution to Western social thought is almost exclusively Athenian, and the modern West retains descendants of many characteristic conflicts: the contest between tradition, polis and individuals; the dual sources of law (dikè and nomos); and the dual value systems.
Conflicts between individuals and the *polis*

Although the belief in people as individuals had appeared along with the *polis*, the relationship between the two is ambiguous. Ancient authors often treat the *polis* as interchangeable with its citizens: ‘Athenians’ and ‘Athens’, for instance, are often effectively the same thing. But sometimes a *polis* is seen as something beyond the mass of its citizens. In his Funeral Speech, Pericles praises the city, commanding his listeners to “realise the power of Athens, and feed your eyes on her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts.”*88* People strive and die, not just for one another, but for something that is above them collectively. Thucydides has the Corinthians say of the Athenians:

> As for their bodies, [the Athenians] regard them as expendable for the city’s sake as though there were not their own ... [and furthermore] each man cultivates his own intelligence, again with a view of doing something notable for his city.*89*

The distinction between the people and the *polis* is apparent in the speeches that Thucydides attributes to Pericles—the chief architect of Athenian policy from the middle of the fifth century bc. On one hand, Pericles says that citizens are free to do whatever they please within the *polis*:

> We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people’s feelings.*90*

At other times though, he clearly expects individuals to be constrained by laws so they do not trample on the freedoms of others.

> We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law [*nomos*]. This is because it commands our deep respect. We give our obedience to those we put in positions of authority and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.*91*

There is a belief repeated throughout Thucydides that each individual’s efforts to excel will contribute to the overall greatness of the city*92*.

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*88* Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 2:43:1

*89* Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 1:70:6

*90* Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 2:37:2

*91* Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 2:37:3. The ‘unwritten laws’ Pericles refers to here are the traditional laws of the gods.

*92* Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 1:70:6
I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and ... that each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility.  

In this view, the polis is simply the sum of it citizens and their achievements. At other times though, people clearly believe not only that the interests of individuals and the polis may be in competition, but also that the polis should take precedence.

My own opinion is that when the whole state is on the right course it is a better thing for each separate individual than when private interests are satisfied but the state as a whole is going downhill. However well off a man may be in his private life, he will still be involved in the general ruin if his country is destroyed; whereas, so long as the state itself is secure, individuals have a much greater chance of recovering from their private misfortunes.

Thucydides attributes a large part of the Athenian defeat to the triumph of individual self-interest over the needs of the state or the demands of law.

Conflicts between the polis and the traditional family-based order

The Greek concept of dīke arose in a society made up largely of extended families (phratra), or the clients of a strong patron family (genos). As urban centres grew, the old rules were inadequate for a more complex society. Not surprisingly, although people tried to observe the laws that the gods had laid down, there were conflicts between the traditional order and the new environment of the polis. The contest was most intense where the ancient order of the gods was challenged by the new human-made laws—which happened most

93 Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 2:41:1
94 Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 2:6:2–3
95 “Pericles had said that Athens would be victorious if she bided her time and took care of her navy, if she avoided trying to add to the empire during the course of the war, and if they did nothing to risk the safety of the city itself. But his successors did the exact opposite, and in other matters which apparently had no connection with the war the private ambition and private profit led to policies which were bad for both the Athenians themselves and for their allies. Such policies, when successful, only brought credit and advantage to individuals, and when they failed the whole war potential of the state was impaired.” (Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 2:65:1)
often in the legal system and in political decision-making. This is most dramatic in the
tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides which play out these conflicts.  

In the earliest portrait of the Greek legal system—Aeschylus’s Eumenides—the conflict is
quite explicitly about the clash of old and new systems of justice: dikē and nomos. The story
of Orestes is the last chapter in the complex blood feud in the House of Aretes.
Orestes—guilty of murdering his mother Clytemnestra in retaliation for her murder of his
father, Agamemnon—is pursued by the Furies. The play opens in Delphi where Orestes has
taken sanctuary in the Temple of Apollo. Apollo believes that Orestes has expunged his
guilt through his sufferings and sacrifices, and sends him to Athens where his case will be
heard and the curse on his family ended. The Furies pursue him and find him a suppliant
at the temple of Athena (and so under the goddess’s protection). Athena agrees to decide
between the Furies’ demand for revenge and Orestes’ plea that Apollo has cleansed him.
She is faced by not only their competing claims, but also two approaches to justice: the
reason of Apollo (who represents Orestes in the trial) and the frightening blood-justice of the
Furies. The arguments of the Furies rest on the most ancient of reasons: Orestes is guilty of
shedding the blood of a direct relative. They claim this crime exceeds Clytemnestra’s
murder of her husband because they did not share blood. Apollo responds with a display of
reason and oratory—the new legal weapons of the Athenians—arguing that the marriage
vow is sacred to Zeus, highest of the gods, and therefore Clytemnestra’s murder was the
greater: therefore Orestes had a right to avenge the death of his father. Athena declares that
the case is too hard even for her wisdom, and so she establishes a jury of twelve Athenian
citizens to help judge the case. (In doing so, Aeschylus is claiming divine sanction for this
democratic institution.) The jury however returns a tied verdict, and it is Athena’s casting
vote that frees Orestes. The Furies are enraged, claiming that their ancient wisdom and
power has been defied by younger gods: they threaten to destroy the land in retribution.
Athena reasons with them, pointing out that the outcome was reached by a fair trial. She
offers them a place below the city of Athens where they will be honoured; they will still have
a place in Athenian justice alongside reason and oratory. Eventually, Athena persuades
them to accept: the old and new will co-exist in Athens—reason and fear, dikē and
nomos—to be mediated by the orator and judged by the collective wisdom of the jury. The
play ends with a great hymn by Athena in praise of persuasion, rhetoric, the chief tool of the
orator.

The nature of resolution in Eumenides—Athena’s casting vote—is significant. It is not a
person that breaks the deadlock, but a god. Human beings are unable to decide between
the old and new values and systems of justice. The appearance of a god is a device used
repeatedly in plays of the time, particularly the tragedies of Euripides. The tragedians

96 Greek tragedy is often structured as an agon, a conflict between two rivals—in this case,
rival systems of justice and order.
acknowledged the impossibility of a rational choice between two value systems using the assumptions of Greek oratory, and their only option is to ask the gods for guidance.\textsuperscript{97}

The Greeks of the fifth century BC were aware of the conflicts in their system of justice, although they did not diagnose its source. Nor did they resolve the conflict. The struggle remained a permanent feature of Greek political philosophy until the end of Antiquity.

The correspondence between individual and society

The conflict between the old and new traditions only existed within city-states. Human-made laws only applied within the polis; they did not and could not govern relations between cities and states. However, the perennially warring Greeks needed principles to govern ‘international relations’. The traditional laws of the gods certainly applied to all people, regardless of which city they came from but, except for a few limited conventions covering aspects of warfare,\textsuperscript{98} they did not apply to cities or states. The solution implicitly adopted by the Greeks was to regard the polis as though it was a person or a human body.

This correspondence between person and polis was used in many ways in Greek thought, but the most important in relations between states was to justify the ‘natural’ principle, “the weak should be subject to the strong.”\textsuperscript{99} This was the principle the Athenians used to

\textsuperscript{97} If a person makes a rational decision for one system of justice, it follows that they must have good reasons for their decision. For a decision to count as a good decision, the person must have a value system against which they can assess competing claims. Furthermore, for a decision to be rational, the person must also be able to defend their value system rationally—that is, they do not hold their position by force or tradition or some other criterion. However, if the person is to be persuaded to another position, they must also reject their existing system of values. In doing so, they admit that their former values were not rationally held, and hence they were behaving irrationally. A person that is behaving irrationally cannot be persuaded by rational means—at least this is what later Greek philosophers believed. Consequently there can be no rational way of getting a person to change what they believe. Consequently persuasion can only be on non-rational grounds. This is consistent with what we know of early Greek rhetoric, which focused on emotional appeals, verbal gymnastics and impressiveness to achieve its ends—an approach that later generations of philosophers would criticise heavily.

\textsuperscript{98} In the heroic poems, dikē did govern aspects of warfare, and these rules continued to have force in the fifth century BC. Heralds between warring poleis were inviolate; armistices were observed to allow armies to collect and bury their dead; and treaties were sworn by oath (sacred to the gods); and breaking a treaty required a justification to the gods.

\textsuperscript{99} Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 1:76.2 and 1:43.1. Thucydides mentions the ‘natural law’—that the weak are subject to the strong—only in relations between states. But it is implicit in the social structure within Greek society—men rule over women, masters...continued on next page
justify coercing its allies into a de facto empire. Only where states were equal in power, and had no rational reason for believing they could subjugate one another by force, could alliances be formed. The Athenian general, Themistocles, tells the Spartans that, “it was only on the basis of equal strength that equal and fair discussions on the common interest could be held.”\(^\text{100}\) If disputes arose between equal powers, disagreements they were resolved by arbitration, *dikê*.

Thucydides is quite explicit that the same rules applied between cities as between individuals under the traditional laws. When the Mytileneans sought alliance with Sparta after rebelling against Athens, they began their embassy by saying:

*Dikê and aretê* are the first subjects with which we shall deal, especially as we have to ask for your alliance, and we know that there can never be firm friendship between man and man or a real community between different states unless there is a conviction of *aretê* on both sides and a certain likemindedness in other respects; for if people think differently they will act divergently.\(^\text{101}\)

The Mytileneans give the two criteria for alliance and the formation of friendships between both people and cities: mutual recognition of *aretê* and commonality. The word Thucydides uses for the second is *homiotropoi*—literally ‘like places’—and implied similar customs or similar lives. Commonality of kinship was a reason constantly given for alliances; its lack created natural enemies.\(^\text{102}\) Herodotus says that the Greek nation consisted in “the community of blood and language, temples and ritual, our common way of life.”\(^\text{103}\)

**Greek political thought after the fifth century BC**

The conflict between the two views of community—summarised by the conflict between nature and convention, *phusis* and *nomos*—came to a crisis in Athens at the end of the

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\(^{100}\) Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 1:92:7

\(^{101}\) Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 3:10:1

\(^{102}\) One underlying cause of the Peloponnesian War was that the Spartans and Athenians belonged to different tribes—Dorics and Ionians respectively—and so regarded each other as natural enemies. Tribal allegiances also helped each city secure allies across the Greek world.

\(^{103}\) Herodotus *Histories* 8:144:1. Just how people know they are similar, *homios*, and have something in common is never explained though—presumably people just know if they are similar or not.
Peloponnesian War. When Athens was defeated, all of its claims to aretē, agathos and dikaiosunē were ruined. Its leading intellectuals responded by launching a searching examination of all aspects of Greek social and political life. The resulting political theory however never truly moved beyond the competing claims of nomos and phusis: as the philosophers recognised, both made many claims that were hard to deny. So instead, they tried to incorporate elements of both traditions, aiming at a synthesis that satisfied the requirements of both. Historically, four views came to dominate the ancient world: Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean and Stoic. Although as a whole each differed greatly from the others, because each theory was a synthesis of ideas, they also shared many individual claims. In late Antiquity, these superficial similarities were the starting point for borrowings between the schools and their slow convergence—a trend that culminates in events I will discuss in the next chapter.

PLATO

Plato was born four years after Pericles launched Athens into the Peloponnesian War and was twenty-seven when Sparta finally humiliated his city. He grew up not only in a city at war, but one racked by coup d’etat and internal strife, reflecting a profound conflict in beliefs about how people were to live together. Plato was a member of a distinguished family and, as a young man, had political ambitions. When the Spartans established an oligarchy to rule over the defeated Athenians in 404 BC, the young Plato was invited through family connections to participate in the new government. Initially enthusiastic, he was quickly repelled by the oligarchs’ violence as they tried to suppress their democratic opponents. When the democracy was restored the following year, his hopes for a political career revived. His optimism died though in 399 BC when the democrats tried and executed his mentor Socrates. Plato abandoned any hope of active political life in Athens and turned to philosophy—although his dialogues show, he remained deeply concerned with public life and how people could live best.

Plato’s early dialogues

Plato’s work can be divided into broadly three phases: early, middle, and late. The early dialogues104 are believed to follow Socrates’ own views closely, and feature the older

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104 The exact order in which Plato wrote his dialogues is unknown. However, the early group is usually believed to include the Apology, Laches, Euthyphro, Crito, Charmides, Ion, Euthydemus, Lysias, and a transitional group that may also belong with the ‘middle’ dialogues: Protagoras, Meno, Gorgias and Cratylus.
the development of ideas about communication in European thought

philosopher in conversation with prominent Athenians and intellectuals of his day, searching out the truth of justice, society and human happiness. Although Plato’s dialogues range over the entire field of philosophy, they are centrally concerned with: [1] the nature of areté, [2] whether areté can be taught, and [3] how people are to live in the polis.

Plato’s exploration of how people are to live together in the polis is underdeveloped in the early dialogues. Most of the dialogues focus on the nature of areté. However, Plato does not address areté as such. Rather, he discusses the parts or aspects of areté, although he does not reach a definitive position of what these are. In Protagoras, he lists five that appear in many later dialogues:

[1] courage
[2] piety
[3] wisdom
[4] sōphrosunē (a term derived from phrenes and meant loosely ‘soundness of mind’ although it had connotations of self-control, discipline and discretion.)
[5] dikaiosunē (obviously related to dikē, and usually translated ‘justice’ or ‘righteousness’. However, the root word, dikais, has a wider range of meanings, including ‘well-ordered’, ‘civilised’, and ‘observant of custom and duty’.)

Plato addresses the first four of these in the early dialogues: courage in Laches, piety in Euthyphro, sōphrosunē in Charmides, and wisdom throughout. In each dialogue however, Socrates reduces the other participants to bewilderment. In Laches, for example, neither Socrates nor the generals Nicias and Laches—all men of proven bravery—are able to define what courage is; indeed, Nicias is unable to explain satisfactorily what areté is. Bafflement however is not a bad thing; Plato’s early dialogues end with false opinions exposed and participants keen to solve the problem they have discovered.

Throughout the early dialogues, Plato appears to believe that the polis is nothing more than the sum of its individuals; social life is usually discussed in the context of individual improvement. This is a position he later makes explicit in the Republic, where he says, “the qualities that characterise a state must also exist in the individuals that compose it. There is nowhere else from them to come from” (Republic 435). In Protagoras, the Sophist claims to be able to teach the art of politics, but in the discussion, both Protagoras and Socrates focus on how such an education will affect the individual student—not society at large. In the final section of Gorgias, Plato considers the use of rhetoric in society, but chiefly to dismiss the sophists’ claims about the nature of rhetorical ability.
Along with exploring arete in the early dialogues, Plato also challenges the claims of contemporary educators to teach arete. Plato’s main protagonists are the Sophists. When the Sophists began to arrive in Athens in the mid-fifth century BC, Athens was in transition from an aristocracy to a democracy of its male citizens. Although Pericles had claimed that “in questions ... of public responsibility what counts is not membership of a particular class [aretēs] but actual ability [agathos],” in reality the wealthy and well-born were still powerful. What defined the aristoi—at least in principle—was their possession of arete, which fitted them for leadership. (In reality they were not the aristoi, the ‘best’, but the oligoi, the ‘few’—an oligarchy, ruling through wealth, political influence and personal fame.)

Even in Plato’s time, many believed that arete was an inherited property limited to a few leading families. Consequently, the Sophists’ claim that arete could be taught amounted to saying that anyone could win power, wealth and fame provided they had the necessary intelligence. This assertion had a galvanic effect on the Athenians, especially the democrats and young men of the city keen for advancement. There were several important corollaries to the Sophists’ claim. If arete could be taught and was not ‘natural’, it followed that there were no natural rights and wrongs, only conventions that people agreed to observe. If all values were simply convention, there were also no natural laws. If there were natural laws, there was likewise no natural order to society; such order as did exist was that

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106 Alongside the Sophists in Plato’s attack are the poets—the tradition Greek educators. In Ion, Plato rejects the rhapsode’s claim to know many subjects from their recitations of Homer. Plato argues that when the rhapsode performs they are possessed and out of their senses, and hence have no genuine knowledge of what they speak. Homer may have spoken of battles, but that does not make the rhapsode an expert on strategy or tactics; nor does it make them brave. The same is true of other skills and crafts the rhapsode claims to know, undermining the poet’s traditional role in Greek education. In the Republic, Plato bans poets from his ideal state (Republic, 376ff, and particularly 398).

107 Thucydides The Peloponnesian War 2:37:1–2

108 Just as the Sophists rejected the claim for natural laws, they were also sceptical about the existence of the gods, who the Greeks saw as the authors of the natural law. A surviving fragment from Protagoras says “Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not, nor of what form they are; for there are many obstacles to such knowledge, including the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life.” Not surprisingly, the leading Sophists were charged with impiety for expressing such a view. Around 430 BC, the Boule passed a law that anyone who did not believe in the gods or taught theories about celestial phenomena should be liable to prosecution—a clear attack on the Sophists (Plutarch, Pericles 32). The comic playwright Aristophanes also makes fun of Euripides—the playwright most closely associated with the Sophists—for inventing new gods (Frogs 887f).
imposed by the strong to serve their own interests. (This was the prevailing view in Athens as Thucydides describes it in people’s speeches and the city’s actions.)

These claims, and the Sophists that taught them, were a natural target for Plato. Plato had grown up a member of the aristocracy. His friend Socrates had been executed by the democracy on charges typically levelled at the Sophists. The Sophists’ claims that aretē, law and dikaiosunē were just so many conventions revolted Plato’s old-fashioned, aristocratic belief in objective standards and virtues. And, as a young man, he had seen first-hand how the principles taught by the Sophists were the same as those that had resulted in the Athenian defeat. Plato tackles the Sophists claims principally in two of the early dialogues: in Protagoras he discusses the Sophists’ ‘cleverness in politics’; in Gorgias, he attacks their rhetoric—the art of persuasion and the most important tool for speeches presented in the Assembly.109

In Protagoras, Plato tackles the problem of whether a Sophist can teach aretē110. Protagoras claims he will teach his students “prudence in affairs private as well as public; he will learn to order his own house in the best manner, and he will be able to speak and act for the best in the affairs of the polis”111. In short, he claims to teach the art of politics and make good citizens of his pupils. As aretē was necessary for both activities, Protagoras is implicitly claiming to be able to teach aretē.

Socrates responds with two arguments that aretē cannot be taught. First, he points out that while an amateur who gave advice to an expert (such as a shipwright or an architect) would be ridiculed, the same is not true of citizens who offered advice in the Assembly; it followed that people cannot think that citizens require training in affairs of state—an activity that all agreed required aretē. Second, he points out that even the best citizens can

109 In Euthydemus, Socrates describes a discussion he has had with two Sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. The dialogue makes no significant theoretical points, and appears to be largely a cautionary demonstration of futile point-scoring, chop logic and word games. The dialogue ends with a friend of Socrates commenting “when I contemplate any of those [ie the Sophists] who pretend to educate others, I am amazed. … they all seem to be such outrageous beings.” (Euthydemus 307–308)

Cratylus, usually placed amongst Plato’s middle period, belongs in the same game. Plato has Socrates satirise contemporary investigations into the nature and origins of language—a favourite activity of the Sophists.

110 Plato’s target is carefully chosen. Protagoras was a major intellectual, and enjoyed a reputation in his own time at least equal to that of Socrates. He was moreover a personal friend of Pericles and stood for the intellectual ambitions of Periclean Athens.

111 Plato Protagoras 318
nonetheless have vicious sons; if the best cannot teach areté, no one else could hope to.

Protagoras responds to Socrates’ first point with a myth illustrating that areté is a precondition of social life; without mutual respect and justice (dikaiosunē), life in the polis would not be possible. Consequently, all people must have a share in these, otherwise the polis would be unstable—which it plainly was not.

Protagoras responds to Socrates’ second point by referring to the institution of punishment, which illustrates that goodness can be taught: punishment is an education for either the person punished or for others. He adds that all education tends to establish areté: poets and domestic life teach what we would call ‘morals’; music encourages sōphrosunē and makes people more civilised; physical education makes people brave. Protagoras says that it is in everyone’s interests to teach areté to others. And the most appropriate person to teach is one who is more advanced in areté than others—and this is what Protagoras claim to be.

On Protagoras’s description, however, Socrates concludes that all areté must involve knowledge—even courage is wisdom. In a long and inconclusive discussion, Socrates explores whether this is actually the case. He does this through two moves: the first to show that all things that people call areté—wisdom, sōphrosunē, courage, dikaiosunē, and piety—are all essentially the same thing. Second, he demonstrates (somewhat spuriously) that being courageous requires knowledge. Combining the two Socrates concludes that areté must involve wisdom. Protagoras argues that Socrates is mistaken in his logic, and the dialogue ends with the question of whether areté can be taught still unanswered. What has been established in this dialogue however is that, if areté is knowledge then it can be taught, but if it is not knowledge then it cannot be taught. The Sophists’ claims to teach areté though have been weakened, even if they have not be disproved.

A point to note: Socrates’ claim that all areté is wisdom—a claim broadly supported by all ancient schools of philosophy—cements a belief about human action in Greek thought. People do good because they know what is good, says Socrates, and do evil only through ignorance or the impairment of reason by emotion. Action is thus a product of the intellect and reason. What the Greeks did not have was a clear concept of ‘will’ or ‘wants’ as motivators of human action. The closest term, boulethai, is derived from boule, ‘counsel’ or ‘consider’, and has connotations of deliberation and judgement. The consequence for Greek ethics is that, if a person’s areté can be developed at all, that development was purely intellectual. In his later works, Plato recommended training in mathematics and dialectic. It was only with Aristotle that the idea that more than intellectual training was required to establish a good society became permanent in Western thought.

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112 Shrples 1996, pp72–73
In *Gorgias*, Plato attacks the Sophists’ training in rhetoric[^13^], and their notion of justice, *dikaiosune*. The discussion focuses on two related topics, the nature of rhetoric and the kind of *polis* that Sophistic rhetoric is used in. Socrates begins by asking Gorgias exactly what he teaches, to which the Sophist answers:

> the power to convince by means of speech the jurymen in a lawcourt, the Council in their Chamber, the members of the Assembly, those present at any civic gathering. With this power the doctor and the trainer will be your slaves, the businessman will end up making money ... for you, able as you are to speak and convince the masses.[^14^]

Socrates is dissatisfied with this definition. Comparing rhetoric with other professions, he points out that many professionals need to be able to persuade. He asks Gorgias to explain what subject matter belongs specifically to rhetoric, as other professions have their specific subjects. Gorgias responds that rhetoric is chiefly concerned with law-making and law-giving: in the Assembly and the law-courts.

To explore how rhetoric achieves its aims, Socrates then draws a sharp contrast between being persuaded by belief (which may or may not be true) and being persuaded by genuine knowledge. Having obtained Gorgias’ agreement on this distinction, he then asks which of the two rhetoric uses in order to persuade. Gorgias answers, belief. “The rhētor [rhetorician] need not know the truth about things; he has only to discover some way of persuading the ignorant that he has more knowledge than [the experts]”[^15^]. The point is a particularly damaging one: the word rhētor referred not only a public speaker, but also to a politician who spoke in the Assembly or a plaintiff before the court. What Gorgias is saying effectively is that public figures do not need to speak the truth—they must merely appear to know more than their audience and not get caught out). Gorgias also agrees with Socrates that “rhetoric ... creates belief about the just and the unjust, but gives not instruction about them”[^16^].

At this point, the discussion is interrupted by Polus, who sees Gorgias being trapped into saying that the Sophist is unjust. Polus returns Socrates to his original question, the nature of rhetoric, and demands that Socrates gives his own view. Socrates, annoyed at Polus’s behaviour, responds that he does not think that rhetoric is the *tekhnē* the Gorgias and Polus think it is. (*Tekhnē* includes learned arts and professions, which require more than a knack; it includes artistic skills like music, practical arts like cookery, crafts like ship-building.

[^13^]: As in *Protagoras*, Plato picks his protagonist carefully. Gorgias of Leontini had a reputation as a great speaker, both of set speeches and when improvising. He was foremost amongst the teachers of rhetoric in Athens.

[^14^]: Plato *Gorgias* 452

[^15^]: Plato *Gorgias* 459

[^16^]: Plato *Gorgias* 455

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professions like soldiering, and scientific activities like medicine. Implicit in Plato’s definition of a tekhnē is that it should achieve some good.) To demonstrate his point, Socrates constructs two analogies on other tekhnē. Cooking is the counterfeit of medicine, he says, and cosmetics are the counterfeit of gymnastics. Gymnastics make people healthy and strong; cosmetics only gives them the appearance of health. Similarly, medicine restores people to health if they are ill; cooking only titillates the senses without providing nutrition. Rhetoric, says Socrates, is likewise a counterfeit. What the polis really needs is what is good for it, namely justice. What rhetoric provides is merely the appearance of justice. Consequently, rhetoric as Gorgias describes it is not a tekhnē, because it aims at no good and is merely a collection of tricks and techniques. Plato does not continue his discussion on the nature of rhetoric (although he takes up the problem again in the middle dialogue, Phaedrus, which I discuss in Chapter 11). He turns instead to the type of society that his protagonists envisage.

In the remainder of Gorgias, Socrates draws a sharp distinction between the life of the rhētor and the philosopher. He aligns philosophy with true knowledge, aretē, and what is best for the polis; the rhētor by contrast he associates with false belief, ignorance, and self-interest. Socrates’ final protagonist, Callicles, states angrily that the genuinely superior man seeks happiness in satisfying his wants and needs, and frees himself from all constraints, even the law. The happiest man is not the democrat—for democracies set limits on their citizens—but the tyrant. The tyrant has the ability to attain the power necessary to do as he pleases to satisfy his desires. Socrates objects that freedom to act as one pleases is not much use if the individual does not know what to do with it: the ignorant tyrant is therefore greatly to be pitied. Socrates adds that committing injustice is worse than suffering injustice. At this point, the discussion breaks down entirely—indeed, Plato has Callicles refuse to continue talking. Socrates is left to characterise two diametrically opposed characters: the Sophist and the philosopher. Sophism never recovered from Plato’s propaganda.

The outcomes of Plato’s investigations in these early dialogues is the demolition or weakening of all contemporary beliefs as an adequate basis for improving aretē or the polis. Although this was an admirable demonstration of the power of his dialectical reasoning, it did not leave much behind. All candidates for improving aretē and equipping people for an active life in the polis had been rejected. Admired generals declare themselves unsuitable to teach courage; leading Sophists do not know what the aretē they claim to teach is or are manifestly unjust. Socrates’ therapy leaves his protagonists bewildered, but also (when they are sympathetic) intrigued, ready to explore the problem again now that their false assumptions have been revealed. But in these early dialogues, Plato does not advance a positive doctrine of his own. This changes with the middle dialogues.
Plato’s middle dialogues

The Socratic method that Plato followed in the early dialogues can never, of itself, produce positive claims, only sort potentially true arguments from demonstrably false ones. In the middle (or 'great') dialogues—particularly *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Republic*—Plato begins to develop his own arguments, advancing doctrines that the historical Socrates did not teach.

In the *Republic*, Plato discusses the last part of *aretē* left unaddressed in his early dialogues: *dikaiosunē* (justice or righteousness). The discussion begins as Polemarchus tries to defend a variant on the Olympian definition: that justice is giving every man his due and, specifically, helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. Socrates quickly shows that such a definition leads to absurdities, and therefore cannot be a true definition of *dikaiosunē*. No sooner has he finished than he is interrupted by the Sophist, Thrasymachus, with the second, contrasting position taught by the Sophists: that “justice or right is whatever is in the interests of the stronger party.” Plato has Socrates mount a longer and less satisfactory refutation. Although this silences Thrasymachus, it does not satisfy his other listeners. They restate the position illustrating how the strong would actually foolish not to act unjustly to acquire what they want; justice is nothing more than agreement between people to avoid suffering at the hands of others. Socrates concedes that this is how *dikaiosunē* appears to operate in the world. Nonetheless, he is convinced that this is not

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117 Plato *Republic* 331
118 Plato *Republic* 338
119 "[People] say that it is our natural instinct to inflict wrong or injury, and to avoid suffering it, but that the disadvantages of suffering it exceed the advantages of inflicting it; after a taste of both, therefore, men decide that, if they can’t have the ha'pence worth without the kicks, they had better make a compact with each other and avoid both. they accordingly proceed to make laws and mutual agreements ... the nature and origin of justice.

"... men practice it against their will and only do so because they are unable to do wrong [to others]. This we can easily see if we imagine that a just man and an unjust man have each been given the liberty to do what they like, and then follow their subsequent careers. We shall catch the just man in exactly the same pursuits as the unjust, led by self-interest, the motive that all men naturally follow if they are not forcibly restrained by the law and made to respect each other's claims.” (*Republic* 358–359)

"People are unanimous about the merits of self-control or justice, but think they are difficult to practise and call for hard work, while self-indulgence and injustice are easy enough to acquire, and regarded as disgraceful only by convention; wrong on the whole pays better than right, they say, and they are ready enough to call a bad man happy and respect him both in public and in private provided he is rich and powerful, while they have no respect for the poor and powerless, and despise him, even though they agree that he is the better man.” (*Republic* 363–364)
what it ought to be, although initially he is unsure about how to prove his case. Up until this point Plato has only been using the dialogue to demolish the two prevailing views of justice. To proceed, he now begins to construct a thesis of his own.

He has Socrates propose that, as the subject of individual justice is obscure, the group should consider *dikaiosune* in the *polis* where the issues are written much larger. (In doing this, Plato makes explicit a long-held belief that there is a correspondence between the individual—and specifically the individual soul, *psukhe*—and the *polis*. On this basis, he can claim that "*dikaiosune* can be a characteristic of an individual or a community"120.) Since *dikaiosune* is found in all societies, Socrates begins by speculating on the origins of the simplest type of *polis*. In order to survive, he says, people need resources—such as food, shelter and clothes—and consequently the community requires a number of professions if it is to survive. A *polis*, says Socrates, is the name of the community that has all of the professions necessary to meet its needs. He suggests that the minimum required for self-sufficiency would include farmers, builders, clothes-makers, merchants, sailors, ship-owners, market-sellers and manual labourers. He then notes that some people are better suited to some tasks than others, and that it is in the best interests of the community if each person specialises in the profession they are best suited to. "One man would not do more than one job or profession well."121 This principle will later be formalised as a requirement for *dikaiosune* in the *polis*.

This ‘simple *polis’ provides its members with all the necessities of life, and Socrates appears to regard it as ideal122. His listeners though object that he “might be catering for a community of pigs”123. They demand that citizens have the ‘ordinary comforts’: “let them sit on chairs and eat off tables and have normal civilised food.”124 Socrates agrees that “though the society we have described seem to me to be the true norm, just as a man in health is the norm, there’s nothing to prevent us ... studying one whose temperature luxury

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120 Plato Republic 368. Plato presses the analogy between society and body rather harder than usual. He says that the ideal simple state with a healthy body, whereas the civilised states is one "whose temperature luxury has raised". (Plato Republic 372). The most important use Plato makes of the correspondence is in *Timeaus*, where he links the human body and soul to the *kosmos*.

121 Plato Republic 374

122 It is possible that Plato is satirising the ‘simple life’ societies proposed by the Cynics. Whether or not he is being ironic is largely irrelevant—Plato makes no more use of it in the rest of the *Republic*.

123 Plato Republic 372

124 Plato Republic 372
has raised”. This is a crucial turning-point: the system of government that Plato develops for the civilised polis is necessary because people want more than the necessities of life and are unhealthy because of it. Government is needed to control greed; in the simple polis no government is necessary.

Socrates agrees to modify his original state to include nonessential professions such as artists, sculptors, painters, musicians, poets, playwrights, furniture-makers, fashion experts, and servants. This addition though will make the civilised polis very much larger than his ideal. Consequently:

... the territory which was formerly enough to support us [in the simple polis] will now be too small. If we are to have enough for pasture and plough, we shall have to cut a slice off our neighbours' territory. And if they too are no longer confining themselves to necessities and have embarked on the pursuit of unlimited material possessions, they will want a slice of ours too ...

Greed and the desire lead to war. Thus, the polis requires soldiers to guard it, and the principle of specialisation of labour demands that, like other professions, soldiering should be the sole task of one group in society. This group of ‘Guardians’ occupies much of Plato’s discussion in the remainder of the Republic. Later, he divides this group into two: the Rulers who make decisions, and the Auxiliaries who enact and enforce those decisions.

Socrates says the characteristics these Guardians will require are “a philosophical disposition, thumoeidēs, speed and strength”. By ‘philosophical disposition’, Plato means ‘a love of knowledge’. Thumoeidēs is a word Plato uses interchangeably with thumos, which in his day referred to the qualities that today we broadly attribute to ‘heart’: courage, spirit, energy, temper, passion and the like. These are all natural qualities, says Socrates, but they require training otherwise they will be no use to the community.

Having identified these characteristics, Plato turns to the Guardians’ education. The role of education in Plato’s Republic is primarily to form of the mind, moral character and physical ability that the polis requires of its Guardians. Education disciplines the soul (psukhē) and prevents waywardness. Mathematics and philosophy are added later to the education of the Rulers.

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125 Plato Republic 372
126 Plato Republic 373
127 To ensure people are best suited to the roles that the polis requires, Plato has Socrates propose a program of selective breeding and educational examinations—birth is not to be the basis for social position and a strict communism is enforced to break family ties.
128 Plato Republic 376
129 Thumoeidēs means literally ‘the image of thumos’.
Having sketched out this civilised polis, Plato then has Socrates demonstrate that it possesses the four chief aretai. It has wisdom, because of the philosophical temperament and training of its Rulers. It has thumoeidēs because of the bravery and physical education of its Auxiliaries. It has discipline because each group—Rulers, Auxiliaries and citizens—agree on who is to rule in the polis. This ‘harmony’ ensures that those of lower orders do not attempt to supplant the higher orders. Dikaiosunē, or justice, says Socrates, exists “when each of our three classes ... does its own job and minds its own business”\(^{130}\).

We agreed a city was dikaios when its three natural constituents were each doing their job, and it was disciplined and brave and wise in virtue of certain other states and dispositions of those constituents\(^{131}\).

Having discovered what dikaiosunē is in the polis, the discussion then returns to its original question: the nature of dikaiosunē in the individual. Plato restates the principle of correspondence between individual and polis: “we are bound to admit that the qualities that characterise a polis must also exist in the individuals that compose it. There is nowhere else for them to come from.”\(^{132}\) From this Plato deduces that the psukhē has three parts or elements.

- [1] the rational part which possesses foresight, calculates and decides.
- [2] the thumoses\(^{133}\), which is responsible for the emotions and impulses such as bravery, ambition, fortitude, determination, and loyalty.
- [3] physical desire and appetite, which satisfies physical needs, wants and desires, such as hunger and sex.

These three correspond to the three parts of the polis: Ruler, Auxiliaries and other citizens. A person is wise because they possess reason; they are brave because of their thumos; they disciplined when thumos and physical desire are properly subordinated to reason. And the person is dikaios when these three elements are in harmony, allowing the psukhē to perform its proper role. Injustice, adikiaosunē, exists when harmony is absent: where emotion or desire supplants reason.

As Plato recognised, such a polis was radically different from any existing polis, and furthermore would be very hard to construct in practice. This justified his claim that dikaiosunē was almost entirely absent from poleis as they existed in his time and that, in practice, justice was whatever the strong permitted. But, he adds, the strong will not be able to achieve their own desires because they and the polis they try to dominate will lack

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\(^{130}\) Plato Republic 434

\(^{131}\) Plato Republic 435

\(^{132}\) Plato Republic 435

\(^{133}\) In Plato’s philosophy, thumos becomes a part of the psukhē, and is not separate from it.
discipline, wisdom and courage—so refuting the Sophists’ claims that justice “is whatever is in the interests of the stronger party.”

Later generations regarded Plato’s polis as entirely impractical\textsuperscript{134}. Indeed, in the \textit{Laws}, Plato returns to some of the practical problems he left unaddressed in the \textit{Republic}. The \textit{Republic} however remains Plato’s most influential statement on society. Its main legacy was a vision as society hierarchically ordered ruled by a wise minority. Also of lasting was the way people viewed the psukhē: the threefold division became standard the Antiquity, as was the hierarchy of head over heart over physical desire.

\textbf{Plato’s Theory of Forms}

The most enduring development in Plato’s middle dialogues is the Theory of Forms. Although Plato himself never connected it with communication, it became an enduring part of Western thought and had permanent, if indirect, effects on beliefs about communication, community and language.

Plato initially developed the Forms to ground his theory of ethical knowledge, but in the later dialogues it became a complete theory of reality. It was a response to a group of problems left by the previous generation of philosophers. Heraclitus (fl. 500 bc) had taught that everything is in constant flux. But, he added, true knowledge could only be based on what was unchanging, and consequently no true knowledge of things could be based up on observations of the changing world of senses. In making this claim, Heraclitus opened up a permanent gulf between sensory experience and knowledge. Other Greek philosophers agreed that true knowledge could only be based upon unchanging principles, but disagreed what those principles might be. The Pythagoreans taught that mathematical order underlay all order in the \textit{kosmos} and that everything ‘imitates’ the order of numbers. Parmenides and later Eleatic philosophers argued that motion, plurality and change are all impossible, and hence all reality was an indivisible unity (observations to the contrary are simply appearances, not the true nature of things). Anaxogoras claimed that the first principle was mind (\textit{nous}), which organised the infinitesimally small particles from which all things were composed.

Plato—whose own teacher, Cratylus, had been a student of Heraclitus—agreed that reality, the world of Being Itself, was unchanging. The world perceived by the senses is an everchanging impression of that unchanging reality, but it is constantly changing from one thing into another, Becoming one thing only to pass away again. Consequently sense data is an inadequate basis for true knowledge: all that the senses can reveal is how things appear

\textsuperscript{134} Aristotle \textit{Politics} 2:1–6, Cicero \textit{De Oratore} 1:51:224–225
to be, not what they actually are. All people can have from appearances are misleading illusions or, at best, temporarily adequate opinions. Under the influence of the Pythagoreans and the Eleatic philosophers, Plato accepted that reality could only be apprehended intellectually. For instance, in this world, we never encounter perfect equality, only approximations to it. Nor do we ever encounter a truly one-dimensional line—any line that is drawn always has some degree of thickness, which a true line does not possess. In this world, we may see the concept of ‘three’ in many ways: in the angles of a triangle, in its three sides, in its three points. But, despite the variety of ways we can perceive the number three in the world, there is only one concept of ‘threeness’ and its nature is purely intellectual and unchanging. Plato called such timeless realities Archetypes or Forms or Ideas (he did not use a single term). The Idea though is not a mental abstraction, a creation of the human mind. The Ideas are fully real, beyond the existence of any of their expressions or any observations of them. The Forms possess a degree of reality higher than anything in this sensory world, which is only an image or a distorted shadow of them. An individual object may participate in several Ideas at one time—a horse, for example, may participate in Horseness and Whiteness (Horseness is essential for an object to be a horse, for that is what makes it a horse; a horse though may be a horse without participating in Whiteness; being white is simply an ‘accident’ of a particular horse, not its ‘essence’.)

In the Republic, Symposium and Phaedrus, Plato argued that justice, beauty and goodness truly exist. In order for people to truly evaluate one thing as better than another—more just, more beautiful—Plato says that there must be some absolute standard against such claims can be assessed. Consequently, there must exist the Forms of Justice, Beauty and Good, for without the Idea there can never be an image in this world. When people’s senses perceive something beautiful, for example, what they recognise is its resemblance to the eternal Beauty, of which the sense impression is only a distorted image.

Although the Forms are the basis for all that people sense, they cannot be observed directly by the senses, or even by casual reflection: they require concerted intellectual effort. When one critic of the theory told Plato, “I can see tables, but I cannot see tableness,” Plato archly responded, “that is because you have eyes but not intelligence.”

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135 Plato uses *eidos* and *idea* interchangably. *Idea* was retained in Latin translations and from there entered English; *eidos* was translated as the Latin *forma*, from we derive the word ‘form’. In Greek of the fifth century BC, neither word has much of an intellectual sense; they mean loosely ‘image’ or ‘copy’. The modern connection of *idea* with the mind is due largely to Aristotle, although the Empiricists of the seventeenth century changed his meaning of the word considerably. Our word ‘ideal’ has some of the sense of an objective, non-mental nature that the *Idea* does in Plato’s Greek.

136 Diogenes Laertius Diogenes 236
Plato mentions three principles that link images with their Ideas: resemblance (*mimesis*), participation (*methexis*) and love (*eros*). Just what Plato means by these three terms is ambiguous—although what he does not mean is clear enough: Plato was highly sceptical of ‘scientific’ descriptions of the universe, and these three principles were specifically non-mechanical. An object ‘resembles’ its Idea in the way that a reflection or shadow is similar to the original—it looks like it in some respects but lacks the reality of the original. An object ‘loves’ its Idea, in the sense that the Idea is its perfected form, and the object ‘grasps at’ it and seeks to hold it. ‘Participation’ is the most enigmatic of all; Aristotle writes that, “what the ‘participation’ or the ‘imitation’ of the Forms could be [Plato] left an open question.”\(^\text{137}\) Plato’s vagueness though left all it open to the mystical interpretations made by later generations.

Plato implied that some Ideas are of a higher order than others. The highest that he mentions in the middle dialogues are the Ideas of the Good (*Republic*), the Beautiful (*Phaedrus, Symposium*) and the Just (*Phaedo*)—although there is a sense that these are somehow different names for the one Idea. In the later dialogues, Plato introduces the Idea of the One, which he says is equivalent to the Good\(^\text{138}\). In the *Republic*, Plato says that the Idea of the Good is necessary for knowledge of all other things\(^\text{139}\). “The Good … may be said to be the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge [the Forms], but also their existence and reality; yet it is not identical with reality, but is beyond reality, and superior to it in dignity and power.”\(^\text{140}\) This suggests a hierarchy of reality. Aristotle makes explicit what Plato appeared unwilling to write down: “The Forms are the causes of the essences of all other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the Forms.”\(^\text{141}\) (As I will discuss in Chapter 9, a descendant of this hierarchy came to dominate medieval views of reality and, indirectly, society.)

In the *Republic*, Plato introduces the Ideas to ground the ethical knowledge that the Rulers require when making decisions. Only once they have grasped the nature of the Good can they make good decisions for the *polis*. The training of the Philosopher Rulers, as he describes it, involves purging students of the distracting illusions of the senses, and training

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\(^{137}\) Aristotle *Metaphysics* §1.6, 987b13. Aristotle says that Plato simply adopted the Pythoagorean principle of ‘imitation’, merely changing the name.

\(^{138}\) *Philebus* and *Parmenides*. The appearance of the One in Plato’s philosophy shows the influence of the Eleatic and Pythagorean philosophers, which both taught that the ultimate source or nature of reality is undivided: Unity. The problem for Plato is reconciling the ethical Socratic origins of the Good and the One of Pythagorean philosophy, which was based on number.

\(^{139}\) Plato *Republic* 509

\(^{140}\) Plato *Republic* 509

\(^{141}\) Aristotle *Metaphysics* §1.6, 988a10
their intellects to perceive the Ideas—passing from particulars to universals, from concrete to intellectual, and from what people believe is good or them to what is truly Good.

Plato summarises this theory and the philosopher’s education in the Myth of the Cave\(^\text{142}\). He describes a cavern in which people had been imprisoned since childhood, and shackled so that they can only face the back of the cave. Behind them is a fire, and between them and the fire runs a road on which men carry bundles. As figures walk along this road, the fire casts shadows on the cave wall. Knowing nothing else, the prisoners assume that the flickering shadows are reality—but are unable to understand their real nature. Plato likens the education of the philosopher to a prisoner escaping their bonds. First they are able to turn and see the figures on the road, and learn that the shadows on the cave wall are only an illusion, and the figures on the road are real. Grasping this reality, the Forms, the prisoner is then able to understand that the shadows are only an illusion, and can account for their passing and changing shapes—recognising that many different shadows may be explained by a single figure or Form. Even this task though will be difficult, for they will be dazzled by the fire’s light—the light of reality. If the prisoner is forced up out of the cave into the sunlight, “when he emerged into the light his eyes would be so overwhelmed by the brightness of it that he wouldn’t be able to see a single one of the thing he was now told were real.”\(^\text{143}\) At first, the prisoner would find it easier to look at shadows (illusions), then reflections in water (beliefs), then the objects themselves (the Forms), and finally the sun itself (the Good, the supreme Form, from which all others derive)\(^\text{144}\). Later on he would come to the conclusion that it is the sun which produces the changing seasons and years and controls everything in the visible world, and is in a sense responsible for everything that he and his fellow-prisoners used to see.\(^\text{145}\)

Later generations understood the myth not only as a metaphor on the philosopher’s ascent, but as a picture of reality itself. Reality proceeded from a single controlling principle, as the Pythagoreans had argued, passing outwards into multiplicity, change, darkness and illusion. In his later dialogues, Plato married the eternal, creative Forms with myths of creation and gods, giving them a religious aspect. In the \textit{Laws}, he remarks that “everything is full of gods”, and later Platonists came to identify the Idea of the Good with God (an identification that would prove influential in Christian theology seven hundred years later).

\(^{142}\) Plato \textit{Republic} 514–521

\(^{143}\) Plato \textit{Republic} 516

\(^{144}\) In \textit{Phaedrus} and \textit{Symposium}, Plato compares the sun with the Form of Beauty.

\(^{145}\) Plato \textit{Republic} 517
Plato’s later dialogues

In the later dialogues\textsuperscript{146}, Plato conducts a searching reassessment of the ideas he had advanced earlier in his life. The conversational style is increasing replaced with myth or direct teaching, and the figure of Socrates retreats, not appearing at all in the last and longest work, \textit{Laws} (a working out of the problems left by the \textit{Republic}). Although Plato advance ideas in these later dialogues which would be important for later Christian beliefs about the soul, they have had far less influence on ideas about society.

In \textit{Parmenides} Plato critiques his own Theory of Forms. Questions he raises include: How many Forms are there? What is their relation to each other? What is the relationship between Idea and object? What does ‘participation’ mean? How is knowledge of the Forms possible? Plato does not provide firm answers to many of these questions, although he does establish the conditions that the theory must meet to be acceptable. Much of what Plato said in the middle dialogues—and in particular the \textit{Republic}—could not satisfy these criteria. Neither Plato nor later Platonists solved the problem of participation satisfactorily; within two generations, the Academy began to discuss empirical knowledge, and within a century of Plato’s death, it had adopted Scepticism, suspending belief in the possibility of certain answers to any question. The Platonists only returned to the Theory of Forms as a viable philosophical doctrine five hundred years later in the second century AD.

Another problem with Plato’s Theory of Forms is how the Forms came into existence in the first place, and why it is that the world is an imperfect image of these perfect forms. Indeed, in the middle dialogues, Plato gives no reasons why the visible world exists at all. In \textit{Statesman}, \textit{Philebus} and most fully in \textit{Timeaus}, Plato addresses this problem in a discussion on the world’s origins. In \textit{Philebus}, Plato firmly establishes that the \textit{kosmos}, like the human body has a soul (\textit{psukhē}), and furthermore that just as the human mind rules over the human body, so the \textit{kosmos} is ruled by Mind, and this is its cause\textsuperscript{147}. Even the gods as aspects of this Universal Mind. The universe is a living thing, made of a body and a soul, ruled over by intelligence.

In the \textit{Timeaus}, Plato offers an explicit creation myth, in which a demiurge (craftsman), creates the universe as a living thing, using the Forms as a model\textsuperscript{148}.

\begin{quote}
the creator … found that no unintelligent creature taken as a whole was fairer than the intelligent as a whole; and that intelligence could not be present in anything which was devoid of soul. For which reason, when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{146} Timeaus, Critias, Parmenides, Philebus, Sophist, Statesman, Theaetetus, and Laws.

\textsuperscript{147} Plato, Philebus 30

\textsuperscript{148} Plato Timeaus 27–29
was by nature the fairest and best. ... the world became a living creature truly
endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God.\footnote{149}

Within this universe, the Demiurge created the starts and the planets, then the gods and
finally the bird, fishes and land animals, including human beings. He says that human
beings are necessary “for without them the universe will be incomplete, for it will not
contain every kind of animal which it ought to contain, if it is to be perfect.”\footnote{150} This is a
crucial passage in later philosophy, and was interpreted to mean that this world, even in its
apparently flawed state, is the best of all possible worlds, and that every part of it is
necessary for its perfection—a theme I will take up in detail in Chapter 9.

**Plato’s contribution**

As I will discuss in Chapters 8 and 9, Platonism provided the basis for social and
cosmological thought from late Antiquity until the late Middle Ages. The *Republic* in
particular, for all its impracticalities, would be singly the most influential theory of society
in western thought. Plato’s belief that society originated in individuals coming together for
mutual benefit is the first appearance of the Social Contract theory, and later ancient
philosophers usually agreed with this explanation—as did many well into the
Enlightenment. A corollary of it is that that, as society is no more than the accumulation of
individuals, its characteristics are simply those of its members. Therefore there is essentially
no such thing as society—an argument that still has supporters today. The most lasting
effect on beliefs about community though was the idea that societies are perfected when
they conform to an ideal, unchanging structure—a belief still current in theories of
corporate organisations\footnote{151}. (There is no sense in Plato that communities are dynamic, that
they are subject to change, that they are natural, or that they are mediated by discussions
and arguments between people.)

Many of Plato’s arguments and formulations became canonical, accepted even by later
schools that opposed the Platonists. It was also decisive on the formation of Christianity.
All major schools of ancient philosophy after Plato divided the soul into three parts:
appetite, *thumos* and *nous*—a model the Christians would take over as ‘body, mind and
spirit’ (altering the emphasis of Plato’s hierarchy, placing spirit above mind). The Theory of
Forms was enormously influential in late Antiquity, positing that reality operated on two
distinct levels: eternal and changeable, pure and corrupt, temporal and timeless. This

\footnotesize{\footnote{149} Plato *Timeaus* 30  
\footnote{150} Plato, *Timeaus* 41  
\footnote{151} Morgan 1984, pp25–29}
formulation provided the Christians with a philosophically respectable model for the distinction between heaven and earth. The Christians identified the Christian God with the Platonic Good. The Christians reinterpreted *dike*, the universal law, as ‘God’s law’. (Even when seventeenth century scientists and philosophers rejected theological explanations of natural phenomena, they retained the belief in a ‘law’, as in the ‘laws of nature’.)

In many ways however, much of Plato’s philosophy was a continuation—albeit an enormously sophisticated one—of many earlier beliefs. The Theory of Forms preserves the belief that there is an underlying unity of both material and social worlds. In many ways, it is a reformulation of the Olympian tradition, with its belief in a single order underlying the variety of the world. Like the *themistias* of Zeus, the Forms provide an objective basis for both ethics and physical reality. Plato also agreed broadly with the existing view that society is made up of individuals, whose *arete* defines their position and role in life. To participate in society well—that is, to be a just, *dikaios* person—is to know one’s place and capacities, and to take the place in the order of society that one is best suited to, and not to interfere with others. Plato agreed that the *aristoi*, ‘the best’, should direct society, and furthermore that what defined the *aristoi* was the excellence of their *arete*—although Plato significantly reformulated what *arete* was. Plato’s correspondence between individual and society, *microkosmos* and *macrokosmos*, became a permanent feature of later Classical and Medieval beliefs about society and the order in the world—beliefs which persisted in modified forms until the eighteenth century.

**Order and structuralism**

Looking specifically at Modern beliefs about communication for a moment, the most obvious parallel with ancient thought is the parallel between Platonism and structuralism. In the last chapter, I listed some of the core assumptions of structuralism. Many of these are strikingly similar to key features of Platonic philosophy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structuralism</th>
<th>Platonism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>language, literature, myth, signs, taboo, culture and society operate at two levels—such as <em>langue</em> and <em>parole</em>, <em>code</em> and <em>message</em>, <em>competence</em> and <em>performance</em></td>
<td>all reality operates at two basic levels: Being and becoming; the Forms and their distorted reflection in this world of the senses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>langue</em> (or its analogues) is a self-contained, formal system, that refers only to itself and not to the world</td>
<td>the realm of Forms is complete and self-contained, and in no way dependant on the world of the senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>langue</em> (and its analogues) has priority over <em>parole</em></td>
<td>the reality of the Forms has priority over their distorted reflections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structuralism | Platonism
---|---
all people that speak a particular language share the same langue—even though the parole of particular people may be unique | all objects of the same kind participate in the same Form (for instance, all horses participate in the Form of the Horse)
language (or culture and society) has a universal structure shared by all people; all languages, cultures and societies are variations on this archetype. | the Forms provide a single unifying order behind the diversity observed by the senses.

The architects of structuralism did not explicitly set out to apply Platonic philosophy to the analysis of language. The connection between Platonic philosophy and structuralism lies outside the scope of this thesis and, as far as I know, has not been investigated. However, the connection relies on the coincidence of only a few key factors.

First, as I will discuss in Chapter 12, when language was first being analysed by the Greeks, its nature was dragged into the conflict between nomos and phusis. While the ancient grammarians never resolved this particular dispute, what they did implicitly agree was that ideas about language were in the same category as ideas about society. Specifically, it was governed by norms and rights and wrongs. Language operates at two levels: the ideal (the way people ought to speak and write) and the actual (the way they do speak and write). Furthermore, they regarded variations from the ideal as flaws to be corrected. This dualism in beliefs about language became a permanent feature of later grammatical theory.\footnote{This was not the only way the Greeks could have understood language: they could equally well have regarded the order in language as an expression of physics, and variations explained in terms of complex interactions between numerous but subtle causes, this was certainly how biological complexity was understood.}

Second, as I will discuss in the next two chapters, the dominant character of European thought throughout the Middle Ages was a Christianised form of Platonism. Even after the decline in theology and the rise of the sciences in the early Modern period, dualistic thinking remained a feature of European thought—whether Descartes’ opposition of mind and body, Kant’s noumena and phenomenon, Hegel’s idealism. Plato’s works themselves, after their revival in the fourteenth century, became a permanent part of Europe’s intellectual resources, and Platonism’s basic categories would have been familiar to all educated Europeans. It was probably just a matter of time before the dualistic nature of language became analysed in the categories of dualistic Platonic philosophy.
Aristotle (384–322 BC) was Plato’s student and collaborator at the Academy for some twenty years. He left after Plato’s death in 347 BC and, with other former members of the Academy, he established a school in Asia Minor. He returned to Athens in 335 BC to establish his own school, the Lyceum, which he led almost to the end of his life. Unlike Plato, who has been held in high esteem throughout most of Western history, Aristotle’s influence has varied. In Antiquity, his followers, the Peripatetics, gained a reputation as scholars or technicians, not philosophers. In the early Middle Ages, the West knew only a few of Aristotle’s works on logic—the remainder on metaphysics, scientific research, botany, zoology and society were lost until they reappeared via Muslim sources in the twelfth century. In the High Middle Ages, he was ‘The Philosopher’ to the Scholastics, but knowledge of his philosophy was mediated via his highly varied Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and Christian commentators. The Scholastics’ main interest was in Aristotle’s metaphysics and natural science, not his social and political philosophy. His influence declined along with Scholasticism and rise of the early Modern sciences in the sixteenth century. Since the mid-nineteenth century his works have enjoyed a revival amongst scholars, although their current position can give the misleading appearance of a continuous historical importance on a par with Plato’s.

Unlike Plato, almost none of the works Aristotle published survive; all that remain are his ‘esoteric’ works: lecture notes and draft theories he wrote for himself and his close students. These were the only source that the Middle Ages possessed, and even in Antiquity scholars from the first century BC appear to have relied primarily on them. They are not final, finished works like Plato’s dialogues. Also, they appear to have been edited and partially rewritten at several different times, so there are inconsistencies between them. The exact relationship between Aristotle and Platonic philosophy remains a problem, but Aristotle’s politics and ethics, along with the metaphysics they are based on, suggest that Aristotle saw himself completing Plato’s philosophy—even when that meant correcting it in order to complete it.

Aristotle’s metaphysics

The foundation of Aristotle’s philosophy rests on a reformulation of Plato’s Theory of Forms—particularly the relationship between the Forms and objects of the material world, and the problem of how the world changes if it is an image of unchanging Forms. Aristotle came to reject the Platonic doctrine of entirely immaterial Forms, claiming instead that form was fully present in material objects. For Aristotle, any object consisted of substance—the raw stuff of existence—in some form. Substance never exists by itself; it always takes some form or other. In this, Aristotle rejected Plato’s claim that the Forms were entirely immaterial and intellectual, insisting instead that form was fully present in
any material object. Consequently, for Aristotle, material objects are fully real in a way they are not in Plato.

With this basic assumption, Aristotle then corrected what he saw as a fundamental error in the nature of Plato’s Forms. A white horse, according to Platonic doctrine, participates in the Forms of Whiteness and Horseness, and furthermore both Forms are equally real. Aristotle agrees that the substance, the horse, is fully real. But whiteness or any other colour is a quality of particular horses, and this quality is dependant on the specific horse’s basic existence. Consequently colour and substance belong to different categories. Plato’s error, as Aristotle saw it, was to say that all Forms belong to the one category. Aristotle identified eight categories—substance, quantity, relations, place, time, position, state, action, and affection—but only the first, substance, is properly real; the rest are qualities of substance.

In another key shift away from Plato, Aristotle said that the forms gave substance a dynamic structure, not a static one. Plato’s model for the Forms had been unchanging mathematics; Aristotle—the son of a physician and an avid naturalist—took biological development as his model. Just as seeds grow into plants and children into adults so, he says, all substances move from a potential state to an actual one. In Aristotle’s metaphysics, all things move towards some goal, telos, its ‘final cause’. The telos is intrinsic to an object’s form from the moment it comes into being, and draws the object it from its potential state to its fully realised state. (Being ‘real’ is a complex notion in Aristotle’s philosophy: at any moment, an object is real, being the outcome of its development to that moment; but the form itself may bring about further change. An embryo grows into a child, which grows into an adolescent, which grows into an adult; at any moment the form of a person is real, but it also continues to develop.) The object also needs some cause to prompt it into action—an ‘efficient cause’.

The four causes—formal, material, final and efficient—are the basic architecture within which the rest of Aristotle’s scientific observations are worked out.

Like Plato, Aristotle believed in a perfectible universe. He held that an object which reached its telos perfected its form. Perfection, he insisted, was entirely possible in this world, without the existence of some ‘higher’ intellectual plane as Plato posited. This process of perfection proceeded at a number of levels. The material world is perfected in vegetable life. Plants draw on the material world for their sustenance and they have a ‘vegetative psukhē’ which fits them for this: one that knows hunger and thirst and is

\[\text{Reasoning that all things in the kosmos need to be launched toward their telos}, \text{ Aristotle concluded that the kosmos itself must have some efficient cause. This he calls the ‘Unmoved Mover’; an agent that causes all subsequent motions in the universe, but is itself unmoved—having nothing to move it. Aristotle regards the Unmoved Mover as divine, but its relationship with the conventional gods is unclear.}\]
capable of nutrition. Plant life, in turn, is perfected by animal life, which has not only all of the capacities for nutrition but also motion. To do this, animals have a second psukhē (or a second aspect to their psukhē) which has the faculties of perception and directing action. This part is also capable of all the abilities Plato attributes to thumoeides—including courage, loyalty, and emotion. (Aristotle regarded all perception and emotion and a ‘motion of the soul’ and was hence controlled by that part of the soul concerned with motion.) Animal forms are in turn perfected by human beings. Alone of all things in the kosmos, humans have a threefold psukhē: capable of nutrition, motion and finally rational, intellectual thought. This complex system preserves and justifies Plato’s threefold division of the psukhē, but it defines it in ways entirely unlike all previous Greek beliefs about the psukhē I described in Chapters 3 and 4.

Aristotle’s social philosophy

Aristotle’s politics and ethics are worked out within his metaphysical system. Because human beings are a natural part of the kosmos, he says that they, like everything else, perfect themselves, realising their potential. The telos of human lives, he asserts in the Nicomachean Ethics, is the good, agathos

154 Aristotle On the Soul §2.4–5, particularly 410a25, 415b24 and 416b33

155 Equating the good with the telos of human life does not fit neatly into Aristotle’s metaphysical hierarchy. It may reflect the continuing influence of Plato, who regarded the Good as the highest Form. Against this interpretation however is Aristotle’s explicit rejection of Plato’s Form of the Good (Nicomachean Ethics §1.6, 1097a9ff).

156 Nicomachean Ethics §1.7, 1098a15f. Aristotle believes that aretē may be plural, regarding courage, wisdom, sōphrosunē, and so on as individual aretai.
The problem of aretē and human good is the subject of the *Nicomachaen Ethics*. The term ‘ethics’ is derived from ἔθος, by which Aristotle means ‘habits’ or a person’s character as it is revealed in their actions (much as an actor’s character is revealed on stage through their words and gestures). Ethics in this sense is not fundamentally concerned with how people should act or what rules they should follow, as we use the word today in term like ‘business ethics’ or ‘professional ethics’. Aristotle is concerned with the formation of character—that is, with aretē. (Where the modern world is concerned chiefly with having people act correctly, most Greeks believed that person who possessed aretē would act in ways that are desirable and therefore laid stress on character and were concerned only incidentally with action. Aristotle agrees with this view, saying that aretē is necessary for right action.)

Much of Aristotle’s *Ethics* is concerned with enumerating the aretai, which were pretty much those accepted by his contemporaries. Aristotle divides these into two groups. First are the ‘moral virtues’, concerned with courage, temperance, wealth, honour, anger and social behaviour (chiefly friendliness, truthfulness and wit). Each of these moral virtues, says Aristotle, is the mean between to vices: for instance, pride lies between vanity and humility. In the second group are the ‘intellectual virtues’, which are the perfected forms of reason and desire. These are chiefly epistēmē (science or knowledge drawn by inductive logic from observation), tekhnē (professional skills and arts) sōphrosunē (practical wisdom), intuitive reason, and philosophical wisdom. By acquiring and practising all of these moral and intellectual aretai, people would live their lives in ways that created genuine happiness.

157 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §2-5, 1106a10
158 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §5:9 1137a20
159 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §6:12 1144a7–1145a11
160 Aristotle’s ‘doctrine of the mean’ may be a response to a problem Plato raised in *Protagoras*. There, he has Socrates say that two things that are both opposite to the same thing must be identical (*Protagoras* 332f). For instance, folly is the opposite of wisdom, but it is also the opposite of sōphrosunē, therefore wisdom and sōphrosunē are the same things (which the Greeks did not believe). Following this logic, Socrates claims that all of the aretai are essentially the same thing. Aristotle rejects this, saying that there are numerous aretai, and the location of aretē between two vices demonstrates how this is possible. For instance, in his formulation, pride is the opposite of both humility and vanity, but no one would say that the latter two are the same thing.

161 Together with sensation, Aristotle says that reason and desire are the thing in the psukhē which control truth and action. (*Nicomachaen Ethics* §6:2, 1139a18)
Despite the ‘doctrine of the mean’, the distinction between practical and intellectual aretai, and some differences in specific aretai, Aristotle’s ethical program to this point is not fundamentally different from Plato’s. The break between the two comes when Aristotle says that people cannot develop aretē or achieve happiness without the polis.

Aristotle takes a dim view of most people’s ability to become good. Although some people have natures which makes them inclined to aretē, most people would only do so through fear of punishment. Most people need to be trained, and be brought up in the habit of acting with aretē. “It is difficult to get up from youth a right training for aretē if one has not been brought up under rights laws”162. So aretē requires dikē and dikaiosunē.

...man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from dikē and dikaiosunē, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice [adikaiosunē] is the more dangerous, as he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used with intelligence [sōphrosunē] and aretē, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he has not aretē, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice [dikaiosunē] is the bond of men in poleis for the administration of justice (which is the determination of what is dikē) is the principle order in political society.163

Dikē and dikaiosunē exist only within the polis: a person deprived of their polis is deprived of dikē164, and therefore is incapable of developing aretē. This conclusion contrasts strongly with both Plato and the Sophists, who agree that the character of the polis is simply the sum of its citizens’ characters—Aristotle says that the polis forms the aretē of individuals.

People come together to form a polis, says Aristotle, for two reasons. First, they are naturally political creatures165. A person without a polis is like a hand without a body or a chess piece without the rest of the game—they lack the ability to perform their natural function. The polis is thus a natural institution—and like every other natural thing in Aristotle’s universe, it moves towards a telos. In this case, “the polis or political community aims at a good in a higher degree than any other [smaller community], and aims at the highest good”166. The second reason people live in a polis is that it provides the circumstances in which they can achieve happiness. Unlike smaller social units, such as the family or the village, the polis is self-sufficient—it contains all of those things necessary for human beings

162 Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics §10.9, 1179b31
163 Aristotle Politics §1.2 1253a37
164 Aristotle Politics §1.2, 1253a2f.
165 Aristotle Politics §3.6 1278b20f, 1.2 1253a2
166 Aristotle Politics §1.1, 1252a4–5
to perfect themselves and achieve happiness. So, according to Aristotle, to possess *aretē* requires a person to participate in their *polis*.

However, to be a good person involves more than being a good citizen. A person may do good service to the *polis*, but the *polis* may itself be bad in principle (a bad *polis* is one which does not have the general welfare of its citizens as its aim). So human happiness depends upon the *polis* having a good constitution, within which the *aretē* of individuals can be formed. Citizenship in such a *polis* is therefore the same as an education in *aretē*.

Aristotle’s *Politics* is concerned chiefly with establishing constitutions that promote the exercise of *aretē*. Such a society will necessarily be hierarchical, because some citizens are more advanced than others in the development of *aretē*. Consequently, the hierarchy will be one in which those with more experience will teach those with less.

A large part of Aristotle’s description of the ideal *polis* is devoted to education, just as Plato’s *Republic* is. Much of what he says is drawn from contemporary educational practices, but it also owes much to Plato’s *Republic*: his program is largely the same as Plato’s in both structure and moral purpose. Aristotle mentions reading, writing and drawing for their usefulness; learning the poets for customs and proper behaviour; gymnastics to build strength and develop courage; music for moral discipline and the development of rational enjoyment. But, for Aristotle, possessing the various *aretai* is not sufficient to be able to use them well. To be *agathos*, a person also needs to judge rightly when each is appropriate. Being able to tell a good musician from a bad one requires a different type of judgement to that used on lawcourts or political decision-making. To be a good person is to know what is good in each situation, and what people who are good are owed in those situations, and to be able to judge situations correctly. This ability, says Aristotle, is *dikaiosune*, justice. (In making this claim, Aristotle is extending the usual Greek meaning of *dikaiosune*—the ability to judge legal and political issues—to mean judging rightly in general. Presumably, he does this to rescue the usual Greek understanding of *dikaiosune* as both a personal characteristic and the principle that regulated relations between people in the *polis*. Although Aristotle preserves both beliefs, he redefines them.)

He says that, in one sense, *dikaiosune* is the ability of a person to judge rightly between the various *aretai*. It is a personal capacity, one of the *aretai*—indeed, the greatest of the

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167 Aristotle *Politics* §§8.1–7

168 Here, Aristotle means *dikaiosune* in a more general sense than ‘justice’, as it is usually translated. It includes not only ‘judging what is right or lawful’, but also ‘discerning what is excellent’ and ‘identifying what is noble’.

169 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §5.1, 1129a7
aretai, because without dikaiosunē, a person is not able to exercise aretē, and hence unable to be a full citizen, perfect their nature or achieve genuine happiness. The second sense aligns dikaiosunē with law. Aristotle says, “all lawful acts are in a sense just acts”¹⁷⁰. Just laws, when rightly framed, promote happiness in the polis. They encourage people to be brave, temperate and good-natured. They also forbid acts which are regarded as unjust. This form of dikaiosunē, as it is reflected in the laws, “is complete aretē ... in relation to our neighbours”¹⁷¹. Without dikaiosunē in this sense, is not possible for any person to achieve any good within the polis. “Dikaiosunē is the bond of men in poleis for the administration of justice (which is the determination of what is dikas) is the principle order in political society”¹⁷². So, for Aristotle, dikaiosunē is both a personal characteristic (aretai) and the fundamental bond of society. (For both of these claims to be true, Aristotle must implicitly assume that justice is the expression of each individual’s character, and hence that society is the sum of its individual members—an assumption quite contrary to his stated position, but interesting for what it reveals about contemporary Greek beliefs.)

Most of Aristotle’s discussion of dikaiosunē is concerned with justice in the community—even though it appears in the Nicomachean Ethics, as part of his discussion of the aretai. Aristotle says that dikaiosunē in the community is understood in two ways. In a general sense it means simply those ways that the law (dike) requires citizens to act in their relationships with one another. Aristotle however focuses on a more specific sense, which can be divided into two parts. The first part dikaiosunē in this sense involves people observing the order in the polis, which is embodied in the way that public goods and responsibilities are distributed. The second part of dikaiosunē involves the corrective measures taken to right the proper order of the polis when it has been disturbed—for instance through criminal actions or immoral behaviour¹⁷³. Aristotle’s focus in the Politics is almost exclusively on the first—how constitutions should be framed to order the goods of human life. He does not discuss the daily administration of a polis, which includes ‘corrective dikaiosunē’, such as how wrongdoers are tried and punished, and injustices corrected. (Just as Greek ethics is chiefly concerned with good character rather than with right action, so Aristotle’s politics is concerned chiefly with establishing good constitutions on the belief that the will function properly once they have been properly implemented.)

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¹⁷⁰ Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics §5.1, 1129b13f
¹⁷¹ Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics §5.1, 1129b24
¹⁷² Aristotle Politics §1.2 1253a37
¹⁷³ These are referred to as ‘distributive justice’ and ‘corrective justice’, but modern legal textbooks can interpret this in a purely legalistic way, divorced from Aristotle’s concern with the perfection of the human soul.
Framing constitutions is essentially about how public goods—such as public office—should be distributed. Everyone agrees, says Aristotle, that public goods should be distributed to those that deserve them. However, different types of poleis have different beliefs about who is deserving. In democracies, all free citizens are regarded as equally deserving, and consequently public goods and responsibilities are distributed equally. (So, for instance, all citizens in a democracy may have the opportunity serve on a jury or in magistracy or in the army.) In an oligarchy, by contrast, the distribution of some goods—such as public offices—is restricted to citizens of wealth or birth. The highest good Aristotle identified in the Ethics was happiness, and this consists in acting in accordance with arete. Therefore, the best kind of polis is one that rewards citizens with arete. These people are, in the proper sense, the aristoi, and the corresponding government is an aristocracy. (Aristotle restricts membership of the aristoi in several ways. He excludes farmers and traders, because they will lack time or capacity to exercise their civic arete. He excludes women because they cannot control their emotions. He excludes slaves because they are incapable of ruling themselves, and hence unfit for ruling anyone else.)

The aristoi have the responsibility to educate others in the habit of arete. This is the proper role of a political life. Aristotle regards active participation in political life—in a society where all of the aretai are integrated—as the highest good in practical life. (This is not the highest life of all. Just as the aretai are divided into practical and intellectual, so there are two types of happiness: acting in accordance with the practical aretai and with the intellectual aretai. A political life is the highest form of life consistent with the first. The second Aristotle calls theoria or ‘contemplation’. Aristotle regards this life as ‘divine’, and higher than the political life.)

Because the perfected polis is one in which arete is rewarded and the aristoi rule, but different citizens are at different stages in the education in arete, it follows that different citizens are due different goods and rewards. Aristotle is therefore opposed to a social system in which goods and rewards are distributed equally, irrespective of peoples’ individual talents. In particular, he is opposed to democracies in which public offices and responsibilities are open to all—it is simply irresponsible, in his view, to allow people lacking in arete to sit on juries or hold important public offices for which their characters are unsuited.

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175 Aristotle Politics §7:8, 1328b39–1329a2. Although these restrictions have been heavily criticised since the nineteenth century, they are little more than Aristotle’s justification of Greek custom in his time; they are not central to his political philosophy.

176 Aristotle Nicomachaen Ethics §10:7–8
Aristotle’s political and ethical philosophy counters the claims of the fifth century Athenians that it is natural for the strong to rule the weak, and that true happiness lies in satisfying one’s desires. Because true happiness consists in acting in accordance with areté, but acting on the basis of desire is contrary to areté, therefore acting to satisfy one’s desires will not lead to genuine happiness. Furthermore, since an action that is contrary to areté is incompatible with life in the perfected polis, it follows that the laws of the perfect polis cannot have as their sole end the satisfaction of individual desires: that way leads to the collapse of the polis. In Aristotelian terms, even if the strong extort what they want from the weak in order to do as they desire, they will not be happy and, in the longer-term, they will lose the only institution capable of helping them achieve happiness.

To summarise this complex set of claims about people and society then:

[1] human beings, like everything else in the kosmos, move towards their end, telos, and in it, perfect themselves, fully realising their potential
[2] the telos of human life is the good, agathos
[3] the highest good that humans can attain is happiness
[4] happiness consists in an activity of the psukhē in accordance with the aretai
[5] the aretai Aristotle identifies are largely the virtues already accepted by Greeks
[6] the aretai can be divided into the practical aretai and the intellectual aretai. The highest form of practical areté is the political life, for it integrates all of the other aretai in the polis. The highest form of intellectual life Aristotle calls theoria or ‘contemplation’
[7] the aretai necessary for life in the polis are intellectual culture, temperance and justice—the same three aretai necessary for human happiness
[8] people need to be trained in areté—they need to be taught the intellectual aretai, and habituated into the practical aretai
[9] to learn areté requires dikē and dikaiosunē—without them, people will not be able to judge between the aretai or do what areté requires
[10] dikē and dikaiosunē only exist within the polis
[11] the polis is the natural institution in which all human good are integrated, and it exists to help people realise their potential for good and happiness
[12] dikaiosunē is the chief bond between people in the polis

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177 Aristotle Nichomachaen Ethics §7:1–3
178 Aristotle Politics §7:15, 1334a11f
179 Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics §2:1 1103a12f
[13] Citizenship within the polis is an education in the aretai, and how to judge them rightly. This education includes training the intellect, as well as a system of rewards and punishments to habituate people into the practical aretai.

[14] Because people are at different stages of development in their training in the aretai and their ability to judge them, society has a natural hierarchy—from most advanced to least.

[15] Those best suited to lead the polis are those most advanced in the aretai—that is those that are the best, the aristoi.

Aristotle’s contribution

Aristotle’s Politics is far closer to the practice of Greek politics than Plato’s Republic. Since, in Aristotle’s view, everything moves towards its perfected form, even the worst of existing poleis nonetheless possess attributes of the perfected polis. The constitution of the best polis can be constructed by examining all existing political constitutions and, following Aristotle’s inductive procedure, selecting the best from each. So, not surprisingly, Aristotle retains much of Greek politics and society in his philosophy; his contribution is to provide it with a rational basis and a standard for deciding between competing claims.

For similar reasons, his ethics and the aretai he describes are also fairly conservative. In his metaphysics, nature guarantees that the existing virtues are the best and are not in need of correction (as some philosophers believed). Again, his contribution is to place them within a system. His ethics though preserved the fundamental tension in Greek beliefs. On one hand, Aristotle says that human beings are naturally social creatures, incomplete without the polis—like a hand without a body. A person without a polis will lack dikaiosune and so be unable to act in accordance with arete—and hence be unable to achieve genuine happiness or realise their potential as a human being. On the other hand, many of his assumptions about ethics are firmly individualistic. His metaphysical hierarchy—material, vegetable, animal, human—does not extend to the corporate nature of the polis. For Aristotle, the community exists so that people may perfect their individual natures and achieve genuine happiness. While participation in political life is good, it is far below the ‘divine’ status Aristotle accords to the contemplative life of theoria. Aristotle’s ethics consist chiefly in perfecting the individual’s character, not in governing relations between people.

The tension between individual and social is most obvious in his definition of justice, dikaiosune—which he regards as both a personal characteristic (aretê) and “the principle order in political society ... the bond of men in communities”. In later Western thought, communication, as the process of forming and maintaining communities, remains caught between these two poles (with other options excluded). Linguistics for instance is fundamentally divided between those that believe language is a social phenomena pre-
existing any individual that speaks it, and those that see language as a capacity of individual human beings.

Aristotle regards political constitutions as an education in aretē—a belief that again has implications for communication. Aristotle has a much broader view of education than Plato. Apart from gymnastics, Plato’s education is almost exclusively intellectual. Aristotle would regard this as inadequate: such a program would develop the intellectual aretai, but ignore the practical virtues—courage, temperateness, wealth, honour, anger and social behaviour. Aristotle though takes a dim view of people’s ability to practice the second simply by being instructed. People, he says, need to be habituated in the practical aretai. To achieve this, the polis needs a system of rewards and punishments. So education for Aristotle involves far more than knowledge. Communication is essential to education, so communication in Aristotelian terms is not purely about knowledge or intellect; people also learn from rewards and punishments, and both fear and hope have meaning. (Aristotle may have this in mind when he turns to rhetoric, which I will deal with in detail in Chapter 11. There, he says that it is best if people can be persuaded to make political and judicial decisions using rational arguments. However, he adds that many people are unable to follow chains of reasoning, so instead it is necessary to appeal to the emotions—including hope and fear.)

Despite being far closer to the practice of Greek politics than Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s Politics was no more successful. Ultimately, it was Aristotle’s metaphysics that had the greatest influence on beliefs about community and communication, not his politics or ethics.

For all their novelty and dazzling complexity, Aristotle’s metaphysics preserved important features of earlier Greek thought. He agreed that there is a single natural order that structures both the physical and social worlds. It also gives Aristotle’s universe a natural hierarchy: material, vegetable, animal and human. Corresponding to the last three were

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180 The one attempt we know of to implement Aristotle’s political program in Antiquity was undertaken in Athens in 317–311 BC by Demetrius of Phaleron. Demetrius was a student of Theophrastus, who was Aristotle’s successor as head of the Lyceum. Demetrius was appointed to rule Athens by Cassander—one of Alexander’s successors—after the city’s capture in 317 BC. How whole-hearted Demetrius was in implementing Aristotle’s program we do not know, although he certainly used the cloak of philosophy to give his rule legitimacy; the man himself was a tyrant and he ruled in the interests of the rich. Demetrius was driven out in 311 and the Athenian democracy was restored, although under the rule of the Macedonian kings. Whether the program ended because of its association with Demetrius, or Aristotle’s hostility towards democracy, or simply the Athenians’ desire for their ancient system of government, we do not know.
three souls: vegetative (concerned with nutrition), animal (concerned with motion and perception) and human (capable of intelligence and reason). This order in turn provides an hierarchy amongst people: at the bottom are those dominated by their appetites; above them are those ruled by their passions; at the top are those whose rational parts keep their appetites and passions in their ‘proper’ place.

The Stoics

Hellenic ideas about society, citizenship, values, morality and politics all assumed that the polis was the highest form of human life. Peoples’ place, status and responsibilities were defined in terms of their role and capacity within the city. That assumption ended with the defeat of Greek cities and the rise of the Hellenistic empires in the late-fourth century BC, and the Roman empire in the mid-second century BC.

The incorporation of the individual poleis into much larger, ‘multi-national’ political groupings led to changes in politics, decision-making, law, and the virtues premised on the old civic order. For instance, it was not practical to run the empires democratically; monarchy proved the only viable alternative. However, the new rulers soon recognised the problems involved in imposing their will on empires of unprecedented size. Alexander’s solution—and one adopted by his successors—was to be declared a god. Deification aligned the king’s laws with the divine law, dīkē, and ensured they survived his death. (If the king was merely a mortal man, then his laws were no more than an expression of his will, and so ended with his death.)

The Greek cities were defeated by the armies of Phillip of Macedon and subsequently incorporated by his son, Alexander the Great, into an empire that stretched from the Balkans to the Indus. Alexander died suddenly in 323BC and, lacking a clear heir, his empire disintegrated. Power was divided between Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucid Persia, and a succession of kingdoms in Greece and Anatolia.

Deification was no great novelty in Egypt, already used to divine pharaohs, and the Greeks had long deified statesmen and heroes. Alexander did not however demand god status from the Persians or Indians, who were unfamiliar with the practice. Deification had no real religious significance for the Greeks; it simply gave the kings the authority they needed to make the alliance of cities work without demeaning civic leaders or member states.

The Roman emperors adopted a similar policy, although for the first three hundred years of the Empire, deification usually took place after death rather than during life—worshipping a human being would have been blasphemous to the Romans. Roman policy changed with Diocletian (ruled 284–305AD), who remodelled the Principate as an Eastern monarchy. In the Greek East, Diocletian was worshipped as a god; in the Roman West, the administration created Roma, the personification of the eternal city.
Even with this new instrument of control, Alexander and his successors realised they could not practically impose their will on unwilling subjects. So, in the lands they conquered, they left most of the existing local laws and administrative systems in place because they already provided a respected means for maintaining order and finances. The king’s laws dealt mostly with relations between member states, raising armies, and undertaking major public works. In effect, the empires were run under two sets of laws: the king’s law, which applied universally, and the local customs of each conquered city or region.

The multicultural Macedonian empires also eroded the traditional distinction between Greek and barbarian. Alexander himself married a Persian princess and encouraged his generals to do the same, mingling the Macedonian and Persian courts. He ordered thousands of Persian boys to be taught Greek. In a famous passage, “he prayed for … *homonoia* and a community [among peoples] in the realm of the Macedonians and Persians.” (Homonoia translates roughly as ‘unity of hearts’ or ‘same-mindedness’.)

The longer-term effect was a belief that the traditional distinction no longer held and that all people were, at heart, alike.

From Alexander came the idea of a universal empire, with universal laws—aligned with *dike*—springing from a divine source. This empire transcended traditional social divisions: all people were equal, whether Greek or barbarian. But within this empire existed smaller communities each following their local customs. Citizens of this empire had two identities; within the structures of their local community, and as citizens of the universal empire.

Along with the *polis*, the classical schools of Hellenic philosophy would also be eclipsed, at least for a time. Philosophically, the assumptions of both Plato’s republic and Aristotle’s politics were no longer valid, and they were displaced by the Stoics and Epicureans, who came to dominate the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

The Epicureans dealt with the vastly expanded world and consequent devaluation of local affairs by rejecting them. Happiness, said Epicurus (341–271 BC), consisted in freedom from pain and worry. Since affairs with other people, particularly in public life, resulted in disappointment, the best response was a life of self-sufficient withdrawal, living in simplicity and temperance. Adapting earlier arguments considered but rejected by Plato, the Epicureans claimed that all human behaviour was self-interested, intended to secure happiness. However, the Epicureans realised that the actions of entirely selfish people jeopardised the equally selfish pursuits of others, and accordingly they acknowledged the need for a state to ensure the security of every person from their fellow-citizens. To achieve this, people entered into an implicit contract neither to inflict nor suffer harm, agreeing to

183. *Arrian Life of Alexander* 7.11.9
respect the rights of others in return for their forebearance. These agreements, said the Epicureans, were the origins of the laws and institutions of society. This arrangement however is only justified as a means to ensure the largest private happiness possible: society has no intrinsic worth, but was merely expedient. (Expediency was the only virtue that the Epicureans recognised.) The best form of life was one of simplicity and temperance; friendship shorn of desire was the best type of relationship to be had with other people. Epicurus taught a materialistic, atomistic philosophy, which demonstrated that there were no vengeful gods (for there was no such thing as a purely spiritual being) and that death was not to be feared (for it involved no more than they dissolution of atomic bonds). The Epicurean philosophy of withdrawal found acceptance mainly amongst the wealthier and more educated sections of Greek and Roman society—the Epicurean focus on security coincided with their own interests. But the Epicureans’ attack on religion (they considered religion to be one of the chief sources of human anxiety) and the adoption of a materialistic, anti-spiritual physics could not have been calculated to win disciples in the ancient world. Epicureanism and its philosophy of withdrawal had little influence on the social beliefs of the ancient world.

It was the Epicureans’ rivals, the Stoics, that became most identified with the new social order. With the benefit of four hundred years hindsight, Plutarch wrote that Zeno, founder of the Stoa “wrote [his Republic] having fashioned a dream or image of a philosopher’s republic well-ordered by law, but Alexander turned the word into deed”\textsuperscript{184}.

The development of the Stoics

Unlike Platonic or Aristotelian philosophy, which always returned to the works of their founders, Stoic philosophy developed constantly. Established by Zeno (334–262 BC) in Athens at the end of the fourth century BC, it only achieved its orthodox form with Chrysippus (c.280–c.206 BC) a century later. Following attacks by the Platonists in the mid-second century BC, Stoic doctrine was again revised by Panaetius (c.185–c.110 BC), who also popularised the Stoa in Rome. Most of the Stoics’ influence on later Western thought was through Roman sources—chiefly Cicero (103–46 BC) and Seneca (c.4 BC–c.65 AD)—although they tended to emphasise ethics at the expense of other parts of Stoic philosophy.

The Stoics were originally a branch of the Cynics, and derived much of their early ethics from them—along with their conceptual problems. The Cynics were founded by

\textsuperscript{184} Plutarch, Alexander 6. In reality, the philosopher and the conqueror never met; Zeno did not arrive in Athens until after Alexander’s death and could not have written his Republic at an earlier date.
Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates. But, unlike Socrates’s most famous pupil, Plato—whose discipleship consisted of developing Socrates’ dialectical method to inquire into aretē—Antisthenes chose to follow the example of Socrates and live a life of virtue.

The Cynics taught that human happiness consisted in a life of freedom. Like Socrates, they equated freedom with virtuous self-sufficiency. People, they taught, were born with the capacity for freedom, but most failed to achieve it through a desire for ‘warmth and honey-cakes’\(^1\)

\(^1\) A life of comfort—and hence, a life in a society that provided such comforts—prevented freedom and self-sufficiency. So, in the debate between nature and convention, phusis and nomos, the Cynics rejected social conventions and lived “according to nature”. They learnt self-sufficiency from the animals: sleeping in the open; eating what they found or begged for; learning indifference to hardship and shame\(^2\). We are assured that Diogenes, the most famous of the Cynics, urinated and masturbated in public, even in the midst of philosophical discussions\(^3\). Not surprisingly, the Cynics developed a reputation for boorish and anti-social behaviour. But their apparently genuine revulsion towards traditional social values led them to cultivate indifference to conventional distinctions: wealth, nationality, class, birth, and even slavery\(^4\).

The only thing the Cynics valued was aretē which, like Socrates, they equated with wisdom. Anything that hindered the development or practice of aretē was to be resisted; anything that did not contribute to it they regarded with indifference. Hence the saying attributed to Diogenes, when reproached for going into a brothel: “the sun shines in privies, but is not polluted by them”\(^5\)—aretē is untouched by circumstances.

The Cynics’ ideal society consisted of the virtuous (which they equated with the wise). Each person would be self-sufficient, and society would possess no laws, government, property or marriage. In the absence of this ideal, the Cynics rejected all existing states; they belonged to ‘the city of the world’—the kosmopolis—which had no laws apart from those of nature.

\(^1\) Diogenes Laertius Diogenes 233

\(^2\) The term ‘cynic’ comes from the Greek kuon, ‘dog’. It was originally applied to Diogenes as an insult; he, typically, adopted it with pride.

\(^3\) Diogenes Laertius Diogenes 223, 242

\(^4\) The Republic of Crates, now lost, is said to have taught that in the ideal society, people would live in one ‘herd’, with neither family, nor property, nor distinction, nor need of wealth, nor rank, and without laws. The Republic of Zeno, still written while a student of Crates, regards anyone without aretē as an enemy—even family members. In his Republic, there were only to be free men and women, who lived with one another only with mutual consent, and without marriage. (Diogenes Laertius Zeno 260, 272)

\(^5\) Diogenes Laertius Diogenes 241
Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic school, was originally a student of the Cynic Crates, but he became unimpressed with the Cynics' uncouth behaviour, and left some time in the late fourth century BC. Nonetheless, his own philosophy retained many Cynic tenets. Like the Cynics, the early Stoics regarded *aretē* as the only good and they cultivated indifference (*apathia*) to everything else. They practiced a life of self-sufficiency; living “according to nature”. But unlike the Cynics, whose philosophy consisted largely in rejecting accepted conventions, Zeno made the Cynic claims into a positive philosophy. This however forced the Stoics to explain what they meant by “living according to nature”, along with terms like *aretē* and *phusis* (nature). By the late third century, Stoic thought was canonically divided into three parts: logic (which does not concern us here), physics, and ethics—the first two providing the basis for the last.

Like the Greek philosophers of the fifth century BC, the Stoics’ starting point in physics was the problem of change posed by Heraclitus: that all things are in constant flux. The Stoics observed that all things that bring about change had a material nature, and concluded that, since all things in nature change, all reality must be purely physical.

The Stoics taught that all objects were formed from two principles, one passive and one active. The passive principle was matter or substance, unformed in any way. The active principle they called variously *Logos* (Reason), *Nous* (Mind), God, Zeus, Nature, or the spirit of the universe. It acted on the passive principle, qualifying it in various ways, to give it structure and specific characteristics. All creation participated in this ‘spirit of the universe’ and was subject to its laws. Even the gods of traditional belief were simply aspects of it (to this extent, the Stoics were monotheistic). As the ‘divine Logos’ or Reason, the active principle rendered the *kosmos* intelligible to the rational mind.

For the Stoics, individual things were not isolated objects, as Aristotle assumed, but parts of a larger whole, the *kosmos* (which means literally ‘the order’ or ‘that which is ordered’). Because all parts of the *kosmos* were formed of the same principles, Logos and substance, all things were fundamentally interrelated. In particular, God or Logos was present in everything—although the degree of presence depended upon the combination of active and passive principles. In particular, human beings shared in the divine principle. Over and over the Stoics says “God is within you, God is without you”—the *Logos* exists throughout the universe and within every human being.

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190 The Stoics’ claim that everything was material brought them into conflict with the Platonists, who regarded the true nature of reality as entirely immaterial.


192 Glover 1909, p38
The Stoics believed that all change occurred through a process of strict material causation. And since, in their view, the entire kosmos was material, they deduced that everything that happens is predestined.

Whatever may happen to you was prepared for you in advance from the beginning of time. In the woven tapestry of causation, the thread of your being has been intertwined for all time with that particular incident.  

Stoic physics provided the framework for Stoic ethics, which worked out the command, “live according to nature”. Since the active principle of nature was God or Logos (Reason), the right life was one according to the dictates of reason and of God. So for the early Stoics, like the Cynics, the good life consisted in the cultivation of wisdom, which they regarded as the only virtue. To everything else, they practiced indifference (apathia). Anything that impaired reason—such as the emotions—was to be controlled. The Stoic ‘sage’ was much like the Cynics’ ideal man: self-sufficient, wise, unmoved by circumstances, and dispassionate.

The existence of a divine law solved the thorny problem of justice, dikaiosunē, that the Stoics had inherited from the Sophists, Plato and Aristotle. Justice for the Stoics was simply obedience to the divine law—acting according to the dictates of reason.

In the second century BC, the Sceptics of the Platonic Academy undertook a searching critique of Stoic philosophy, arguing that, on its own terms, Stoic philosophy was seriously flawed. The Stoic sage, for instance, was a monstrosity, unlike anything in nature, behaving in an entirely unnatural manner, suppressing all feelings and emotion. The Platonists also pointed out the difficulty of believing in a universal law of reason in the face of so many differences in moral and legal practice, many of them apparently unreasonable. They asserted that in reality, people are governed entirely by self-interest tempered by prudence (This is precisely what the Sophists had called justice, and was a position supported by the Stoic’s main philosophical competitors, the Epicureans.)

The Middle Stoa under Panaetius met this challenge by reinterpreting the original Stoic doctrines, and incorporating some of Plato’s humanism and Aristotle’s metaphysics. Although this robbed Stoic philosophy of theoretical consistency, it made it more approachable, particularly for the Romans. Despite the lack of internal cohesiveness, the Stoa’s broad claims—particularly in ethics—became widely accepted.

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193 Marcus Aurelius Meditations 10:5; see also Seneca Letters 77:13
194 Cicero Legibus 1:619
The doctrine of complete predestination was modified slightly, claiming that human beings had some latitude in their response to Nature.

In our power are thought, impulse, will to get and will to avoid, and, in a word, everything which is our doing. Things not in our power include the body, property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything which is not of our doing.\textsuperscript{195}

The individual can act in accordance with Nature, or they can engage in an inevitably futile struggle with it. (Just how human beings have this freedom in a deterministic, material universe the Stoics did not explain.) The Stoics taught that the only path to genuine happiness was to live in harmony with the Logos. A person had to accommodate themselves—literally ‘make themselves at home’—to their circumstances. A Stoic metaphor that later became a commonplace was the theatre: each person had their role and had to play their part to the best of their ability, whether the role was great or small.\textsuperscript{196}

The Middle Stoa also softened the earlier model for the Stoic sage, emphasising instead the ‘brotherhood of man’ and the Stoics’ responsibilities to those around them. Since all people share in the Logos, they are all in a sense ‘sons of God’ and therefore are all brothers to one another. This is a world in which all people have an equal place, not just the wise. Together, they were citizens of the world-city, the \textit{kosmopolis}. However, where Diogenes the Cynic had used the term to reject conventional society, the Stoics gave it positive meaning. Society is a product of God, the Logos, and hence people have responsibilities to one another, just as they have responsibilities to live in harmony with Nature and Reason. Each individual was called upon to participate actively in the affairs of the world and fulfil their duty to others within this community.

The man who dissociates and severs himself from the laws of our common nature by refusing to accept his lot is an excrescence on the world.\textsuperscript{197}

The Stoics never fully displaced their earlier doctrines. Later generations struggled between the Stoic sage withdrawing from the world and the call of the brotherhood to enter into the world. So Stoicism demanded two types of activity from its adherents. The first involved withdrawing from society and the ‘outside’ world in order to contemplate the divine Logos and establish what it required. The second involved living as a member of society and accommodating to the demands of the Logos.\textsuperscript{198} This left people commanded \textit{both} to regard themselves as single individuals cut off from one another, and to participate actively in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[195] Epictetus \textit{Manual} 1
\item[196] Epictetus \textit{Manual} 17, Seneca \textit{Letters} 77:20
\item[197] Marcus Aurelius \textit{Meditations} 4:29
\item[198] Durmont 1985, p102
\end{footnotes}
society. Where earlier generations has regarded an individual outside society as ‘unnatural’, the Stoics could conceive of a private person, but one with public responsibilities.

Cicero and Seneca

The main mouthpiece for Stoic philosophy in later ages was Cicero (103–46 BC). He was the most widely read ancient author throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and his legal and moral writings were a standard part of European education until the nineteenth century. Although his philosophical sources were eclectic, and he considered himself a Platonist, the sources of his political and social writings are primarily Stoic.

Cicero’s major contribution to later social thought was to give the Stoic ‘natural law’ a permanent place in European politics\(^{199}\). In the *Republic*, Cicero gives the natural law its permanent form in Western thought: natural law is reason; it is in accordance with nature; it is universal; it binds all people equally; its source is God.

> True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment.\(^{200}\)

In this passage, Cicero, like the Stoics, admitted that human beings, and hence human laws, could be at variance with the natural law (although, in this condition, they were made imperfect). Elsewhere, Cicero states that people have to obey the laws and customs of their own cities. These too were products of nature, and hence it was right to live in accordance with them.

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\(^{199}\) A measure of Cicero’s influence is that, although his *Republic* was lost between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, many of the important passages had been quoted by both Roman and Christian authors, and so became matters of common knowledge.

\(^{200}\) Cicero *Respublica* 3:22
The existence of the natural implied for Cicero the equality of all people. Since people are products of nature, and the law is in accordance with nature, then it follows that people are made to be lawful. Therefore the capacities required for behaving lawfully—possession of reason, agreement on what is right and wrong, identical experience when punished or rewarded—must be shared by all people. Consequently, all people must be regarded as equal before the law. All people—even slaves and barbarians—are part of the ‘brotherhood’ of humanity and none is excluded.

For both Cicero and the Stoics, neither the existence of the Universal Law nor the essential equality of all human beings implied an egalitarian society. Equality is not a fact: Cicero points out that people differ in wisdom or wealth. Rather, equality is a moral requirement for life in society; a claim which does not require equality in status. The societies of both Greece and Rome were hierarchical, and the Stoics defended this hierarchy, arguing that it arose from the demand to act virtuously. The Stoics taught that virtue (virtus, the Roman equivalent of arete) was human nature perfected. Part of virtue, says Cicero, is the fulfilment of duties. He discusses these at length in De Officiis ('On Duties'). The highest duty a person had was to their parents, and by extension, to the fatherland (patria). Next came children and the immediate family, then more remote relations. After family a person had responsibility to friends (De Officiis 1:17:589 and 55–56). Other human beings were, by implication, owed no more than what can be given to them from what is owned in common. (Cicero gives the example that people have a duty to point out the right road to travellers—it costs nothing and diminishes no one.) So, society is firmly hierarchical, ordered by specific reciprocal relations.

Apart from his philosophical and legal works, Cicero influenced later social beliefs in a second, unintended manner: through his correspondence. Cicero was a prolific letter-writer, sometimes penning several a day. After his murder in 43 BC, over nine hundred were published by his secretary—the single largest body of private correspondence that survived the decline of Rome. These frank letters reveal Cicero the man, a character quite unlike the detached Stoic philosopher of the Tusculum Disputations. The Disputations praise aloofness, suppression on the passions that affect public life, and a life of contemplative seclusion. The letters by contrast show a man in the thick of political life: campaigning for political office, triumphant as a lawyer, despairing when driven into exile, crowing when recalled, vacillating between political rivals Pompey and Caesar. When Caesar finally came to power, Cicero was compelled to surrender his public offices and leave public life. He retired to his villa at Tusculum and forced himself to write philosophy, but—in most un-Stoic fashion—he plainly pined for an active role at the head of the republic, following political events feverishly. At Caesar’s death, he loudly praised the assassins (although he had had no part in the plot), and returned to Rome to lead the republican defence against Caesar’s heirs, Marcus Antonius and Octavian—an attempt which cost him his life. Here is the other side of the Stoic coin: a man that feels impelled to contribute to society and work to the good (as he sees it) of his fellow citizens: as a lawyer, Consul, and defender of the republic. Although his letters were admired in Antiquity for their style, not their politics, and were largely ignored in the Middle Ages, they had an electrifying effect on the...
The other Roman of Stoic leanings to be influential in later ages was Seneca (c.4 BC–c.65 AD). He writes a century after the murder of Cicero, as tutor and later adviser to the emperor Nero. Seneca’s philosophy is much the same eclectic mix as Cicero’s, and reflects the increasingly common habit of all the schools to borrow from one another. He agrees that nature forms the standard for both virtue and reasonable behaviour. Like Cicero also, he sees the Republic as the time when Rome reached its political maturity. While both agree that Rome had fallen from that position in their own times, Cicero had faith it could be restored; a century later, Seneca did not believe that it could be rescued from its dictators or its moral corruption. The crucial difference between the two men is that Seneca saw Rome as irredeemably flawed. He sees social and political corruption at every turn and is pessimistic that it can be remedied; he has an overwhelming sense of the basic sinfulness of human beings. The mob has become so vicious that even government by a tyrant is preferable. Not surprisingly, Seneca places no value on a political career; all it can do is crush the virtuous, for Seneca believes that it is impossible for the good person to do much for their fellow-citizens in public office. (He might be reflecting on his own declining ability to influence Nero. Seneca eventually lost the confidence of the increasingly deranged emperor, and was ordered to commit suicide in 65 AD.)

Despite his pessimism, Seneca did not conclude that the virtuous should withdraw from society and spend their time in a life of private satisfaction as the Epircureans did. The demands of the Stoic brotherhood still had potency for him. He insisted that the wise had a moral duty to offer their services to society in some way. Unlike earlier political philosophers—who had never lived under dictators that held all real political power—Seneca conceived of a public service unconnected with political office or even political function. Seneca reinterprets the Stoic brotherhood in a new way: he identifies it with society as a whole, distinct from the political state.

In practical terms, Seneca believed that the wise person contributes through their moral relations with other people, or else through philosophical contemplation (worship of God...
became a civic virtue and a contribution to the public good). The teacher and the virtuous person were, in Seneca's view, both more influential and more noble than whatever ruler the state possessed. Seneca marks a turn in philosophical thought from politics to religion, which replaces the traditional Stoic political and social virtues with humanitarianism. Gone is the harsh self-sufficiency and moral perfectionism of the early Stoic sages. Seneca praises mercy, kindness, charity, tolerance, generosity and love—and correspondingly condemns cruelty, harshness, hatred, and anger, particularly to dependants or less fortunate in life (particularly slaves). In the following two hundred years, it was in these values that the Stoics would have the largest and longest effect in the ancient world.

Late Stoic thinkers such as Seneca, began to open up a gap between public life and political life. The growth of a set of public goods outside the state, the separation of public and political life, and the increasing identification of philosophy with religion would continue over the next two hundred years after Seneca's forced suicide. These themes are marked in the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius (emperor 160–180 AD).

The individual lived simultaneously in two communities: their particular polis and the kosmopolis. They were subject two laws and systems of justice: reason and the conventions of their polis. As members of a particular social community, people were bound by the laws of their community; as human beings, they were bound by the law of the kosmos, which is reason. The emperor Marcus Aurelius sums the twin responsibilities saying, "My nature is [both] rational and social, and my city [polis] and my country [patris], as far as I am [Emperor] is Rome, but as far as I am a man, its is the world [kosmos]"203. The net effect is an incongruous belief that people are fundamentally both individuals with the responsibility to act according to nature and reasoning, social creatures with responsibilities to one another.

In Stoic thought, people became individuals as they never were in earlier periods. Where before people had places and relationships within the relatively small world of the polis, now they stood alone in an impersonal kosmos; increasingly, they felt cut off from one another. Aretē in Stoic thought ceased to be defined in terms of excellence in some activity or performing some role within the polis. Rather, it became excellence of character, unrelated to other people—mostly usually, in acting according to the dictates of reason.

203 Marcus Aurelius Meditations 6:44
The Stoic influence on Roman law

Although the Romans preserved Greek philosophy for the later West, they made no significant intellectual additions of their own. Their greatest contribution to social thought was in their institutions, particularly in their legal system. Even after the decline of the Western Empire in the fifth century AD, Rome and its laws still held enormous prestige. At the beginning of the High Middle Ages, intense study of Roman law revived—most notably at the University of Bolonga after a copy of the Roman Civil Code was discovered nearby in the late eleventh century AD. Lawyers, magistrates and scholars trained in Roman law became widely sought in the High Middle Ages, and they formulated the bulk of Europe’s early post-feudal legal systems until the end of the Renaissance. Roman law was the model and inspiration of virtually every Western European nation’s legal system.

The most important surviving legal document is the Justinian Code, compiled between 529 and 535 AD in an attempt to impose order on a thousand years of Roman law. The Code is made up of four parts, the most important of which is the Pandects (or Digest), which was intended to guide magistrates when applying Roman law. It contained over a thousand selection from 39 jurists, most of whom lived in the second and third centuries AD.

Little of the Pandects is theoretical and it is hard to know how much the jurists were influenced by their own ethical claims: some of what they wrote may simply have been commonplace; others parts may have been firmly held philosophical and ethical principles. Such philosophy as appears explicitly in the Code is consistent with generally-held ethical and social concepts of the second and third centuries AD. Virtually all are Stoic in origin.

204 For instance, English law took precedents from the Code as legally binding until the seventeenth century, as did the American State of Louisiana until the nineteenth century. Scot 1932 gives numerous examples of borrowings in his commentary on the Civil Law, particularly in the Editor’s Preface.

205 Although the social doctrines of the Platonists, Sceptics and Epicureans would have been just as familiar to the educated jurists, they apparently had little use for the claims of these schools.

The one philosopher cited by name in the Pandects is a Stoic, Chrysippus, who is cited saying, “Law is the queen of all things, Divine and human. It should also be the governor, the leader, the ruler, of both the good and the bad, and, in this way, be the standard of whatever is just and unjust, as well as of those things which are civil by Nature, prescribing what should be done, and prohibiting what should not be done.” (Digest 1:3:2. The quotation comes from Chrysippus’ On Law.) This definition is cited, with minor variations, several times within the Code, which indicates just how widespread the basic claims of Stoic philosophy had become amongst the ruling class from which the magistrates were drawn. Ulpian (c.170–228 AD), the most quoted of the jurists, describes jurisprudence as “a true, and not a pretended philosophy”, and jurists should know “in the first place, from whence the science is derived”. He also, like the late Roman Stoics, identifies philosophy with religion, describing...continued on next page
Stoic philosophy was particularly congenial to Roman law. It emphasised obedience to law and custom; its morality was based on public duty; its virtues were matched traditional Romans mores. Unlike the other schools of philosophy, the Stoics assimilated the traditional pagan gods, treating them as aspects of the divine Logos (rather than rejecting them as the Epicureans had, or treating them as the Idea of the Good as Platonists did). They justified the traditional social order. And justice, for both Stoics and Romans, consisted in obedience to the law.

The *Pandects* begin with the familiar Stoic division of the *kosmos*, applied to law:

> Jurisprudence is the knowledge of matters divine and human, and the comprehension of what is just and what is unjust.\(^{206}\)

Until the second century \(\text{AD}\), Roman law was divided into two parts—the Natural Law (*jus naturale*) and the Civil Law (*jus civilis*). The Natural Law, as it is described in the Code, is identical to the Stoic Logos: it is divine, universal, unchanging, and equivalent to reason.\(^{207}\) “Natural Laws that are observed without distinction by all nations and have been established by Divine Providence remain always fixed and unchangeable.”\(^{208}\) The Natural Law was observed by all nature, not just humans, and from it came the basic institutions of society and law.

Natural Law is that which nature has taught to all animals, ... [and] applies to all creatures which originate in the air, or the earth, and in the sea. Hence arises the union of the male and the female which we designate marriage; and hence are derived the procreation and the education of children; for we see that other animals also act as though endowed with knowledge of this law.\(^{209}\)

Civil Laws by contrast lacked the permanence or divine origin of the Natural Laws. They are those laws “which every State establishes for itself are often changed either by the tacit consent of the people, or by some other law subsequently enacted”\(^ {210}\).

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\(^{206}\) *Digest* 1:1:1

\(^{207}\) *Institutes of Gaius* 1:1:1, *Digest* 1:2:1

\(^{208}\) *Digest* 1:2:11

\(^{209}\) *Digest* 1:2: introduction

\(^{210}\) *Digest* 1:2:11
In the third century AD, the division of law into Natural and Civil was expanded with the addition of the Law of Nations (*jus gentium*), although this was identical with the Natural Law on most topics\(^{211}\).

All peoples who are ruled by laws and customs partly make use of their own laws, and partly have recourse to those which are common to all men; for what every people establishes as law for itself is peculiar to itself, and is called the Civil Law, as being that peculiar to the State; and what natural reason establishes among all men and is observed by all peoples alike, is called the Law of Nations, as being the law which all nations employ. Therefore the Roman people partly make use of their own law, and partly avail themselves of that common to all men...\(^{212}\)

As in all Greek and Roman law over the previous millennium, the Civil Law had two sources: unwritten and written. The unwritten law “is that which usage has confirmed, for customs long observed and sanctioned by the consent of those who employ them, resemble law.”\(^{213}\) In Roman law, this functioned in much the same way as English Common Law. The written law had several sources. Under the Republic, they were:

1. statutes passed by the entire Roman people
2. *plebiscita* were established by a vote of the plebians or ordinary citizens
3. decrees of the senate.

All three however were binding on the entire Roman people\(^{214}\). After the rise of Augustus, a second group of sources appeared: “Decisions of the Emperors, the Orders of the Magistrates and the Answers of Jurisconsults”. In theory, all three sources had their authority from the people. In a statement much repeated well into the Modern Era, Ulpian writes:

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\(^{211}\) The chief point of difference between the Natural Law and the Law of Nations is on the subject of slavery. The Natural Law said that all people were created free, and therefore equal, and thus enjoyed equal rights. However, the Law of Nations noted that it was a fact that people went to war, resulting in captivity and slavery—which were contrary to natural law (*Digest* 1:2:2). However, slavery was an institution known throughout the civilised world and had the sanction of long custom, which in the opinion of the jurists was sufficient to give it the force of law (*Digest* 1:2:9).

\(^{212}\) *Institutes of Gaius* 1:1:1

\(^{213}\) *Digest* 1:2:9

\(^{214}\) This division in the sources of law—plebians, senators and the entire people—dated from very early in Roman law and, early in Roman history, there had been disputes about which groups each type of law applied to. The *Lex Hortensia* however ruled that plebiscites bound the whole people (*Institutes of Gaius*, 1:1:3), and custom had long established that senatorial decrees were similarly binding.
Whatever the Emperor has decreed has the force of law; since by a Royal ordinance [Lex Regia] which was passed concerning his sovereignty, the people conferred upon him all their own authority and power.\textsuperscript{215}

This is an extraordinary claim given that Ulpian lived much of his life under emperors that held their position primarily by military force, not by the will of the people. His inspiration is presumably Stoic philosophy, which held that since in nature all men are equal, none of them are naturally emperors, and hence the only legitimate source of their power was from their fellow human beings.

The definition of justice in the Pandects—“the constant and perpetual desire to give each one that to which he is entitled”\textsuperscript{216}—is identical with Cicero’s definition justice, and is Stoic in origin. Although it echoes definitions argued by Plato nearly a thousand years before the Justinian Code was compiled, the meaning had shifted. In classical Greece, what a person was entitled to was defined in terms of their role in the polis and the reciprocal relations with others. By contrast, Roman law increasingly dealt with people as individuals. They had rights simply by virtue of being a person, independent of their social position or relations with others. The appearance of rights as a property of individuals parallels the shift of ethics from reciprocal relations (in the polis) to a characteristic of human beings as such (in the kosmopolis). As the ancient world found, an ethic based on reciprocal relations was unachievable in a community that embraced the entire known world. Whether or not the development of rights in Roman law was influenced by the Stoics, it certainly paralleled developments in their philosophy.

The appearance of individual rights, independent of social position, is paralleled by the increasing legal equality of all people\textsuperscript{217}. In particular, the weak—women, children and

\textsuperscript{215} Digest 1:4:1

\textsuperscript{216} Digest 1:1:introduction

\textsuperscript{217} The Stoic emphasis on equality led to several important changes in legal life in late Antiquity. For instance, Stoic philosophy implied that women were equal to men in principle (Marcus Aurelius Meditations 1:14), and the Roman jurists from the late second century AD increasingly gave women independence from their husbands, along with children, dependants and the destitute. Stoic humanitarianism apparent in Seneca and Marcus Aurelius is probably the inspiration for increasing humane laws. Slaves in particular were given increasing levels of protection; their owners were forbidden to kill, main or maltreat them. Unlike Aristotle, who regarded a slave as “a living tool” (Politics §1:4, 1253b29), the Stoic Chrysippus said that no man was a slave “by nature”, and should therefore be treated as a “labourer hired for life” (Chrysippus On Law). This principle passed into law, and appeared in the Pandects as:

“[slaves] may humbly apply to [the City Prefect] where their masters treat them with cruelty, harshness, or starve them, or may state to the Prefect of the City that they have...continued on next page
slaves—were increasingly protected from exploitation, reflecting a growing belief in the worth and dignity of human life, regardless of social status. Again, this parallels late Stoic humanitarianism and the Stoic’s almost-religious insistence in the brotherhood of all people and the element of divinity embodied in every person.

The Stoic contribution

By the third century AD, the Stoics were finished as a living school of philosophy. In the Roman period, Stoicism had borrowed increasingly from other schools, which increased its appeal but destroyed its theoretical rigour and internal coherence. Apart for professional philosophers, Stoicism consisted more of ethical and religious dispositions rather than a body of doctrine. Amongst the enduring beliefs about society that the Stoics fostered were claims that:

1. there is an order to the universe (kosmos), and its source is God, Logos, Nature or Mind
2. Nature establishes an order in the world, law (nomos), and this law is identical to reason (logos)
3. human beings, as part of the natural order, are subject to the divine law—in particular, people possess a part of the divine and are therefore all brothers; all are essentially equal; and all equal members of the kosmopolis. Human beings are thus social animals. And each is due some respect, just as the divine in which they all share deserves respect.

been forced to endure indecent attacks. It was also a duty ... that [the Prefect] should protect slaves from being prostituted by their masters. (Digest 1:1:12:8)

Severus (emperor 193–211 AD) gave privileges to large families and destitute children (Institutes of Justinian 1:26:9). Provincial governors were given increased powers to protect the poor and weak against their powerful neighbours and from soldiers (Digest 1:18:6:2). There were also attempts to make the law more equitable. For instance, in 212/13 AD, the emperor Caracalla gave Roman citizenship to almost the entire free population of the Empire, a privilege previously restricted mostly to the ruling classes in Italy. (The historian Dio Cassius says Caracalla’s motivation was financial: it made every person in the Empire liable for death duties and taxes on the manumission of slaves—the Empire’s main indirect taxes and levied only on Roman citizens. Caracalla’s acquisitiveness was legendary: he was the only emperor of the period to leave the treasury in surplus.)

These developments cannot be attributed to prosperity or advancing social circumstances: as I will discuss in the next Chapter, after the death of Marcus Aurelius, the Empire suffered calamitous defeats, suffering repeated invasions, an epidemic of political assassination, military mutinies, galloping taxation, and runaway inflation. The most plausible inspiration for laws that protected the vulnerable in a time when the demands of the State were overwhelming is in the ethics of the late Stoics.
since the law of nature is universal, there are some rules of morality, justice and reason that are binding on all human beings—because they are intrinsically right and naturally deserve respect.

human happiness lies in complying with the requirements of the natural law. However, because human beings have the capacity to choose, they can act contrary to the natural law—although this is ultimately futile and the source of disorder and unhappiness.

because the *kosmos* is a single unit, and all parts of it have a part in God, it is unnatural and immoral for a person to attempt to cut themselves off from their fellow citizens. All people are called upon to contribute to the welfare of others and to fulfil the duties placed upon them by both nature and custom.

in complying with the universal law, people perfect their own natures. Specifically, to act according to reason and obey the laws of God, people are just and virtuous.

because human beings can act against nature, they can establish laws in their communities that are different from the natural order. However, no society can be stable unless it acknowledges and harmonises with the universal law. Human law and human societies are subject to the natural law and to God.

the law and the community are the common property of the people, and therefore authority arises from them collectively. Political power, properly understood, is the collective power of the people. Rulers and magistrates derive their legitimacy from the people.

For the Stoics, all people form a community by virtue of the existence of God within each person. To communicate—in the sense of contributing to this community—is to obey the dictates of God, nature and reason; fulfil one’s duties; and behave morally towards others, working to their good. Since civil laws and customs are ultimately natural in origin, each person is obliged to comply with them. Violence, emotion and emotional behaviour all confound reason, and are therefore inimical to communication.

The Stoic community however is one composed of individuals that, although notionally equal, are all ultimately independent from one another. Although early Stoic thought emphasised that all humanity forms a single *polis*, from the second century BC, people increasingly felt cut off from one another. The gap between public and private first evident in Seneca had become a yawning gulf a century later. This sense of loss and separation became a hallmark of later Stoic thought. Nowhere in classical Greece or Republican Rome is there the lonely figure of Marcus Aurelius, nor was there any need for his stern prohibition against people cutting themselves off from society. Western thought had to accommodate itself to laws, institutions and a philosophy which was premised paradoxically on a natural society composed of autonomous individuals that experienced themselves as separate from one another.
The Stoics influenced later beliefs about society at two key points: during the centuries in which Christianity became established as the dominant religious, administrative and social force in Europe (a period which I will discuss in the next Chapter); and in the late Renaissance as early Modern ideas about community were being formulated (Chapter 13). The Stoic’s most vivid contribution to Modern thought is in political philosophy. The opening lines of the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776) show the continuing influence of Roman Stoicism.

We hold these truths to be self-evident [ie axioms of reason], that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNICATION

Classical Greek ideas about the order of society developed out of the collision of groups of ideas about society, summarised as the conflict between nature and convention, phusis and nomos.

On the side of nature, phusis, was the belief that the world and society were ruled by a divine order. This defined each person’s place in society, their relationships with other people, and how they were to behave. These relationships gave society an implicit hierarchy. Communication, understood as participation in society, meant observing the law of nature, giving each person what they were due in their position and role.

On the side of convention, nomos, was the belief that society was an institution formed entirely by human beings with the goal of helping each person satisfy their own personal desires. Society existed only as a means to an end—to secure personal happiness—and existed only because people had found that working together was more effective than a solitary life for securing that goal. In such a society, people constantly competed for the means to secure happiness: where the ‘natural’ social order was static, this was dynamic. Some people however were more effective at getting what they wanted from others, and this

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Their author, Jefferson, was both a jurist with a close knowledge of Roman law, and also a keen student of classical authors, knowing both Greek and Latin in his teens. His primary however was the English philosopher, John Locke, who I will introduce in Chapter 13. Locke’s sources in turn were principally English law which had incorporated Roman law with some Christian philosophy over nearly five hundred years before. So, while the ultimate sources were Stoic, they had passed into the common stock of European thought, unconnected with any specific school.
led to a hierarchy in society, from strongest to weakest. Since every person has a ‘right’ to pursue happiness, it is therefore right that the weak should be subject to the strong. However, the strong recognise that they are not all-powerful, and need the help of the weak, and so agree to place limits on their behaviour in return for aid. These agreements are the basis of all laws in society. They are purely human conventions (*nomoi*) and might be changed at any moment. Communication, as the means by which order in society is established, is equivalent to the process of making conventions and laws.

In both cases, communication was the same as justice, *dikaiosunē*.

Subsequent developments in political philosophy attempted to synthesise claims from both traditions, resulting in three very different views of community, but nonetheless agreeing on many individual points. For instance, in his *Republic*, Plato initially conceded most of the assumptions of the Sophists (individualism, law as social convention, satisfaction of desire leads to apparent happiness, justice appears to be what the strong permit), but nonetheless ended up designing an ordered community which is a descendant of the Olympian tradition. By contrast, the Stoics asserted that the order in the *kosmos* was natural and that society, as part of the *kosmos*, shared in its order. But the Stoics also claimed that all people were individuals and as such were all ultimately equal—such hierarchies as society had were conventional, not natural. Stoic ethics too was firmly individual—although they preached the importance of engaging in society, this was ultimately only a means: the end was personal happiness.

The three main claims made by Plato that affected subsequent beliefs about society were:

1. society was formed by individuals working together for mutual profit—society has no origins in nature and its characteristics are those of its citizens
2. society is perfected when each person knows the place they are best suited for, and keeps to it; Plato’s society is perfected when it conforms to an ideal structure
3. his Theory of Forms, which provided a hierarchical model of reality, which would subsequently become the model for cosmic order.

Communication in a Platonic sense is participation in order and in the Forms.

Aristotle’s two main contributions were:

1. his metaphysical system, in which every thing moves towards its perfected state; human society is part of the natural order, and exists to perfect human nature
2. human perfection and happiness consists in life in accordance with *aretē*, which requires training in order (*dikē*) and justice (*dikaiosunē*)—things only to be found in society. A life in society is thus an education in virtue; society has a hierarchy, as those more advanced in *aretē* train those less advanced.

So, for Aristotle, communication is effectively an education in, and the practice of, *aretē*, particularly justice, *dikaiosunē*.
The Stoics’ enduring claims concerning community were:

[1] there is a natural order to the universe (kosmos), and it is identical to reason (logos)

[2] all people participate in this order, and hence all people are fundamentally equal citizens of the kosmos and brothers to one another; all people are called upon to enter into society and work to the good of their fellow-citizens

[3] all people are also citizens of their local community, and are also obliged to participate in it, even though it may diverge from the laws of reason and the kosmopolis; people therefore inhabit two worlds: the divine and the mundane, universal and local

[4] all people are simultaneously individuals before the divine (and called upon to withdraw from the world in order to contemplate the logos), and also citizens engaged with others in society.

To communicate was to discover what reason required, obey the dictates of nature, fulfil one’s duties, and behave morally towards others and work to their good.

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From Greece and Rome, we have four broad beliefs about communication in society:

[1] communication is participating in the natural order of society or the kosmos

[2] communication is the process by which people established a ‘social contract’

[3] communication is education in virtue or of the intellect

[4] communication is part of the process for deciding between the claims of the two traditions concerning community.

When Antiquity gave way to the Middle Ages, it was the first that prevailed. For much of the Christian Middle Ages, communication was regarded as communion; participation in the order laid down by God. The second view disappeared until the Renaissance, when renewed study of Greek and Roman texts coincided with a resurgence in individualism. Education remained a permanent concern of western societies; its capacity to transform society and improve individuals morally has never been seriously questioned. But for most of history, formal education has been regarded as largely separate from communication—a legacy of the quarrel between the philosophers and the Sophists (which I will discuss in Chapters 11 and 14). The last type of communication—rhetoric—declined in the formation of public policy with the loss of popular government in the ancient world. It was also treated as part of communication-as-technique, which I will discuss in Chapters 11, 12 and 14.

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219 Baron 1955 traces in detail the influence of studying and using Roman texts by the Humanists in the late fourteenth century.

220 See Kimball 1986 for a history of the idea of a liberal education from Greece to Modern times.
Politics and persuasion

The conflict between the two traditions represented by *phusis* and *nomos* was far from being only a problem for philosophers. From the fifth century BC, the Greek world was presented with two radically different sets of standards for making decisions and ordering the community. The Greek solution to the competing demands in politics and law was to make a public presentation of cases followed by an appeal to the wisdom of the community for support. The Athenians in particular were proud to claim:

> We ... take our decisions on policy or submit them up to proper discussions: for we do not think there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated.\(^{221}\)

‘Discussion’ as it is used in the surviving Hellenic plays and histories is not a conversation participated in equally by all (what we usually mean ‘discussion’ today). The size of the Assembly and juries meant that only a few might speak. Most people could only listen or talk to those people seated nearby. Most could not ask questions and few could advance alternative proposals. Consequently, the formation of policy was a contest between orators. When the orator addressed the Assembly or a jury, they would have spoken about what they believed was right and proper (*agathos*) in the situation, and asked those they addressed to act accordingly, encouraging *aretē* in their listeners. As the Greeks’ understanding of *aretē* evolved, so the range of strategies available to the orator expanded. The ancient problem of *aretē* and how it was to be developed has lasting legacies in modern communication—particularly communication programs done for the ‘public good’ intended to change people’s behaviour (like advertising campaigns on smoking, drink-driving, gambling, sexual health, water use, recycling, and energy use).

In Homer, it is *agathon* for a person to know their place in the community and act as their role requires—which is established by *dikē* and *themis*. So persuasion in Homer consists largely of reminding people what they are required to do in the circumstances they find themselves. Speeches consist mostly of a statement about the relevant circumstances and a demand for people to act as *dikē* requires.

In the late fifth century BC, the Greeks still assumed that if a person knew what they are to do—what was *agathos*—they would do it. But their notions of *dikē* and *aretē* had broadened. In the Olympian tradition, the nature of the divine order had changed. Dike$, the order of the kosmos, was increasingly identified with mind and reason (logos). At the same time, the pre-Socratic philosophers and playwrights insisted that *aretē* was dependant upon knowledge—hence the dictum of Socrates that *aretē* was wisdom and people act

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\(^{221}\) Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War*:40:2
badly only out of ignorance. On these assumptions, when an orator sought to move others, they could appeal to knowledge or to reason. (This is reflected in the speeches recorded by Thucydides, which usually consist of factual claims and deductions from them.)

The appearance of a rival to the Olympian tradition, one based on self-interest, requires more sophisticated strategy to persuade people. The orator in Periclean Athens has to address two types of people.

1 those who already share the speaker’s assumptions about what is the right and good way to act. If they support the Olympian tradition, they need only to be reminded of what is expected of them and encouraged to act accordingly; if they support the rival ‘Conventional’ view and believe that good consists in satisfying desires, then the speaker need only demonstrate that this is the case.

2 those who do not share the speaker’s assumptions about what is right and good. The goal of rhetoric is to persuade them to abandon their assumptions and accept those of the speaker. However, as I discussed earlier, people at the time usually knew what was agathos for them—and they did not question it. Consequently, an argument based on reason could not succeed—it was not possible to disprove the deductions of one tradition using the assumptions of the other. Consequently, when addressing this second group of people, the orator’s chief rhetorical tactic was either to demonstrate the audience’s assumptions were mistaken, or alternatively to cajole people into changing their beliefs using non-rational arguments—which in the case of the Greeks usually involved either emotional appeals or dazzling wordplay to hide specious logic. (I will discuss these in more detail in Chapter 11.)

The techniques used to deal with the second group of people were the disreputable techniques attributed to the Sophists—a group that also supported the new argument that happiness lay in self-interest. (The historical Sophists took a more humane position, but it was not how their opponents described them). The Sophists’ first major rival, Plato, rejected the use of emotion, of false logic and appeals to individual interests. Emotions, he said, cloud the rational faculty and prevent true knowledge. Plato followed Socrates, claiming that decision-making had to be based on knowledge of the Good and sound reasoning. Plato draws on the basic assumptions implicit in the Olympian tradition, but he advances and modifies them extensively in his treatment of reason and virtue.

As I will discuss in Chapter 11, Aristotle agrees that it is undesirable to make decisions on the basis of emotional appeals and clever wordplay, but he cannot deny their effectiveness. Consequently, he discusses them amongst the techniques of the orator. But his emphasis,

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222 Aristotle’s Rhetoric is the first European analysis of the emotions, and consists mainly in describing how they can be used to move an audience.
like Plato, is on the use of logic and a proper knowledge of right behaviour and what is good for the community as a whole.

Overall however, Plato and Aristotle rejected the rhetoric, along with the Sophists that taught it, and democratic governments it was best suited to. Both regarded education as far more important to the functioning of the ideal polis. If communication is the process of forming, maintaining and perfecting communities, then for them both it is identical with education and consists in developing knowledge—and, in the case of Aristotle, the exercise of judgement.

From the Greeks we have many of our basic beliefs about how people may be changed for the better. Most of these beliefs were known by later ages, even though the social conditions had changed greatly. Not surprisingly, these beliefs provided the basic categories for organising communication aimed at changing community behaviour. These are apparent in the strategies taken by our modern ‘persuaders’, such as advertisers and marketeers. The methods used in advertising can be organised into the same basic categories as the Greek arete. For instance:

1. We are occasionally told to obey the law, simply because it is the law—just as Homeric characters were expected to do what dikē required, not because it will produce a return to the individual, but simply because that is what people in the community are expected to do.

2. The advertising of consumer goods by contrast appeals to self-interest, and asserts that happiness can be achieved through satisfying personal desires.

3. Socrates and Plato regard arete as wisdom, and therefore the development of arete is an intellectual education. In modern terms, this would be interpreted as a concern with information and knowledge. And today, ‘communication campaign’ is used interchangeably with ‘information campaign’ and ‘education campaign’.

4. Aristotle, who has a less positive view than Plato on people’s ability to act on intellectual training alone, adds rewards and fear to the tools of statecraft. And in advertising, we also find fear and (occasionally) rewards used to bring about social change.

There are important differences between the ancient orators, and modern journalists, advertisers and marketeers, which I will discuss in Chapters 11 and 14. The journalist for instance is chiefly concerned with information and facts, and only rarely with persuasion; the

\[223\] For early Greeks, like Socrates, knowledge of all kinds had a strongly practical and moral dimension; only from Plato and the Pythagoreans does there appear a gap between action and the intellect.
orator was interested in information only in so far as it was useful for persuading people. Information is at the core of most modern communication theories, whereas it has almost no place in ancient political oratory. While marketing and public relations aim to persuade, as the Sophists and orators did, their target is specific behaviours—usually purchasing some product or service—not the assumptions about rights and goods from which people reason their actions. While public relations and marketing certainly use linguistic and emotional devices first discovered by the Sophists and orators, they do so merely because they are effective. By contrast, the Sophists employed non-rational argumentative methods because they realised that there is no rational way of getting people to exchange one set of justifiably held beliefs for another—whether based on nomos or phusis.

Developing ideas about people

Developments in ancient social thought are paralleled by changes in the way the Greeks and Romans understood themselves as people. Since communication takes place between people in society, developments in the concept of person influence ideas about communication.

To restate the definition of ‘person’ I gave earlier:

\[ \text{to be a person in the full sense, you have to be an agent with a sense of yourself as an agent, a being which can thus make plans for your life, one who holds values in virtue of which different plans seem better or worse, and who is capable of choosing between them.} \]

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In Homer there are, properly speaking, no people in the Modern sense, only characters that follow the law (dike) laid down by the gods. They do not think through their desires or goals, much less choose between them; they simply know what is required of them and seek to act accordingly.

In Thucydides, there are people almost in the Modern sense. Characters are fully aware of themselves as agents, capable of calculating their interests against standards, and planning for the future. However, they rarely decide what to do for themselves; normally they are quite sure about what is good (agathos) for a person like them to do in their circumstances. The only genuine decision-making takes place between people who have different concepts of what is agathos. So, what we would regard as crucial to the nature of a person—the capability to decide between competing claims—first appears as a social activity; only later do people learn to apply the process of decision-making personally. Also, Greeks of the fifth century BC have no clear concept of will as a motivation for action: the only valid basis for

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224 Taylor, 1985, p257.
action is intellectual (Socrates’ dictum that *areté* is wisdom and people only do evil out of ignorance is a corollary of this belief).

With Plato and Aristotle, characters have all of the capabilities that we now regard as necessary to be a person. However, their concept of a person differs from the Modern definition in their conception of the soul, *psukhé* (which, for the Greeks and Romans, included what we refer to as the mind and consciousness). Plato identifies a person with their soul; an immortal and immaterial agent, pre-existing the world, which temporarily inhabits and motivates the physical body, but is ultimately separate from it. Because, according to Plato, the soul belongs to the unchanging, immortal realm of the Ideas, it is certainly not formed by society. It follows that society must be simply the sum of its individual constituent souls.

While Aristotle rejected Plato’s dualism of body and soul and the claim that it pre-existed birth, he nonetheless retained the basic categories of body and soul. For him however, the soul was the form of the body, rather than an object separable from it. And, just as the body can be developed and perfected through appropriate training, so too can the soul. The proper training for the soul is an education in *areté*, which he says, can only take place within the *polis*. Aristotle therefore belongs to a tradition that claims that human souls are fundamentally formed by the *polis*—a position which is diametrically opposite Plato.

Claims that the soul is formed by the *polis* had to be drastically revised when the empires of Alexander and Rome rendered the self-sufficient *polis* obsolete as a political and social unit. For the remainder of Antiquity, the *psukhé* stands alone, a product of nature, not the *polis*. People slowly changed from political creatures to individuals. This can be seen in changing the nature of *areté*. From Homer to Thucydides, *areté* was regarded as basically the capacity of a person to do excellently what was required of a person in their social role. Hellenistic ethics by contrast was concerned with developing the individual’s character.

As people increasingly saw themselves as individuals, the soul retreated inwards into the body, away from the outer social world. Where Plato regarded the soul as filling up the body right to the surface, and Aristotle said that a person’s character was revealed in their actions, in Stoic thought, the soul was hidden, unseen. Where characters in Homer had direct access to one another as people, the late Stoics saw a dark gulf between people. People’s perceptions and experiences of themselves became increasingly interior, and correspondingly they became cut off from one another. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this retreat inwards from the world would accelerate in late Antiquity, and became extreme in early Christianity. The last great school of Antiquity, Neoplatonism, emphasised the distinction between body and soul, the intellect and the material world, to the point where they were fundamentally opposed and antagonistic; the soul’s experience of the body was like being ‘plunged into a bath of dirty water’. The soul became a spark hidden deep within people, and between them lay a dark ocean of mute, insensible matter. With the severance of one soul from another appeared the dream of a type of communication in
which one lonely soul finds direct, intimate communion with another. The separation and hiding of the soul is blamed throughout later history for the failure of communication.

The gulf between souls also has implications for communication-as-transmission. Early Greek beliefs regarded communication as transference from one person to another; later versions transformed this into the more complex problem of transference from one soul to another, with an intervening process of physical ‘transmission’ and ‘reception’. The development is preserved in Modern transmission models—a message originates in the mind as a concept, is translated into physical form, which is transferred through space, to be received by some physical mechanism, and finally transformed again into an object in the mind.
CHAPTER EIGHT

EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEWS ABOUT COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT Christian ideas of community were based on notions of salvation, in which the individual ‘died in the flesh’ and was ‘reborn in the spirit’. Reborn, they became part of the mystical ‘body of Christ’. Communication in this sense was communion. In this community, the faithful sublimated themselves within the corporate Christian identity and devoted themselves to the good of others.

Although ‘dead to this world’, Christians were still forced to live in it. They responded by rejecting the material world and seeking God in solitude. The Christian community was to be maintained spiritually, not socially.

Stoic influences led to Christ—the spirit that animated and bound together the Christian body—with the Logos, the order and reason of the kosmos. The order of Christian society was thus also the natural order, created by God. Platonism was subsequently used to explain the participation of the individual in Christ in the same terms as the relationship between the material world and the Platonic Ideas. Christian society was understood as an image of the peace and harmony of heaven. It was perfected when it took the structure laid down by God, and each person took their place, obeying the laws of God and those God had placed over them.

The vision of the perfect society that early Christianity bequeathed to the Middle Ages was one in which people left the world, disciplined their physical natures, purified their souls, obeyed their lawful authorities, and contemplated God.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

As the Stoics were becoming the dominant philosophical influence on Roman social thought, Jesus of Nazareth appeared in Roman Judea, preaching a message of repentance
in preparation for the imminent establishment of God's long-awaited kingdom. After a short mission amongst the Jews, he was arrested and executed\(^1\). For the sect he established, what Jesus taught while alive swiftly became less important than the events of his death\(^2\). After he was crucified, his followers had a number of experiences that convinced them that Jesus had been restored to life and raised to Heaven through God's power. They drew the conclusion that Jesus was thus not just a man, or a teacher of the Law, or even a prophet, but the long-anticipated Messiah sent by God to save the world. Furthermore, this Messiah was not simply a divinely inspired man, but was God himself\(^3\).

\(^1\) Jesus' Judaism appears conventional, if rather strict. In the Gospels, he acts like a country rabbi from Galilee. He affirms the Jewish, and cites it to support his own actions (for instance, Mark 2:23–28, 3:1–6). He is reported doing or saying things that can only have their origins in the Jewish Law, such as commanding people to sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 1:40–45, Matthew 5:23), and his disciples appear to have kept the food laws—Peter would not have struggled with his conscience as he did when commanded in a vision to kill and eat animals forbidden under the Law (Acts 10:11–17) if Jesus himself had overturned the food laws. Jesus' interpretations of Jewish Law that are well within contemporary bounds (Sanders 1993, pp205–237). He cites the Prophets (for instance, Matthew 11:2–6, Matthew 21:31) and calls on them in support of his actions (for instance, Mark 2:28). When asked what are the greatest of the commandments, Jesus gives a traditional summarisation: a person, he says, has two interrelated responsibilities: to God and to others in society. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40, citing Deuteronomy 6:2 and Leviticus 19:18)

His short mission, arrest and summary execution are typical of other Jewish holy men of the time. (Others mentioned in the New Testament and by the Jewish historian Josephus include John the Baptist, (Antiquities 18:63–64), Theudas (Acts 20:97, Antiquities 97–99), and 'The Egyptian' (Acts 21:38, War 261, Antiquities 169–172). Josephus also reports unnamed prophets leading people into the Judean wilderness.) The main difference between Jesus and most Jews of his day is in the strictness of his legal interpretation. In short, we can best understand him as a Jewish teacher without a hint of apostasy, on a mission to Israel.

\(^2\) In Paul's letters, Jesus the man hardly appears at all: what is significant for Paul is his resurrection and relationship to God. Likewise, a third of Mark's Gospel—the earliest of the canonical four and the model for Matthew and Luke—is devoted to the week leading up to Jesus's death.

\(^3\) Christianity treats 'Jesus' and 'Christ' as interchangeable names, but originally they were not. Christ is not a name but a title: it is the Greek rendering of the Jewish term 'messiah', meaning 'God's anointed'. In Judaism, a messiah was not divine but fully human. Cyrus the Great, who released the Jews from Babylon, was regarded as a messiah: divinely inspired but fully human. The idea that the Messiah is identical with God is a purely Christian idea. In this chapter, I have used 'Jesus' when referring to the man, and 'Christ' for the second person of the Trinity.
Seized by these revelations, they began to announce the news of Jesus’ resurrection and the revelation of God’s mercy for the world. They called for repentance in preparation for Christ’s return and the immanent establishment of God’s Kingdom that had been promised by Jesus.

The apostles’ message was simple, consisting of a handful of statements they asserted were true. God the Father had sent his Son into the world, but the Son had been crucified. God had allowed this for the benefit of humanity, a sacrifice for its collective sins. God the Father had raised his Son from the dead and exalted him to heaven to be at his right hand. The Son would return soon, and those that belonged to him would live with him forever, but until that time, God sent the Spirit into the world to guide his people.4

In Christ’s resurrection, the faithful saw the promise of their own triumph over death, escape from evil, and reunion with God5. The promise of Christianity was the simultaneous salvation of the individual and the world, and the reconciliation of both with God forever. Christ’s sacrifice had redeemed mankind’s sins and had initiated the reunion of Man with God, a process that would be completed with Christ’s return.

This message required little sophistication. Time was short. The Kingdom was imminent and Christ would return soon. The remaking of society through a social organisation, or Church structure, or ethical system was unnecessary: God would provide these in the new Kingdom. The overwhelming need was for repentance and faith in the saving Christ.

The expansion into the Greek world

Almost from the outset, the Church divided into two missions: one to the Jews and one to the Greeks. But within a decade, it was apparent that Jews were not embracing the new faith, whereas Greeks were.6 However, including non-Jews in the sect raised thorny legal

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4 From Acts 2:17–33

5 In Jesus’ time, resurrection was a relatively new idea in Jewish thought, only appearing around 200 BC. Resurrection is not a part of Biblical Judaism, nor is life after death (only one passage in the Bible hints at it: Daniel 12:2). By the first century AD, the Pharisees and the general population believed in resurrection; the Sadducees however did not (Safrai and Stern, 1974). Most Jews however believed in a bodily resurrection—a Persian idea—rather than a spiritual resurrection. The appearance of a spiritual afterlife in Jewish thinking probably results from contact with the Greeks.

6 For instance Acts 14:1–2 & 17:1–13. We know virtually nothing of the significance of conversion for Greeks and Romans, nor their personal reasons for converting. The only detailed description of conversion we have from the ancient world is Augustine’s (354–430 AD), who writes about it a dozen years after the event, and from the unusual perspective of being a...continued on next page
questions. Did they have to convert to Judaism before they could become Christians? Did they have to observe the Jewish law? Importantly, did they have to obey those parts of the Jewish Law that traditionally distinguished Jews from pagans—circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath worship? The mother-church in Jerusalem argued that the Jewish Law applied to all converts, but some missionaries working outside Judea argued that the Law applied to the Jews alone and Greek converts were not bound by it.

A compromise between the two groups was reached around 47 AD, although the details do not survive. What the apostles appear to have done is distinguish between the two parts of Jewish Law—those concerning relations between people and those covering relations

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7 Acts 15:1
8 Acts 10:28
9 Acts 15:12–29
10 In the first century AD, the Jewish Law was understood as being made up of regulations covering two intermeshed relationships—the first between God and humanity, the second between people. The bulk of the Law of Moses fits into either one or other category. For instance, the Ten Commandments can be readily divided into those laws concerning Israel’s duties to God, and those covering individual’s relations with others.

Responsibilities to God

[1] You shall have no other gods before me.
[3] You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
[4] Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Responsibilities to others

[9] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
[10] You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbours.

The distinction between the two relationships is also apparent in the standard summary of Judaism of the first century AD. It survives in texts by several contemporary Jewish figures, including the sage Hillel (c.30BC–c.10AD), the Alexandrian philosopher Philo (fl.40AD) and the historian Josephus (c.73–c.100AD). They summarised the Jewish Law by quoting two commandments “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” and “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 respectively. Hillel is quoted in Mishnah Abot 1&2; Philo’s formulation is preserved by the early Christian historian Eusebius in his Preparatio...
between humanity and God. They agreed that the Greeks did not need to observe the latter, particularly those that marked the Jews’ service to God (circumcision and the food laws), although they were forbidden to worship pagan gods or idols. But the laws covering relations between people were upheld.

The apostles’ compromise however compromised the Jewish Law, for the Bible was explicit that God’s judgement and salvation were based on whether an individual kept the Law and performed the works required by it. The compromise also opened up another more difficult question: if the Law did not apply to the Greeks, on what grounds did a person attain heaven? The answer that carried the day was Paul’s: salvation could not be earned by observing the Jewish Law (although good works were a precondition for salvation).

Salvation depended on God’s mercy, and was his free gift; people simply had to have faith. Over and over, Paul stressed that salvation was by works of faith, not works of law. For Christians, faith in God predominated and doing good works receded into the background.

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**Evangelica 8.7**—a formulation that is also used several times in the New Testament (for instance, Matthew 22:36–40).

1 In his letters to his scattered congregations, Paul angrily denounces any transgression of laws concerning relations between people (Sanders 1977, p544). He demands that Christians observe the highest moral standards—although this appears to mean the Jewish standards Paul himself had grown up with (Romans 6:2, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Galatians 5:16–24, 1 Thessalonians 3:13 & 5:25, Philemon 2:15), rather than anything Jesus taught.

Acts says only that apostles wrote to the congregations commanding them to “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.” (Acts 15:29)

12 Sanders 1977, p543

13 For instance Galatians 2:16, 3:1–5, 7–11, 14, 18–22, 26

14 The dominance of Greeks and Greek ideas in the Church inevitably led to the loss of typically Jewish conceptions about God, sin and redemption, body and soul. Nonetheless, the early Christians deliberately retained some parts of their Jewish heritage (not least because it gave them political protection under Roman law).

1 Christianity retained everything of the Jewish prophets that foretold the events of Jesus’ life and death, and confirmed that he was the promised Messiah

2 It retained all of the Jewish creation myths; these demonstrated that God was not simply another deity who could be absorbed into the pagan pantheon (as other eastern gods had been), or who was limited to a specific people (as the gods of the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and Persians were), but was the sole author of Creation and the only path to redemption

3 Christians emphasised the Jewish idea that God was the source of all that was good and holy. (This was one of the sharpest differences between the Christians’ God and the pluralistic but morally ambiguous Hellenistic gods.)

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The Church retained many of the ethical commandments in the Torah, although usually in the form that Jesus or the apostles gave them. The Christians, however, dispensed with laws concerning sacrificial procedures, or that marked the Jewish service to God (food, dress, circumcision), or forbade mixing with non-Jews.

What the Christians retained was, from a Jewish perspective, less important than what was lost (or, from Christian perspective, had been superseded by Christ on the cross). Major losses included:

1. The Jewish Law (Torah)—Paul in particular emphasised that the 'Old' Covenant was both completed and superseded by Christ on the cross, and that he established a 'New' Covenant as Jeremiah had prophesied (Hebrews 9:8–13). Paul also stressed that it was faith in God, not behaviour consistent with the Law, which was necessary to attain salvation.

2. Covenant: the Jewish belief in a contract with God, in which each party gave commitments and extracted concessions from the other, was entirely lost. In Christianity, humans become entirely dependent upon God’s grace for their salvation.

3. Unity of God: Central to all Jewish theology is the claim “the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The unity of God was not a claim that the Christians could deny, but the appearance of Christ and the Holy Spirit made huge demands on the ingenuity of theologians, and split the Church on a number of occasions. Also, the hosts of angels and saints massively exceeded the Jewish view of heaven.

4. History: to the Christian mind, the culmination of history was the incarnation. For Paul and John’s Gospel in particular, the Kingdom is established and Christ is fully present in the world. History ceased to unfold. By contrast, the Jewish understanding of God’s requirements—revealed in their history—continued to develop. The Christians regarded their revelation as an absolute truth, one to be safeguarded from all doubt or disputation. It might be illuminated by philosophy, but it was not to be questioned.

With the ousting of the Jewish Law from Christianity, the loss of good works as a precondition of God’s mercy, the appearance of two divinities alongside the One God, and the totally unexpected character of the Messiah, the connection between orthodox and Christian Judaism began to disintegrate. While initially the Palestinian Jews tolerated the new sect (Acts 5:34–39), the relationship quickly soured. Paul reports being punished by the synagogues (2 Corinthians 11:24). James, the brother of Jesus, who headed the Jerusalem church, was martyred in 62 AD by the Jews—an event which gave many orthodox Jews a bad conscience (Josephus Jewish Antiquities 20:200–201; Chadwick 1967, p18). After his death, the other disciples fled Jerusalem. When the Jewish War with Rome broke out in 66 AD, the Christians appear to have played no part in the conflict. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, one of the main physical links between Jews and Christians was broken. By 85 AD, a formal anathema became part of synagogue liturgy: “May the Nazarenes and heretics be suddenly destroyed and removed from the Book of Life” (Chadwick 1967, p21). Thereafter, Christianity would be primarily a phenomenon of Rome’s Hellenistic east, little influenced by the transformation of Judaism under the rabbis. After 70 AD, Jews and Christians had continued on next page
Paul

Paul, more than any of the disciples, provided the basis for a Christian community based on faith in Christ, independent of Judaism and Jewish Law. His ideas about salvation and faith did not come from Jesus (whom he never met) or from the young church (of which he was initially a zealous persecutor). Rather, they came in his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, and the overwhelming entrance of Christ into his life.

All of Paul’s thought is marked by the division between life with Christ and life without, and he draws a sharp line between those that have “put on Christ” and those that have not. Salvation cannot be achieved by human effort alone: only the direct intervention of Christ could save Man from destruction. Without Christ’s aid, all human life was superfluous and misguided (indeed, potentially sinful, as Paul’s persecutions had been).

For Paul, Christ not only initiated universal redemption but was also the path to salvation. God had, in the person of Christ, become man so that Man might become God\(^{15}\). The Christian has to follow Christ, dying to the world of flesh—subject to sin and suffering—in order to be reborn in the spirit united with Christ: “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”\(^{16}\) In entering the Christian community—through baptism and symbolic rebirth—the believer not only became like God but part of God: “he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him”\(^{17}\).

\(^{15}\) Romans 8:2–4

\(^{16}\) Romans 6:3–11

\(^{17}\) 1 Corinthians 6:17. Paul’s concern with the spirit illustrates the influence of Greek thought from the very beginnings of Christianity. Paul’s division of body and spirit is not a Jewish one, but Greek. For the Biblical Jews, a person is made up of flesh and blood (nefesh, a term usually translated as ‘soul’). Nefesh was responsible for the body’s vitality and, indirectly love, hate, appetites, impulses, and all striving and purposefulness (Bultmann 1958, p52). Because nefesh animated the body, it was mortal and died with the body. Consequently, when Palestinian Jews of Jesus’ time discussed resurrection, it was in terms of a bodily restoration.

Contemporary Greeks by contrast believed that a person was made up of body and psukhē (also translated as ‘soul’, and one term used in the original Greek New Testament to render nefesh). The psukhē was immortal and went to Hades after death; the body belonged to the changeable world, and was subject to decay and eventual death. Under the influence of the Hellenistic philosophers, the body and psukhē came to be seen in a dualistic opposition, in which the psukhē belonged to an intrinsically higher order of existence, and that in life, it was ‘imprisoned’ within the body. According to the philosophers, salvation came from liberating the soul from the body. Consequently, the Jewish idea of a bodily resurrection was repulsive to the Greeks. Under the Greek influence, the Christian resurrection was... continued on next page
Paul’s experience of God’s power, his expectation of God’s kingdom, and his belief in the need for spiritual rebirth, led him to regard human activity that did not lead to Christ as secondary. Although Paul’s letters show that he was asked for guidance on social issues, there is a sense in his replies that the questions are unimportant to him because, with the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom, everything would be changed. Although intended for specific circumstances, his advice came to be taken as general principles of behaviour, mandated by God, permanently marking Christian ideas about life in society.

In general, his advice was intended to keep his converts tranquil and focussed on God until Christ returned. For instance, when asked whether a married person should seek divorce before the Kingdom, Paul responded that a Christian’s focus should be God, undistracted by worldly matters. “The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.” It would be better, says Paul, if the single remained unmarried and celibate, but those that could not control themselves should marry (in case they sinned or become distracted by sex). Those that were married should remain so (unless it led to marital strife) because divorce is not pleasing to God. But, stressed Paul, marital status is not important: what matters is faith in Christ.

For similar reasons, relations with the state were secondary to faith in God. He told his congregations that, until Christ’s return, Christians were to lead blameless lives and live according to whatever law they had, whether Roman, Greek or Jewish, obeying just rulers. Children were to obey their parents, wives their husbands, slave their masters, citizens their rulers.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Paul also advised people to remain in whatever social state they found themselves: slaves should not run away or actively seek their freedom (unless they were offered freedom, in

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18 For instance 1 Corinthians 15:51
19 1 Corinthians 7:32–34
20 For instance Romans 13:1–7
21 Ephesians 6:1–9, Colossians 3:20–4:1, 1 Timothy 5:1–2
22 Romans 13:1–2
which case they should take it\textsuperscript{23}). People should focus on God, not worry about social advancement or fighting court cases\textsuperscript{24}. Human society was secondary to worship of God.

Paul’s most important positive contribution to the idea of community is that, once dead to the world of flesh and reborn into the spirit, Christians becomes part of the ‘Body of Christ’. Just as a human being is made of flesh and spirit, so too is the Christian community: the baptised form the body and Christ is the spirit that animates it.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so is it with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many\textsuperscript{25}

Paul also asserts that, since the intervention of Christ, the old social distinctions are no longer relevant: God loves all of his creations, regardless of nationality, intelligence, strength, social status or beauty\textsuperscript{26}. The only things that distinguish people within the community are the gifts bestowed on them by God: the capacity for healing, wisdom, miracles, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and so on\textsuperscript{27}—although he cautions Christians not to be too proud of these abilities, for they all come from the Holy Spirit, and are given for the common good of the community. Once admitted to the Christian community, believers’ behaviour was to be in imitation of Christ\textsuperscript{28}. But for Paul, who never met Jesus, this meant the example of Christ on the cross: sacrifice, suffering and universal compassion. In contrast to contemporary Hellenistic philosophy, which defined virtue in terms of individual character, Paul defined Christian virtues in terms of service to others: love, compassion, sacrifice, suffering, humility, forgiveness and patience for others\textsuperscript{29}. “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.”\textsuperscript{30}

Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones,
holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.31

As members of the body of Christ, believers became part of a single organism and expressions of a collective Christian identity; something with no parallel in the classical world. Within this commune—which later writers would regard as a reflection of the kingdom of heaven—believers emulated Christ, subordinating their desires to the good of others and the will of God.

People became members of the ‘body of Christ’ through baptism and were bound together by God’s love. What sustained the Christian body was the Lord’s Supper. This is an event that Paul has little to say about32. Its significance was explained by the Gospel most consistent with Paul’s vision: John. Like Paul, John believed that the faithful are part of Christ, but he also says that in eating the bread and drinking the wine, the Christian community takes Christ into themselves. Christ is simultaneously in them and they in Christ.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man [Christ] and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”33

John says that Christ is the ‘bread of life’ which gives a person eternal life with God, while faith in Christ satisfied the thirst of the soul for salvation34. Paul too says that eating the ‘bread and blood’ sustains the body of Christ.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.35

31 Colossians 3:11–15
32 Paul mentions the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 9:23–26, but appears to treat it as a memorial or—as the Greek term eukharistia means—a thanksgiving.
33 John 6:53–56
34 John 6:32–35
35 1 Corinthians 10:16–17
Early Christian ideas about community

In ‘dying to the world’ and being ‘reborn in the spirit’, early Christian thought sharply separated the world with Christ from the world without. Correspondingly, Apostolic Christianity had two general notions of community—spiritual and material—and therefore two views of communication (the means by which the Christian community was brought together and maintained). The ‘material’ society involved Christians acting for the good of others within their community, emulating Christ’s example on the cross and becoming Christ in their actions. Life in the community in this sense is the practice of virtue, although virtue meant service to others, rather than the Hellenistic perfection of character. In the mundane world, this community was sustained by teaching the Law and Gospels, which provided continuing instruction and examples of virtue.

In the spiritual sense, communication is akin to the spirit that binds together and animates the flesh of body. The Christian’s entry into this body begins with God’s revelation and the response of faith in the believer. In baptism, the Christian dies with Christ and is reborn into him, becoming the body of Christ. Christ himself simultaneously fills each individual and the body of the church. The body is sustained through participation in the Eucharist, in which Christ is the food and drink of the soul. Communication is thus the mystical participation of the faithful in Christ. Unlike the ‘material’ notion of community, this involves no activity as such, but simply the presence of Christ. Because Christianity placed priority on the spirit over the body, it was this second, passive concept of community that became ascendant in later Christian thought.

STOIC INFLUENCES ON CHRISTIAN IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNITY

As Christianity expanded into the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, it became the de facto rival of two groups—the mystery religions and the philosophers. Although the Church gathered much symbolism and ritual from the mysteries, the cults appear to have contributed nothing to the idea of community life36. Far more important were the philosophers.
Questions of divinity, ethics, the good life, virtue, and the reasons for suffering were all core concerns of Hellenistic philosophers long before Christianity appeared. By the first century AD, many philosophical terms and concepts had become commonplace in religious discussions. As Christ's return became delayed, the Church had to mount a more detailed defence of the apostle's claims, and its arguments and categories began to show many similarities with those of the philosophers. The fusion of philosophy and Christianity was made easier because Paul and John in particular used terms consistent with contemporary

other mysteries: the mystery of Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection quickly became the central message of Christianity.

Paul explicitly and repeatedly refers to the 'mystery' of Christ's resurrection, and the promise of the afterlife for his followers. “Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment ... at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:51–52). “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Corinthians 4:1). See also Ephesians 3:2–5 & 5:32, Colossians 2:2, 1 Timothy 3:16, Romans 11:25. The Greek churches retained the term *mysterion* to refer to the central saving event and the Christian liturgy generally. Initiates incorporated into Christianity much of the other mysteries, such as symbols from other cults used to signify death, renewal and resurrection. See Shelton 1988, pp12ff, for other parallels between Christianity and the mysteries. Like the mysteries, initiation into the Church became increasingly complex: instruction in the later empire typically took two to three years of study. Baptism became transformed from a simple immersion to a more complex rite involving exorcisms, anointing with oils, giving salt, marking with the cross, oaths, and affirmations (Brox 1994, pp94–100). While Christianity made no secret of its message, like the mysteries, only initiates were permitted to witness the central event, the Eucharist. Because of these parallels, pagans and Christians accused one another of importing and copying their ceremonies. Tertullian described Mithraism as “a satanic plagiarism of Christianity” because some of its rites recalled the Christian sacraments (In The works of the Emperor Julian vol I, p348). Pagans in the fourth century said much the same about the parallels between the vigils for the yearly death and rebirth of Attis and the Christian Easter observances which were held around the same time each year (Chadwick 1967, p25 n1). The mysteries would exist alongside both the state religions and Christianity until the mid-third century, when they declined as increasing strife and the deteriorating economic situation robbed the mysteries of the immigrant worshippers that had been their lifeblood.

Initially the Church appears to have regarded the philosophers as rivals—Paul for example criticises the “foolish men of philosophy” (I Corinthians 1:18–23). However, later generations came to believe that, far from being a threat, God had given philosophy to the Greeks, just as he gave the Law to the Jews, to train them and bring them to Christ.

Christianity was far from alone in its appropriation of philosophy. Between the second and fifth centuries AD, there was a strong convergence of philosophy and all types of religious thought (Brown 1971, p64). The surviving Gnostic and hermetic literatures show how avidly people drew on Greek philosophy to solve their problems.

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philosophy (although their immediate sources were probably Hellenised Jewish beliefs rather than Greek philosophers).

When Christianity emerged from its Judean nucleus, the Roman Empire’s chief philosophers were the Epicureans and the Stoics. While Christianity adopted a few maxims from the Epicureans, assimilation was impossible: the Epicureans denied the existence of all gods or divine punishments or any type of afterlife; they preached that everything was composed of material atoms and there was no spirit; and they said that there was nothing to fear in death, for all it involved was the rearrangement of atoms.

Even a brief parade of Christian notables from the second century onwards illustrates the influence that philosophy and the classical education program had on Christian thought. Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165 AD) studied under a Stoic, a Pythagorean, and an Aristotelian, before settling on Platonism. He would be influential in equating Plato’s God with the God of the Bible (Chadwick 1967, p75). Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215 AD), one of the early Church’s foremost theologians, believed that if Christianity was to be more than a religion for the uneducated, it had to come to terms with Greek philosophy: Christians must not “fear philosophy as children fear a scarecrow” (in Dodds 1965, p106). Clement also used philosophy to attack the Gnostics—the greatest threat to Christianity in his day. While the Stoic-trained orator Tertullian (c.160–c.230 AD) savagely rejected the philosophising of Christianity—“What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?”—he had to acknowledge that many saw philosophy and Christianity as related. Origen (c.185–254 AD), the most important Christian philosopher before Augustine, remarked “No man could practice true piety without philosophising” (Markus 1974, p47). Origen shared a teacher with Plotinus, and it was Plotinus’ Neoplatonism that provided the basis for the theology and philosophy of Augustine (354–430 AD).

Christianity was open to philosophy because for some two hundred years beforehand the Jews—particularly the large community in Alexandria—had used Greek philosophy to illuminate their religion. The process of Hellenisation had been accelerated by the broad dispersion of Jewish communities in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean. The Jewish use of philosophy presumably began in Alexandria around 250 BC with the translation of the Bible into Greek: a task that required considerable scholarly resources. After that, Jewish literature, particularly originating from Egypt, shows marked philosophical tendencies: the Fourth Book of Maccabees deals explicitly with Greek philosophical questions. Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon introduce the divine character Sophia, the Wisdom of God (Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–8:1); just as the Stoics believed that the different pagan gods were aspects of the Logos, so Wisdom appears to be an aspect of God, eternal and existing with him before Creation (Ecclesiasticus also identifies Wisdom with the Law personified.) But most influential in Christian thought was the Jewish philosopher Philo (c.20 BC–c.50 AD), who forged a synthesis of Platonism and Judaism. Just as the god of the Platonists was the author of the Ideas of which the world is just a corrupt image, so Philo sees the relationship between God and the world being mediated by conceptions such as Angel, Spirit, Wisdom, and Word (Eiselen et al 1929, pp1066–1067)—of which the most important was Logos (Reason or Word). All are persons, but none are distinct from God, a concept that was important in the later formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.
Stoicism by contrast presented far more opportunities for Christian thinkers. The New Testament shows many suggestive parallels, although it is not possible to identify specific Stoic influences in more than a handful of passages, and even these are probably second-hand from Jewish sources. By far the most important point in the New Testament for introducing Stoic concepts was the use of Logos opening in the opening of John’s Gospel.

In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.\(^\text{38}\)

It is far from clear whether John’s use of Logos reflects a Jewish or Stoic influence\(^\text{39}\) but, whatever its source, the identification of Christ with the Logos—along with parallels between the Holy Spirit (\textit{Pneuma Agiou}) and Stoics \textit{pneuma}\(^\text{40}\)—provided Greeks with a familiar universal divinity, pervading the \textit{kosmos} and present in every person. That Christ

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\(^{38}\) John 1:1–5. A Stoic would have found little to complain of in the opening chapter of John’s Gospel.

\(^{39}\) Under the influence of Hellenism, Jewish philosophy had come to treat the Word (\textit{Logos}) of God as an autonomous personality, although not distinct from God. So, in Genesis God called things into creation by the power of his Word: “God said ‘let there be light’. And there was light.” This may have been the immediate source of John’s opening lines. The Wisdom of Solomon, written in Alexandria around 50BC, introduces the character \textit{Sophia}, the Wisdom of God, with attributes strikingly similar to John’s Logos.

For in her [God’s Wisdom] there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well. (Wisdom 7:22–8.1)

\(^{40}\) In everyday Greek, \textit{pneuma} means simultaneously the life-substance, the soul, and the air we breathe. For the Stoics, the \textit{pneuma} (\textit{spiritus} in Latin) was the divine breath or divine fire, which was the principle of life. the Stoics taught that the world would end in a divine fire, \textit{Pneuma}, which would simultaneously destroy and renew the world—a concept that found correspondence with the Christian’s idea of Judgement Day.
was the Logos explained how he could be immanent in the Church and fully operational in the world, as well as the agent of Creation (something the gospels do not explain). That each member of the body is filled with the Spirit, and the corporate body is pervaded by Christ has strong affinities with Stoic thought. Paul’s insistence on the essential equality of all people, regardless of social status or intelligence or nationality—an entirely un-Jewish claim—bore obvious similarities with citizenship in the Stoic kosmopolis.

In the first century AD, Stoic concepts of divinity were commonplace: the kosmos possesses an intrinsic rational order; this order is the Logos, Reason; the Logos is God; all human beings possess a spark of the Logos, giving them their rational faculties; because all people share in the Logos, all men are brothers and all are sons of God; each person is due respect as a bearer of the divine spark, regardless of social status or nationality; the best life is one in accordance with the Logos (both as reason and the order of the kosmos); the Logos establishes the natural law which is observed in some measure by all people; the Logos calls on all people to live together and work for the good of all as citizens of the kosmopolis, the world-city. Under the identification of Christ with the Logos, all of these became Christian beliefs. None however owe anything to the apostles’ original message of redemption.

From the Stoic probably came the Christian concern with will (which would become central to Augustine’s theology, as I will discuss later). A person’s will was not an issue in the New Testament. Anticipating the almost immediate establishment of the Kingdom, all that people needed to do was affirm their faith in Christ and they would be saved. However, when Christ did not return as anticipated, Christians found themselves having to wait and endure circumstance, which began to test their faith—particularly after they began to be systematically persecuted. They not only had to make a choice for Christ over sin, but they increasingly had to remain determined to live a Christian life. The Roman Stoic doctrine of will provided a method for stiffening Christian resolve. The Stoics taught that everything that happened to a person was pre-ordained and unalterable. All a person could do was either accommodate themselves to their circumstances or rail uselessly against fate. A person’s happiness therefore turned on their decision to accept what was fated and control any irrational emotional impulses.

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41 Stoicism was not the only doctrinal source of equality; many of the mystery cults also emphasised brotherhood that bore no relationship to social status in the world outside.

42 There were brief persecutions of Christians under Nero in 68AD, and again sporadically in the late second century. For the most part however, Christians were tolerated, and government officials observed Trajan’s advice to Pliny, directing him not to seek out Christians and not to punish those that apostatised. (Pliny the Younger, Letters 10:96, 97)

43 The concept of will as a part or motivator in human action was a late development in philosophy. It does not really appear in Plato for instance: instead, he suggests that people act based on knowledge of what is good, and only behave badly out of ignorance. After him, the Greeks tend to base motivation on knowledge and intellect—for example, the Greek...continued on next page
The Stoics may also have influenced the development of the characteristically Christian dual identity. The Stoics taught that, because all people contained a spark of the Logos, all were brothers and citizens of the *kosmopolis*, and so had ethical responsibilities to one another. But, by contrast, in the presence of the divine, each person was an individual. Living a good life involved both participating in the community and withdrawing from it to contemplate the Logos and understand what Reason required. As I will discuss later, Christianity began to show a similar dual identity: while the faithful waited in this world they were members of the Body of Christ, sublimating their individuality within its corporate personality; but before God each Christian was an individual.

Despite many parallels, there were limits to the incorporation of Stoic philosophy into Christianity. Stoicism was primarily an intellectual quest, hence its cultivation of reason and the control of the emotions. But, for the Church, reason alone was not sufficient to grasp the Christian truth, even when the Stoics supplemented it with ethics: faith (*pistis*) was also required. *Pistis* however was a major stumbling block because, for philosophers, it was the lowest form of knowledge: below reason, below experience, below opinion. The search for truth by Christians and Stoics was also ultimately different: the Christian sought illumination in the Bible and the passionate embrace of Christ. The Logos was the saving Word of God, not divine Reason. And belief—not reason—was the basis of salvation. These were claims no Stoic could accept.

By the mid-second century, the Stoics were finished as a living intellectual force. Although their works continued to influence Christian thought for another two hundred years, their main importance was in opening up Christianity to philosophy, providing it with a terminology and a method for examining and explaining the Christian message. This would be crucial in the incorporation of Platonism into Christianity from the third century.

**THE CRISES OF THE THIRD CENTURY AND THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

The appearance of Christianity corresponded to a period of increasing anxiety in Roman society. Although the crisis eventually placed control of the Empire in Christian hands,

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term equivalent to our verb ‘to will’, *boulethai*, has connections with words associated with counsel, deliberation and judgement (Sharples 19972–73). Today we still refer to someone with a strong will as ‘determined’. Romans by contrast were less intellectual and leaned towards volition: people act because they *chose* to act (*voluntas*) and want to act (*velle*).

Social conditions in the Empire between the second and fifth centuries are a subject of some dispute. In part, this is inevitable when dealing with such a huge institution, stretching from...
the increasing misery and despair of the third and fourth centuries changed the Church’s earlier optimism and ideas of community.

A sense of spiritual anxiety first appeared in the mid-second century⁴⁵. People felt increasingly cut off from their communities and their gods. Traditional concerns seemed

Spain to Mesopotamia, and embracing maybe one hundred million people at its height. Some authors suggest that Britain and the African provinces reached their economic peak in the third and fourth centuries AD at the same time as northern and eastern borders were being overwhelmed (Cary 1960, p751, Brown 1971, p34). Grant (1997) nominates the third and fourth centuries, rather than the republican or early imperial periods, as ‘the climax of Rome’. The main source I have used in this section to describe social and economic conditions within the Empire is Dodds’ The Age of Anxiety (1965). Although it has been criticised, it still provides a better explanation for the rise of Christianity than subsequent more-optimistic estimates of the Late Roman Empire.

⁴⁵ There is evidence that the new unsettled mood was not solely a product of the failing political and economic climate, and that the urban population felt less at home in the great cities of the Mediterranean that earlier, when the Empire was still secure from invasion and internal stability was overseen by strong emperors (Dodds 1965, p36). The crisis was in the first place a spiritual one. Increased trade and unprecedented opportunities for travel amongst even the moderately well-off lead to an erosion of local traditions. Barriers of wealth were sapped as long-term economic stability led to economic growth and to a new urban ‘middle’ class that sat ambiguously between the peasantry and traditional ruling orders. The aristocrats also lost focus: their loyalty no longer went to a local, tangible polis, but to either an outsized world-embracing empire or the abstract kosmopolis of the Stoics. The universe of Rome grew unbearably large, and local affairs and individual lives were dwarfed in comparison (Dodds 1965, Brown 1971). “After generations of apparently satisfying public activity, it was as if a current that had passed smoothly from man’s inner experience into the outside world had been cut. The warmth drained from the familiar environment. Traditional concerns seemed trivial, if not oppressive.” (Brown 1971, p51).

The traditional religious bulwarks had been undermined by the philosophers during the previous two centuries, and provided increasingly less support for the population. Under the influence of the Stoics and Platonists, the traditional gods had been displaced by something resembling monotheism. But their remote and impersonal God lacked the homely human qualities of the traditional Olympians. And the gods of old Rome had become enormously inflated as deities of the Empire; they become less familiar and comforting. As the divine withdrew from the world, the material world—and human life with it—became devalued (Dodds 1965, p33).

Uprooted and cast adrift, people increasingly sought out personal significance in an impersonal universe by turning to philosophy and the mystery cults. There was a marked spread of the oriental cults in the first and second centuries AD, as people sought a sense of place and belonging that the state religion no longer provided. There was also a notable decline in the public religious festivals from 170AD. Handbooks on astrology, magic and dream interpretation proliferated (Brown 1971, p63). There was a major revival in the traditional Greek oracle sites in the second century (Brown 1971, p51; Dodds p55–56). Perhaps...continued on next page
trivial or irrelevant in the vastness of the empire and the kosmos. Goodness and beauty drained out of the world; pessimism become commonplace. Distress grew after 170AD when the Empire was repeatedly invaded. The Empire responded by raising new armies and paying huge bribes to threatening German tribes and the Persians. While these measures prevented immediate invasion, they also emptied the treasury, forced up taxes, and provoked political instability, weakening the Empire within.

In the mid-third century, the empire was ravaged by plague and faced unprecedented invasions. For nearly thirty years, the Emperors controlled less than a third of the territory claimed by Rome at its height. The cost of maintaining the army, the loss of vital grain supplies and inept economic management led to runaway inflation. The currency was grossly debased and attempts at price-fixing failed. The salaries of soldiers and government employees, on whom the needs of the time fell most heavily, were simply eliminated. Mutiny reached plague proportions. Between 247 and 270AD, thirty new emperors were proclaimed; only one of them died in his own bed.

After nearly fifty years of crisis, political, social and economic order was temporarily restored by Diocletian (reigned 284–305). He doubled the army’s size to six hundred thousand, and increased the imperial bureaucracy to serve the army’s gigantic administrative and

46 In 251AD an enormous Gothic invasion crossed the Danube, annihilating the Roman army and emperor sent to repel it. Unchecked, the Goths ravaged the Balkans and reached Byzantium in 259AD. In the east, Shapur of Persia took advantage of a four-way contest for the Principate in 256AD to capture all of Syria, including the Empire’s third largest city, Antioch. In 260AD, Shapur took prisoner the hastily appointed emperor Valerian and his army of twenty thousand. Barbarian longboats from the Crimea harried the undefended cities of Greece and Anatolia in 253 and 268AD—with disastrous results for the supply of grain to Greece, the Balkans and Asia Minor. The Saxons ravaged Britain, and the Franks plundered their way across Gaul and Spain. The Alamanni Goths reached Milan before being halted in 268AD. From 250AD, plague debilitated the empire (Brown 1971, p24; Cary 1960, 721–730; Grant 1997).

47 Between 258 and 275AD, prices in most parts of the empire rose by an estimated one thousand per cent. (Grant 1994, p47)

48 In Gaul and Britain, rebel generals broke away to establish empires of their own. In the East, the Roman satellite of Palmyra, which had initially defended Rome from Shapur, asserted its independence, and for twenty years held the eastern third of the Empire, from Armenia to Egypt.

49 Brown 1971, p24
financial needs. The cost of paying, feeding and equipping this huge force was ruinous. In many places, the army reverted to requisitioning supplies directly from local farmers and peasants. Diocletian’s taxes crippled the Empire, creating widespread depression and economic misery. To secure vital trades, he and successive emperors forced people and their children to remain in the one profession for life. Cities in the West emptied as people tried to avoid imperial tax collectors and army recruiters. Although Diocletian’s economic reforms prevented inflation and economic chaos, the fact remained that the Empire was virtually incapable of paying for its own survival when faced with invasion.

The popular conversion to Christianity

At the popular level, Christianity offered many benefits in troubled times. In a world where life was repeatedly threatened and increasingly devalued, the promise of a better life was highly attractive. Christianity also removed a great deal of complexity from contemporary religion. In the preceding seven hundred years, Greek and Roman religious importations produced a bewildering mass of alternatives: adherents could pile cults on mysteries on philosophies, yet still they felt insecure. Christianity removed the burden. The believer made a single choice for a single god and accepted a few statements as fact, and their salvation was assured. In an ‘Age of Anxiety’, such a simple, sweeping demand abolished confusion and uncertainty.

But the greatest attraction of the Church between 240 and 320 AD was the material and financial support it gave to its members. Organised charity in the economic chaos of the later third century was probably the single most potent cause of the Christian success. The alms collected by the Church from the Christian community were offered up to God by the bishop, then distributed amongst those of the congregation in need—and to them alone.

Almsgiving was a deeply religious act: the collection was a sacrifice to God and, once

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50 Brown 1971, p24. Diocletian’s army was the largest standing military force ever assembled in the ancient world.

51 The choice between mysteries and Christianity was probably simplified by the collapse of the cults. As the economic crisis deepened in the third century, trade and immigrants declined, robbing the mysteries of their financial lifeblood.

52 Christian charity was practised on a scale unheard of in the ancient world. Eusebius reports that, by 250 AD, the Church in Rome supported over fifteen hundred widows and poor people (Ecclesiastical History 6.43:11). Even the Church’s opponents, such as the last pagan emperor, Julian, admitted the Christians’ success was due to, “their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives”. Pagans, he frankly admitted, did not measure up to the support the Christians offered their own. (Julian, To Arsacius High Priest of Galatia, Letters 22: 429d & 430d)
blessed, became part of the 'loving-kindness' of God to his people. God looked after his own. While the Church grew immensely wealthy, this wealth remained within the Christian community: those that wanted access to it had to convert.

During the emergencies of the mid-third century, when plagues, invasions, and rioting affected most areas of the Empire, the Church proved itself to be the only organisation in the towns that could provide any form of public services. It looked after the burial of the dead, organised food supplies, ran hospitals and ambulance services. When barbarians arrived at the gates, the local bishop was often the person who handled negotiations on behalf of the town. In parts of the Empire, the Church was the social organisation.

In the worsening climate, the Church’s understanding of man’s relationship with God and the nature of the resurrection became altered. Initially Christianity had been rapturously positive. But the delayed return of Christ, persecutions, and the deteriorating social conditions undermined this optimism. The balance of Christian attention shifted from John and Paul’s message of triumph to the more watchful pose of the Synoptic Gospels. They

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53 Brown 1971, p67
54 Brown 1971, p67 & 110
55 The Church’s importance in local administration is reflected in the role it was given after the first Christian emperor, Constantine (reigned 312–337), came to power. From about 320, bishops gained some judicial and administrative responsibilities in their cities (Markus 1974, p144, Brown 1971, p89, Meyerhoff 1989, p14), and Constantine’s son Constantius II (reigned 337–361), made them an integral part of the imperial bureaucracy, granting the Church immunity from many taxes. By 325, Greek churches at least were organised along the same lines as the government administration, and covered the same territory (Chadwick 1967, p131). The Church gained autonomy from the State, having received vast estates and donations from Constantine and Constantius II, and ecclesiastical courts became independent of the civil system.

56 After the sporadic attacks of the second century, persecution became more frequent in the third. Under Decius (reigned 249–251), it briefly became official policy. Decius’s aim was principally to deprive the Church of its leaders and organisation—bishops, presbyters and deacons. Similar purges occurred from 250 to 300 AD (Dodds 1965, p108). The greatest and last of the persecutions began in the fourth century. As part his efforts to secure the army’s loyalty, Diocletian made observance of the old Roman religions and the cult of the emperors mandatory: refusal to do so was regarded as treason. Dissenting groups were brutally suppressed, beginning with the Manichees sometime between 295 and 300 AD (Markus 1974, p88), ending them as a religious force within the Empire. In 303, Diocletian unleashed the Great Purge of the Christians that would last until the death of his successor Gallienius in 310. This was much more wide-ranging than Decius’ purge, and any Christian of whatever degree was liable to torture and execution.
announced that, while Christ had entered the world, the battle between good and evil was not yet complete. The world, far from being fully redeemed, was still a hostile place for the faithful. The Synoptics placed greater stress than Paul on observing God’s law, along with the terrifying punishments God would mete out to the disobedient. This view tended to emphasise humanity’s ongoing alienation from God, rather than reconciliation with him. It also stressed humanity’s essential unworthiness, its inability to experience God without the intercession of Christ, and its utter dependence on God for salvation.

With this shift, from reunion with God to continued alienation, developed the most characteristic feature of Christian social thought. Since the reconciliation with God had only been begun, not completed, the division between unbelievers and the faithful was not so sharp as Paul had believed. Christians found themselves caught in transition between those two worlds: they lived in the world and in heaven. Their status in each was quite different however, and correspondingly the Christian identity was split in two. On earth, Christians sublimated their individual desires to the good of others within the body of the Church. In heaven, every person was loved as an individual and was untouched by social relations. (Marks gospel says that, “when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”) As conditions deteriorated, the gulf between a Christian’s spiritual and worldly selves widened: the more they sought entry into heaven, the more alienated they felt in the world.

[Christians] dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships and strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland foreign ... their existence on earth, their citizenship in heaven.

There were two main responses from Christians, both with consequences for ideas about community: first, the rejection of the world and with it the rise of extreme asceticism and, second, flight from the world and the appearance of hermits and monasteries.

**Asceticism**

Alienation came to be experienced as a painful, unbridgeable gap between the inner life and the outer world. In the Greek world—which identified the outer world with the body and inner experience with the soul and, after Plato, treated the soul as ‘higher’ and ‘purer’ than the body—the deepening crisis was reflected in a breach between body and soul, and the subjugation of the former. The deeper the spiritual crisis, the greater the gap between people’s inner and outer lives became, and the more the body had to be subjugated to the

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57 Mark 12:25
58 In Markus 1974, p30
spirit. From 200 AD, writers of all religious and philosophical persuasions expressed increasing disgust with their own bodies.

Christian profound revulsion for the human body was extreme. Believing that the body’s life was the soul’s death, they took extraordinary and gruesome vengeance upon their bodies. They locked themselves in packing cases; weighed themselves with heavy chains; gave up food for the entire forty days of Lent; squatted on pillars for years. Complete sexual abstinence was common; some men castrated themselves. Some equated marriage with adultery, and the early Church classed it with murder and apostasy. In part, what drove this frenzy of self-hatred was persecution—many Christians had sought martyrdom as the ultimate sign of faith, but after the persecutions ended, people turned to mortification as a test of faith. (Christians described this frenzy of mortification as askēsis, ‘training’—teaching the body to know its subordinate place, and training the soul

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59 Plotinus (205–270) writes “everywhere we hear of [the soul] as in bitter and miserable durance in body, a victim to troubles and desires and fears and all forms of evil, the body its prison or its tomb, the Cosmos is cave or cavern” (Enneads 4:8:3). His student Porphyry tells us “he was ashamed of having a body.” The Emperor Marcus Aurelius (reigned 160–180) called the body ‘clay and gore’: the soul was plunged into it as into a bath of dirty water (Meditations 3:3 and 8:24).

60 The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (200 AD) announces, “Woe to the flesh that hangs upon the soul! Woe to the soul that hangs upon the flesh!” (In Dodds 1965, p31 n1).

61 Dodds 1965, p33

62 Brown 1971, p98

63 Galen and Origen both testify that Christians abstained from sexual relations throughout their lives (In Dodds 1965, p32). The value of sexual abstinence and particularly virginity in Christianity appears to derive mostly from Paul and Gnostic influences. There is no support in the Gospels for it, except for one disputed passage (Matthew 19:10–12) where Jesus mentions eunuchs and sexual abstinence.

64 Eusebius reports with satisfaction that Origen attempted to castrate himself, although he may be relying on later anti-Origenist propaganda—Origen himself appears to have disapproved of the practice.

65 Dodds 1965, p33

66 Grant 1994, p221

67 Asceticism reflects the influence—in a grossly exaggerated form—of the Greek concept of sin in Christianity. For the Greeks, sin was an imperfection or a deficiency of aretē. Sin could therefore be resolved by purifying the soul through training and self-discipline (askēsis). This ‘training’ is purely an individual endeavour, undertaken for individual betterment.

By contrast, in Jewish thought, sin is guilt in the sight of God and others in society, and is the result of wrong action with respect to others. Consequently, a person could not rid themselves of their sin by their own efforts alone. Rather they had to atone for their...
to resist the temptations of the world. Askēsis had been a standard part of philosophical education since Aristotle, but for the Greeks its demands were moderate: eat only when hungry, sleep when tired, avoid drunkenness, practice self-control, have sex only for getting children and only within marriage).

Just as the physical body had to be subordinated to the human spirit, so too did the physical world have to be subordinated to the spiritual. From 200 AD, Christian thinkers began to condemn all of creation as evil, in contrast with God’s goodness. This extreme dualism is uncharacteristic of contemporary Hellenic thinkers—Stoics, Aristotelians and Platonists—and is probably Persian in origin. This dualism has the implication that God, being entirely good, must exist completely outside and separate from the created order, which was condemned as entirely evil: a belief that further separated the Creator from his creation. The doctrine had the effect of widening the gap between Heaven and Earth, humanity and God, body and soul—further deepening the spiritual angst.

Leaving the world: hermits and monks

Asceticism was one response to spiritual defilement; another was to abandon the world. The urban Hellenistic world—where most Christians lived—equated worldliness with city life. In the third century, many Christians came to believe that it was impossible to ‘die to the world’ and still remain in the cities. In response, they sought out lonely and desolate places. The ‘anchorite’ movement began in the east, but spread with astonishing speed. The movement took two forms.

In Syria, Armenia and Mesopotamia, the displaced became hermits, living in the desert or caves with wild animals. They broke flagrantly with the mores of contemporary society: dressed in animal skins, their matted hair and histrionic behaviour unsettled the Roman world. But despite their disturbing nature, they exerted a powerful attraction for ordinary urban Christians. By leaving the cities behind, they were believed to gain mysterious power,
able to confront the devil and address God directly in a way not open to ordinary people. From the outset, the Church struggled with the hermits because their behaviour was contrary to the Gospel’s demand for love, humility, and service. It was also easy for hermits to drop out of the Church altogether. The Syriac hermits were a disturbing and unruly movement for both society and the Church hierarchy, and the Church repeatedly tried to suppress them or incorporate them into the body of the Church.

By contrast, the second, Egyptian, form of withdrawal, saw Christians reject the wild individualism of the Syrians, and instead band together in the closed community of the desert monastery—an institution which was soon emulated around the Mediterranean. Instead of the ferocious and querulous behaviour of the hermits, the monks took a life of discipline and devotion marked out by prayer and manual labour. Their closed world, with its iron discipline, lead to a system of social order unparalleled in the Roman world, one which would become a vital social force in the chaos of the following centuries. In the East, the monks went out into the community, working in hospitals and food supply centres, burying the dead, tending the sick and wounded in times of plague or invasion. In the West however, the retreat into the monasteries was more thorough, and by the fourth century, the break with the outside almost complete: the monks formed a closed spiritual elite with little contact with the surrounding world.

Monasticism came to be regarded as the ideal form of Christian life. Hundreds of monasteries were founded, and there are numerous records of people, particularly the aristocracy, retiring to monasteries at their end of their lives in order to be closer to God. The monks became a ‘third order’ in Christianity, being neither priests nor laymen but dedicated to the worship of God. The monk represented the perfected Christian, completely subordinating themselves to God: giving up all worldly possessions, ambitions and comforts; submitting themselves to prayer, discipline and service. While they worked in the world, they were still separate from it—cut off by their vows of humility, poverty and celibacy, by routines of prayer and work, and their distinctive dress. Several medieval orders also imposed vows of silence, to further distance themselves from the world and be closer to God. While the monks and monasteries served the community, they were also cut off from it, alone before God (the terms ‘monk’ and ‘monastery’ come from the Greek monos ‘alone’). To the Christian virtues of suffering, service and love, the monasteries added one more: obedience. Although in part this was no more than an intensification of the Pauline demand for obedience, the rigidity of monastic obedience and the subordination of the individual was something new. As the basis of the monasteries’ strength, obedience was soon emulated throughout the Church.

71 Chadwick 1965, p178
72 Brown 1971, p110
Implications for communication

The second half of the third century, the Empire was incapable of ensuring security or peace; it was repeatedly ravaged by plague; runaway inflation destroyed the Roman economy; towns emptied to avoid imperial taxes and army recruiters. The Christian response of rejection and flight is simply an extreme recognition that the preconditions of society—security, peace, order, authority—had vanished.

Christian ideas of society focussed exclusively on the Christian community—the outside world was hostile and had no value for them. The two versions of community I described earlier—one based on mutual material aid, the other being the spiritual ‘body of Christ’—became more extreme. They met in the community of the monastery, in which monks:

[1] gave up family, friends, wealth, honours, and all things of value in the world
[2] took vows of celibacy, poverty, abstention and silence (denying the body)
[3] undertook strenuous labour (to discipline the body), usually in service of the community
[4] devoted themselves to prayer and meditation (giving attention to God), and
[5] lived under a code of rigid discipline and obedience (proper to the Pauline doctrine of obedience to authority).

Although love notionally remained the force that bound the Christian community together, discipline and obedience were the real keys to its survival. They secured the Church during persecutions and ensured vital social services when all others vanished. The shift from love to obedience is reflected in the way that God was perceived and portrayed in art: in the third century, the Loving father and the Good Shepherd give way to the Pantocrator, the awesome ruler of all, the almighty judge and emperor of the world. This was not a God of meekness and suffering, but one to which Christians owed unfailing obedience and submission.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEOPLATONISM

The appearance of Neoplatonism

In the deepening social and spiritual malaise, the philosophical schools that had dominated the Empire—Epicureans, Stoics and Sceptics—all failed. What took their place, and provided the escape from suffering and reunion with God so desperately sought in the late Roman world, was Neoplatonism. From the late third century, Platonists began a massive synthesis, combining key elements of all preceding schools with the metaphysics and religious themes of Plato’s middle and later dialogues. Aristotle’s metaphysical hierarchy was joined with Plato’s hierarchy of Forms, to form a great chain that linked all parts of
creation in a single hierarchy. The Stoic’s Nous was transformed into the Mind of the kosmos, which held the Platonic Ideas. Above all was the transcendent ‘One’: a development of the Demiurge of Timaeus and the Good of the Republic. All creation and values came from this transcendent First Principle, which existed outside change, time, or comparison. As it contemplated itself and its perfection, it brought forth in turn:

1. the Mind (Nous), which held the timeless, unchanging Ideas
2. the Soul (Psychē), which knew change and development
3. the Body (Phusis) of the kosmos, the material world.

The Neoplatonists understood this procession as an outwards flow from unity to multiplicity, timelessness to mutability. And since they regarded unity as perfection, this outwards impulse was also a downward descent, from absolute Good to its absence: a perfect point of light spreading outwards into the darkness. A second impulse saw creation return inwards and upwards. Plato had described how an image strove to grasp its Idea and perfect itself—an action he called ‘love’ (eros). In Neoplatonism, each level of creation loved the one above, and sought its completion in it. Thus the One is simultaneously the source and goal of all creation.

Neoplatonism offered escape from a world increasingly beset by political, military, economic and religious strife. Since the physical world was the furthest from perfection and the Good (and so was, by definition, the haunt of evil), salvation could be achieved through a return to the One. Through contemplation, the philosopher could turn inwards and upwards, grasping first the Platonic Ideas, then the Mind they existed in and, finally, rising to reunification with the One. In this moment, mysticism completed and surpassed rational contemplation: the line between observer and observed disappeared, and the philosopher participated in all parts of creation.

Neoplatonism completed the ancient estrangement of the individual soul from the social world. The Neoplatonists equated a person with their soul, which they said had become encased in flesh and cut off from the light and knowledge of the One. The task of philosophy was to free the soul from its prison in the body and the physical world (which included society). Entirely absent from Neoplatonism is the Stoic demand for participation in the community: indeed, society was regarded as actively harmful, for it shackled a person to the

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73 For instance, the fifth century Platonist, Macrobius wrote that “...all things follow in continuous succession, degenerating in a sequence [from God] to the very bottom of the series, [and so] the attentive observer will discover a connection of parts, from the Supreme God to the last dregs of things, mutually linked together and without a break”. (In Lovejoy 1948, p63)
senses, the body, illusion and a world deprived of goodness. The only way to attain enlightenment and reunification with the Divine was to turn inwards. Neoplatonism was widely taught from the late third century, influencing the theology and metaphysics of several religions. Once absorbed by the Christian Church, Platonic concepts pervaded Western thought another thousand years. Neoplatonic ideals of personal withdrawal, meditation, asceticism, silence, bodily denial, encounter with the Divine through contemplation, rejection of the physical world, and focus on the transcendental were dominant features of much of the Christian Church—particularly so in its more mystical Western form.

The incorporation of Platonism into Christianity

Even before the revival of Platonism, early Christian writers had been disposed to think in terms of archetypes and mystical participation. For instance:

1. as the Logos, Christ is both the agent and essence of creation: everything is in Christ and Christ is in everything.
2. God is fully present and undivided in the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. Paul describes Adam as a ‘type’ (tupos). All humanity participates in his sin and expulsion from Paradise, and knows death and suffering as a consequence. Creation also shares in the Fall.
4. Christ too is a type, but of humanity redeemed and perfected. The new spiritual humanity participates in Christ and shares in his righteousness.
5. The first generation of Christian writers in particular stressed that Christ’s passion and redemption encompassed all of humanity.
6. Because there is one Christ, there is one Universal Church, which is fully present in every individual church.

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74 Plotinus commands his followers to “turn from the things without to look within. The sum of things is within us” (Enneads 3:8:4).
75 In the east, where Plato’s original texts survived and were studied after the loss of the Western empire, Platonism maintained links with politics and ethics. In the medieval Latin west, where both Plato and Plotinus were only known indirectly through Augustine and Boethius, the mystical and rigorous aspects had the ascendancy.
76 John 1:1–4
77 Romans 5:12f
78 Romans 5:15–21
Of all of the ancient philosophical schools, Platonism was the best suited to this mode of thought. Its strong religious sense and strong moral demands likewise recommended Platonism to Christian thinkers. In its monotheism and its belief in God as the source of both creation and all that was good, its vision of divinity was closest to the Christians. From the late second century, Christian thinkers began to integrate Platonic philosophy within their faith, both for their own intellectual satisfaction and as a tool for explaining the Christian revelation to the Hellenistic world. Christian mysticism also came to be expressed in Neoplatonic terms. Christians did not regard Platonism merely as a convenient philosophical prop: it was understood as an expression of the Divine Wisdom (Logos), provided by God to illuminate and defend the Christian mysteries.

Fundamental Platonic principles now found corroboration and new meaning in the Christian context: the existence of a transcendent reality of eternal perfection, the

79 To take a single example of Platonism influencing Christian mysticism: in a passage of his *Confessions*, much quoted in the Middle Ages, Augustine records a conversation with his mother about the life of the saints in Heaven that shows striking parallels with Plotinus:

And when our conversation had reached such a point that the greatest delight of the bodily senses ... was not comparable with the joy of that future life, and indeed not even worthy of being remembered with it, we raised up our minds with ardent love to the Truth, Himself. Step by step, we passed through all those bodily things—through the sky itself, from which the sun and moon and stars shine down upon the earth. And we ascended so far in our inward contemplation, speaking and wondering in Thy ways, coming to the most spiritual parts of our minds and transcending them, that we reached the realm of unfailing abundance in which Thou feedest Israel eternally with the food of truth, and in which wisdom is life, the wisdom through which are made all those things which have been and which will be ... And while we were talking about it, and longing for it, we did touch it a little, with an all-out thrust of out hearts. And we sighed and left there the released first fruits of the spirit. And we came back to the sounds of our mouths, where spoken words have their beginning and end. (*Confessions* 9:10:24)

The parallels with Plotinus are strong here. The first sentence echoes Plotinus’s expectation that the spiritual life, close to God or the One, is unspeakably better than even the best of the physical world. Good is Truth, wisdom, mind and spirit. Augustine’s contact with God is achieved by rising through the body, then the mind, then the soul—finally touching the God for a brief moment, in which time and sensation are lost: an experience Plotinus describes in his own reunion with the One (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*). And like Plotinus, Augustine goes beyond the bounds of physical creation, passing ‘through the sky itself’ by turning *inwards*—an act which depends on the Platonic correspondence between the cosmos and the individual.

80 Socrates and Plato were seen as divinely inspired: “Christians before Christ” claims Tertullian. Clement argued that philosophy had been given to the Greeks as the Law had been given to the Jews, to prepare them for Christ. Augustine regarded Plato’s thought as “the most pure and bright of all philosophy”, in almost perfect accord with Christianity.
sovereignty of divine wisdom in the cosmos, the primacy of the spiritual over the material, the Socratic focus on the ‘tending of the soul’, the soul’s immortality and high moral imperatives, its experience of divine judgement after death, the importance of scrupulous self-examination, the admonition to control the passions and appetites in the service of the good and the true, the ethical principle that it is better to suffer an injustice rather than to commit one, the belief in death as a transition to more abundant life, the existence of a prior condition of divine knowledge now obscured in man’s limited natural state, the notion of participation in the divine archetype, the progressive assimilation of God as the goal of human aspiration.\textsuperscript{81}

By the fifth century, Christianity had absorbed—at its own fashion—the Neoplatonic metaphysics necessary to explain the nature of God, his love for creation, and the process of redemption. In the process however, Neoplatonism displaced earlier beliefs. God’s love, for instance, became the outflowing through which the One created the cosmos. God’s wisdom which had been spoken through the prophets and, in John’s Gospel, had been equated with the Christ, became the Logos or the Nous, the rational intellect that ordered creation, through which reconciliation with the One could be achieved. The physical universe was stripped of majesty and became despised as the realm of misery and evil, a trial for the spirit. Salvation was no longer rescue from sin but assimilation with God (effectively it became deification). Evil came to be understood not as the opposite of good, but merely its absence: either as the furthest point from the outflowing goodness of God, or else as the deliberate turning away of the soul from God\textsuperscript{82}. God himself became the eternal, impersonal Platonic Mind, existing outside time and beyond human thought, whose ‘unfailing abundance’ brings into existence all of creation through contemplation—“the Wisdom by which all things are made”\textsuperscript{83}.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{81} Tarnas 1991, p101–102
\item\textsuperscript{82} Evil came to have a legitimate place in creation. Indeed, it was a necessary component, the absence of good, which ultimately reflected the beneficence of God. Augustine writes that “In this universe, even what is called evil, when it is rightly ordered and kept in its place, commends the good more eminently, since good things yield greater pleasure and praise when compared to the bad things. For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil. What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good?” (\textit{Enchiridion} §11)
\item\textsuperscript{83} Augustine \textit{Confessions} 9:10:24 translated by Sheed. See also Dodds 1965, p111
\end{itemize}
Consequences for communication

Neoplatonism had little interest in society: it lacked the strong Stoic ethical demand of service to the community and others. The goal of Neoplatonism was to become God\(^{84}\) and live constantly in the intellectual realm\(^{85}\)—for Neoplatonists life in society imprisoned the soul in the body\(^{86}\).

As in all earlier Greek philosophy, the path to perfection was through virtue (\textit{arete})\(^{87}\), which the Neoplatonists divided into ‘political’ and ‘contemplative’\(^{88}\) (a borrowing from Aristotle’s \textit{Politics}). Neoplatonism’s political virtues were the four ‘cardinal’ virtues of earlier Greek philosophy—prudence, courage, temperance and justice—but their function became largely negative: to moderate the passions and direct people to act according to reason. The purpose of the political virtues was not to serve others, but rather to create “a social organisation which will not inflict injuries upon its members”\(^{89}\). There are no benefits to be had from such a society, only the avoidance of misery. For Neoplatonists, the contemplative virtues—which included knowledge, wisdom and understanding—were more important as they helped a person free their soul from the body and sin. Achieving this allowed a person to live undisturbed by social relations or external events.

\(^{84}\) Plotinus \textit{Enneads} 6:7:36, 6:9:9, Porphyry \textit{Sentences} 32:25:9

\(^{85}\) Plotinus \textit{Enneads} 4:8:8

\(^{86}\) Describing the descent of the soul from the intellectual realm to the physical body, Plotinus says, “there comes a stage at which [souls] descend from the universal to become partial and self-centred ... [it] is a deserter from totality ... its vision is no longer set in the Intellect; it is a partial thing, isolated, weakened, full of care, intent upon the fragment; severed from the whole, it nestles in one form of being; for this it abandons all else, entering into and caring for only the one, for a thing buffeted about by a worldful of things: thus it has drifted away from the universal and ... it administers the particular; it is caught into contact now...” (\textit{Enneads} 4:8:4)

\(^{87}\) “Virtue ... linked with thought, occupying a soul, makes God manifest: ‘God’ on the lips without a good conduct in life, is [only] a word” (Plotinus \textit{Enneads} 2:9:15)

\(^{88}\) Porphyry distinguishes between four virtues in his \textit{Sentences}—although human beings were only capable of the first two. First were political virtues, which mastered the physical body. Second were the purifying virtues, which rid the body of evil. Third were intellectual virtues, which made the soul good. Fourth were the ‘pattern’ or archetypal virtues. Only the political and purifying virtues were accessible to humans: “He who energises according to the political virtues is an earnest man; he who energises according to the purificative ones is a daemonic man or even a good daemon. He who energises according to those alone which relate to the mind is a god. He who energises according to the pattern virtues is the father of the gods” (\textit{Sentences} 32:31:4–8, a \textit{daemon} in Greek mythology was a semidivine creature half way between humanity and the gods—the Christian equivalent is an angel).

\(^{89}\) Porphyry \textit{Sentences} 32:23:8
“[The wise man] thinks all fortunate events, however momentous, to be of no great matter—kingdom as the rule over cities and peoples, colonisations and the foundings of states, even though it all be his own handiwork—[and similarly] takes [no] great account of the vacillations of power and the ruin of his fatherland …

[It does not matter if] he is offered a victim in sacrifice … if he go unburied … if falls into his enemies hands, into prison … [or] his nearest is taken from him, his daughters and daughters-in-law dragged away into captivity…”

Achieving the contemplative virtues demanded practicing of the political virtues, but only as a means to an end, not because they had an intrinsic value. Neoplatonists were not “concern[ed] for others’ welfare but for our own peace of mind.” This peace was not to be found in society or the world, but within the individual: “turn from the things without to look within. The sum of things is within us.”

For ideas about communication, the most important adoption from Neoplatonism was the Theory of Forms. This was used to give a rational account of the great Christian mysteries. For example, commenting on bread and wine in the Last Supper, Paul says:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation \( \text{koinōnia} \) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation \( \text{koinōnia} \) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake \( \text{metekhomen} \) of the one bread.

\( \text{Metekhō} \), participation, is one of the three Platonic terms used to describe the relationship between Ideas and their images. Theologians took Paul’s term \( \text{metekhō} \) in its Platonic sense, and so read the passage to mean that Christians participate in the body of Christ in the same way that objects participate in their Idea or Archetype. Participation is achieved through the Eucharist, when believers eat the bread—the body of Christ. (Since there is

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90 Plotinus *Enneads* 1:4:7. Augustine, the greatest of the Christian Neoplatonists, comforted himself with this passage as his city was besieged by the Vandal army, and he himself lay dying (In Armstrong 1966, p190 n1).

91 Plotinus *Enneads* 1:4:8

92 Plotinus *Enneads* 3:8:4

93 1 Corinthians 10:16–17. Whether Paul meant the term in its Platonic sense is highly doubtful—he only uses \( \text{metekhō} \) a few times and in only two letters (1 Corinthians and Hebrews).

94 The other two are the ‘love’ \( \text{eros} \) of an image for its perfect form which led it to ‘grasp’ its Idea, and the image’s ‘similarity’ or ‘imitation’ \( \text{mimēsis} \) of its Idea—as a shadow is similar to the object which casts the shadow.
only one Christ, Paul says there is only ‘one bread’, through which the many believers come to be the ‘one body’. For Paul, this ‘participation’ is entirely spiritual and entirely exclusive: once a person has ‘participated in God’, sin no longer has a place—a person “cannot partake [metekhein] of the table of the Lord and [also] the table of demons”\(^96\). The other important term Paul uses in the passage above, koinōnia: derived from koinos, ‘shared in common’, it originally meant ‘fellowship’, but under the Christian spiritualism it came to be understood in a mystical sense akin to metekhō. The Latin translation of koinōnia is communio, the source of our word ‘communion’.

The mystery of how God took human form was likewise interpreted in Platonic terms, again using the concept of participation, metekhō. Paul explains that in becoming a man of flesh and blood, Christ “partook [meteskhen] of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil”\(^97\). In a similar way, all creation participated in Christ and was made in his image. All humanity participated in Adam’s fall, and all Christians participated in Christ’s death and resurrection. And finally, each individual church participated in the one Universal Church, the body of Christ.

The final major Neoplatonic contribution to Christian ideas of community was in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of creation, which married Plato’s Forms with Aristotle’s metaphysical hierarchy. The idea of hierarchy became dominant in the Middle Ages, and I will discuss it in the next chapter. But, in brief, Neoplatonism suggested that all creation —human society included—belonged to the ‘Great Chain of Being’ which descended from God to the lowest speck of being. Its divine parts comprised the One, Mind and Soul (or in Christian terms, God, Christ and the Holy Spirit). On earth, it followed Aristotle’s hierarchy, although in a descending rather than ascending form: humanity, animals, plants and physical matter. The corollary for human society was the belief that all communities are naturally hierarchical, and each person is to remain where God has placed them. As in Plato’s republic, society is perfected when it takes a divinely ordained structure, and communication is participation in this structure.

**Limits on Platonism within Christianity**

The Platonisation of Christianity was not without opponents. Pagan philosophers heaped abuse on the idea that a Platonic God would take human form and suffer the humiliation and death that the Christians said Jesus had. Christian Apologists met this challenge by ignoring Jesus as a historical person, and treating him entirely as an aspect of God, the

\(^{95}\) 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

\(^{96}\) 1 Corinthians 10:21

\(^{97}\) Hebrews 2:14
Logos (Wisdom) by with God created and ruled the cosmos. “The human qualities and human suffering of Jesus play singularly little part in the propaganda of the period; they were felt as an embarrassment in the face of pagan criticism.”

Even within Christian ranks there was opposition to Neoplatonism (and philosophy generally). Although orthodox Church doctrine was framed in rationalist philosophical terms, there were always groups—notably the monks and hermits—that rejected speculation and relied solely on the Gospels. Even amongst the orthodox, the Neoplatonic gradation of reality—from God to creature—could not be easily reconciled with either primitive Christianity’s insistence of the unity and divinity of creation, or with the later more pessimistic distinction drawn between Creator and creation and the alienation of man from God.

However intellectually satisfying the elucidation of Christianity was, Christianity subsumed its Platonic elements for several reasons. First, however much theologians might admire Plato and Plotinus, they could not deny that they were pagans, and hence philosophy was incomplete without Christian consummation. This is vividly illustrated in Augustine’s...

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98 In treating Christ purely as the agent of creation, theologians relied heavily on the opening of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ... He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.” (John 1:1–3, 10). See also Brown 1971, p90

99 Dodds 1965, pp118–119

100 In responses to a series of heretical movements that had split the Church from the early fourth century, the Church increasingly defined the articles of Christian faith. The first articles were produced at the Council of Nicea (325), in response to disputes over Christ’s divinity and his relationship with God. Questions about the nature, essence, substance and will of God could not be explained from the Bible alone, and consequently philosophical terms were increasingly employed.

101 The rejection of philosophy and return to the purity of the Gospels was a constant problem for the organised Church throughout the Middle Ages, especially as it was often associated with movements that upset the established social order: Montanists in late Antiquity, Hussites in the fifteenth century and Luther’s Reformation in the sixteenth century all asserted the priority of the Gospels.

102 The need for Christianity to ‘complete’ Platonism was a challenge met by Christian thinkers from the mid-fourth century, and is best illustrated in the work of Augustine. Although he held Plato and Plotinus in enormous esteem, and agreed with Plato that the eternal, unchanging Ideas provided the stable basis for the existence of all things, he diagnosed a major weakness in Platonic metaphysics: a proper explanation for the relationship between the Ideas and their images. Plato’s account of how the relationship was formed was, in Augustine’s eyes, inadequate. In *Timaeus*, Plato’s story of creation, the Demiurge—the Craftsman that fashioned the world—did not form the Ideas: they pre-existed even him, and...
conversion; although deeply read in Neoplatonism, he had been unable to establish the 
personal connection with the divine that he craved before his emotionally charged 
acceptance of Christ. In his subsequent works, he stressed the necessity of faith to the 
Christian thinker: “I have faith in order to understand”. Third, the Christians preached 
that God—infinite and timeless—had broken into the temporal finite world when he 
became a man: this was not a feat that lay within the capacity for rational philosophy to 
explain. In Christian eyes, this was an act of love that transcended all of the normal rules of 
creation, and could only be comprehended through faith in God. Fourth, for the believer, 
the direct encounter with God was more important than the intellectual apprehension of 
the Ideas. Since the Ideas were an expression of God, they were secondary to him, and 
therefore less significant than the encounter with Christ. Fifth, for the bulk of Christians, 
revelation was easier to grasp and more satisfying than the philosophers’ arguments. After 
Augustine, Christianity reduced its emphasis on the Platonic Ideas, although the Christian 
habit of thinking in terms of archetypes, symbols and forms continued unabated. And 
finally, Christians took the view that faith was more important to salvation than 
philosophical knowledge—even if its scope was also narrower. Reflecting on whether a 
Christian needed to know the achievements of the Greek natural scientists, Augustine says:

... it is enough to believe that the cause of all created things, whether in heaven or on 
earth, whether visible or invisible, is nothing other than the goodness of the Creator, 
who is the one and the true God.

he merely imposed onto the existing anarchy an order that imitated the Ideas. But this, says 
Augustine, does not explain the origin of the Ideas or their necessary relationship with the 
world. Drawing on the Neoplatonic distinction between God, Mind, Ideas and images, 
Augustine says that Plato’s theory could be completed if there was a Creator who willed 
creation into existence, but did so in accordance with the Ideas that were in the Divine Mind. 
Following the well-established precedent in the opening of John’s Gospel—“[the Logos] was 
in the beginning with God; all things were made through him”—Augustine says that the 
Ideas are the collective expression of God’s Word, the Logos—who is now understood as 
Christ. Thus all archetypes were contained in Christ (and through him creation was called 
into being), and all of creation was an expression of Christ.

In the High Middle Ages, Scholasticism’s greatest crisis erupted when William of Ockham 
questioned whether universal terms—beauty, good, truth—named real things (realism) or 
were simply human inventions with no correspondence in reality (nominalism). He 
ultimately rejected the Forms as spurious, unverifiable and unnecessary. Universals exist 
only in the human mind, and are concepts formed by abstraction from observation.

Augustine Enchiridion §9
AUGUSTINE AND THE CITY OF GOD

The most influential piece of Christian philosophy on later medieval ideas about society was Augustine’s *City of God*. Begun in 413, following the Sack of Rome by the Vandal army in 410, it was initially a defence against pagan charges that the Christians had undermined the pagan gods that protected the Eternal City. But over the thirteen years of its composition, it grew into a comprehensive account of Christian society.

The detail of the first ten books does not concern us here: in them, Augustine reviews the history of Rome, Greece and Assyria, along with their customs and theologies, and concludes that their worship of pagan gods had not ensured their happiness. Having rejected claims that the pagan gods had protected Rome, Augustine turns to a positive account of society.

There are, he says, two opposing cities: the City of God and the Earthly City. They are not to be confused with heaven and earth, or Christians and pagans. They are, he says, completely mingled and will not be separated until Judgement Day. What differentiates them is love. The citizen of the City of God loves God and neighbour; the citizen of the Terrestrial City loves only themselves and lives selfishly.

Having defined the cities, Augustine then explains their origins amongst the angels and in humanity. The division of angels took place on the first Day of Creation, when God created the angels. Some of the angels turned away from the divine light, which caused their intellects to be darkened (although they retained all of the powers of the other angels that remained faithful to God). These became the fallen angels.

The division of humanity, says Augustine, was caused by Adam’s sin, in which all humanity shared. The Fall had two consequences relevant to society. First, humanity was punished with death and eternal separation from God. This, says Augustine, is a terrible punishment: just as the body dies when the soul leaves it, so the soul dies when God leaves it. However, Augustine adds that God is merciful and, through Christ, has made it possible for people to live with God again (although the punishment of physical death remains). Consequently, the good and the bad experience death differently. For the good, who love God and take the opportunity to live with him, physical death leads to eternal rest and peace. For the bad, who love only themselves and try to live ‘in the flesh’ apart from God, it leads to eternal suffering, because they are cut off from God.

Augustine *City of God* §11:11
The second consequence of the Fall is that, because of Adam’s sin, every person’s passions and carnal desires will rise up to challenge their wills, making it difficult for them to do good. However, an individual is not completely at the mercy of their appetites: the human will is still capable of choosing between right and wrong, and so doing good.

Augustine concludes that the root of sin in both humanity and angels is the will. It is in the two opposing acts of will and the two forms of love that the division between the two cities lies. The Terrestrial City is based on an individual’s love for themselves and contempt of God; the City of God is based on the individual’s willing love for God, even to the extent of holding themselves in contempt.

Having illustrated the origins of each city, Augustine considers what the goal of each is. Both cities strive after what is good and avoid what is evil, but each has totally different beliefs about what these things are. He starts by considering the highest form of human life in the Earthly City. Augustine notes that this topic had long been debated by pagan philosophers, with little agreement. He lists various principles that have been advanced: a happy life is one that maximises the goods of body (strength and health) and soul (knowledge and virtue); a life of action balanced with contemplation; a life in accord with virtue; a life in society with family and citizens; a life with the gods.

Augustine criticises each and finds that they do not bring lasting happiness to the citizen of the Terrestrial City. They certainly do not bring genuine happiness for the heavenly citizen, and can even be vices if they corrupt the will. From the perspective of a citizen of the Heavenly City, none of these ‘goods’ is particularly important. For them, the greatest good is eternal life, and the greatest evil is eternal death. Eternal life is only to be found with God; separation from God leads to eternal death. Eternity with God is unending peace; eternity cut off from God is perpetual suffering.

So the goods of the two cities are utterly different. The citizen of the Terrestrial City expects to find happiness on earth, whereas the citizen of the Heavenly City does not—happiness is only to be had with God outside this world. While the latter live on earth alongside the former, their love of God and membership of his City are not aimed at securing earthly happiness but eternal peace.

Augustine was the first major philosopher in Antiquity to make will central to human nature and society.
Augustine does not think that earthly society is evil. The Earthly City does aim at a kind of peace (which Augustine regards as the greatest good). But when conducted by people that are interested only in subjugating others to ensure their own security, such a peace is invariably achieved through conflict. Although force may produce submission, Augustine says that there is no way to achieve permanent authority over people using only earthly means. Peace imposed by force does not last long before being challenged and, like all oppression, is morally destructive. If earthly governments aim only at terrestrial peace, neglecting the peace of the Heavenly City, then the result, even for the victor, will be unhappiness.\footnote{Augustine \textit{City of God} §15.4}

The greatest good of the Heavenly City, says Augustine, is peace.\footnote{Augustine \textit{City of God} §§19.11–12} Heavily influenced by Platonism, he defines peace as ‘tranquillity of order’. "Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place."\footnote{Augustine \textit{City of God} §19.13}

The peace of the body then consists in the duly proportioned arrangement of its parts. The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of the appetites, and that of the rational soul the harmony of knowledge and action. The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature. Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord. Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those of the family who rule and those who obey. Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens. The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquillity of order.\footnote{Augustine \textit{City of God} §19.13}

In heaven, where the citizens of the City of God will receive their eternal reward, there will not be equality. There will be different degrees amongst the angels and the saints. This will not however be a source of discord:

\ldots no inferior shall envy any superior, as now the archangels are not envied by the angels, because no one will wish to be what he has not received, though bound in strictest concord with him who has received; as in the body the finger does not seek to be the eye, though both members are harmoniously included in the complete structure of the body.\footnote{Augustine \textit{City of God} §22.30}
In a similar way, in earthly society people need not be equal. Some may not be happy and may in fact be miserable, but because they have a connection with order they will have some measure of peace—and more than they would have if there were no order in society. Nor need everyone belong to the same social rank: a society may be justified in keeping slaves. Finally, order in society requires that some people rule, while others are ruled. Those with authority must use it “not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others—not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.”

The earthly peace and the heavenly peace are quite different from one another. But the citizen of the City of God lives in the world and, like the citizen of the Earthly City, has an interest in maintaining social and political order. This allows Augustine to affirm Paul’s demand that the heavenly citizens should obey the laws of their country, having faith in God for a reward after death. So long as a society aims at some measure of justice and peace, Augustine says it has a degree of legitimacy.

True justice depends on all things being in order: body, soul, family, society and relationship with God—all as God intended. However, Augustine recognises that this definition requires that citizens have a direct knowledge of God. He also acknowledges that some societies before the Incarnation did achieve a measure of peace and justice. He is therefore prepared to admit a more general definition of society as “an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love”. Acting reasonably to achieve socially agreed goods, people can achieve a degree of order—in which case Augustine concludes, the Greek cities, the Roman republic, and the empires of Egypt and Babylon were societies with a certain legitimacy and the citizen of heaven could obey the laws of such countries.

The City of God was one of the most influential works in the Middle Ages. Augustine’s contribution to ideas about community was to define peace, justice, and the highest good as order. Society is perfected and at peace when it takes a particular structure and orientation—in particular, as it mirrors the order of heaven. The high value Augustine places on order was in part a consequence of his use of Neoplatonism: the organisation of Plato’s own republic had also been in terms of order. Both Plato’s republic and the Augustine’s City of God were images of eternal archetypes and, since God is outside time and change, any society that was an uncorrupted image of him and heaven would likewise be unchanging.

113 Augustine City of God §19:14
114 Augustine City of God §19:17
Plato and Augustine knew that society was made up of people with different capacities, and both explained how a unified society could be made from unequal units using the analogy of a body composed of different parts. Like Plato, Augustine says that justice consists in proper order—although for Augustine, this means obedience to God’s will and legitimate rulers.

The belief in society as an ordered unchanging reflection of heaven, obedient to God’s will dominated the early Middle Ages—the topic of the next chapter.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION AS ORDER**

By the fifth century AD, a stable view of Christian community had emerged, combining elements from the Gospels and classical philosophy. It rested on a number of assertions about the order of creation, in particular:

1. creation is the image of Christ, and so possesses a single divine order
2. everything participates (Platonically) in this order
3. the source of this order is God, and is timeless, changeless and perfect
4. as an image, creation is inferior to the original (Christ)—and this inferiority is manifested in the fact that it is subject to change, decay, suffering and evil
5. creation is divided into spiritual and material parts
6. happiness consists in assimilation with God, from whom everything came.

Human nature is made up of two parts, material and spiritual. Human happiness depends upon escaping the body and living ‘in the spirit’ with God. In heaven, each person is an individual, untouched by social relations: “when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”\(^\text{115}\). In this life on earth however, people live in society—although the best life is one that emulates the life to come.

Society is the body of Christ, comprising the baptised faithful, with Christ at their head. It is bound together by Christ, nourished by the ‘food’ of his body and the ‘drink’ of faith. Participation in Christ is understood in mystical and broadly Platonic terms—a Christian participates in Christ as an image participates in its Idea. In this life, Christians emulate Christ on the cross, subordinating their own desires for the good of others. The Christian virtues are to be love, compassion, sacrifice, humility, and forgiveness. In this life, Christians sublimate themselves within the corporate Christian identity.

\(^{115}\) Mark 12:25
When perfected, society on earth mirrors the order and peace of heaven (although the Fall has removed humanity's ability to establish a perfect society without divine aid). Since heaven is outside time and change, its perfection too is changeless: it is perfected when all of its diverse parts are properly ordered in the 'body' of society, each person in their right place and none usurping the place of others. Right knowledge depends upon knowledge of God and obedience to his will. These in turn depend on love of God and surrender of the self.

The ideal community that the Middle Ages inherited from early Christianity was the monastery. In monasteries, monks surrender all things of value in the material world, discipline and deny the body, serve others through labour, devote themselves to God through prayer and meditation, and live under a code of rigid discipline and obedience.
ABSTRACT In the military emergencies of the late Roman Empire, traditional civic associations broke down entirely, replaced by a divine hierarchy that married Christianity with secular power. The Germanic tribes that migrated to the Empire between the third and sixth centuries established new kingdoms in the West, bringing new ideas about law and social order.

Politically fragmented, and cut off from the Eastern centres of civilisation, trade and learning, Western Europe became a closed feudal society. When security and prosperity were re-established in the eleventh century, the Church sponsored a massive synthesis of newly-recovered works of Greek and Muslim science within the Neoplatonic framework of Christianity. By the High Middle Ages, two related views of society had emerged. First, the Scholastics provided a philosophical justification for the hierarchical feudal society comprised of diverse parts, unified by a law originating in God. Second, society was one link in the Great Chain of Being which descended from the throne of God down through angels, heavens, humanity, animals, plants, and minerals to the lowest levels of creation. In both cases, to communicate was to take one’s place within the medieval universitas and uphold the divine order laid down by God. Scholastic philosophy marks the first explicit connection between communication and community.

SOCIAL ORDER IN THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

The military emergencies of the third century AD found the Empire unprepared: militarily, administratively and financially. After half a century of catastrophic set-backs, the Empire was restored under sweeping changes to its constitution, cemented in the reforms of Diocletian (reigned 284–305). By 300 AD, the Empire had swept aside its ancient Senatorial administration, and replaced it with a military-based imperial service.
To cope with the continuing threat of German and Persian invasions, the size of the army was doubled. To support the vast force, the Empire’s administration and finances were thoroughly reorganised. The imperial administration was divided in two. The East—where the military need was greatest—profited immediately, retaining the taxes and tributes that had previously gone west to Rome. The West, less populated and prosperous, suffered from the loss of revenue. The West’s lack of urbanisation also affected its income. Tax gatherers tended to focus on easy targets, such as towns, and consequently the financial burden fell most heavily on the West’s merchants and artisans. They responded by fleeing to the countryside, and the towns soon ceased to be centres of trade and commerce. Within a century, the major cities in Gaul shrank to a quarter and less of their earlier size.

The effort required to feed and pay for the Empire’s defence warped Roman society, and many ancient rights and distinctions were lost. For example, to increase the range of people that might be taxed, the Emperor Caracalla extended Roman citizenship to virtually every free man in 212. But far from elevating all members of the community to the rank of Roman, Caracalla’s edict devalued citizenship utterly: the old distinctions of Roman and non-Roman, Italian and non-Italian, patrician and plebian were swept away.

In the deteriorating economic circumstances, professionals found membership of a guild or corporation (collegia) virtually obligatory for survival. By the third century, the emperors granted tax concessions to members of collegia essential to public and military services. But when this proved inadequate, the Empire removed all competition and transformed the collegia into monopolies; later bringing many under direct imperial control. As the military situation worsened, members of many collegia were tied to their professions—some professionals were even forbidden to marry outside their guilds. In the fourth century, membership of a collegium became compulsory for virtually all artisans, while the urban ‘middle’ class were pressed into government service. Diocletian made the profession of almost every civilian hereditary, freezing all social mobility outside the military.

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1 Brown 1971, p43
2 Cary 1960, p752. The city of Rome itself was eclipsed when the military headquarters of the Western Empire was transferred to Milan, closer to the Empire’s threatened borders; the free donations to 100,000 of its citizens ceased (Grant 1997, p52) and its grain supplies were redirected to Constantinople.
3 Dio Cassius 78:9:4f. Before Caracalla’s edict, citizenship had been a privilege restricted mostly to the Italian-born and to elites.
4 Collegia had existed from Republican times, and had been legalised by Augustus, but in the emergencies they took on new functions.
5 Grant 1997, p58
same time, local governments were shorn of their power and were reduced to the arm of imperial administration charged with gathering taxes and levies. By 300, membership of town councils was made compulsory and hereditary.

One of the greatest internal economic pressures in the third century was runaway inflation. To halt it, Diocletian fixed maximum prices for some 900 commodities and maximum wages for 130 professions. However, compliance was limited. Goods disappeared from the markets and inflation resumed. Combined with higher taxes and the ban on changing professions, price-fixing eliminated profit in most professions. As a result, people abandoned the towns for the relative obscurity of the countryside.

The country, traditionally the most conservative element of Roman society, also underwent massive changes. The great farming estates (latifundia) took in those fleeing the cities—ruined artisans, army deserters, runaway slaves—protecting them from the tax gatherers and army recruiters in return for labour and skills. Small land-holders also sought the protection of local magnates, and in return either surrendered their holdings or else worked their landlord’s estates. The latifundia became the dominant social organisation in the late Roman Empire. With their newly swollen resources, the landlords extracted themselves from urban fiscal demands (further increasing the financial pressure on the towns), and secured themselves from external threats by arming their tenants to see off marauders—and imperial tax officials. When the Emperors realised that they could not do without the revenue and resources of the estates, they made a fateful agreement with the landlords. The owners of the latifundia agreed to pay fixed taxes, while the emperor forbade tenants to leave the land and placed them under the absolute control of the landlord. This is the basis of serfdom in Europe.

6 Under the early Empire, while provinces were newly conquered, the Romans were content to leave local laws and town councils in place. These councils often had considerable latitude—passing by-laws, judging cases, even minting their own local currency—so long as they remained loyal to Rome, paid their taxes and complied with imperial directives.

7 As a result of being forced to collect taxes, council duty became highly unpopular. Under Roman law, if a council was unable to collect Roman taxes from its administrative area, the councillors themselves had to make up the shortfall (Cary 1960, p746). In 250, to secure its finances, the Empire made participation in town councils compulsory for all citizens of even modest means. Some, desperate to avoid ruin, tried to give up their property instead.

8 Cary 1960, p764

9 Grant 1997, p48

10 Grant 1997, pp62–63; Cary 1960, pp752–754

11 The institution of serfdom developed differently in each half of the Empire. It was adopted swiftly in the East, but by the seventh century the Eastern Church had virtually freed all of the tenants; in the West, the institution was slower to take hold, but was never challenged.

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The military circumstances produced a new socio-economic order that had nothing to do with the ancient political systems based on virtue or citizenship. Society was divided into the wealthy *honestiores* (land-owners, town councillors, imperial civil servants) and the poor *humiliores*. The *humiliores* were virtually indistinguishable from slaves: although Roman citizens, they had fewer legal rights and greater penalties than the *honestiores*; their status was hereditary, and they were forbidden to leave the land they worked. Above both *honestiores* and *humiliores* sat the Emperor and his court.

**Relations between the Empire and the Church**

In the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, parallels between priestly and imperial organisation drew closer. For lack of administrators, the Emperors gave the bishops a major role in the Empire’s administration, along with tax concessions and huge donations of land and serfs. The bishops became particularly prominent in the West, where central government services were deteriorating. In the invasions of the fourth century, they also took the initiative in military matters, organising civil defence, paying and feeding the troops, directing the repair of town walls, and

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12. Grant 1997, p83

13. The imperial ideology also finds a loose parallel in Neoplatonic metaphysics. Just as the Emperor presides over the earth and sends his commands out to the wide world through successive layers of intermediaries, so the transcendent One Source brings about creation in a number of levels in a downwards and outwards impulse. And, as in late Roman society, the focus of Neoplatonic attention was upwards, supplicating the One for release from earthly fear and hardship.

The new social arrangement is also reflected in the art of the time, which had become increasingly less representational and more symbolic. Abandoning the convention of classicism, the size and arrangement of figures was dictated by their role, rather than any naturalistic considerations (Markus 1974, p84). Artists of the period portrayed Roman society at three levels: at the bottom, the crowded, featureless poor; at the top the Emperor or his magistrate greatly magnified; between them appeared the landholders mediating and petitioning the Emperor or his representatives on behalf of his subjects, and in turn being responsible for the functioning of local government.

Christian art from the same period shows the spiritual world in the same way: God or Christ sit enthroned above, while below tiny anonymous figures of Christians plead for salvation, and between the two are the saints and angels, who intercede before God and Christ on behalf of the faithful. For the Christians, God was simply the emperor on a vastly greater scale, every part as awesome and unapproachable, and to whom unquestioning obedience was due (Brown 1974, p101).
conducting negotiations with barbarian invaders.\textsuperscript{14} When the Western government finally declined in the later fifth century, the people of Rome invested their bishop with supreme temporal powers. In part, the bishops’ adoption of this role is not surprising because both the monasteries and bishoprics had fallen into the hands of the Empire’s traditional ruling and administrative class: the Roman aristocracy.\textsuperscript{15}

After the fifth century AD, the West was ruled over by a double oligarchy of senators and bishops. The aristocracy ruled the great estates with almost unlimited power. Drawn from the same class, the Western bishops oversaw much of the urban administration, although they became increasingly responsible for many great estates left to the Church.\textsuperscript{16} At the same time, the Church demanded the support of the state in its spiritual mission, and attempted to assert its spiritual authority in secular matters.\textsuperscript{17} Although Church and

\textsuperscript{14} Markus 1974, pp144 and 150. The role of the bishops, rather than the military, in dealing with invaders is not as incongruous as it might seem: except for the pagan Angles, Franks and Huns, all of the Empire’s Germanic invaders were Christians, and so might be persuaded by religious arguments where the Empire’s declining military power was ineffective. The most famous case of bishops saving cities is in the efforts of Pope Leo the Great (reigned 440–461). Traditionally he was credited for turning Attila the Hun back from Rome in 452. Leo was less successful in 455 when the Vandal army appeared before Rome’s gates, although he did persuade them to take no lives and destroy no buildings in the fourth Sack of Rome. Despite being Arian heretics, the Vandals nonetheless complied with Leo’s request and contented themselves with plundering the city.

\textsuperscript{15} Brown 1971, p109

\textsuperscript{16} It became common for the aristocracy to retire to senior Church posts at the end of a life in the civil administration. This formed one of the primary bonds between Church and State through much of the early Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{17} The most important symbol of the Church’s moral superiority over the Empire—even if it had only limited political implications—took place in 395. In Thessalonica, a mob murdered the city’s military commander in retaliation for his arrest of a popular charioteer. The Emperor Theodosius responded in an uncharacteristic fashion, allowing the military to take whatever action it felt necessary to reassert itself. The Thessalonican garrison took revenge on the population by massacring seven thousand people in the hippodrome. Although Theodosius had rescinded his original order and was not present at the massacre, Bishop Ambrose of Milan—far the most powerful priest in the West—held the Emperor morally responsible and refused to allow him to take communion until he made a public repentance. Theodosius submitted, appearing in the Milan basilica bare-headed in sackcloth, to make a full and very public confession to Ambrose. A more lasting symbol of the Church’s power in the empire was the transformation of the imperial coronation into a religious event with the accession of Leo I in Constantinople in 457: the Patriarch, as God’s representative on earth, bestowed the Empire on the emperor and charged him with its welfare.
Empire overlapped in many activities\textsuperscript{18}, the Church tried to hold itself firmly separate from the state. It held that the combination of religion and secular authority was a pagan institution, and the two had been separated by the coming of Christ. Christ was the last person to legally hold both royal and priestly powers: after him, it was unlawful for a person to be both priest and king\textsuperscript{19}.

The relationship between church and state reached its canonical formulation in a letter from Pope Gelasius in Rome (reigned 492–496) to the Emperor Anastasius I in Constantinople (reigned 491–518), setting out the ‘doctrine of two swords’:

There are mainly two things, August Emperor, by which the world is governed: the sacred authority of the pontiffs and the royal power. Of these, priests carry a weight all the greater, as they must render an account to the Lord ... you must bend a submissive head to the ministers of divine things ... [for] it is from them that you must receive the means for your salvation.

In things concerning the public discipline, religious leaders realise that imperial power has been conferred on you from above and they themselves will obey your laws, for fear that in worldly matter they should seem to thwart your will\textsuperscript{20}.

The emperor needs the Church for eternal life; the Church needs the imperial regulations in temporal affairs. Between the two there should be mutual helpfulness. Although Gelasius could be read to mean that the Church takes priority over the state (and indeed, that is the drift of his Latin legal terminology), this was not how he was understood for over six hundred years. Rather, God ordained that human society was to be ruled by two authorities, temporal and spiritual, and they were not to be combined. In a Christian society, all people are members of both Church and the State, and both are ruled in accordance with God’s law. Since God’s law is a unified and undivided, there were no genuine grounds for conflict between Church and State. Each however had to take care not to interfere with the roles that God had appointed for the other. This became the basic doctrine of Church–State relations until the High Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{18} The Church oversaw a considerable part of the civil administration; the Empire, particularly in the East, had a say in the appointment of bishops and the Emperor had considerable sway in Church business—even Church doctrine.

\textsuperscript{19} Sabine 1964, pp194–196

\textsuperscript{20} In Durmont 1985, pp107–108
THE GERMANIC KINGDOMS OF WESTERN EUROPE

As Roman power and finances were diverted eastwards in the third and fourth centuries, pressure from Germanic tribes along the Empire’s northern and western borders reached unprecedented levels. Rome held its own against the tribes until the mid-third century AD when the military situation declined sharply. In 251, the Goths overran Rome’s trans-Danubian provinces and broke into the Balkans. In 256, the Franks and Alemanni crossed the Rhine into Gaul and plundered as far as Spain and Italy. The fourth century saw a series of huge tribal migrations—sometimes violent, sometimes cooperative—in which German tribes crossed the Empire’s borders, eventually to settle in the Empire’s underpopulated and under-defended West. The Franks settled in northern Gaul, the Burgundians in western Gaul, the Angles and Saxons in southern Britain, the Visigoths in Spain, the Vandals in northern Africa, the Ostrogoths in central Italy, and the Lombards in northern Italy. Although initially heavily outnumbered by the Romans, the Germanic tribes held the real military power. It was a Gothic chieftain Orodacer who, in 476, brought the Western Empire to an end, at least in name, by forcing the abdication of the last Western Emperor.

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21 The tribes that entered the Empire between the third and sixth centuries are traditionally described as ‘Germanic’, although they came from an area much larger than modern Germany. In the West the Frisians occupied the area of the modern Netherlands; the Jutes and Angles occupied Jutland; the Saxons lived in the area of northern modern Germany. Along the Rhine were arranged the Franks, the Burgundians, the Alemanni, and the Macromanni. Most of these peoples had settled into an agricultural life by the second century AD. The subsequent rise in their populations forced their expansion eastwards, although the eastern Germanic tribes were usually pastoralists and herders rather than farmers. On the Baltic were the Lombards; in the area of modern Poland and Ukraine were Vandals and Rugians. A separate branch of the Vandals held the eastern Balkans, and the Gepids held the western Balkans. The Goths lived in what are now Romania, Bulgaria, and southern Ukraine. The Goths were divided into eastern and western Goths (Ostrogoths and Visigoths).

22 There were several reasons that the Germanic tribes began entering the Empire. First, intertribal warfare drove some to seek refuge under Rome’s protection. For instance, in the mid-second century, the Bastarnae from what is now Romania sought refuge within the Empire from the Goths on the Ukrainian plains and the Gepids in the west. Second, decreasing agricultural production in Scandinavia and northern Germany may have caused a southward migration to the warmth and prosperity of the Mediterranean. Third, a growing population in the east also put pressure on the nomadic eastern tribes, who expanded from the Balkans as far east as the Crimea and the Don. In the fourth century, the Ostrogoths carved out a huge empire from the Crimea, east to the Don, and north to the Baltic, putting pressure on other tribes. Fifth—and the immediate cause of the most spectacular migrations—the eastward movement of the Goths brought them into collision with the savage Hun tribes from central Asia: a conflict in which the Goths suffered heavily, forcing them to seek sanctuary with Rome.
After the migrants settled in Western Europe and northern Africa, Germans and the Romans lived alongside one another, although in most cases under their own laws. Relations between the two were complex. For the most part, the Germans had a high respect for Rome and its institutions: many had migrated in the first place to take advantage of the Empire’s strength; not to destroy it. The Romans however tended to look on the Germans as barbarians, and their policies usually only served to weaken the Western Empire.

The Eastern Empire did what it could to prevent the slide of the West into barbarian German control, but with limited resources and opportunities, the West slipped out of Byzantine control in the mid-sixth century. The Eastern Empire would continue as Europe’s greatest power and centre of learning until the thirteenth century, while the West became estranged through limited travel and religious division. In 633, Islam exploded out of Arabia to embrace, within thirty years, all of northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, and Spain—drastically reducing Western Europe’s already limited trade, and cutting it off from intellectual developments further east. Under-populated, with little to trade, its internal government fragmented between a dozen kingdoms, the West became a cultural backwater.

The organisation of life between the sixth and eleventh centuries was an amalgam of Roman and Germanic traditions. Because the German tribes held the military superiority, they also held political power and it was their system of government that defined the structure of new kingdoms in Western Europe. Roman society however was only extinguished politically, not economically. Even after the German settlement, most people were descendants of the Empire’s citizens and lived under the economic conditions of the

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23 Theodoric, who led the establishment of the Ostrogothic kingdom in central Italy, was in the habit of saying “an able Goth wants to be like a Roman, but only a very poor Roman would want to be like a Goth”. (Brown 1971, p123)

24 Although the Romans usually looked down on the Germans as barbarians, the Empire was forced to employ them as mercenaries. By 395, German commanders led the defence of the West on behalf of the Empire and had married into the imperial family. German armies were instrumental in the defeat of Attila’s invasion of Italy and Gaul in 451. Even after the Goths deposed the Western Emperor, they still chose to rule as viceroys of the Empire, not as an independent kingdom. Despite the German’s usual esteem for the Empire, relations with Rome were not always happy. In 376, the Visigoths had sought sanctuary in the Empire from the Huns, but when the Roman governor responsible for their welfare robbed them of their possessions and brought them to near starvation, they revolted, plundering their way across Greece as far as the capital, eventually reaching Spain, stripping Rome three times en route. Even then, attacks on Rome were not entirely wanton destruction: Alaric, who led the siege and first Sack of Rome (410), appears to have been bent on saving the Empire, particularly from the inept Western Emperor Honorius.
late Empire. Society was almost entirely agricultural and remained organised around the *latifundia* within the institution of serfdom. The marriage of German tribal government with serfdom produced the institution of feudalism. This never had a precise legal definition and, in the fragmentation of Europe between the sixth and eleventh centuries, operated differently in different kingdoms (so what follows is only a general description).

**Germanic law**

The Germans understood law very differently from the Romans. Influenced by Stoic philosophy, the Romans believed that there was a universal law and that its nature was reason. All human laws tended to the universal law and could not genuinely contradict it. Enacting law was an act of human will in accordance with reason. Laws were for the common good and were believed to embody reason. The Stoics taught that, since every person had the capacity for reason, the basis of all law and public office lay with the people. Roman law agreed with the Stoics' claim but added that the people transferred their political power to the chief magistrate, and therefore the Emperor's decrees had the force of law, even though they were not ratified by the whole people.

By contrast, Germanic law was characteristic of semi-nomadic tribal societies. It was preserved orally and rooted in tribal custom. Like Greek oral law, Germanic law reflected life within the community as it had been from time immemorial, and was primarily employed to keep peace between members of the tribe. Its defining characteristic was custom, not reason, and remained so until the High Middle Ages.

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25 We do not know with any exactness the population of either the Empire or the Germanic tribes. At its height in the second century AD, Rome's population was probably about seventy million (Grant 1997, p65; Davies 1997, p26; Cary 1960 gives one hundred million). We know that this number declined in the later Empire, although not by how much—best estimates suggest about fifty million people in total, of which probably between fifteen and twenty million lived in the West. Figures for the German tribes are even more vague, although we have some surprisingly detailed counts. For example, when the Vandals crossed Gibraltar into North Africa in 428, they recorded the numbers transported: some 160,000 people passed the Straits. The Vandals were a large tribe: we know of others that struggled to find a few thousand warriors. This suggests that, together, the dozen major immigrant groups probably numbered no more than a million people: maybe five percent of the West's population when they first settled within the Empire.

26 Sabine 1964, pp213–214

27 Sabine 1966, p99f

28 Berki 1974, pp95–96

29 Six hundred years after the migrations, William the Conqueror, states in his Statutes that both Anglo-Saxons and Normans in England will be ruled "as our predecessors decreed"

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Each tribe had its own laws—unlike the Greeks and Romans, the Germans did not believe law was universal. Because their law was based on custom, the Germans did not see themselves as ‘making law’. Even when custom was unclear or encountered new situations, the tribe did not make new laws: rather, it would ‘find out’ what the old law required. Since the law belonged to the entire people, the people had a natural right to be consulted on what a particular law might mean—although in practice, the task of ‘finding out’ what the law required was usually undertaken by a group accepted as competent to speak for the whole people: the king’s council or, after the tribes converted to Christianity and settled in Europe, the bishops and barons. Once the law had been ‘discovered’, it was published so that all would know what it required. Promulgation was usually made in the name of ‘the entire people’ or with the consent of ‘the chief men’—although ‘consent’ meant that people agreed that the law really was as the declaration stated rather than that it had been voted into existence.

Because all people lived under and knew the law, all people could in principle judge it. And, just as in the process of ‘discovering’ the law, the adjudication of the law was done collectively: by the king’s council in matters between nobles, or else a variety of smaller

(Statutes of William the Conqueror, §8, in Henderson 1896). The emphasis on custom survives in English common law, which still places great weight on precedent. The basis of law in custom also had influence long after the decline of the Germanic legal systems themselves. For example, in his Reflections of the Revolution in France, Edmund Burke defends the English system of liberties established on custom against the new rationalist liberty of the French Revolution: “Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. … We are generally men of untaught feelings, that, instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and … we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them.” (Burke, pp181)

30 Berki 1974, p96f
31 Sabine 1966, pp203–207
32 Charlemagne (reigned 768–814)—most powerful monarch of the early Middle Ages and first Holy Roman Emperor—located the law firmly with the consent of each member of the community, as the following excerpt from one of his statutes illustrates: “Charles the Emperor … together with the bishops, abbots, counts, dukes, and all the faithful subjects of the Christian Church, and with their consent and counsel, has decreed the following [statute] … in order that each loyal subject, who has himself confirmed these decrees with his own hand, may do justice and in order that his loyal subjects may desire to uphold the law.” (In Sabine 1964, p204) Over three hundred years later, the same basic formula of consent, with the nobles acting as representatives of the people, was a standard one in all English law. For instance, in England, the Assize of Clarendon issued in 1666 opens: “Here begins the Assize of Clarendon made by King Henry II, with the assent of archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, and barons of all England.”
councils for more local infringements. The function of government was not to legislate but to judge people’s actions against the law of the tribe (contrasting sharply with Roman and Greek political philosophy, which was primarily concerned with how constitutions and laws were established by the human will).

Well before the Germans entered the Empire, their law was understood as an aspect of their religion—although we know few details of either. Law pre-existed any king or form of government, and all were subject to it. The law was omnipresent and eternally valid. When the Germans converted to Christianity in the second and third centuries, they continued to believe that the source of law remained divine. It became a gift, bestowed by a loving God on those tribes that deserved it. In contrast to both Roman and modern liberal views, the German tribes understood law as a privilege, not an act of subjugation or a restraint. Because the law was divine and eternal the people were in a sense the creatures of the law—the people as a communal body was made by the law and belonged to it.

When the tribes established new homelands in Western Europe, the law was transferred from the tribe to the location: the origin of the concept, ‘the law of the land’. Like tribal law, the law of the land was not universal: it was limited to locality, and different lands had their own laws. Just as earlier Germans saw themselves as creatures of the law, the settled kingdoms saw themselves as belonging to their lands.

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33 These small judicial councils were one of the chief origins of the English jury system.
34 Berki 1974, p97. Even as late as the English Civil War (1642–1648), most of the English thought of their parliament as a court rather than as a legislative body. Some parliaments in English speaking countries retain the power to try cases of law. Parlement was also the term used by the French throughout the Middle Ages for their supreme lawcourts.
35 Our main source on pre-migration Germanic customs is Tacitus’ Germanica, written in the early second century AD from a thoroughly Roman perspective.
36 Berki 1974, p97. This view explains why, by the eleventh century, the most privileged portions of Western society had the most laws, while those at the bottom like serfs, had few opportunities to appeal to the law against the arbitrary will of their masters. (Southern 1967, p105)
37 Sabine 1964, p201. The area covered by the law of the land might be quite small, and proved remarkably persistent. For example, in France the numerous local laws with their origins in medieval law were only abolished after the French Revolution and the establishment of the Napoleonic Code.
38 Overall, Roman law did not survive the decline of classical education or urban society that supported it (Berki 1977, p93). However, a simplified form did persist in Italy and southern France as the customary law of Rome’s descendents.

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Land became tremendously important to the Germans. After the settlement of the West, they adopted an agricultural way of life, and consequently land became more important than it had been in their nomadic days. The land provided food and the necessities of life. It became the ‘Mother Country’: creating, nurturing and protecting its children. But agriculture required a settled existence and security. In the early Middle Ages, when local raiding and plundering were commonplace, security implied the need to defend and even die for the land, so warriors and war leaders became essential in medieval society.

**Kings**

At the time of the migrations, the most important political office in the Germanic tribes was that of the king. Roman accounts say that German military commanders were selected for their bravery, and rulers for their nobility, and the selection was then endorsed by the entire tribe: king's power was not based on authority but on example, and kings that did not live up to expectations could be deposed. Kings were creatures of the law, and the law pre-existed them. They were thus subject to the law, and were not above it (as the Roman Emperors sometimes saw themselves).

By the time of the migrations, the office of king had become partially hereditary, although candidates had to show they could lead and were fit for command. Just as the law was confirmed by the consent of the people, so too was the king, and their descendants—particularly the nobility—never forgot it.

In part, the king was the tribe’s supreme war leader, but the office also had religious connotations as well. Like most of the ancient world, the Germans drew no sharp line between political and religious offices. Kingship was divine in origin, just as the law was.

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39 Berki 1974, pp99–100
40 Berki 1974, pp94–95. The word king is related to kin, reflecting its hereditary nature.
41 In 1100, when Henry I first came to power in England, he recognised that he was king by “mercy of God and the common counsel of the barons of the whole kingdom of England” (White & Notestein 1915). Even the Holy Roman Emperor was elected by the princes of Germany. The election process was described in minute detail in the Golden Bull of Charles IV (1356): the bishops and princes qualified to elect the Emperor, summonses to the election, escorts and their sizes, oaths, even precedence in seating. (See Henderson 1896 for a translation.)
The office of king gave the office-holder supernatural powers, such as being able to heal the sick or ensure a good harvest. It was however the office, that was supernatural not the person—if deposed, the individual would cease to have any unusual powers.

When the Germans converted to Christianity, the old pagan belief of divine appointment was recast in Christian terms. The bishops confirmed the ruler and, in some cases, bestowed the king’s powers. Bishops helped select kings, and sometimes arbitrated between rivals. The early Middle Ages saw strong links between kings and priests: in part, this accorded with the Christian belief that God had appointed kings and bishops together to govern the Christian world—a fact reflected in the coronation oaths of kings, which combined both secular and ecclesiastical rituals. The coronation was also the occasion when the nobles and bishops swore their fealty to the king—and kings understood that they had authority over both priests and secular rulers. In the early Middle Ages, Gelasius’ doctrine of two authorities was in abeyance, and although no one would have denied it in principle, temporal and spiritual powers were seriously blurred in the person of the king.

42 For example, Southern 1967, p92. The belief in the healing powers of a king endured into the Modern Age. When Charles I of England was beheaded in 1642, handkerchiefs dipped in his blood were believed to cure many ailments.

43 This loss of supernatural abilities may explain why kings were not often put to death when deposed: they no longer had any power and so posed no particular threat. In Berki 1974, p95.

44 When the last of the Merovingian dynasty of France died in 751, Pope Stephen III confirmed Pepin the Short as the new king of the Franks. When Pepin’s son Charlemagne invaded Italy to support Pope Leo II against rebels, the Pope crowned him Emperor of the Romans—the first person to hold the title in over three hundred years. For his authority, the grateful Pope relied on a forged document, the Donation of Constantine, which claimed that the Emperor Constantine had given temporal control over much of Italy and its islands into the hands of Pope Silvester I.

45 At his coronation, a king was anointed with holy oil like a priest. Like a bishop, he was invested with a staff and ring, and was given the power to destroy heretics and unite all his subjects in Christian faith. In the early Middle Ages, kings occasionally described themselves as the ‘Vicar of Christ’. The coronation ceremony also bestowed on the king the sword and sceptre, symbolising his power in the secular world and giving him the authority to use violence. (Southern, 1967, p91; Sabine 1964, p212)

46 Charlemagne’s oaths of fealty, issued in the Capitulary of Charlemagne (802 AD), make quite clear that he saw priests as his subjects and liable to obey his laws. (The Capitulary is in Henderson 1896)

47 One eleventh century priest writes, “Kings and priests have a common unction of holy oil, a common spirit of sanctification, a common quality of benediction, the name and power of God and Christ in Common ... Both Kings and Priests are deified and sanctified by the grace of unction and by the consecration of their benediction ... If therefore the King and the Priest are both, by grace, Gods and Christs of the Lord, whatever they do by virtue of this grace is...continued on next page
If the land was the ‘mother country’ to the Germanic settlers, then the king—as defender of the Church and people, and the leader of the kingdom’s nobility and armies—became their ‘father’. This identification had several sources. One is the parallel between the kings and priests (who, since Antiquity had been called ‘fathers’). Another was the translation into concrete political terms of the Christian idea of God the ‘loving Father’: just as God watched over and cared for every created soul, so the king watched and defended every one of his subjects. The people looked up to God for salvation in the next world; they looked up to the king for security in this. This identification of secular and sacred power would be important later in the Middle Ages when theologians began to claim that the secular order corresponded to the heavenly.

Vassalage

After the king, the most important political figures in the Western kingdoms were the barons. They evolved from the war-chiefs that commanded warrior bands before and during the Germanic migrations. Although the nomadic and pastoral existence of the migrating tribes meant that the professional warrior class was only a small fraction of the Germanic population, at need, the tribes’ entire male population could be called upon. Each man—or household—owed fealty to their local war-leader. The local war-leader in turn would submit to the overall authority to an overall war-commander, the king.

When the tribes settled in Europe, the warrior-chiefs either took over or married into the Roman latifundia. The barons’ capabilities as warriors and leaders made them integral in an age that experienced near-constant raiding, either from neighbouring lands or by Vikings or Magyars. Raiding meant that fortified estates continued to be the centre of agricultural life, and the task of defending land, property, stock and crops, was taken on by the new German lords. In the barons, the German warrior nobility became married to the old Roman system of serfdom. The barons were both military leaders and owners of large parcels of land, along with the serfs and slaves that worked it. This was the basis for the medieval feudal system.

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48 Berki 1974, p100

49 The origins of the English word lord illustrate the barons’ original role in agricultural defence: it comes from the expression hlaf-ward or ‘loaf-guard’—the person that defended bread and other food supplies.

50 Slavery certainly existed throughout the early Middle Ages, although by 1100 it was largely ended in agriculture. Slaves had largely disappeared from French agriculture by the tenth century.

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Security in this situation was achieved through the modification of the warriors’ hierarchy into a complex system of fealty and protection. By the eighth century, the barons controlled the land that was worked by the serfs. The barons protected the serfs and villages and organised military defence, and in return the serfs provided labour and agricultural supplies. The barons in turn swore fealty—vassalage—to the king, and promised to provide military support for fixed periods during the year. This was a fundamentally local system:

century, although in Germany the conquests of Otto I in the mid-tenth century brought many Slavic captives into Bohemia—as well as creating the word ‘slave’ which displaced the earlier Latin terms servus and mancipium. In England, about one tenth of the population recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) were slaves, although the Norman system of agricultural servitude saw this number decline swiftly. Slaves were an important part of Polish economy until the twelfth century and the Russian until the sixteenth, when serfdom was introduced on the Western model. In Italy, with a higher urban population, slaves were usually not agricultural labourers but artisans in small-scale industry or else domestic servants. Slaves were a complex issue in Spain, where the Muslim influence forbade the slavery of people of the same religion. However African and Middle-eastern slaves were used on the sugar plantations of Aragon and Catalonia, from where the Spanish extended the system to the New World in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Although serfdom may look like little more than slavery to Modern eyes, it differed in important ways. Although serfs held a demeaning position in medieval society, they did have a status in medieval law—above slaves but below freeman. If they were mistreated, they had some appeal to relief. Serfs could own property, and what profit they made from it belonged to them—indeed, there is evidence that serfs could be quite prosperous. Serfs were only required to work their landlord’s holdings at fixed times. They were barred from military service and their landlord was obliged by law to protect them. By the eleventh century, the immediate connection between slavery and serfdom had been broken, and there are examples of apparently prosperous individuals choosing to become serfs for economic reasons. In a period when the greatest shortage that landowners faced was labour, having labourers tied to the land was attractive to the barons and they were prepared to pay well to secure loyal workers. In exchange for serfdom, a person might gain a plot of land or monetary payments as well as protection (Southern 1987, pp99–100). So, in the eyes of the law, serfdom was a contractual arrangement, albeit a permanent and hereditary one: the landlords provided the serfs with protection, the serfs in return worked the land and supplied agricultural goods. (Berki 1974, p98)

From the twelfth century, the serfs’ rights were eroded, but they nonetheless continued to be distinct from slaves and had rights. The peasants’ revolts in France (1351) and England (1381) demanded (unsuccessfully) the end of serfdom. In the later Middle Ages, particularly in Eastern Europe where serfdom appeared only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the conditions that the serfs lived under were particularly harsh. They could be hired out for labour by their masters, sent to work in industry or mines, and even mortgaged. Polish lords had power of life and death over their serfs until 1768. In 1797, in a Russian population of 36 million, there were 20 million serfs owned either privately or by the Crown and Church (Andrews 1965, pp101–102). The number had grown to some 40 million by 1861 when they were freed by Alexander II (Thomson 1966, p331).
the system of fealty did not extend far. In particular, the king’s authority often did not extend to the serfs of his vassals\(^51\), and the barons did their best to keep the king out of their estates.

Unlike the kings, the barons had no religious significance. Where the kings held their office by birth, election, and the grace of God, the nobility owed their positions in the first place to sheer power—either in land, military strength or, if they were a bishop or abbot, through their spiritual authority. Their positions and oaths of fealty did not become hereditary until the twelfth or thirteenth century\(^52\).

Amongst the most important landlords in the Middle Ages were the bishops—a fact that seriously compromised their relations with the West’s secular powers later in the Middle Ages. Even under the late Roman Empire, senatorial bishops had owned large estates in France and Italy. After the German kingdoms were established in the sixth century, the Church continued to gain lands: on their death, many barons donated land and serfs. So the Church came to wield enormous temporal power in the West. With this power, along with the education and spiritual authority they possessed, the bishops inevitably became part of the king’s court, and it was normal for them to swear fealty to the king like other barons. (The Church’s independent temporal power also expanded greatly in the eighth century, when Pepin the Short and Charlemagne freed the Popes of Lombard interference and established papal vassalage over the entire central part of Italy—effectively turning the popes into temporal kings.)

In time, the system of vassalage became more complex and its scope wider: not only were individuals vassals of others, but towns and estates could also swear fealty. Amongst the nobility, different grades of barons began to be distinguished: prince, duke, marquis, count, viscount, and earl\(^53\). The system of vassalage also extended downwards, to encompass the

\(^{51}\) Sabine 1964, pp215–216

\(^{52}\) Sabine 1964, p210; Southern 1967, p107

\(^{53}\) Baron is a general term in the early Middle Ages, and meant ‘vassal’—a free man that had sworn an oath of fealty to a superior. Refinements to the aristocratic hierarchy were always inserted above the rank of baron, which by default came to be the lowest rank of the nobility. All of the terms were used to indicate a rank above baron. The origin of the terms is diverse: prince was the highest rank after king, and derives from princeps, the title adopted by the early Roman Emperors; next in rank was duke which comes from dux, Latin for ‘leader’; marquis or marquess comes from the French word march, a contested area of land at the edge of a kingdom—and consequently a less-secure and less-wealthy area than that controlled by a duke; count comes from the Latin comes, ‘companion’, meaning one of the king’s circle; viscount is simply vice + count; earl comes from a Saxon word eorl for ‘warrior’ and was used in contrast to ceorl, a simple freeman or ‘churl’. Below the nobility...continued on next page
many freemen, small farmers, villagers and townspeople. Although feudal holding tended to
remain landholdings, it could in principle be anything of value: the right to operate a mill or
a toll, or to hold some government post\textsuperscript{54}.

The organisation of community in the early Middle Ages

The organisation of early medieval society was a marriage between the institutions of
serfdom and the *latifundia* with the organisation of the Germanic nobility. The continuing
need for security against raids or invasion produced a society based on a vast network of
protection: serfs and villagers looked to their local lord for immediate protection; lords in
turn looked to their princes and kings. As the Middle Ages progressed, the number of grades
in this hierarchy increased: different degrees of serfdom, minor free landholders, petty gentry,
landed nobility and the princes and kings. Until the eleventh century, the bulk of Western
society formed a pyramid of mutual obligations. superficially, the structure of feudal
Europe took on the same overall shape as late Roman society, but rather than being bound
together by legal rights, society was organised through oaths of personal allegiance.

The organisation of society was understood to be a divine order, decreed by God and created
by the law. The law bound the entire people together as a single unit, and tied each person
to the station where God had placed them. People were entitled to the treatment and
status that their ancestors had customarily enjoyed in their same position since time
immemorial.

The local and personal nature of feudalism explains the relative lack of nationalistic
sentiment in the period, or anything that we would recognise as ‘political activity’\textsuperscript{55}. Once
the ancient tribes settled into an agricultural life, a person’s allegiance was given to those
immediately above and below them in society, not to some larger unit such as a tribe or city
or country. This was probably inevitable in times when anarchy made large-scale political
organisation impossible. If there was patriotism, it was to Christendom, not to a nationality.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the early Middle Ages did not explicitly
define its beliefs about community. Much less did people of the time analyse the ways in
with communities operated. Communication in the sense of this process, was thus much
simpler than in Rome and Greece, and involved a person in broadly five activities.

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\textsuperscript{54} Sabine 1964, p217

\textsuperscript{55} Berki 1974, pp99–100
taking their place in society (king, noble, freeman, serf, slave), giving and taking the oaths of fealty to those above and below, fulfilling the duties that those oaths required, and obeying the lawful commands of superiors

giving to each person what respect and treatment they were due in their social position

obeying the law, judging whether others had lived as custom dictated and, where law was unclear, helping discover what the law of the land required

being a faithful Christian and obeying God’s law, as it was taught by the Church

defending the land, since it is the land that makes and supports a person, and is the source of the law which makes people.

THE SCHOLASTICS OF THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

The rise and influence of Scholasticism

The first half of this chapter has dealt with how the characteristic forms of social life in the Middle Ages became established: forms that continued with many variations until the beginning of the Modern Age. The second half deals with ideas developed by the philosophers and theologians of the High Middle Ages (roughly 1150–1350).

By the eleventh century, improvements in technology increased agricultural productivity, which in turn lead to increased prosperity. Improvements were also made to military technology, leading to greater security. Internal raiding largely ceased, and the borders were secured from invasion. All these things greatly influenced the pattern of European government. By the eleventh century, most minor barons had been either reduced to vassalage or swallowed up by their more powerful neighbours so that, politically, Western Europe consisted of the territories held by princes and dukes of roughly equal power. The development of almost impenetrable fortresses in the eleventh and twelfth centuries made

56 The early Middle Ages saw a number inventions unknown under Rome that revolutionised agriculture and harnessed new kinds of energy: the heavy plough, animal harnesses, waterwheels, and windmills (Mokyr 1990, pp32–39). The Europeans also developed farming methods that overcame traditional problems of keeping farm animals fed, so providing a continuous source of both food and muscle-power. At the same time, innovations in building techniques and materials—such as chimneys, shingles, and plaster—made life more endurable, particularly in northern climates. All of this increased productivity which in turn increased population and prosperity.

57 Crucial improvements in military technology included the invention of the horseshoes and stirrup, which gave mounted warriors far greater control, range and effectiveness. Increased prosperity also permitted the construction of new types of castles.
overwhelming an opponent militarily almost impossible, and so arms played a decreasing role in Europe’s internal political life. The main powers became concerned with establishing stable political relations without military force. The unprecedented scale of baronial holdings and the increasing complexity of social relations also required a more sophisticated system of administration.

These diplomatic, legal and administrative needs were met from the twelfth century by a new generation of university-trained clerks and chancelleries. These men were instrumental in transforming advances in theology and philosophy into the practice of government. Although Church scholars in the early Middle Ages had known Cicero’s and Seneca’s works on Roman government, the difference between just rulers and tyrants, and the application of justice, during the centuries when the West’s overwhelming goals were simply survival and establishment of Christian faith, the Church had not had an opportunity to put this learning into practice. But with the rising prosperity and security, Cicero’s writings in particular became more widely studied and influential: they were, for instance, a principle source of John of Salisbury’s influential *Politicus* (1159) which set new standards for secular rulers. This work owes little to feudal institutions, and dealt with society in terms of the Roman republic, in which people were “united by a common agreement about law and rights”. Such principles—alien to feudal society—were taught to the West’s new class of cleric-administrators by the medieval universities, and they appear to have made some attempt to implement them. For example, the rise of this class corresponds with the restoration of reason in medieval government, and the displacement of judicial methods such as trial-by-ordeal by rational analysis and deduction.

As I discussed in Chapter 7, the Stoic-inspired Cicero and Seneca had made reason the source of all natural law—which the medieval West equated with God’s law. The Neoplatonic tradition in Christianity also asserted the importance of reason in the divine nature and hence in law. This identification was greatly strengthened by the discovery in Bologna around 1150 of a copy

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58 The impact of the university-trained administrators can be seen in the sudden growth in administrative documentation from the twelfth century. Sophisticated law and social relations required greater means of recall than was possible using the oral recall of the Middle Ages, and so writing was pressed into service. The change in England is documented by Clanchy 1979. He estimates, for example, that in twelfth century England, no more than thirty thousand land titles were drawn up but, by contrast, several million were made out in the century between 1250 and 1350.

59 In Sabine 1964, pp246–247

60 The use of an ordeal—such as drowning or burning—or trial by combat to test a person’s guilt or innocence rested on the belief that God would not permit the harm of an innocent person. It treated both religion and justice as branches of magic. Both the rising intellectual sophistication in religion and the rediscovery of Roman law made reliance on miracles less tenable. In 1215, the Lateran Council forbade priests to store or bless instruments of ordeal, although the practice persisted until the fourteenth century.
of the Justinian Code and *Digest* of Roman law, which made explicit the role of reason as both the source of law and the means for its implementation.

The increased use of ancient and rational methods in law and government reflects the increased vitality in European intellectual life during the High Middle Ages. The goal of this sudden efflorescence of intellectual activity in the twelfth and thirteen centuries had been established in late Antiquity, chiefly by Augustine and Boethius, who had recommended the study of all knowledge—carefully purged of pagan taint—as an aid to understanding Christian scripture and illuminating Christian faith. “As far as possible, join faith to reason,” wrote Boethius. The Scholastics reasoned that, since everything came from God, then all knowledge stemmed from him and so, despite the apparent disparity between faith and reason, it was not ultimately inconsistent and might be fruitfully harmonised to reveal God’s purposes. Faith completes knowledge of the natural world, wrote Thomas Aquinas: theology completes natural philosophy and science. During the early Middle Ages, the Church had higher priorities and lacked the resources to pursue this program. However, with the rise of prosperity in the eleventh century the Church devoted enormous resources and scholars to intellectual work. With almost all of Europe converted to Christianity, the threat of paganism receded and the Church re-engaged revered pagan authors such as Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca from a position of religious superiority and intellectual security.

The goal of a complete synthesis of all philosophy within Christian belief sharply affected the direction of Scholastic thought and training. It rested on the recovery and mastery of ancient philosophy and law to complete the task set by Augustine of fully comprehending Christian revelation. On the whole, the Scholastics had no interest in novelties, or any form of knowledge not known to Augustine and Boethius. The Scholastics looked at the world through the lens of Greece and Rome (and their Muslim and Jewish commentators). Their efforts were greatly stimulated by the recovery of most of the surviving works of Greek science and natural philosophy—chiefly Aristotle, Ptolemy and Galen—which presented a fully integrated and dazzlingly coherent account of the entire natural and social world. This, along with the Digest of Roman law recovered around the same time, provided the Scholastics with a model of a completed Christian philosophy.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{61}\) At first sight, the task of reconciling Aristotle’s naturalism and empiricism with the otherworldly bent of Christianity might seem entirely unachievable. However, because Christian thought was heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, there were many points of contact. The starting point for Aristotle himself had been the philosophy of Plato. While he felt the need to ‘correct’ it in several important ways, he also retained much that Plato had established: the division of reality into form and matter; the division of the soul into intellect, emotion and appetite; the priority of the intellect over matter; the significant role the philosopher played in the state. When the Neoplatonists had conducted their vast synthesis of ancient philosophy, important parts of Aristotle’s philosophy had found a place.

...continued on next page
The political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas

The Scholastics did not deal directly with the nature of society and community, but treated it obliquely in their discussions of government and God’s creation. Human society was one aspect of God’s creation. Creation they analysed by resolving its four Aristotelian causes: formal, material, efficient and final. Creation’s efficient cause—what set it in motion—was God’s will, while its material existence was guaranteed by God’s being. Much more complex were the form of creation (its formal cause) and God’s purposes for it (its final cause). Since human society is one aspect of God’s creation, the primary aspects about society to be explained are its form and how it achieves its purposes. In Scholastic philosophy the form of society was reflected in the form of creation at large (which I will discuss later), while the means for fulfilling society’s purposes was government. So, for the Scholastics, the order of creation and the nature of government covered the essentials of any discussion about society. The definitive statement of both questions in the High Middle Ages was in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274).

In his philosophy, Thomas regarded all forms of knowledge as originating either directly or indirectly with God, and hence he saw neither a conflict between different forms of knowledge (faith and reason in particular), nor any impediment to their integration. Thomas’ work represents the single greatest attempt to synthesise the works of Greek science, Roman law and Christian revelation known in the thirteen century. In his political philosophy, he draws primarily on five sources: Biblical revelation, Christian tradition, Augustine’s City of God, and Roman law, organised within the framework of Aristotle’s Politics and Ethics.

Like Aristotle, Thomas starts his analysis with the goal of human life, which he says is happiness. Denying that it consists in wealth, honours, fame, glory, power, pleasure or any bodily good, he concludes that happiness consists in contemplating God—a claim he took from Augustine’s City of God. Like Augustine, Thomas says that this can only be fully

For instance, his doctrine of God as the Unmoved Mover that sets all other things in motion; the belief that all things move towards their end (telos); the hierarchy of reality and the grades of souls (matter, plant, animal, human, divine).

Thomas’ principle statements on human society are made in the Summa Theologiae and the Summa Contra Gentiles. Thomas also began a book on the rule of kings (De regimine principum), but had completed only four chapters at his death: the bulk of the work was completed by Ptolemy of Lucca. He also started a commentary on Aristotle’s Politics but completed only three chapters.

Summa Theologiae 2(1), q.2 art.1–6
achieved in reunion with God, and hence cannot be achieved in life\textsuperscript{64}. But while perfect happiness is unachievable in this life, partial happiness is possible\textsuperscript{65}. Achieving this brings Thomas back to Aristotle’s definition of happiness: it consists in a life lived in accordance with perfect virtue\textsuperscript{66}.

Thomas says that, while people have an aptitude for virtue, they do not naturally behave virtuously: they need to be habituated in virtue\textsuperscript{67}. The need to train people in virtue so they may perfect their natures and achieve happiness led Aristotle’s to conclude that people are meant to live in society, not as individuals. In Thomas’ philosophy however, the link between virtue and society is muted\textsuperscript{68}, although he agrees that society is necessary for human happiness. Thomas’ approach is to reflect that the good habits are an ‘internal’ principle that leads people to act virtuously. There is he says also an ‘external’ principle

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{64} “God has promised us perfect happiness, when we shall be as the angels ... in heaven”. \textit{Summa Theologiae} 2(1), q.3, art.2 rep.4
\item \textsuperscript{65} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 2(1), q.5, art.3 resp. “A certain participation of Happiness can be had in this life, but perfect and true Happiness cannot be had in this life. This may be seen from a twofold consideration. First, from the general notion of happiness. For since happiness is a perfect and sufficient good, it excludes every evil, and fulfills every desire. But in this life every evil cannot be excluded. For this present life is subject to many unavoidable evils: to ignorance on the part of the intellect, to disordered affection on the part of the appetite, and to many penalties on the part of the body as Augustine sets forth in the \textit{City of God}. Likewise neither can the desire for good be satiated in this life. For man naturally desires the good which he has to be abiding. Now the goods of the present life pass away, since life itself passes away, which we naturally desire to have, and would wish to hold abidingly, for man naturally shrinks from death. Therefore it is impossible to have true Happiness in this life. Secondly, from a consideration of that in which Happiness specially consists, namely, the vision of the Divine Essence, which man cannot obtain in this life.”
\item \textsuperscript{66} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 2(1), q.4, art.6 resp. Like Aristotle, Thomas distinguishes between the active and the contemplative life, and says that, since the contemplative life consists in reflecting on the truth (which is the nature of God), then the contemplative life is the happier (2(2), q.3, art.2 rep.4). He says later that, “the life to come is entirely contemplative” (2(2), q.3, art.5 resp.)
\item \textsuperscript{67} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 2(1), q.63, art.1–2 and 2(1) q.95 art.1 resp.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Aristotle’s link between achieving virtue and living in society cannot be a strong one in post-Augustinian Christianity. Aristotle’s justification for a social life was that virtue can only be learnt in an institution that possesses all of the goods—which he defines as the self-contained polis. This is not a claim that Christian theologians can fully accept because, as Augustine claims, true happiness lies with God in the next life, and not in this one. Consequently, no society contains all goods for they all lack the greatest good, and so Aristotle’s premise is violated. In any case, in questions of morality, Christianity always placed great emphasis on individual responsibility and obedience to God, so limiting a significant role for the influence of others.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
leading people to good, and that is God’s law, assisted by his grace. “The proper effect of
law is to lead its subjects to their proper virtue; and since virtue is ‘that which makes its
subject good’, it follows that the proper effect of law is to make those in whom it is given,
good.”

Law has a much larger role in Thomas’ political philosophy than in Aristotle’s. Thomas’
views are heavily influenced by both Augustine and Roman law, and consequently he shows
many parallels with their source: the Stoics. Like them, he says that all law derives
ultimately from God. God’s Divine Reason provides the eternal law of the universe. This
however can be known perfectly only by God and those that can behold him directly. Because
creation is less perfect and more limited than its Creator, everything in creation
has only a partial knowledge of the eternal law. Everything participates in it as far as its
nature permits, and this establishes the natural law, known to both animals and
humans. Amongst other things, the natural law gives every creature the inclination to
protect itself, reproduce, teach its young, and punish wrong-doers; nature gives human
beings additional specific desires to seek truth and develop their intelligence. In addition
to the natural law, humans have human laws, based partly on the eternal law (and hence
never truly in conflict with the natural law, but derived from it), and partly on the
usefulness of additional laws in life, for instance, for dealing with ownership and property.
According to Thomas, the sources of human law are custom and reason. God also
establishes the divine law, recorded in the Bible, for guiding people to their redemption.

69 Summa Theologiae 2(i), q.90
70 Summa Theologiae 2(i), q.92, art.1 resp.
71 Summa Theologiae 2(i), q.93, art.2 resp.
72 Summa Theologiae 2(i) q.91, art.2 resp. and rep.3
73 Summa Theologiae 2(i) q.94, art.2 resp. and q.95 art.2 resp.
74 Summa Theologiae 2(i) q.91, art 3, resp. Thomas quotes Cicero saying “justice has its source in
nature; thence certain things came into custom by reason of their utility; afterwards these
things which emanated from nature and were approved by custom, were sanctioned by fear
and reverence from the law” (De Inventione 2:53). The ultimate source for this definition is
Stoic and is reflected also in the definitions of law in the Digest.
75 As in Roman and Germanic traditions, Thomas attaches great importance to custom in law
and insists that it should not be lightly put aside (Summa Theologiae 2(ii) q.97 art.2 and 3 )
76 Summa Theologiae 2(i) q.91, art.4, resp. Divine law is needed to supplement human and natural
laws because its purpose is redemption and return to God—an act that lies outside the goals
of nature and hence cannot be achieved by observing the laws of nature and human society
alone. Divine law is an act of God’s grace and lies outside nature.
Thomas claims that, in order to acquire virtue, people need law—which implies that they should live in lawful societies. Despite the lack of consistency with Aristotle’s logic linking virtue and society, Thomas gives variations on Aristotle’s two reasons for the existence of society. First, he says, humans are naturally social and political creatures; second, humans need the help of others to secure the necessities of life because individually they are not self-sufficient.

Thomas distinguishes between two basic types of social institutions: “the domestic, composed of members of the same family, and the civil, composed of members of the same nationality.” The two are not distinct: households are part of the state, and so are ordered to the same end. (There are intermediary forms as well, comprising aspects of both.) Families and states both require some form of government for, without it, each person would pursue their own interests and none would pursue the common good, which is the chief source of human happiness. So a ruler of some kind is required in every kind of society.

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77 Thomas’s logic connecting virtue to society is rather tortured in places. For instance, following Aristotle, he claims that teaching people requires a system of punishments to deter wrong-doers. Thomas then says that such punishments are only available to societies, not individuals, and that individuals do not have the power to coerce others (Summa Theologiae 2(1), q.90, art.4, rep.2)—a claim that is simply not true and misunderstands the point of Aristotle’s system of rewards and punishments.

78 Thomas ignores the traditional source of Christian society in God’s creation of woman as a helper to man. Indeed, he specifically rejects it (Summa Theologiae 1 q.92 art.1 resp.) If man had required a helper in his work, he says, God would have created other men. Women have a single function in Thomas’ society: reproduction.

79 “…man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society.” (Summa Theologiae 2(1), q.94, art.3, resp.)

80 De regimine principum 1:1. Thomas says that human beings are more sociable than other animals “for other animals are furnished by nature with food, with a covering of hair, and with means of defence, such as teeth, horns or at any rate speed of flight. But man is supplied with none of these things by nature. Rather, in place of all of them reason was given to him, by which he might be able to provide all things for himself, by the work of his own hands. One man however is not able to equip himself for these things, for one man cannot live a self-sufficient life. It is therefore natural for man to live in fellowship with many others”. He goes on to add that human beings are not fitted with a natural knowledge of what is useful and harmful, as other animals are, and therefore, “it is necessary for man to live in a community, so that each may devote his reason to some particular branch of learning; one to medicine, and other to something else, another to something else again”.

81 Summa Theologiae 3(suppl) q.26, art.1 resp.

82 Summa Theologiae 2(1) q.90 art.4 rep.3

83 In De regimine principum 1:2, Thomas mentions a hierarchy of household, locality, city and province, presumably surmounted by the whole state or nation.
In the family—which is made up of husband, wife, children, and servants—the man rules the others: children owe their fathers affection, wives owe their husbands love, and servants fear their master’s power. The needs of societies are more complex and hence the requirements of rulers are greater. The purpose of a ruler is to establish laws which secure the common good, lead citizens to a moral life, coordinate the efforts of each citizen in society, ensure peace, suppress disorder, defend citizens from external enemies, and ensure citizens have the material needs to achieve all these things. In ordering the behaviour and resources of others, the ruler must act for the common good and on behalf of all members of the community, not for their own private interests. As in Roman law, the ruler is a delegate of the people.

A law... regards first and foremost the order of the common good. Now to order anything to the common good belongs either to the whole people, or to someone who is the vicegerent of the whole people. And therefore the making of a law belongs either to the whole people or to a public personage who has the care of the whole people.

Using Aristotle’s analysis of Greek political institutions, Thomas considers the various ways that people may be governed. He praises monarchy, aristocracy and ‘polity’, and rejects tyranny, oligarchy and democracy. He is divided on the best form of government: at some times he favours monarchy; at others a mixed constitution comprising monarchy,
the development of ideas about communication in European thought—although he refers to it in medieval terms, where laws are “sanctioned by Lords and Commons”\textsuperscript{89}. Since all laws are ultimately derived from God, all legitimate government is ultimately for the good, and all legitimate rulers are delegates of God\textsuperscript{90}. And rulers may further delegate the implementation of law to subordinates, establishing a hierarchy of rule and offices\textsuperscript{91}.

Finally, Thomas notes that the goal of civil society is the happiness of people in this material life, but it does not have the power to lead to happiness in the next. For that, God has provided the divine law to instruct people and the Church to teach them. Therefore, the state must recognise a separate society in the Church, although it is made up of the same members as the civil society. Thomas says that both Church and the secular state have a role to play in the material and spiritual welfare of people. However, salvation can only be achieved with the assistance of the Church, he regards the Church’s authority as higher than that of secular rulers\textsuperscript{92}, and says there are conditions where the Church may annul subjects’ oaths of loyalty to their rulers\textsuperscript{93}.

The effect of Thomas’ political philosophy is to cast feudalism as the best form of government and give it a place within Christian theology. He justifies all major contemporary beliefs about society and government. In particular:

\begin{itemize}
\item[1] human law is the property of all people equally, bestowed on them by God
\item[2] the sources of law are custom and reason and, once law is found out, it must be promulgated
\item[3] rulers, when legitimate, are appointed in some fashion by the people, and their rule is for the common good
\item[4] because God is the source of all law, rulers derive their authority from God
\item[5] rulers may in turn delegate authority to their vassals, and they to their own subordinates, so establishing a hierarchy or rule
\item[6] The natural law imposes limitations on the power and actions of kings
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{89} Summa Theologiae 2(1), q.95, art.4, resp. Thomas’ support of a mixed constitution is presumably based on Roman law, which is quoted in the next section of the Summa. He may also have known of Cicero’s arguments in the Respublica favouring a mixed constitution.

\textsuperscript{90} Summa Theologiae 2(1), q.93, art.3, resp.

\textsuperscript{91} “It belongs to the dignity of a ruler to have many ministers and diversity of servants to carry his command into execution, the height and greatness of his lordship appearing by the multitude of persons of various ranks who are subject to him” Summa Contra Gentiles 3:77

\textsuperscript{92} De regimine principum 1:14

\textsuperscript{93} Summa Theologiae 2(2) q.12 art.2 resp.
[7] There is a continuity of social institutions stretching from the state to the household
[8] In domestic groupings, fathers rule over wives and children; masters rule over their servants (which includes serfs).

The greatest weakness of Thomas’ philosophy was that he believed that all forms of knowledge—even faith and reason—were not ultimately at variance and so could be reconciled in a vast, all-embracing synthesis. The result was that he used philosophy to clarify, secure and defend institutions and traditions as he found them. In political philosophy, this meant he tended to justify government as it existed in the thirteenth century. Although his philosophy aimed to embrace all truths, the result in political philosophy was a system that proved inflexible and in serious conflict with his sources—particularly Aristotle.

His method of synthesising all knowledge saw him attempt to reconcile five very different social traditions: Biblical revelation, Christian tradition, Augustine’s *City of God*, Aristotle’s metaphysics, *Politics* and *Ethics*, and Roman law (with its Stoic sources). As I noted above, conflicts between Aristotle’s claim that the state contained all goods and Augustine’s claim that the greatest good was only enjoyed in the next life had the effect of weakening the necessity of life in society. In the end, Thomas has to rely on the authority of Aristotle to secure his claim that humans are naturally social and political creatures, and ignore Augustine’s claim that government exists only as a result of sin. But even though he drew heavily on Aristotle, he also violated basic assumptions of Aristotle’s politics. For instance, Aristotle wrote for a Greek city-state which he assumed was self-sufficient and in which each person contributed to and benefited from public life. Thomas applied the politics of Greek city-states to medieval European kingdoms, even though they had hundreds of times the population and were thousands of times the area, and had a social hierarchy that prevented most people from participating in public life. He also ignored political institutions as they existed in his time, and seems to have assumed that they were the same as the institutions of ancient Greece and Rome—for instance, in his belief that the ‘mixed constitution’ of Roman law was the same as the balance between kings, barons and commons in feudal society. He also ignored the fact that the Roman-Stoic legal principle that political power lay ultimately with the common people had no real parallel in the feudal system with its myriad local reciprocal rights.

The detail of Thomas’ political philosophy did not survive long; rendered irrelevant by three developments. The first was the decline of feudalism from the thirteenth century which I described earlier, as the commons assisted the rise of monarchs to absolute power, breaking the fences of baronial control. Thomist political philosophy had no place for the new, more democratic institutions such as guilds which had been created by economic prosperity.

The second—which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 13—was the decline in the Gelasian doctrine of two swords and the conflicts around the Popes’ claims to universal sovereignty—a controversy in which the Scholastics were badly misled by their continuing
dependence upon Aristotle. The Gelasian doctrine divided the world into things spiritual and things material, giving the Church authority over the former and kings over the latter. However, the Church also required some property with which to achieve spiritual ends. In the thirteenth century, the popes steadily expanded the scope of material things under its authority. Since, in Christian thought, all material things existed to achieve spiritual ends, the Church had absolute authority in both spiritual and temporal matters—a position made explicit in 1302 by Pope Boniface. The declaration was decisively defeated in 1309 by the French king Philip, with the aid of the French clergy. Philip and the Parisian Dominicans seized the papacy and transferred it from Rome to French-controlled Avignon, where it remained for the next seventy-five years. They also produced a vast literature justifying nations as political societies independent of the Church. Subsequent resistance by the German Emperors to continuing Papal claims to sovereignty saw the Empire’s supporters transfer almost all of the Church’s spiritual functions to the other world and advanced the idea of society as fully self-contained and self-governing. The Empire in particular was aided by the Franciscans, who asserted that the renunciation of property beyond bare need and the adoption of Christlike poverty were necessary for the proper performance of the Church’s spiritual duties—a view declared heretical, so splitting the Church within, and opening a vicious round of claims about cleric abuse, further weakening the Church’s moral authority. The political theory of the Empire and the Franciscans would see the Church’s functions reduced to teaching, entirely separate from the secular state, and deprived of all coercive power—a doctrine that would be enacted three hundred years later in the early Modern Age.

The third factor working against Thomistic philosophy came from within Scholasticism itself. Thomas represented a strand that believed that reason was compatible with and enhanced Christian faith. But even before Thomas’ time, there was the opposing view, that reason could draw no conclusions concerning matters of faith: there is no connection between theology and science, and Christian faith needed to be cut from of the necessities of philosophy. In time, it defeated Thomas’ efforts at synthesis. Within philosophy, it advocated a much stronger naturalism.

The Scholastics did however leave several more general legacies in social thought. The most important was the belief that reason could be used both to analyse and to order social life—particularly in the creation of law and the administration of justice. Another was to give new currency to the ancient Stoic belief that there was a Natural Law that preceded all human laws and which no human-made law could genuinely contradict. As I will discuss in Chapter 13, Locke’s political philosophy rests on a notion of Natural Law derived from the Scholastics’, and in his arguments that citizens have a natural right to resist a tyrant—arguments vividly exploited in the American War of Independence—were almost identical to Thomas’ own views in the Summa Theologiae and De regimine principum.
of natural law also meant there was a human nature that was the basis of all human law, and that human laws must not contradict—such as the impulses to live, marry, produce children, and seek truth and happiness. The Scholastics’ study of ancient political philosophy gave rise to the belief that, behind all the variety of human life and societies, there were laws and principles that held good for all peoples.

Despite the eventual demise of their political philosophy, the Scholastics made a second and far more enduring contribution to beliefs about society through their analysis of the form of creation and the appearance of the Great Chain of Being.

THE ORDER OF NATURE AND THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

The problem of creation and the Neoplatonic ‘Golden Chain’ of Being

The Great Chain of Being (or the Great Scale or the Golden Chain) was never a precise or fixed doctrine, but rather a general belief about the organisation of the universe. Its fullest expression was in the High Middle Ages, but it was first explicitly formulated by the Neoplatonists in the third century AD, although their sources were in turn far older. In Chapter 8, I described the larger framework of Neoplatonic creation: the outward impulse from the One creating successively the Mind, Soul and Body of the universe; and the returning ascent back from multiplicity to unity, when creation returns full circle to its Goal. The Great Chain provided the detailed arrangement of things within this basic architecture.

The origins of the Great Chain lie with Plato. For Plato, reality lies with the Ideas, and the goal of every material things is to become like its Idea and, in so doing, perfect itself. Plato also implies that the Ideas themselves are creations of a single principle, the Idea of the Good or Beautiful, which the Neoplatonists called the One—a being which all Platonists regarded as God. For the Platonists, this supreme Idea is entirely self-contained, requiring nothing to perfect it. However, as the Platonists recognised, if perfection is achieved only in God, and everything else in creation is simply an image of it, then the question must be addressed: why does creation exist at all, for creation adds nothing to the perfection of God and if it did not exist then God would be none the worse for it.  

Plato deals with this question in Timaeus, which describes the creation of the world by the Demiurge or ‘Craftsman’, using the Ideas as a template. (Later Platonists regarded the

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95 See Lovejoy 1948, pp43–45
Demiurge as a personification of the Idea of the Good, and treated it as God\textsuperscript{96}. In the dialogue, the astronomer Timaeus reasons that, since God is good, then God is devoid of any envy or jealousy. He says that not bringing a thing into existence that might exist is an act of jealousy: but since the Good is not jealous, then it follows that these other things must exist. Indeed, in order to be perfect, God must produce creation. So Plato turns the argument that God does not need creation to be perfect on its head: God would be less than perfect if he did not bring creation into existence. (Six hundred years later, Plotinus agreed with Plato that, “Since the higher exists, the lower must as well”\textsuperscript{97}.)

Because the Good is not jealous of any other thing, it wants the things it creates to be as perfect as possible, and hence as like as itself as possible—from which the Neoplatonists deduced that this universe was the best there possibly was, for it is in the nature of the One to create perfection.

Having found that creation is a necessary function of God, Timaeus then turns to the question, how many things must creation contain? The answer is, all possible things. For, if the world failed to contain something that it could, it would be less than perfect. Since creation is perfect, it must therefore contain everything that can exist. The creation myth of Timaeus then describes the formation first of the heavens, then gods and then mortal animals of the air, sea and land. Plato explains that mortals exist “since without them the universe will be incomplete, for it will not contain every kind of animal that it ought to contain, if it is to be perfect.”\textsuperscript{98} Although, considered individually, a god is better than a mortal, a creation that contained only gods would be less perfect than one that contained both gods and mortals—along with every other type of creature. A creation that lacked variety would be less perfect than one that was filled with every potential thing. Later Platonists used the same argument to explain the existence of evil: a creation that contained only good would be less ‘full’ and less perfect than one that contained both good and evil\textsuperscript{99}.

\textsuperscript{96} Neoplatonists regarded the Demiurge as an ‘emanation’ from the One, through which the creative powers of the One were exercised. On this interpretation, Neoplatonic Christians understood the Demiurge as Christ, through whom creation had come to be, implementing the Ideas in the Divine Mind.

\textsuperscript{97} Plotinus Enneads 3:3:7

\textsuperscript{98} Plato, Timaeus 41c

\textsuperscript{99} “The Reason–Principle is sovereign, making all: it wills things as they are and, in a reasonable act, it produces even what we know as evil: it cannot desire all to be good: an artist would not make an animal all eyes, and in the same way, the Reason-Principle would not make all [creatures] divine: it makes Gods but also celestial spirits, the intermediate order, then men, then animals; all is graded succession, and in this no spirit of grudging [envy]” (Plotinus Enneads 3:3:11)
The Neoplatonists teamed this concept of ‘fullness’ or ‘plenitude’ with the concept of ‘continuity’ from Aristotle’s metaphysics. Things are continuous, Aristotle says, if they share a common boundary that also holds them together\(^{100}\). Plato’s concept of fullness implies that between two things there can be no ‘gap’ in creation, which implies that there must be an intermediate form—and so, by some rather loose logic, all things therefore form a continuum as Aristotle describes it. The Neoplatonists regarded continuity as equivalent to ‘fullness’.

Aristotle’s analysis of the natural world provided examples of continua that were later used to support the concept of nature’s ‘fullness’. He observes several ways in which plants and animals can be placed in a sequence or an order. For instance, animals can be ranked by development at the time of birth\(^{101}\), or in order of intelligence or strength\(^{102}\). This implies that they possess qualities that may be ranked in a linear sequence. Although Aristotle cautioned that animals and plants cannot be ranked on the one scale\(^{103}\), it is also true that, judged against some criteria, creatures will fall into a series of classes. In this case, the classes tend not to be clear-cut—they pass imperceptibly from one to another\(^{104}\) (which appeared to fulfil the requirement of the Platonist’s definition of ‘fullness’, and that there should be no ‘gaps’ in creation.)

Historically, the most important sequence Aristotle defined ranked living things according to the powers of the soul: nutrition, appetite, sensation, locomotion, and intellect\(^{105}\). These, he says “constitute a series, each successive term of which ... contains its predecessor”\(^{106}\). This sequence in turn defined a series amongst creatures: lifeless things, plants, animals and humans—and potentially even higher forms above humans\(^{107}\).

\(^{100}\) Aristotle, *Metaphysics* §11:12, 1069a5

\(^{101}\) Aristotle grades animals on their development at birth (*The generation of animals*, §1:1, 733b1–15), and on their sensibility and habits of life (*The history of animals* §8:1, 588b17f)

\(^{102}\) Aristotle *History of animals* §8:1 588a20–588b5

\(^{103}\) Animals, for instance, differ from one another in a number of different ways—intelligence, strength, anatomy, and so on—and while one animal may be ‘superior’ to another in respect to one quality, it may be ‘inferior’ with respect to another. “All things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike,—both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one has nothing to do with another, but they are connected” (*Metaphysics* §12:10, 1075a16).

\(^{104}\) “Nature proceeds little by little from things lifeless to animal life in such a way that it is impossible to determine the exact line of demarcation, nor one which side thereof an intermediate form should lie.” (*History of Animals* §8:1, 588b5)

\(^{105}\) Aristotle, *On the Soul* §2:3, 414a30

\(^{106}\) Aristotle, *On the Soul* §2:3, 414b29

\(^{107}\) Aristotle, *On the Soul* §2:3. These are not sharp steps, but a gradual continuum: “... after lifeless things in the upward scale comes the plant. ... there is observed in plants a continuous scale of ascent towards the animal. So, in the sea, there are certain objects concerning which ...continued on next page
Dionysius the Areopagite

The medieval version of the Great Chain was primarily established by a small collection of Neoplatonic Christian works written under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite. Although probably the work of a fifth century Syrian monk, the name led medieval scholars to believe he was one of Paul’s Athenian converts108, and so regarded the Dionysian corpus as the second oldest Christian writings (after Paul’s letters) and second only to the Bible in significance.

Heavily influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophy of Proclus (c.410–485), the Dionysian corpus casts Christian theology within the Neoplatonic doctrine of procession and return: the outward impulse from the One bringing all parts of creation into being, and the inward return to reunification with the Source. Like earlier Alexandrian theologians, he found easy correspondences between Neoplatonic outgoing and return and the Christian theology of creation, fall, incarnation and redemption. Like the Neoplatonists and the Christian Fathers, the pseudo-Dionysius regarded God and the angels as intellectual, and reunion with God as an intellectual ascent—achieved through knowledge and contemplation109. And, like the Neoplatonists, the pseudo-Dionysius believed that salvation was only open to beings with “reason and intelligence”110.

The four books at the heart of the Dionysian corpus begins with the Divine Names, which explains the characteristics attributed to God in the Bible, such as goodness, justice, wisdom, power, life, and being111. In the process, the Divine Names also sets out the order of creation: initially with the second and third persons of the Trinity—the ‘blossom’ or ‘radiance’ of God’s goodness112—and then creation proper. Employing Neoplatonic terminology and imagery, the pseudo-Dionysius says that God, in his goodness and love, possesses an exuberance of being, which is not only full but overflowing113. From this ‘overflowing’ or ‘outpouring’ of this excess of love and goodness proceed all of God’s

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108 A Dionysius is referred to in Acts 17:34. The early Church historian Eusebius also referred to Dionysius as a bishop of Athens (Ecclesiastical History 3:4).

109 For example, [Dionysius] Celestial Hierarchy §1:4

110 [Dionysius] Ecclesiastical Hierarchy §1:4

111 [Dionysius] Divine Names §§4–8

112 [Dionysius] Divine Names §2:7

113 The pseudo-Dionysius uses the normal Greek philosophical term ousia for ‘nature’ or ‘being’, but later he prefixes it with hyper, meaning ‘above’ or ‘beyond’: by this he means that God not only has being, but surpasses being and nature, for God exceeds every created thing in being. The term, once translated into Latin, provided the root for our word ‘supernatural’.
creatures. As well as being the source of creation, God is also the goal of everything he has created, and in him everything is reunited and completed. Everything returns to its beginning, as a circle returns to its starting point, or all the radii of a circle are joined to the centre.

Creation occurs in and possesses an order. The pseudo-Dionysius discusses aspects of this order in the second and third books, concerning the angelic and ecclesiastic hierarchies. The *Celestial Hierarchy* deals with the first creatures made by God, the angels, of which the Bible mentions nine types. Although ancient theologians had suggested several ways to list the angels, it was the Dionysian scheme that triumphed in the High Middle Ages. He arranged them not simply in a list, but as three ranks of three choirs of angels, each reflecting triune nature of their source. Only the first of these triads (seraphim, cherubim, thrones) experiences God directly. They pass on the light of God to the intermediate rank (virtues, dominations, powers) and they in turn to the lowest ranks (principalities, archangels, angels). The further each rank of angels is from God, the less intense and perfect they are in their knowledge and love of God.

The main purpose of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is to explain the mystical and symbolic meaning of the Christian sacraments, institutions and symbols (he deals with the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and extreme unction—as well as with the burial of the dead). In the discussion he explains that the grades of priests are modelled on the angelic hierarchy, and consequently show the same threefold nature: in the structure of the ‘Teaching Church’ (bishops, priests, deacons) and in the ‘Learning Church’ (monks, people and catechumens). The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is important as it is the work that first defines ‘hierarchy’: “the arrangement of all sacred realities” by which he means the

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114 [Dionysius] *Divine Names* §9:9, §2:10, §13:1. To describe this outflowing, the pseudo-Dionysius employs a common Neoplatonic metaphor of the sun’s light streaming outwards into darkness: illuminating everything that it touches but becoming successively weaker the further it travels from the Source (*Divine Names* §4:6, §4:1). Creatures absorb this light of goodness and love in direct proportion to their nature (*Divine Names* §11:2, §1:2).

115 [Dionysius] *Divine Names* §4:14, §5:16

116 The pseudo-Dionysius’ discussions of symbols, and their purpose in drawing the mind to God—particularly as they were used in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* to explain the significance of Christian sacraments—were highly influential in the High Middle Ages. They are broadly similar to Augustine’s treatment, which I discuss in Chapter 13, but more explicitly Platonic in treatment. They had no lasting influence beyond the Renaissance, when doubts were raised about the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus, and the intellectual direction was against Platonic symbolism.

117 The term ‘hierarch’ had been in Greek use since pagan Antiquity, and referred to a senior priest. The term hierarchy, meaning series of ranks or grades or degrees, originates with the pseudo-Dionysius.
scheme of graded ranks (higher, intermediate and lower) which is displayed by the angels and imitated in the organisation of the Church. He says that the purpose of the ecclesiastical hierarchy—and indeed any hierarchy—“is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him.”\textsuperscript{118} Within the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies, each member takes what they receive of the divine light from above and passes it on to those further down the scale.

The pseudo-Dionysius said nothing directly about society outside the Church, but he implied that it should take the same form as the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchy\textsuperscript{119}. Even without his few comments, the scholars of the High Middle Ages could have—and did—deduce this from his arguments, as well as other Christian and Neoplatonic sources. For instance, in the \textit{Divine Names} he describes creation as “a great shining chain hanging downward from the heights of heaven to the world below”\textsuperscript{120}. This, along with the doctrine that God creates everything through a continuous overflowing, suggested a continuous graduation from creator to the lowest levels of creation. Dionysius also claimed that even lifeless creation below mankind in the created order showed the same threefold division as God, angels and Church\textsuperscript{121}. Since everything has its existence in a single descent from God, and the levels both above and below human society were organised within a hierarchy, it followed that human society should also possess a hierarchical structure.

The Dionysian concept of divine hierarchy was heavily used in the High Middle Ages in diverse settings: theology, angelology, eschatology, creation and society. By the twelfth century, John of Paris and other theologians employed the pseudo-Dionysius to argue that Europe’s temporal states should be ordered hierarchically\textsuperscript{122}. The Dionysian corpus was also employed in support of papal supremacy. The argument ran that, since the angelic hierarchy is surmounted by God, and the invisible Church by Christ, and since the lower ranks of creation reflect the order of those above, it follows that the visible Church should likewise be crowned with a single figure: the Pope. Since every member of Christian kingdoms was also a member of the Church—even the kings of Christendom—it followed that the Pope was superior to all of these.

\textsuperscript{118} [Dionysius] \textit{Celestial Hierarchy} §3:2
\textsuperscript{119} [Dionysius] \textit{Ecclesiastical Hierarchy} §6:1–2
\textsuperscript{120} [Dionysius] \textit{Divine Names} 680c
\textsuperscript{121} [Dionysius] \textit{Celestial Hierarchy} §4:1 and also \textit{Divine names} §4 and §5
\textsuperscript{122} Leclercq in [Dionysius] 1987, p31
Scholastic philosophy and the Great Chain of Being

The Neoplatonic-Dionysian scheme of outgoing and return provided the basic framework for Christian theology and cosmology during the High Middle Ages, and both the Dionysian hierarchy and the parallels between heaven and earth vastly elaborated. The influence of the pseudo-Dionysius is particularly marked in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas agreed that God, being perfect, creates everything that could possibly exist. The universe is ‘full’—there are no ‘gaps’ in creation—and consequently the universe is perfect. (God even created everything that might lead to sin, for without these things, the universe would be lacking and hence imperfect.) Like the Neoplatonists, Thomas argued that a variety of creatures—some superior, some inferior—was necessary for the perfection of creation. As well as creating the variety of things that make up the universe, God also created an order within which everything has a place. Like the Neoplatonists, Thomas...

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123 Theological summae were usually organised around the analysis and defence of Christian belief within the Dionysian order: outgoing descent: God, Trinity, creation, angels, mankind, virtues, vices. return and ascent: Christ’s incarnation, sacraments, resurrection, last things.

124 [Dionysius] 1987, p31

125 At over 1700 direct citations, the pseudo-Dionysius is amongst Thomas’ most important sources, ranking behind only the Bible, Augustine and Aristotle (Pelikan in [Dionysius] 1987, p21).

126 Thomas relies on the Neoplatonic equation of continuum with fullness. For example, reflecting on the account of Genesis which says that the first animals created by God were the fishes and the birds, Thomas employs the principle of continuity to deduce the necessity of land animals. “Nature passes from one extreme to another through the medium. And therefore there were creatures of intermediate type between the animals of the air and those of the water, having something in common with both.” (Summa theologiae I q.71, art.1 res.4). In short, if nature lacked intermediary forms, it would be incomplete—or lack ‘fullness’—and hence be imperfect.

127 Summa Theologiae I q.73, art.1. Thomas distinguishes between two types of perfection. First is the organisation in which creation is made—which formal cause—which was achieved he says on the seventh day of creation, when creation was ‘full’ (obj.1), that is, it contained everything that it possibly could. The second type of perfection is the completion of creation—its final cause—which is “the end of the whole universe, is the perfect happiness of the Saints at the consummation of the world”. Here Aquinas marries the Aristotelian distinction between formal and final causes, with the Christian doctrine that grace is needed to complete nature.

128 Summa Theologiae I q.92 art.1 resp. and Summa Contra Gentiles 3:71

129 Summa Contra Gentiles 2:45 and 2:48
claimed that if a thing was removed from creation, or the order of things changed, the
universe would be less perfect than God made it.\textsuperscript{130}

the universe … cannot be better, on account of the most noble order given to these
things by God, in which the Good of the universe consists. For if any one thing were
bettered, the proposition of order would be destroyed, just as if one string were
stretched more than it ought to be, the melody of the harp would be destroyed.\textsuperscript{131}

In his account of creation, Aquinas is quite explicit that all things ‘emanate’ from God and
eventually return to him.\textsuperscript{132} The idea of emanation was combined with the necessity of
order, and the fullness and continuity of creation, to imply that the universe is formed in an
immense hierarchy: a ‘great chain’ of creation.\textsuperscript{133}

God wished to produce His works in likeness to Himself … in order that they might be
perfect, and that He might be known through them. Hence, … He laid this natural law
on all things, that last things should be reduced and perfected by middle things, and
middle things by the first, as Dionysius says.\textsuperscript{134}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} 3:71 especially §§3 & 6. Existence is, in itself, a good thing for Aquinas.
He claims that “God loves all existing things. For all existing things, in so far as they exist,
are good, since the being of a thing is itself a good, and likewise, whatever perfection it
possesses.” (\textit{Summa Theologiae} I q.20, art.2, resp.) Consequently, the loss of any single thing
would entail a loss in the total goodness of creation.
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Summa Theologiae} I q.25 a.6 rep.3
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Summa Theologiae} I qq.44 & 45, particularly I q.44 art.1 & art.4. Strictly speaking, the doctrine
of emanation and return cannot be reconciled with Christian doctrine, although Thomas
and other Scholastics certainly make the attempt. The Neoplatonic tradition they drew on
argued that God creates everything that could possibly exist, for to do less would imply that
God was less than perfect. This however implied that both the act of creation and the form
of creation are necessary acts. Christian theology however insists that God is free to do
other than he does and is not constrained—in particular, creation was a voluntary act on
God’s part. So Christian theologians that supported emanationism were caught between
upholding God’s perfection on one hand (which implied the necessity of creation) and God’s
free will on the other (which denied the necessity of creation). See the \textit{Summa Contra
Gentiles} 1:81 for Thomas’ attempt to resolve the conflict.
\item \textsuperscript{133} “In this way a wonderful chain of beings is revealed to our study. The lowest member of the
higher genus is always found to border close upon the highest member of the lower genus.
Thus some of the lowest members of the genus of animals attain to little beyond the life of
plants, certain shellfish for instance, which are motionless, have only the sense of touch, and
are attached to the ground like plants. Hence Dionysius says: ‘Divine wisdom has joined the
ends of the higher to the beginnings of the lower.’” (\textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} 2:68)
\item \textsuperscript{134} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 3 q.1 art.1 resp. Also \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} 2:46:6
\end{itemize}
By this, Thomas meant that not only do the angels and Church have a hierarchical order within creation as the pseudo-Dionysius claimed, but so did every part of creation. This order was a single, vast hierarchy from the lowliest scrap of existence up to God. Its organisation was reflected in the order of creation recounted in Genesis—which Aquinas supplemented heavily with Aristotelian arguments on the continuity of nature. At the bottom was material reality, created first of all. Above that in the hierarchy was the material of the world: earth and water created on the second day. Above them were the plants, created on the third day—and the first created things to possess a soul. Next were fishes and birds, created on the fifth day, and above them the land animals. In addition to a vegetative soul, animals had souls capable of sensation and movement. The most perfect all physical creatures was man (from which woman was created). Above mankind rose the ranks of the angels, and finally above them was God.

Interpreted literally, continuous emanation posed problems for Christianity. It suggested a graduation from God to creation, and hence a participation of creation in the divine. Church theologians by contrast usually drew a sharp line between the two. The problem of continuous emanation could be resolved by appealing to another aspect of Aristotle’s metaphysics. Although all things move towards their final perfected form, they do this at a number of distinct levels: material world is perfected in vegetable life; this in turn is perfected in animal life; animals are perfected in humanity—and Aristotle hinted that there may be higher intelligences as well. So, rather than being a continual gradation, reality could be seen as a ladder or a series of ranks, each touching the ranks above and below. This view meshed neatly with the Dionysian scheme of angels and church hierarchy.

Aquinas’ account of creation is discussed in Summa Theologiae I q.q.65–74

The assimilation of Aristotelian naturalism and neoplatonic mysticism was greatly assisted by the misattribution of the philosophy of Proclus—chief source of the pseudo-Dionysius—to Aristotle.

Commenting on the “different grades of life” Thomas says that the life of plants “is very imperfect”, and the “amongst animals, those that live on land are, generally speaking, more perfect than birds and fishes … because their limbs are more distinct and their generation [of offspring as described by Aristotle] is of a higher order”. Scripture, he says, “seems to imply that fishes are merely bodies having in them something of a soul, whilst land animals, from the higher perfection of their life, are, as it were, living souls with bodies subject to them. But the life of man, as being the most perfect grade, is not said to be produced, like the life of other animals, by earth or water, but immediately by God.” (Summa Theologiae I q.72 art.1 rep.1)

Quoting the pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas says “angels are higher ministers in the hierarchical order than any men whatsoever” (Summa Theologiae 3 q.q.64, art.7 obj.1) Thomas’ discussion of the angels and their hierarchy is heavily indebted to the pseudo-Dionysius (see Summa Theologiae 1 q.q.50–64)
Thomas said that each imperfect thing was for the use of the more perfect: that is, Each thing in the hierarchy uses those things below it. \(^{140}\) “The plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature that man should be master over animals.” \(^{141}\)

The Scholastics drew no sharp line between nature and humanity: human laws were aspects of the natural law and society was part of the natural order (the Scholastics used the word\textit{ universitas} for both). So the order of society is an aspect of the natural order. The natural world is governed by the natural law, which comes from God. The Scholastics held that, in creating the world, what God had done was enact the ideas in his mind. So the form of nature—which is identical to the laws of nature—must be ordered by the same principle that orders all intellects (God’s included): reason. \(^{142}\) Since one of the chief functions of logic (as the Scholastics saw it) was to distinguish between things, all things can be distinguished from one another and hence ranked greater or lesser than other things—and so a hierarchy is the natural and reasonable order of all things. This is reflected in the social organisation of many animals: their natures participate in reason to an extent, which for Thomas accounts “for the fact that cranes follow their leader, and bees obey their queen.” \(^{143}\) Since human beings participate in reason more strongly than animals, all the more they should be ruled by leaders. More generally, the Scholastics held that human society should be hierarchical, as was the rest of creation. So, human society found its place within the Great Chain of Being.

Reflecting its Platonic heritage, medieval Christian thought saw the material universe as profoundly symbolic. Since Antiquity, the Church had taught that material things stood for or were images of immaterial spiritual ones, rather as Plato’s Ideas provided the template for all material things. So the order in one part of creation was repeated infinitely throughout creation—in particular, the order of society corresponded to the forms of nature and the heavens. This principle of correspondence was used to bring the diversity of nature

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\(^{140}\) \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} 3:78, \textit{Summa Theologiae} 1 q.96 art.1 resp

\(^{141}\) \textit{Summa Theologiae} 1, q.96, art.1, resp.

\(^{142}\) “...the whole community of the universe is governed by the Divine Reason [and] the very Idea of the government of things in God, the Ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law” (\textit{Summa Theologiae} 2 q.91, art.1 resp.). See also 1 q.22, art.1 on the source of God’s government of creation in his intellect and providence. Aquinas does not refer to the Stoic concept of Divine Reason, but elsewhere he quotes the Digest of Roman Law, and we know that, like other Scholastics, Aquinas knew the Stoic concept that the \textit{kosmos} was ordered by reason.

\(^{143}\) \textit{Summa Theologiae} 1, q.96, art.1, rep.4
and society into the linear order of creation. For example, within the Great Chain, there were separate classes of creature—‘rungs on the ladder’—including minerals, plants, animals, humans, and angels. But each of these was further subdivided and had its own hierarchies (for which the Dionysian angelic hierarchy provided the archetype). Animals for example were divided into fishes, birds and land animals, and each class had its own rulers: the dolphin amongst the fishes, the eagle amongst birds, the lion over land animals. All were reflections of the rule of God over the world. By correspondence, human society possessed numerous subgroups with their distinctive order and sovereigns: the Church hierarchy of bishops, priests and laity was ruled by the Pope; the temporal state of kings, barons and commons was ruled by the king. Kings in particular began to be described in terms of the ruling animals: eagles, lions and dolphins. A favourite medieval metaphor for human communities was the society of bees. The hive contained many types of bees: workers, warriors, drones, and queens—each with their diverse tasks, but all working to a common purpose and submitting to the single will of their queen.

The ancient metaphor of society as a body was also drawn into the system of correspondences. In Scholastic thought, the intellect was higher than the passions, which were in turn superior to the appetites. In a striking parallel with the structure of Plato’s Republic, the Scholastics claimed that society should be ruled on the same principle: by the wise. The metaphor of the body’s order could also explain the disorder that followed when the ruler was not wise:

Since man is endowed with understanding and sense and bodily power, these faculties are arranged in order in him by the disposition of divine providence according to the plan of the order that obtains in the universe, bodily power being

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144 The idea of the Great Chain was never precisely defined, and so embraced numerous apparent contradictions—such as the coexistence of both a continuous sequence of forms and discrete classes of creatures. Drawing on Aristotle’s definition of continuity in animals, Thomas says: “The lowest member of the higher genus is always found to border close upon the highest member of the lower genus. Thus some of the lowest members of the genus of animals attain to little beyond the life of plants, certain shellfish for instance, which are motionless, have only the sense of touch, and are attached to the ground like plants. Hence Dionysius says: ‘Divine wisdom has joined the ends of the higher to the beginnings of the lower.’” (Summa Contra Gentiles 2:68)

145 “It is generally found both in human affairs and in natural things that every particular power is governed and ruled by the universal power; as, for example, the bailiff’s power is governed by the power of the king. Among the angels also ... the superior angels who preside over the inferior possess a more universal knowledge.” Summa Theologiae 1.4.110 art.1 resp.

146 From 1349, the eldest son of the French king was titled ‘Dauphin’. Although it probably originated as a proper name, it was widely associated with the dolphin. Lions featured in the heraldic devices of the English kings, and eagles by many princes of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany and central Europe).
put under that of sense and intellect as carrying out their command, and the sentient faculty itself under the faculty of intellect. And similar is the order between man and man. Men pre-eminent in understanding naturally take the command; while men poor in understanding, but of great bodily strength, seem by nature designate for servants ... But as in the works of one man disorder is born of intellect following sense, so in the commonwealth the like disorder ensues where the ruler holds his place, not by pre-eminence of understanding, but by usurpation of bodily strength, or is brought into power by some burst of passion.147

There are obvious continuities between the ancient and medieval views of a Christian community: the corporate nature of humanity in particular. But Scholasticism’s naturalism—largely derived from Aristotle—had the effect of drawing Christian society into the world. As I discussed in the last chapter, the early Church regarded a Christian’s homeland and citizenship as being in heaven. Augustine had argued that human law and government were the results of sin. While the Middle Ages never denied the priority of the afterlife over this life, it also saw human society as a natural institution ordained by God and made part of human nature. Human law, far from being the product of sin, was a reflection of God’s eternal law. Although the initial purpose of a hierarchy had been to become like God, the concept of a hierarchy swiftly became a fact of reason and nature. Animal life and the material world, instead of being utterly alien to humanity’s proper state, provided models for the right ordering of life. The Great Chain of Being in particular bridged the enormous gulf the early Christians experienced between the material and spiritual worlds.

The danger in the Scholastic method was that it tied the organisation of society to scientific claims about the material universe—it treated values and laws as facts. When the Aristotelian basis for science was challenged, the entire scheme of Christian society (along with Christian theology and values) was imperilled. This happened on several fronts. As I discussed earlier, William of Ockham threatened the scheme by arguing that faith could not be reconciled with reason, leading to theories of a fully secular state. Although his empiricism was crucial in the development of the modern sciences, his ideas did not displace the argument that society should be modelled on the order of nature. Far more damaging was the incorporation of astronomy and astrology into the Great Chain of Being.

147 Summa Contra Gentiles 3:81. Even before the return of Aristotle’s On the Soul, which is the basis of Thomas’ metaphor, John of Salisbury had used the correspondence between body and society in the Polycraticus §6:1–2.
By the tenth century, the Church had virtually eliminated ancient astrological beliefs. But with the influx of Greek and Muslim learning—which included discussion of the stars and plants—along with the demand to synthesise all knowledge, saw its swift revival.\footnote{See Tester 1987 for a history of Western astrology, particularly Chapter \textit{5} on the Latin Middle Ages. The origins of European astrology were in a mix of Persian star worship and Greek philosophy. Under the influence of Persian star worship, the later Roman Empire was thoroughly convinced of the influence of the heavens (the \textit{macrocosmos}) on both individuals (the \textit{microcosmos}) and society at large. From the second century AD, there was a great upsurge in astrological interest, along with a revival of the classical oracle sites, as people sought answers to the ills of their society. If what happened in society corresponded to the affairs in the heavens, then studying the heavens could illuminate affairs on earth. Philosophers of the late Roman Empire routinely turned their attention to the question of astrological influence. Plotinus discusses whether heavenly bodies influenced earthly events (\textit{Enneads 2:3}). Augustine draws on Plotinus to mount a lengthy refutation of the influence of stars upon a person’s life.}

Drawing principally on Aristotle and Ptolemy, the heavens were given a place in the Great Chain above humanity but below the angels. God ruled over the angels, who in turn moved the stars and planets.\footnote{Thomas relies on Aristotle to claim that “the heavenly bodies are moved by spiritual substances [angels]” (\textit{Summa Theologiae 1 q.110 art.1 rep.4}).} Since human beings were only influenced by things higher in the scale of being, they were subject to the stars—and indeed, “the movement of bodies here below [on earth] must be reduced to the movement of the heavenly bodies, as to their cause.”\footnote{\textit{Summa Theologiae 1 q.115 art.3 resp.} and also art.6.} In the popular imagination, every aspect of life was ruled over by the stars. The planets ruled over the days of the week and the hours of each day. Different professions were subject to different planets.\footnote{In all western European languages, except Portuguese, the seven days are named for the seven classical planets (although the order appears to be based on Hindu astrology, via Muslim sources): Sun-day, Moon-day, Mars-day, Mercury-day, Jupiter-Day, Venus-day, Saturn-day. In Germanic cultures, the Roman gods were replaced by their Gothic counterparts, although modern English is a hybrid, replacing the days of Mercury, Jupiter, Mars, and Venus with Tiw’s-day, Wotan’s-day, Thor’s-day, and Frica’s-day, while retaining the other three Roman versions. In the Eastern Empire, the Church was partially successful in replacing the pagan astrological names with a numerical system—a model that survives in Orthodox Christian Europe. For example, in Russia today, the days of the week are, beginning with Monday: \textit{panyeyelnik} (\textit{panniy}, ‘first’, ‘early’), \textit{ftornik} (\textit{ftorichniy}, ‘second’), \textit{sreda} (\textit{sridi}, ‘in the middle’), \textit{chedvork} (\textit{chetiriy}, ‘four’), \textit{pyatnitsa} (\textit{pyat}, ‘five’), \textit{sabbota} (for the Jewish Sabbath), and \textit{voskresyenye} (‘resurrection’, for the Christian day or worship and renewal).} Individuals characters were moulded by the planets.\footnote{A good example is in the third part of the Knight’s Tale in Chaucer’s \textit{Canterbury Tales}. Chaucer describes three characters visiting the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana, each at the proper hour: Venus three hours before dawn on Sunday (1351–1362); Sunday dawn for Diana}
We still refer to people being ‘mercurial’, ‘jovial’ or ‘lunatics’, although the terms ‘saturnine’ and ‘martial’ have largely dropped out of use. Until the end of the Middle Ages, popular opinion held that people had little control over their own fate, and the state of society depended upon the harmony or disorder of the heavens\textsuperscript{154}. Astrology became an essential part of state-craft and, until the seventeenth century, royal courts often kept astrologers.

To describe the arrangement and influence of the planets, Aquinas and other Scholastics drew on the heliocentric astronomy of Ptolemy and Aristotle\textsuperscript{155}. At the centre of creation lay the Earth, and around it in concentric spheres circled the planets and stars: the Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Beyond them lay the sphere of the fixed stars. The entire system was turned by the \textit{primum mobile}, Aristotle’s ‘First Mover’, which imparted motion to everything below. Beyond these lay the abode of God, the \textit{coelum empyreaum}. The nine spheres of the heavens were each moved by one of the Dionysian ranks of the angels: the lower the rank, the smaller the sphere it turned—and the further

\textsuperscript{153} The determinism of astrology was a challenge to the Christian doctrine of free will. Thomas answered the challenge by saying that a person’s physical nature and intellect were influenced by the stars, but not their will, which was free. However, because most people are ruled by their physical passions, most people behave as the astrologers predict; the wise person who controls their passions is however not subject to their physical natures or the influence of the stars. (\textit{Summa Theologiae} 1 q.115 art.4 rep.3)

\textsuperscript{154} When the Black Death ravaged Europe between 1347 and 1351, astrological causes were sought out. Tester describes how "the official statement of the medical faculty of the University of Paris presented to the king in 1348 reported that ‘on 20 march 1345, at 1 p.m., there occurred a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars in the house of Aquarius. The conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter notoriously caused death and disaster while the conjunction of Mars and Jupiter spread pestilence in the air (Jupiter, being warm and humid, was calculated to draw up evil vapours from the earth and water which Mars, hot and dry, kindled into infective fire). Obviously the conjunction of all three planets could only mean an epidemic of cataclysmic scale’". (Tester 1987, p185)

\textsuperscript{155} Particularly Aristotle \textit{On the heavens} §2:8 and Ptolemy \textit{Almagest} particularly, §1:5, §7:2, and §9:1. Almost as influential was Cicero’s \textit{Dream of Scipio}, the last section of his \textit{Respublica}, which describes the rise of the blessed dead through each of the planetary spheres to the afterlife beyond the stars.

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from God it was. Humanity existed at the furthest point of creation from God: the bottommost point of creation, into which all of the corruption of the universe flowed.\footnote{In On the heavens, Aristotle divided the universe into those perfect incorruptible regions above the sphere of the moon which were the abode of gods, and the sublunary regions which were subject to change and corruption.}

The marriage of Thomistic theology and Ptolemaic astronomy was most vividly portrayed in Dante’s La divina commedia. The Commedia concerns the redemption of the human soul described allegorically in a journey through the entire Christian universe. First Dante is guided downwards through the nine circles of Hell—corresponding to the traditional sins. Next he is escorted up Mount Purgatory, following the path of repentance, and shown the souls being purged successively of the seven deadly sins. Finally, he ascends to final reconciliation with God, rising through the planetary spheres (corresponding to the Christian virtues), finally to behold the saints and God.

Yet this all-too-concrete marriage of theology and astronomy left Christianity dangerously exposed in the longer term. In 1543, Copernicus published a radically different cosmology, one centred on the sun and not the earth.\footnote{The history of science tends to regard the triumph of the Copernican system as the success of a more accurate scientific model over a lesser—ignoring the central role that astronomy came to have in theology. Supporters of the Copernican system—Kepler most notably—tried to reconcile it with a form of Neoplatonised Christianity. Indeed, the idea of the planets orbiting the Sun—the living symbol of God, the ruler of the universe—was rather more amenable to Christian thought than Ptolemy’s model.} Within four hundred years of Thomas’ synthesis, all of its main assumptions had been rejected: Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, the Dionysian hierarchy, Ptolemaic astronomy, and post-Apostolic Neoplatonic Christianity. With their loss the metaphysical grounds for social hierarchy crumbled, paving the way for Modern individualism in religion and politics. Nonetheless, well after the metaphysical foundations of the Great Chain had crumbled, it continued to provide vivid images for the organisation of society. In Appendix 9, I have explored Shakespeare’s descriptions of society in the early seventeenth century, and shown that the Great Chain bulks large in them.

By the late seventeenth century, the impact of Galileo, Descartes and Newton had seen physical heavens removed from the Great Chain. The idea that plants, animals and humans form a hierarchy remained a commonplace amongst biologists until the early nineteenth century.\footnote{Linguistic fossils implying a hierarchy in the natural world remain in use: for example, the search for the ‘missing link’ in human evolution. Darwin’s belief in continuous evolution from one species to another may be another relic of ‘continuity’ and ‘fullness’ in nature—as might the current belief in the innate goodness of natural diversity or ‘biodiversity’.} As I will discuss in Chapter 13, the Great Chain of Being was slowly
replaced as the basic organisation of the cosmos by mechanistic physics. With it, the belief in society as a hierarchy of mutual obligations and relations between people, formed by custom and divine law, was displaced by a mechanistic model: in the Enlightenment, each person became essentially an isolated, self-interested, autonomous individual, and society was no more than the collection of such individuals, coordinated in their dealings by human reason.

**THE APPEARANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY**

By the thirteenth century, the term ‘communication’ had begun to appear in Scholastic philosophy. It had two distinct but related meanings, both arising from theology. Thomas said that God had produced creatures because he wanted to ‘communicate’ his goodness to them, making all of creation like him as far as its nature permitted.\(^{159}\)

Now the likeness of one thing may be found in another in two ways: in one way in point of natural being, as the likeness of heat is found in the body heated; in another way in point of knowledge, as the likeness of fire (perceived) is in sight or touch. In order then that the likeness of God might be in creatures in such modes as were possible, it was necessary that the divine goodness should be communicated to creatures, not only by likeness in being, but also by likeness in knowing.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{159}\) *Summa Theologiae* 1 q.5, art.1 resp. In deciding whether any creature can be like God—as Genesis claims that mankind was made in God’s image—Thomas discusses the ways in which one thing may be like another. “Since likeness is based upon agreement or communication of form (*communicationem in forma*), it varies according to the many modes of communication (*communicandi in forma*).” He then discusses these modes: there is perfect likeness when two things ‘communicate’ equally in a form to the same degree; imperfect likeness when they ‘communicate’ in the same form but to unequal degrees. Two things may also ‘communicate’ in different aspects of the same form. This, he says, explains why some effects are like their causes: for example in the way that “man reproduces man”—that is, children have the same form as their parents. “In this way the things that are from God, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.” Because all things are like God, they participate in him—although not all to the same extent or in the same manner.

\(^{160}\) *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2:47:5. The distinction between likeness-in-being and likeness-in-knowing is related to the difference between nature and revelation. The cause of all things is what God knows (*Summa Theologiae* 1, q.14, art. 8 resp.). What God knows can be comprehended in two ways: [1] by examining the things God has created (1, q.14, art.8, rep.3.) for creation takes the form of God’s mind, that is understanding from nature (or being), or [2] from what God discloses in revelation, that is understanding from what God makes known outside of nature.
‘Likeness of being’ is a concept derived from Aristotelian metaphysics. It is achieved through ‘communication of form’, and can be illustrated in the way that food is utilised by the body. Food, like all material things, is made up of matter and form. In digestion, the body takes the matter of the food, but displaces the food’s form and imposes upon it the form of a human being (so, when we eat an apple, we do not become an apple—that is, we do not take the form of an apple—but the substance of the apple becomes us and takes our form.) “The food which at first is dissimilar [in form] became at length similar through the form communicated to it”\textsuperscript{161}. Similarly, in reproduction, a mother’s body takes matter from food and imposes upon it human form to create a new person, a child, which is like the form of its parents.

Very closely related to this sense of communication is communion—the means by which a Christian participates in Christ. The High Middle Ages extended Paul’s description of the Church as a living person, with the faithful forming its body and Christ as either its head or soul. This metaphor required only minor modification to accommodate it to Scholastic understandings of the human soul drawn from Aristotle’s \textit{On the Soul}. Like every other material thing, the Scholastics understood a human being as composed of matter and form. However the form of a person was different from that of all other material forms, for it was also the soul, possessing intelligence and surviving the death of the material body. Thomas calls the soul a ‘subsistent intelligence’, by which he meant an intelligence akin to the angels but of lesser degree (angels existed in their own right, the soul only subsisted). The human soul was the lowest in the ranks of incorporeal things; the human body was the highest in material things, so that in the Great Chain they two were adjacent, and shared a common border in human nature—which to the Scholastics meant that they were continuous. Thomas says that the human soul and body form a ‘community’, which is how incorporeal and corporeal substances can coexist in the one thing\textsuperscript{162}. The Church is very similar in its organisation, but instead of being composed of material substance it is composed of human beings, and is formed not by the least of incorporeal intelligences, but the greatest of them: Christ. Just as the human body and soul form a ‘community’, so the body of Christian faithful and Christ are in ‘communion’. And since communion takes place through the sacraments, they too are said to ‘communicate’. In each case, communication produces a ‘likeness of being’, as nature makes one thing like another.

A second type of communication produces ‘likeness of knowing’. Since only rational creatures can know, this type of communication is employed only by God, the angels and human beings. Communication in this sense entails one mind making something known to

\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Summa Theologiae} 1 q.119, art.2 resp.

\textsuperscript{162} This union of intelligence in matter occurs only in human beings, and in the Great Chain, human beings mark the boundary between corporal and incorporeal worlds. (\textit{Summa Contra Gentiles} 2:68)
another. In human beings, it is achieved through speech (which Thomas regards as a material symbol of what is in the intellect). By contrast, communication by God and the angels, who have no material bodies and hence no need to use physical symbols or physical senses, is simply the imposition of one mind upon another. Thomas explains the way that all three take place using a variant on communication-as-transmission (which I discuss in Chapter 15).

The two forms of communication are different, although not always entirely distinct. What is striking about Thomas’ use of each is that human communities do not appear to rely on speech for their formation and maintenance: communication in the second sense. The community is formed by law, which is communicated by God as an aspect of the natural law: communication in the first sense.

Both senses continued in use for centuries after the High Middle Ages: in the seventeenth century sacraments were still said to ‘communicate’. As I will show in Chapters 13 and 15, in the seventeenth century, the relationship between nature and communication broke down, leaving only the link between communication and speech. There were several aspects to this change. First was the displacement of Scholastic natural philosophy by the rapidly emerging natural sciences. The rejection of metaphysics entailed the denial of both divine purpose and any natural hierarchy. Another was the tremendous damage done to Catholic

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163 Thomas does call what happens between angels ‘speech’, but means by it the silent speech that occurs within the mind without voice or sound. See Chapter 15.

164 For example, Thomas discusses whether Christians should be allowed to communicate with people that have been excommunicated—a discussion that only makes sense if ‘excommunication’ concerns communication in the first sense and ‘communicate’ in the second. Thomas also says concerning people’s relationship with God: “Man’s life is twofold. There is his outward life in respect of his sensitive and corporeal nature: and with regard to this life there is no communication or fellowship between us and God or the angels. The other is man’s spiritual life in respect of his mind, and with regard to this life there is fellowship between us and both God and the angels, imperfectly indeed in this present state of life, ... But this ‘conversation’ will be perfected in heaven ...” (Summa Theologiae 2(2) q.23 art.1 rep.1)

Thomas confuses the two senses when he addresses the topic ‘Whether it is lawful to communicate with unbelievers?’ (Summa Theologiae 2(2) q.10 art.9). Instructing heathen servants involves speaking, but sitting down to a meal with them involves no speech but a form of communion: Aquinas calls both ‘communication’. Christians are forbidden to communicate with anyone excommunicated (that is, refused communion), but they are permitted to communicate with heathens, particularly if it will encourage them to convert (that is, bring them into communion)—although the Church may forbid communication with heathens for temporal crimes (although not spiritual ones where the Church has no authority).

165 Peters 1989, p391 mentions this use in passing in the seventeenth century.
theology by the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed any real hope of a ‘law of nature’ upon which human law might be based. Protestantism also emphasised that each Christian was an individual and attacked any institution or hierarchy that stood between the believer and God. Third was the continuing force of democratisation, and the influence of Roman law and Stoic ethics, which saw every citizen as an individual with equal worth and value, outside any relationships they might have with others. By the early Modern Age, people came to see themselves as individuals living in a thoroughly material universe, in which the term ‘communication’ came to mean only the act of one mind making things known to others.
the development of ideas about communication in European thought
THE THIRD TRADITION

COMMUNICATION AS TECHNIQUE

10. COMMUNICATION-AS-TECHNIQUE

11. ANCIENT RHETORIC AND DIALECTIC

12. INTERPRETATION
CHAPTER TEN

COMMUNICATION AS TECHNIQUE

ABSTRACT  Both communication-as-transmission and communication-as-order remained largely implicit until the eighteenth century, and were not worked out in detail until the twentieth. But despite no formal account of what communicating is, much had been written since Antiquity on how to communicate. This tradition sees communication as a set of techniques.

The second half of the twentieth century uses two groups of techniques on the assumption that their rules hold good for communication generally: journalism and the plain language movement. Many other techniques have evolved at the same time as new media appeared—radio, television, film, the internet—and older arts, such as illustration and graphic design, became more widespread, but most of these new techniques are known only to specialists or are variations on journalists’ rules.

JOURNALISM

The rules of journalism are largely the rules of print reporters. Most journalists begin their careers as writers and, despite the prominence of television and radio, there remain far more reporters in print than in radio or television. Furthermore, most radio and television stories are prepared as written documents and only later are they spoken. While the demands on radio and television journalists are different to print journalists, and magazine journalism and feature-writing are different from news-reporting, all journalists tend to use the same conventions which first evolved in print. So in what follows, I will refer mostly to the rules used by newspaper reporters.

Writing at speed

News-making happens at speed. Journalists are just one profession amongst many that create the news—others include editors, proofreaders, typesetters, illustrators, announcers, audio engineers, and cameramen. All these people have to be tightly choreographed if the evening broadcast or morning paper is going to be delivered. So, while journalists spend a lot
of time thinking about the words they use, journalism is necessarily a profession of routines, conventions and rules. These have developed over the last two hundred years to help journalists produce words on a huge range of topics, under pressure, to a consistent style and standard. To an extent, they also help reporters compose large numbers of words at speed: they cut down the number of decisions to be made, help order the writer’s thoughts, and suggest ways to structure stories.

The conventions of news-writing also help journalists resolve the problems of their ‘absent audience’. Whenever someone speaks or writes, they make assumptions about the people they address, such as what to talk about and how to say it. When people speak face-to-face they are able to see and correct mistakes immediately. Correcting misunderstandings is a normal part of conversation, although we are so used to checking and correcting that we scarcely notice ourselves doing it. Journalists however speak into a void: they have almost no contact with those they write and speak to. While they may have occasional contact with individuals, they do not know their audience as a whole. The only regular information they have about their readers or viewers is in the form of ratings—a measure of how many papers are sold, or how many people switch on to television and radio programs. Ratings however are not a measure of people’s understanding or interest (nor is that their purpose: ratings are a tool used to attract advertisers). Occasional market research can tell writers little about how their audiences interpret a given story. Reporters get little systematic information about what people like, understand, struggle with, misinterpret or ignore. Even if they did, the skills to analyse their audience or what it understands are not amongst the traditional journalistic skills. Journalists do not usually have the research techniques of psychology or the social sciences. Even if they did have such skills, they would not have time to use them: newsrooms are factories not laboratories.

In the face of silence, journalists rely on experience and conventions to tell them how to write. Following the rules does not guarantee that stories will be either intelligible or interesting. But they do ensure that journalists write to accepted patterns, avoid known problems, and produce copy consistent with other stories written for the same newspaper or broadcaster.

Until the 1960s, almost all reporters learnt their craft as apprentices. Consequently, most of the rules and conventions went largely unwritten; only the broadest were recorded. It is only in the last forty years, since journalists began to train in universities rather than on the job, that these conventions have been written down in detail.

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1 See Sless 1981 for a further discussion of absent audiences. Schlesinger 1978, Golding 1974 and McQuail 1969 all discuss how professional journalists and producers manage in the face of the absent audience. Although their studies were conducted over twenty years ago, the institutional structures and information available to journalists remains little changed.
The journalists’ view of journalistic tasks

Textbooks on journalism divide the reporter’s tasks into two types: investigating stories and writing stories\(^2\), although the second is sometimes treated separately\(^3\).

Most books begin with a definition of what makes a news story. This invariably has to do with the subject matter (the first half of journalism), not the way the story is written (the second half).

The basic elements of news are impact or relevance, timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, currency and the unusual or novel. … Most analysts categorise human interest as a style of news rather than a news element as such.\(^4\)

Textbooks then turn to the usual process of investigating stories, usually treating it under three headings. First are the skills that journalists need, often organised into the order they are called on when investigating a story. These include:

1. interviewing skills
2. observational skills
3. note-taking and shorthand
4. background research, including the use of statistics, public records, Freedom of Information legislation, libraries, polls, and databases
5. corroborating sources
6. seeking out different points of view, particularly when reporting conflicts
7. handling quotes, tip-offs and confidential sources.

Second are the sources of information used by journalists and how each needs to be handled. Particularly important are the sources that first alert reporters to an issue. They include press releases, media events, conferences, speeches, meetings, and leaks. Some newer textbooks warn student reporters to be sceptical of media releases and press kits prepared by public relations experts. While professionally written and may be—and increasingly are—inserted straight into newspapers unedited, they tell the story as the source would like it told. It may however be selective in the facts it gives or the way it interprets them. For the journalist and the reader, the real story may be elsewhere.

Third are the various reporting ‘rounds’ or ‘beats’. These are regular sources of news-stories and issues important to the community. These rounds are often reflected in the major.

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\(^2\) This division is made in standard references including Mencher 1994 and Metz 1977 in the United States and White 1996 in Australia.

\(^3\) For instance Bagnall 1993.

thematic divisions in newspapers, and larger newspapers may employ specialist reporters to cover them. Almost all newspapers will have police, courts and local government rounds, but may also add education, business, finance, politics and sports. Some textbooks provide checklists of the information that reporters typically need to collect for writing stories in each round. “For instance, an obituary requires the name and identification of the deceased; the cause, time, place and location of death; the survivors; funeral and burial plans and some background about the deceased.” The U.S. writer, Mencher, divides beats into seven broad categories: accidents and disasters, obituaries, police, courts, sports, business and local government. He provides checklists for motor vehicle accidents, aeroplane accidents, disasters, obituaries, homicide, burglaries, robberies, fires, verdicts in court cases, arraignments, other criminal cases, sports coverage, local government budgets meetings, and local board of education meetings. He also discusses about the same number of other topics without supplying a checklist.

The advice given by textbooks on investigation is really only relevant to journalists and people like public relations experts that supply material to the media. Otherwise other professions do not have much use for the journalists’ investigative conventions. The rules of journalism that are widely used are those from the second half of the profession: the ways news-stories are characteristically written. Many of journalism’s conventions and rules are now used in many other professions as well, including public relations, marketing, and advertising. Many are treated as though they were universal rules of communication.

The context that journalists’ writing conventions evolved in

Many of the reporters’ rules for writing stories evolved to help them balance the values of journalism against the economic and technological constraints of printing a newspaper.

Many of the familiar values of journalism—objectivity, balance, factual reporting, accuracy, proper attribution of sources, political independence—reflect the general values of the Enlightenment when journalism first appeared and nineteenth century empiricism when newspapers became the first genuine mass medium[^6]. These values were not specific to news-writing. They are also ideals in science, scholarship, law, and public administration.

[^6]: Charles Dickens, sometime reporter and later novelist, fiercely satirised the dehumanising Victorian cult of facts, objectivity, detachment and reason. He is at his most blistering in the aptly-titled *Hard Times*. He opens with Gradgrind, the schoolmaster, bawling at a colleague, “Now, what I wants is, Facts. Teach these boy and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them.” “In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!”
—all of which, like journalism, became professionalised in the second half of the nineteenth century. (The so-called ‘New Journalism’ of the 1960s deliberately adopted the techniques and literary values of novel-writing—use of dialogue, narrative, scene-setting, detailed characterisation. But, apart from longer feature articles and investigative stories, it has had little effect on general reporting.)

Against these values are balanced three constraints: economic, layout and mechanical. Economically, newspapers need to carry advertising. The cover price on most Australian daily newspapers covers about a quarter of their production costs; advertising pays for the rest. Of course, most advertising also does not attract many readers by itself, so the newspaper has to carry stories that will attract readers, who double as potential customers. The newspaper may include ‘advertorials’ or otherwise run stories that readers find interesting or important. This in turn puts pressure on editors to include a wide range of stories (in the case of newspapers) or to specialise (in the case of most magazines). Pictures are another device used to attract and hold readers’ attention although, like advertisements and advertorials, they reduce the space for news-writing. Newspaper composition is a constant balancing act between news and advertising. Space is always at a premium. The result is pressure on reporters to keep stories as brief and as interesting as possible.

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7 The important exception to these Victorian values is ‘freedom of the press’, which initially came to prominence in the American War of Independence, although it had precedents. Before 1605, English printers had to be licensed and seek government approval for everything they published. After 1605, censorship of news-sheets ceased. Along with the English Civil War (1642–48) and removal of the monarchy, this paved the way for the first newspapers in England which critically evaluated the policies and performance of English governments—although these early journals needed some defence, such as in Milton’s Areopagitica (1644). In the mid-eighteenth century, the American colonial newspapers adopted the critical stance of the earlier English writers—Benjamin Franklin for one modelled his newspaper on Joseph Addison’s Spectator. Before the War of Independence, the American newspapers were instrumental in building up anti-British sentiment, attacking British policy, and promoting the concept of one nation of Americans. Freedom of the press, once won, almost proved its own undoing in America. After the Americans gained independence, the American press turned its well-honed skills of vituperation on the newly-established federal government, which was sorely tempted to reimpose censorship. It was not until the nineteenth century that democratic governments in Europe and America accepted that a free press was compatible with free government. (See Stephens 1988, p185–202.)

8 HRSC 1992, pp54–55, Morris 1996, p16. The economics of most nineteen-century newspapers is obvious at first glance: the front page usually carried classified advertisements—and it remains the most lucrative source of income for daily papers. News only became standard fare on front pages from the 1940s.
The layout of newspapers also affects the way journalists write. Traditionally, newspapers are laid out in narrow columns. This means that long paragraphs and sentences can easily run to many lines, producing blocks of text that look dense and unapproachable. Repeated use of long words leads to repeated hyphenation, which typesetters try to avoid—it is ugly and slows reading speed, which in turn makes the text feel heavy and sluggish. In response, journalists try to keep words, sentences and paragraphs short. Although most magazines and some broadsheets now use columns wider than they were fifty years ago, so removing the immediate need to keep things short, journalists persist with the older conventions.

Another writing convention that journalists retain, even though the forces that created it have become obsolete, is the ‘inverse pyramid’. Until publishers began to computerise typesetting in the 1980s, most newspapers were formatted using ‘hot metal’ 9. Each line of text was typeset as a single line of metal. These individual lines were then bolted together in order and then mounted on the printing drum. When stories were assembled, articles sometimes had to be shortened so they would fit the page. While it was technically possible to re-edit and re-set an entire article, the speed at which newspapers were usually produced meant that it was easier to cut paragraphs from the bottom of the article until it fitted the space available. The result however was that the traditional beginning-middle-end structure of stories was not appropriate to news writing: important details in the conclusion might easily be discarded. Journalists responded by writing in an ‘inverse pyramid’.

[This] is shaped so that the most important information comes at the beginning. In the subsequent paragraphs, additional information—detail, amplification, dissenting opinion, background—is placed in descending order of importance

If an editor needed to shorten an article, only the least important facts would be removed. Although hot-metal presses have now largely been replaced by computer technology, the inverse pyramid remains the standard structure for most news-writing. (The inverse pyramid also has the advantage over traditional story-telling of getting to the point of the article in the first few lines, which means that readers can decide whether to read the full story or turn to some other article.)

Newspaper style reflects the compromises between values and constraints. A tradition of factual rather than literary writing has produced a style which emphasises ‘transparent’ writing which does not distract readers from the story. Limited space makes brevity a virtue—in words, sentences, paragraphs and the avoidance of redundancies. The need to attract readers influences both the stories that are told, the aspects that are highlighted as well as the way they are written—sensationalism is partly a product of the economics of

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9 Only small or infrequent newspapers were typeset using individual characters—a far slower process than using hot-metal typesetting machines.

10 White 1996, p177
newspaper production. The need to attract a wide range of readers means journalists write in ways that will be acceptable and intelligible to most people. The following is a typical summary of news-style.

Good writing—direct and clear, simple and straightforward—is an important component of the story. Good writing avoids clichés and redundancies. It does not strain for effect. It does not call attention to itself but to the story it tells.¹¹

Most textbooks on journalism treat news writing at four levels: word, sentence, paragraph and story.

Words

The smallest unit of language of interest to journalists is the word. Of all the journalists’ conventions, the ones concerning the use of words are most widely observed by other professions. The following seven principles with examples, taken from White¹², summarise the main rules.

1. Prefer short words. Short words take less space that long ones. Many journalists also believe that short words are easier to understand than long ones.¹³

2. Avoid long, pompous, abstract words or words that detail.

News writing is factual and aims at precision. It aims at strong images. It avoids words that have several meanings or no specific meaning (“a vehicle could be a sedan, a beach buggy, a motorbike or an oil tanker”). In practice, this often involves writers

¹¹ Mencher 1994

¹² White 1996, pp155–159

¹³ Most journalists handbooks and plain English handbooks say that shorter words are easier to understand. This is only vaguely true. The meaning of a word is not a function of how many letters are used to write it but the way the word is used. The Russian word for hello is здравствуйте while cabbage soup is щи, but surely it is meaningless to say that the first is harder to understand than the second merely because it uses six times as many letters?

It is not true that short words are easier to understand because they are short. It is however true that more commonly used words tend to be shorter—it makes them easier to say. And words that people are more familiar with hearing and using are those that people find easier to understand. So there is a loose correlation between shortness and intelligibility. That said, we have to remember that people understand words—particularly common words with many potential meanings—in the context of their use, not as words as such. (We rarely encounter individual words, out of context.) The word set for instance is one of the shortest in English—there are only two words of one letter and sixty-odd words of two—but it takes the palm for the most definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary. Only from the context can a person know which sense of set is meant.
avoiding Latin-derived words and preferring Anglo-Saxon ones. Some authors provide lists of sample replacements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjacent to</th>
<th>next to</th>
<th>intersection</th>
<th>corner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>try</td>
<td>locate</td>
<td>find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>begin, start</td>
<td>manufacture</td>
<td>make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td>belief, promise</td>
<td>optimum</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>purchase</td>
<td>buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>donation</td>
<td>gift</td>
<td>remuneration</td>
<td>pay, wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exceedingly</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>reside</td>
<td>live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate</td>
<td>ease, help</td>
<td>subsequently</td>
<td>later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immediately</td>
<td>at once, now</td>
<td>substantial</td>
<td>big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inquire</td>
<td>ask</td>
<td>terminate</td>
<td>end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[3] Avoid fashionable words, because they are “bland and predictable”. Again, many textbook writers show the problem and how to resolve it with examples:

| ambience | surroundings | breakthrough | advance | success |

There is a long tradition in English writing for preferring Anglo-Saxon words to French-Latin ones. When the Normans invaded England in 1066, French became the language of government, law and church. Government only began to use English again in 1415 when Henry V invaded France, but French would continue as the language of law until the mid-eighteenth century. For several hundred years, French was used in environments where abstract thought was common; Anglo-Saxon, the language of farmers and merchants, continued to be spoken by the English, although to deal with rather more concrete matters. Modern English reflects this usage. Also, because Old French used by the Normans (and the Latin it was derived from) was an inflected language, its words tended to be longer than the Anglo-Saxon, which had lost many of its Germanic inflections by the eleventh century.
Avoid redundancies, including tautologies (saying the same thing in a different way) and pleonasm (using unnecessary words). Apart from taking space, many writers believe muddled writing reflects muddled thinking. “Clear thinking leads to concise writing”.

Avoid ‘flabby’ words and phrases. They are longer and bland. Use single words instead of phrases. Rely on verbs and nouns to tell the story, not adverbs and adjectives.

If the words ‘basis’, ‘situation’, ‘case’ or ‘the fact that’ spring to mind, think again. Basis attracts other words to it like a magnet and you find yourself with a phrase not a word. Instead of ‘permanently’ or ‘part-time’ you have ‘on a permanent basis’ or ‘on a part-time basis’. Similarly, phrases with ‘case’ or ‘situation’ in them are suspect. They can nearly always be shortened to a word: in most cases [to] mostly, in all cases [to] always, in some situations [to] sometimes.

Avoid the ‘not’ construction; use a word that expresses negativity.

‘The council did not give permission for the redevelopment’ is much weaker (and longer) than ‘The council refused permission for the redevelopment’.

Sentences

While news sentences obey all the usual grammatical rules of English, most journalists use a carefully limited subset. Sentences tend to be short, partly because long sentences look daunting in the narrow columns used in newspapers, and partly because research suggests people find longer sentences harder to understand.
If the number of ideas to be conveyed [in a sentence] increases much beyond three, the sentence will become too dense for the average reader to grasp easily.\textsuperscript{15}

Many textbooks set an upper limit of 25–40 words for the opening sentences of stories and 18–25 for later ones.\textsuperscript{16}

Journalists usually aim to write one fact or idea per sentence. Subsidiary details or modifications are often placed in later sentences or, less often, subordinate clauses, unless their absence might impair the reader’s interpretation.

When writing news sentences, try to confine the sentence to one main fact. You can add any detail in dependant clauses, modifying phrases that give time and place and judiciously chosen informational adjectives. Keep the extra information to a minimum however, and use the simplest possible structure ... \textsuperscript{[1]}t is not always possible to restrict the sentence to a single main fact. When two facts are intimately connected, the connection should be obvious from the sentence structure you choose.\textsuperscript{17}

Journalism texts repeatedly remind student reporters to keep related words and facts together in sentences, and not separate them with dependent clauses.

Because news is factual and strives for objectivity, journalists usually write in the third person; only opinion pieces and reviews of food, cinema and travel regularly use the first person. Print reporting tends to use the past tense, although radio and television are increasingly using present tense to give a feeling of immediacy to their reports.

The factual nature of news-writing also means journalists prefer active sentences. Unlike passive sentences, active sentences show both the actor and they action they took.

Brevity and the use of the active voice forces most sentences into a subject–verb–object structure. (If the object of the sentence is more important, sensational, interesting or unusual, it might be reversed with the subject.\textsuperscript{18}) This structure also involves simpler English verbs and helps reduce the number of prepositions. Sometimes the basic sentence structure might be modified with subordinate clauses, adverbs, and adjectives.

\textsuperscript{15} White 1996, p163

\textsuperscript{16} These word limits are based on readability tests carried out from the 1950s. However, journalists had been minimising the number of words in sentences well before the tests: Brian Preston, editor of \textit{The Daily Telegraph} during the 1940s, limited sentences to eighteen words (White 1996, p154).

\textsuperscript{17} White 1996, p164

\textsuperscript{18} This habit is most common in Australian journalism, and hence known as the ‘reversed Australian object’.
Paragraphs

Paragraphs in news-writing differ from other forms of literature because journalists see the basic unit of the paragraph as a fact, not an idea. Where a paragraph in an academic paper might introduce an idea, then follow with supporting evidence, arguments and illustrations, the news paragraph often contains only one sentence—one fact.

Using short paragraphs also makes editing easier. Subeditors may rearrange the order of facts in an article—for instance, if they merge two stories. When newspapers were printed in hot metal, this was much easier to do if each paragraph dealt with only one fact. Like the inverse pyramid, this rule persists, even though the technology that prompted it has now become obsolete. Because paragraphs may be moved around in articles, journalists try to avoid pronouns or auxiliary verbs that refer to object or events earlier in the story. Paragraphs are usually self-contained.

As I noted earlier, newspaper typesetters prefer short paragraphs, otherwise the text can look forbiddingly dense when set in narrow newspaper columns. If paragraphs need to be cut from the end, it is also much easier to cut a short paragraph than a long one without upsetting the page layout.

Stories

The basic unit of newswriting is the story. There are broadly two types of stories in print journalism: hard news and soft news, although soft news may be further divided into service information, features and backgrounders, commentaries and columns. Hard and soft news differ from one another in both the subjects they report and the style they are written in.

Hard news is the backbone of a newspaper or news bulletin. It is the justification of journalism. Hard news is significant to a considerable share of the audience. Hard news demands its audience’s attention, even if it sometimes does not get it. Hard news is plain, to the point, disciplined.19

Hard news stories are invariably written in an inverse pyramid. “The standard hard news story does not have a beginning, a middle and an end. It has a beginning and then more”20. The introduction or ‘lead’ paragraphs summarise the main facts. Subsequent paragraphs provide further information: detail, quotes, dissenting opinions, background information and source material. Because the lead is the kernel of the story, journalism texts devote considerable detail—sometimes whole chapters—explaining how to write the lead, even

19 White 1996, p176
20 White 1996, p176
though it is often only one paragraph long. The lead contains the key element of the story—who did or said what—and may also include when, where, how and why events happened. Although different newspapers have different ‘house’ styles, there are some principles common to most leads in hard news stories:

1. A hard news story should start with the main clause of the sentence, not with dependant clauses or subsidiary phrases.

2. A hard news story is written in the active voice, wherever possible.

3. Reporters should try to keep the first paragraph of a hard news story as brief as possible [a maximum of 25–40 words] without sacrificing clarity or vital information.

4. All leads that depend on the newsmaker offering opinion, criticism, accusation, interpretation, threat, prediction, warning or suggestion, stating a belief or delivering an appeal should be sourced immediately to the newsmaker.

5. Use a sentence structure that allows the reader to reach the news point quickly. [Usually this involves using the subject–verb–direct object structure, although this may be reversed where a lead has to be sourced.]

6. A hard news lead should usually not contain more than one sentence.

7. Avoid the use of people’s proper names in the lead, unless they are well known to [the] audience.

8. Do not normally start a hard news story with a direct quote. [Direct quotes rarely contain all of the elements a reporter needs in their lead.]

9. Avoid impersonal phrases at the start of the story. The impersonal forms ‘there is’, ‘there was’, ‘it is’ and ‘it was’ are weak. They hold up the flow of the sentence and waste words.

10. Structure the lead so that it is positive rather than negative.

A well-constructed lead also helps the writer compose the remainder of the article: it forces a structure on the material and defines elements that have to be substantiated in the article.

By contrast, “while hard news satisfies the intellect, soft news aims to touch the readers’ emotions.” As well as drawing on different types of information and having a different aim, softer news also takes a freer, more narrative form. Instead of a lead paragraph summarising the chief facts as in hard news, soft news takes a theme, although journalists often avoid introducing it in the first paragraph, preferring an indirect or delayed opening to intrigue the reader.

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21 Extracted from White 1996, pp185–201
22 Mencher 1994, p117
23 White 1996, p249
Other sources of advice used by journalists

The conventions I have summarised here are only one source of guidance journalists have on how to write—although they are the only ones given in textbooks. These rules may be corrected or even countered by other factors. The most important is experience, from which these conventions were first distilled. Reporters practice their craft daily. They think about words and how to use them ceaselessly. Constant practice and reflection develops their style and helps them build sureness and speed—something no set of rules can teach.

Journalists also draw on one another—both for help when writing specific stories and more generally as they learn and refine their craft. Journalism is not a solitary profession. Most reporters work in a newsroom alongside others, and creating stories in this environment is partly a communal activity. Journalists read and listen to one another’s work, offer and receive advice, and adopt the style of those around them. Until the 1960s, this was the environment in which almost all reporters learnt their trade: as cub reporters and apprentices, working alongside more experienced writers. Since then, increasing numbers of journalists have learnt their trade in schools and universities, away from the newsroom, and therefore have become more dependent on the formalised advice of textbook writers.

Finally, as well as the informal correctives of working in a newsroom with other reporters, all journalists’ work is formally checked by editors. Editors may change or even reject what a journalist writes, exercising a news-judgement that is almost impossible to formulate.

In practice, the rules I have summarised are intended chiefly for students. Practicing journalists rely on experience and the judgement of those around them, not textbooks. As most textbook authors recognise, the rules are intended only as a generalisation about what journalists do.

THE PLAIN LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

Along with the codification of journalistic conventions, the second half of the twentieth century saw a profusion of self-help, ‘do-it-yourself’ guides on communication, with advice on preparing everything from business letters to websites. Most of these guides deal with fairly small and specific problems. Since the 1950s however, a group of techniques has emerged that claims universal scope and significant official support: plain language.

The Plain English movement was initially a reaction to the problems many people had using legal and government documents, and these have remained its chief target for the last
fifty years\textsuperscript{24}. While government and law have often bred specialised and obscure dialects, until the early nineteenth century coping with them was a problem for only a tiny, educated fraction of Europe’s population. After then, social and democratic reforms across Europe and North America\textsuperscript{25} increasingly brought citizens into contact with their governments and the law. In the last two hundred years, democratic governments have also continually expanded their jurisdiction and their involvement in citizen’s lives. Commitment to the principle of ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people’ inevitably brought citizens into contact with their governments and, in particular, with government paperwork. Today, the commonest interaction most Westerners have with their governments is in completing their tax return, filling out a social security form, or receiving a computer-generated notice from their local council. Routine government business is increasingly mediated by documents rather than in person. The modern plain English movement grew out of a liberal tradition that believed that citizens had a right to understand the documents they received and laws they were governed by.

‘Plain English’ or ‘plain language’ techniques were initially intended to guide people with little professional writing experience—such as lawyers, legal drafters and government officials—and help them write public information in ways that would be understood by ordinary citizens\textsuperscript{26}. During the 1960s, the emerging consumer movement also began to call for plain language on products (especially warranties) so consumers know what they were buying, eating and using. In the 1980s, some companies began to adopt plain language policies to try to reduce their legal liability, increase the safety of products, and decrease the costs arising from of misreading documents. By the 1990s, the plain language movement had won official endorsement from most Western governments.

As the movement has broadened its focus in the last fifty years, it has also greatly expanded the techniques it uses to make documents easy to understand and use. This makes ‘plain English’ hard to define. I will give several more detailed descriptions later, but the following is a fair summary of most approaches to plain English in the mid-1990s:

\textsuperscript{24} Penman 1993

\textsuperscript{25} For instance: American Revolution 1775; French Revolutions 1789, 1830 & 1848; English Reform Acts 1832 & 1867; German federation and establishment of a German Parliament 1847–48; riots and revolution throughout Italy 1848–49; and the growth of parliamentary government in Britain and France 1850s–1870s. To these changes should be added developments in collective social action: the first trade unions legalised in Britain 1825; Communist league established 1847; women’s suffrage movement established 1848; and cooperative stores appear in northern England in 1851.

\textsuperscript{26} This is the approach taken by Gowers (1954). In the mid-1970s, the Impact Foundation in the U.K. taught typography and print skills to ordinary people.
Plain English is clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary. It is language that avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary and convoluted sentence structure. It is not baby talk, nor is it a simplified version of the English Language. Writers of plain English let their audience concentrate on the message instead of being distracted by complicated language.\(^{27}\)

Until recently, plain English consisted mostly of techniques for writing, implicitly assuming that problems of communication are due to the failure of documents (rather than writers or readers). Plain English is repeatedly described as writing that is plain, simple, clear, straightforward, everyday, and natural\(^{28}\).

Calls for ‘plain’, ‘clear’ and ‘simple’ language are not peculiar to the last fifty years. There were complaints about the language of clerks and notaries in the later Roman Empire. In the Catholic Church, there were repeated movements to return Christian preaching to its ‘original purity’, especially after Latin ceased to be widely spoken in Europe\(^ {29}\). In law, there have been calls for ‘plain speaking’ and ‘plain writing’ almost as long as there have been specifically bureaucratic and legal ways of speaking\(^ {30}\). The plain English movement is only the most recent version of a much older tradition.

\(^{27}\) Eagleson 1990, p4  
\(^{29}\) In the fourteenth century, Wycliff had translated the Latin Bible into English, so that ordinary people could read it. It proved largely uninfluential because it was written before mass printing. Vastly more successful was Luther’s translation (1523), which sold over 300,000 copies in Luther’s own lifetime. As the Catholic Church and governments across Europe realised too late, the printing press was pivotal to Luther’s revolt. The importance of an intelligible Bible was central to Luther’s reforms: he insisted that every soul should know God and what he demanded of Christians. This implied that every Christian needed a first-hand knowledge of the Bible, which in turn meant that every Christian needed an accurate, intelligible translation.  
\(^{30}\) After the removal of the English monarchy, legal reform was a priority for the Commonwealth. For centuries, Latin had been used to write court documents and French was the language of courtroom procedures, but both had been mangled beyond comprehension. For example, we have records of one man accused (in Latin) *quia tethervit vaccam apud watermill*. And there is a report (in French) of an incident at the Salisbury assizes in 1631, when chief justice Richardson *fuit assault per prisoner la condemne pur felony que puis son condemnation ject un brickbat a le dit Justice que narrowly mist*. In 1650 the Parliament passed an act requiring all law to be conducted in English. Unfortunately, substantial change failed as the Commonwealth government degenerated into military dictatorship. When the English monarchy was restored in 1660, Latin and French returned to the lawcourts and would not be ejected until the mid-eighteenth century—archaic Latin legalisms survived well into the twentieth century (*pro bono, habeus corpus*).
The plain English movement of the 1960s and 1970s

The first landmark text in plain English was Ernest Gowers’ *Plain Words* (1948) and its sequels, *The ABC of Plain Words* (1951) and *The Complete Plain Words* (1954). Commissioned by the British Treasury, the books have been reprinted in almost every year since, and several revised editions have appeared. These books have been used throughout the English-speaking world, and increasingly outside the small world Gowers envisaged: government officials writing to the general public. Gowers inspired numerous imitations and summations, and supplied material for uncounted training courses.

Gowers was chiefly concerned with words:\footnote{Gowers’ focus on words reflects the preoccupation of most language reformers in the early twentieth century: see Appendix 10 for a summary. Gowers’ focus doubtlessly also reflected his part in revising and updating Fowler’s *Modern English Usage*, which was concerned with the correct use of English words but did not deal with any larger unit of speech.} effective communication followed from their correct selection.

The golden rule [of writing good English] is not a rule of grammar or syntax. It concerns less the arrangement of words than the choice of them. “After all,” said Lord Macauley, “the first law of writing to which all other laws are subordinate, is this: that the words employed should be such as to convey to the reader the meaning of the writer.” The golden rule is to pick those words and use them and them only. Arrangement is of course important, but if the right words are used they generally have a happy knack of arranging themselves.\footnote{Gowers 1977, p16}

Gowers structured his books around thirteen principles, which can be divided into two groups. These correspond to the processes of ‘thinking about what to say’ and ‘finding the right words to express it’. The first five principles are:

1. Be sure that you know what your correspondent is asking before you begin to answer him.
2. Begin by answering his question. Do not start by telling him the relevant law and practice, and gradually lead up to a statement of its application to his case.
3. So far as possible, confine yourself to the facts of the case you are writing about and avoid any general statements about the law.
4. Avoid a formal framework if you can … Ordinary letters to the public should be cast in as informal and friendly a way is possible.
Be careful to say nothing that might give your correspondent the impression, however mistakenly, that you think it right that he should be put to trouble in order to save you from it.\footnote{33}

Here Gowers’ concern is clear—the official working out what to write in government correspondence to an ordinary member of the community. These precepts are quite specific to this environment. I have not seen these rules repeated in other books except in a much altered form. His remaining eight principles however are much more familiar: they are concerned with how words are to be chosen and used.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Use no more words than are necessary to do the job.
\item Keep your sentences short.
\item Be compact; do not put a strain on your reader’s memory by widely separating parts of a sentence that are closely related to one another.
\item Do not say more than is necessary.
\item Explain technical terms in simple words.
\item Do not use what has been called the ‘dry meaningless formulae’ of commercialese … officials do not write your esteemed favour to hand or address their correspondents as your good self.
\item Use words with precise meanings rather than vague ones.
\item If two words convey the same meaning equally well, choose the common one rather than the less common.\footnote{34}
\end{enumerate}

None of these principles originated with Gowers, but he gave them a great impetus. Variations have been regularly offered by plain English writers ever since. But while much repeated, there are large ambiguities in these rules. In particular: just what makes words ‘simple’, ‘vague’ and ‘precise’? Gowers did not say—nor indeed do later writers on Plain English\footnote{35}. He did however give many examples of both good and bad writing.

Words were Gowers’ chief concern. He “diffidently” added a chapter each on punctuation and grammar\footnote{36}. Other writers however were not so shy and soon added general rules for arranging words within sentences. The three main rules still commonly repeated are:

\begin{itemize}
\item Extracted from Gowers 1977, pp29–30
\item Extracted from Gowers 1977, pp20–36
\item Brown and Solomon 1995
\item Gowers’ diffidence may have been well-placed. I know from practical experience that grammatical rules mean almost nothing to most non-professional writers—and a good number of professionals as well. Most cannot distinguish between subject and objects, much less tell the difference between active and passive verbs. I have yet to see a plain English text that distinguishes between direct and indirect objects.
\end{itemize}
Variations on Gowers’ advice were much repeated by governments and some large organisations in the 1950s and 1960s. But bureaucratic organisations were broadly the limit of formal plain English. This situation changed in the 1960s when public pressure groups demanded more accessible and accountable government, and consumer groups began to demand information about products, particularly foods and food additives. Information and access, they added, was to be in a form that the general public could readily understand. In response, governments set up plain English committees and began redrafting publications, forms and other public information. Some introduced policies that required government information to be in plain English. Organisations like Clarity and the Plain English Campaign (U.K.) and the Plain Language Institute (Canada) were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s specifically to promote plain English, rewrite documents and train writers.

By the 1980s, the concerns of the plain English movement had widened from the use of words and the construction of sentences. The following three examples, which summarise rules typical of plain English at the time, show several new concerns in the use of words:

Example One

…ten typical elements of plain English:
1. a clear, easy-to-follow outline
2. appropriate headings
3. reasonably short sentences
4. active voice
5. positive form
6. subject–verb–object sequence
7. parallel construction
8. concise words

Gowers was not alone in his uninterest in grammar: George Orwell wrote in his influential *Politics and the English Language*, “correct grammar and syntax are of no importance so long as one makes one’s meaning clear.”

In 1978, U.S. President Carter required government regulations be written in ‘clear and simple English’ (Penman 1993). In 1998, President Clinton wrote to the heads of all U.S. government departments requiring that “the Federal Government’s writing … be in plain language”, and providing four basic rules: “common, everyday words, except for necessary technical terms: ‘you’ and other pronouns; the active voice; and short sentences.”

Example Two

[Plain English] instructions regarding linguistic features are usually concerned with word choices, sentence construction and the global structure of the document. ... The kinds of instructions often fall into these categories:

- word choices, eg, choose words your reader will know, write positively, use verbs and not nouns, use personal pronouns or name the actors, get rid of unnecessary words, draft in the present and not the future tense, avoid jargon.
- clause structure, eg, use active rather than passive voice, keep sentences short and clear, define technical terms as you use them, make parallel thoughts into parallel sentences.
- global structure eg, get straight to the point, set a context at the beginning of the document, put the reader first, tell the facts in your reader’s logical order, put detail at the end and don’t let minor points confuse your main message.

Example Three

[1] Write with personal pronouns: you, we, I.
[3] Use a logical pattern and make the links between ideas obvious.
[4] Use titles and subtitles that are informative or summarise the text.
[5] Cut out any information that is not essential to your purpose.
[6] Prioritise the information and put the most information at the beginning.
[7] Use graphics, charts, and pictures to reinforce crucial facts and points.
[8] Use a formal table of contents for long documents or a summary introductory paragraph for shorter ones.
[9] Organise clear sentences: keep the subject and verb close together at the beginning of the sentence.
[10] Explain only one idea in each sentence.
[12] Use verbs instead of nouns for your action.
[13] Use the active voice: make sure the actor is identified as well as the action.
[14] Use passive voice when appropriate and necessary.
[15] Use positive words and sentence constructions, avoiding negatives.
[17] Use a tone that suits your audience and avoid unnecessary formality.

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39 Brown & Solomon 1995
40 Plain English Online, website
Simplify your words; choose everyday language.
 Cut the jargon and avoid acronyms.
 Use technical words with care: define or provide descriptive examples.

Although each of these three examples is still concerned mainly with the selection and arrangement of words, all three have added rules about structures larger than sentences:

1. the overall ‘structure’, ‘order’ and ‘logic’ of the information
2. the use of headings to help group the information and provide ‘signposts’ for readers
3. the use of tables of contents to help people ‘navigate’ through documents.

The addition of non-linguistic elements in the 1980s

By the late 1980s, several plain English experts began to advise writers that focussing on language alone was not enough to ensure readers could understand documents.

When we [the Plain Language Institute] first tell people that we promote the use of plain language in legal documents, most breathe a sigh of relief. They think they will never again have to wade through Latin, archaic English, or incomprehensible legal terms. But when you work with the language of law or government, you quickly realise that the challenge of plain language goes far beyond vocabulary. You also have to think about how words are used, sentences constructed, documents designed, and how people infer meaning from words.

But even well-organised sentences that use commonly understood words can be presented on the page in a way that makes the message hard to understand. Organisations such as the Communications Research Institute [sic] in Australia and the American Document Design Centre [sic] have done a great deal of work to understand how design affects readability. They have helped create a body of knowledge about almost every aspect of how words appear on paper. 

Prompted by research into type, graphic design, instructional design and Human Factors, guidelines about the typographic and visual structure of written information begin to appear in Plain English literature from the mid-1980s. These rules included:

1. the visual hierarchy of headings
2. the optimal number of characters in lines of continuous text
3. the use of space between lines and paragraphs to group and separate text

Plain Language Institute 1992. The Communication Research Institute of Australia explicitly rejected anything to do with plain English or regarding a document’s intelligibility as a product of “how words appear on paper”. The Institute was a leading critic of the Plain English movement in the 1990s.
During the 1990s, the rules of plain English began to be recommended for other media, including the internet and the spoken word. It also involved far more than just making language plain.

Plain English, to put it simply, is a way of expressing your ideas clearly in writing and speaking. As for plain English writing, I think of it as having three parts:

• *Style.* By style, I mean how to write clear, readable sentences. My advice is simple: write more the way you talk. This may sound simple, but it’s a powerful metaphor that can revolutionise your writing.

• *Organisation.* I suggest starting with your main point almost all the time. That doesn’t mean it has to be your first sentence (though it can be)—just that it should come early and be extremely easy to find.

• *Layout.* This is the appearance of the page and your words on it. Headings, bullets, and other techniques of white space will help your reader see—visually—the underlying structure of your writing. The value is immense. ...

**Developments and conflicts in plain English in the 1990s**

Traditional Plain English treats the intelligibility of text as a property of the text itself: whether words, grammar, paragraphy, organisation, logic, typography, or layout. The basic assumption of the plain English movement is that improving the text leads to improved communication. This remains the most common approach to plain English.

From the late 1980s, some authors also insisted that the writers need to put themselves in the position of their readers and consider their needs (although how a writer that understands the information is meant to think as a reader that does not remains a conundrum). At the same time, a few researchers took a further step closer to the reader—and away from the purely text-based approach of traditional plain English—by testing documents with users then using the results to modify the text. In the fifteen years since, sophisticated testing methods have been adapted from fields including ergonomics, anthropology, information design and instructional design.

A very few researchers have taken an even more radical step towards the reader, involving them collaboratively in the development of documents and other information. These

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42 Bailey 1996, pp3–4

43 See Penman 1993
researchers have also pointed out that most public documents—the traditional focus of the plain English movement—exist within complex political and power relations, and these must be managed if useable documents are to result. Some studies of major design projects show that over fifty percent of time can be spent negotiating with political players, and little more than a quarter of the project spent writing or designing (although obviously this varies with the type of work being done).  

By the 1990s, Plain English had become, paradoxically, the domain of experts. Long gone was Gowers’ concern with non-professional writers like lawyers and officials. Doing plain English demanded, at its fullest, skills in writing, editing, graphic design, user-testing, and negotiation skills: an unusual range of skills rarely found even amongst professional communicators. Plain English also required increasing amounts of professional judgement, which the non-expert could not be expected to have. For instance, one repeatedly-criticised rule of early plain English was “use the active voice, not the passive”. While most critics agreed that the passive voice was grossly overused, particularly in legal writing, they pointed out that there were times when it was a valid grammatical device. In response, many plain English manuals then added the rule “Use passive voice when appropriate and necessary” —but did not explain how a non-expert was meant to identify those moments when the rules was ‘appropriate and necessary’.

The larger point made by the critics was that good communication cannot be regulated by rules alone—much less a brief set such as that proposed by the plain English movement. This was tacitly acknowledged by one supporter, who wrote defensively “the [plain] language guidelines, the ones for words and sentences, are just that—guidelines, not inflexible rules.” This is fair enough, but hardly helpful from the perspective of the non-expert writer. The experts allow that rules may need to be broken at some times. But which rules and under what circumstances? How is the non-expert to decide? An expert would know what to do, but as an expert they are not in need of guidance. Although very complex or politically-sensitive documents may require expert advice, most organisations cannot afford experts to ‘do’ Plain English for them. But Plain English has become so complex that the real focus for plain English reforms—people like lawyers and government

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44 For instance, Fisher and Sless 1990
45 The passive voice is appropriate when the actor is unknown (“John was murdered”) or is unimportant (“The government was re-elected”) or is not the focus of the sentence (“Jane was rescued”).
46 Plain English Online, website
47 Kimble 1995
officials that have to write for the public routinely—do not have the training or skills to make the decisions now demanded of them. Catch 22.

Another criticism of plain English in the 1990s concerned the large claims made about its effectiveness and the evidence offered to support it.

Plain English is not limited to expressing only simple ideas: it works for all kinds of writing—from an internal memo to a complicated technical report. It can handle any level of complexity.48

It is doubtful whether science, medicine, engineering or a hundred other technical professionals could operate for long without their technical vocabulary or specialised dialects. Gowers sensibly cordoned off expert languages from his rules—others have not been so cautious.

The evidence offered in support of traditional plain English has often been weak49. Typically, the ‘evidence’ offered has consisted of claims about the number of words removed from legal documents; improved readability scores; the opinion of experts; and the preferences of readers. None count as genuine empirical evidence. If removing words improved intelligibility, then logically the most intelligible of all documents ought to be those with no words at all! Numerical ‘readability tests’ such as the Flesch and Gunning-fog tests have long been criticised50. Opinion is never evidence of useability—especially the opinions of expert writers whose reading habits are so unlike those of ordinary readers. And preferences are a poor guide to real performance: given a choice between two designs, people

48 Bailey 1996, p.4. Kimble (1995) makes the extraordinary claim that plain English “is the language of the King James Version of the Bible, and it has a long literary tradition in the so-called Attic style of writing.” The Attic style developed in classical Athens around 400BC and emulated by the Roman orators: neither language is remotely like modern English. The Attic style was one of political and judicial oratory, not the bureaucracy. Kimble is also apparently unaware that the language of the King James Bible was archaic even at the time it was prepared (Romer 1988, p324).

49 See Penman 1993 and Gospin 1989 for critiques.

50 All numerical ‘readability tests’, such as the Flesch Test and Gunning FOG Test (FOG = ‘Frequency of Gobbledygook’) rest on the assumption that shorter words and sentences are easier to understand. All these tests involve counting the number of letters in words and words in sentences, and feeding the numbers into mathematical formulae. They do not consider the meanings of words or the context they are used in. Take a sentence and scramble the words—or the letters within each word—and it will score exactly the same as the original grammatical sentence, even though it is unintelligible.

Readability tests have been heavily criticised, partly because they are insensitive to the meaning of words, partly because the data upon which they were first developed (mostly magazines in the 1940s–1960s) is limited and out of date.
will sometimes prefer the one that is objectively harder to use. (This is not to say that plain English is necessarily wrong—merely that many of its claims are unsubstantiated by real evidence.) The plain English movement has been curiously immune to criticism—it is highly conservative, retaining old rules even when they are called into question.

Then the critics make all the old arguments against text-based guidelines: long sentences can be managed; there can be good reasons to use the passive voice; shorter does not always mean clearer; readability formulas are only a rough measuring device; and so on. ... But these are all nonissues.

Finally, like many other professional areas, there are disputes over just what plain English really is. There is no longer even a broadly agreed definition. Strikingly, some recent authors have almost nothing to say on the topics central to the early Plain English movement: words and their arrangement. The Canadian journal, Rapport, acknowledges the diversity of views and carries a different definition in each issue. Others however see the lack of an adequate definition as a sign of fundamental incoherence.

One site of this dispute has been the use of user-testing and collaborative development. On one side of the argument has been the view that plain English is the sum of all techniques that make documents easy for people to understand and use—whether through language, structure, design, or user-testing. Plain English in this view is defined by its intent, not its methods. On the other side are those that see user testing and reader-collaboration as involving fundamentally different views of communication from that implied in traditional Plain English. Early Plain English located the problem of written documents within the documents themselves, and therefore assumed that ‘fixing’ the documents would resolve people’s problems with using them. The critics reject this assumption. Involving readers in the development of documents, or testing documents with their help, implies that good communication is not solely the result of drafting or design. Indeed, in practice the findings of testing often subvert the traditional rules of plain English. The consequence is that incorporating user testing in the development of documents fundamentally changes the criteria for good communication: from the structure of the document to what the reader does with the document—from an object to an activity. Collaborating with readers also moves attention from the document to the on-going interaction between the writer and the

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51 For example, Wright 1980, Keller-Cohen et al 1990
52 Kimble 1995 replying to Penman 1993.
53 See Penman 1993
54 For instance, Bailey 1996 spends less than ten pages out of nearly three hundred discussing words.
55 Noted by Penman 1993 and still true ten years later.
56 For instance, Kimble 1995
reader, in which the document is only one instant—a shift from an object to the interaction. It also brings the political life of documents into view and the on-going relationship between the organisation producing it and the person using it. In each of these criticisms, the implicit location and nature of meaning changes from a property of words to be variously [1] in the reader’s head, [2] in the readers’ use of the text, or [3] in the on-going interaction between the writer and the reader. If the meaning of the text is not a property of the text, then it follows that the traditional plain English approach of simplifying the text cannot reliably improve readers’ understanding of documents (it may change it but not necessarily improve it). In particular, the critics argue that effective communication does not necessarily follow from the use of ‘plain’ language—or any particular style or set of rules. All these criticisms though involve a radically different set of beliefs about what communication is—and the debate is far from resolved.

The origins of plain English in journalism and other professions

Historically, the earliest rules of the plain language movement appeared after the conventions of journalism had been codified, and they appear to have been adopted, whether knowingly or not, from journalism. Gowers’ *The Complete Plain Words* for example preserved many of the main features of journalistic rules in his time. For example, like journalists, his distinction between ‘working out what to say’ and ‘finding ways to say it’ is the most basic division in his treatment of writing. His rules for words and sentences matched contemporary reporters’ conventions—use short words, use simple words, use precise words, use words in common use, explain technical terms, keep sentences brief, keep related material together.

There are however two important differences between the rules of journalism and plain English. First, the Plain English movement has adopted the journalists’ precepts as universal rules for good writing, ignoring the context they exist in and the other factors that may correct them. Second, the Plain language movement has focussed exclusively on the second half of journalistic rules: how to write. Journalists sensibly recognise that the subject of a story will affect the style it is written in: obituaries and disasters are not reported the same way as a fashion parades or food reviews.

While the plain language movement adopted many rules from journalism, the reasons and justifications for them changed. For instance, like journalists, plain English writers prefer shorter words and sentences, claiming that they make documents easier to read. But journalists prefer brevity for reasons other than sense alone. As I noted earlier, space in newspapers is scarce and using short words helps tell stories in a smaller space. Short sentences and words also look better when typeset in narrow newspaper columns. But these limitations are irrelevant to the lawyer or government official—the primary focus of the plain language movement. Also, brevity is less important to journalists than using the right
word—if the word is short so much the better. But brevity has apparently become an end in itself for some plain English experts.

In the last fifteen years, the conventions of plain English and journalism have diverged, as plain English experts began to look beyond language to improve the usefulness of written information, incorporating conventions from publishing and graphic design. The sources of its rules have also broadened beyond the conventions of professional communicators—like journalists, typographers, and graphic designers—to embrace the findings of empirical research.

Finally, the plain English movement assumes that methods for communicating well can be reduced to rules—unlike journalism and other professions, where conventions always operate alongside traditions, advice from colleagues and expert editing. Plain English tries to do without the lived experience that professionals use to resolve conflicts between rules and decide when particular rules may be irrelevant.

**SUMMARY OF FEATURES**

Communication-as-technique is largely atheoretical. Its rules and conventions are derived mostly from history and experience, not theory and research. Most take the form: “here are five things we see in all good writing, so follow these five rules and you too will be a good writer.” Where apparently theoretical claims are made, they are usually used to justify a rule or make it more memorable; very few rules are derived from theory. As I will show in the following chapters, while some rules have proved long-lived, the justifications for particular conventions are often rather more fluid\(^57\).

Like communication-as-transmission, there are many variations on communication-as-technique. Below is a list of ten common assumptions in this tradition. Not every version will have all these points, and some versions may add others, but most collections of conventions in this tradition assume most of the following:

1. Written communication is divided into three independent parts: writer, reader, and document.
2. The writing process is divided into ‘thinking about what to write’ and ‘choosing the words to write’—although communication-as-technique often deals only with the latter

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\(^{57}\) I once had a senior and very experienced public relations expert tell me that the ‘inverse pyramid’ was developed because it was a more effective way of communicating than other ways of writing. Apart from being historical nonsense and a gross overgeneralisation about human communication, it illustrates how the justifications supporting rules can change.
The meaning of words is a property of words, and therefore what makes a document intelligible is a property of the document itself—including words, arrangement, structure, logic, and layout.

If readers have trouble understanding a document it is because (a) the writer chose the wrong words (b) the writer arranged the words in the wrong way, or (c) some defect in the document. (That readers interpret text is not an assumption of contemporary communication-as-technique.)

Language can be divided into four levels: words, sentences, paragraphs, and the overall story, argument or document.

Words should be in common use, familiar, short, precise not vague, not fashionable, not ‘flabby’.

Sentences should use the subject–verb–object structure; use active verbs not passive ones; keeps verbs and their subjects together; keep modifications with the things they modify; clearly link related items; avoid redundancy; avoid familiar or stale images; and be short.

Paragraphs should be about one idea or fact, supported by any necessary detail.

The overall structure should follow the ‘logic’ of the subject; begin with a summary or key points; start with important points and follow with increasingly less important items; clearly link related items; and give ‘signposts’ to help readers find their way through the information (tables of contents, headings).

The chief virtues of good writing are simplicity, brevity, clarity and purity (terms that usually go undefined).

None of these assumptions or conventions is specific to journalism. As I will show in the next two chapters, they originate in the rules of logic, rhetoric and grammar and have a history that stretches back to the fifth century bc. In looking at the ancient techniques codified by the Greeks and later the Romans, it is useful to treat them in two broad groups:

1. techniques for speaking and writing, which I discuss in Chapter 11
2. techniques for reading and interpretation, which I describe in Chapter 12 (there are no ancient arts of listening).

In Chapter 14, I trace the evolution of the ancient arts through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and explore the reasons for their decline in the early modern Age—and their adoption by the newly emerging profession of journalism.
ABSTRACT  Until the Enlightenment, the most important set of communication techniques was rhetoric, the art of persuasion, first codified in Greece and Rome. In its fullest form, rhetoric showed orators how to work out what arguments and evidence to present in a speech; how to organise material logically and coherently; what styles to use; and how to present the speech so that it would move audiences to action. It was also teamed with dialectic, the art of argumentation.

The classical arts were neither a theory nor a description of communication. They were concerned with how to speak persuasively, not what happens when people speak or why one technique is more effective than another. Based primarily on experience and lacking a strong theoretical account of communication, the rules of rhetoric proved highly conservative. Many ancient precepts are still in use today in journalism and plain English. Also, the way that the rules were organised and used had consequences for communication beyond speech making: rhetoric is the source of the fundamental division between thought and speech, words and things.

EARLY RHETORIC IN CLASSICAL GREECE

Although ancient sources placed the origins of rhetoric in Syracuse, its full development in Greece took place primarily in Athens, and was shaped by the city’s political, legal and educational systems.

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1 There is already a vast literature on classical rhetoric. Most of it deals with the techniques rather than the view of communication that these techniques rest on. In this chapter, I have summarised the main works that influenced later ages, and pointed out the assumptions that endured. I have avoided detailed analysis of any work or author, particularly their idiosyncrasies except where some point was perpetuated. My focus has been the main stream of assumptions and beliefs and how they developed in the seven hundred years between the Sophists and Quintilian. Chapter 14 deals with the fate of the classical model in the Modern Age, as the ancient arts were taken up and applied in areas outside public speech making, eventually to be used as a paradigm for all types of communication.
By the mid-fifth century BC Athens was, at least in theory, a direct democracy. Every Athenian man could, in principle, speak and vote in the Assembly. Direct participation was also a feature of Athenian law: the litigious Athenians never developed the profession of lawyer, instead requiring each person to speak on their own behalf before magistrates or juries of their fellow-citizens. Popular participation in public life was not simply a right but an obligation of pride.

In practice however, the size of the Assembly and juries made it impractical for every citizen to speak and be heard equally. The Assembly could involve every adult male citizen: about fifty thousand men at the end of the fifth century BC. The minimum size for an Athenian jury was 201, and could be several times that for capital crimes. It is safe to assume then that those that mastered speech-making, also mastered politics and the law.

Rhetoric was not part of education in the fifth century BC, although its development was influenced by prevailing educational practices. Even at the height of Athenian power, opportunities for education were limited. The sons of ordinary citizens could learn a trade (tekhne¯) by being apprenticed to master craftsmen, merchants and skilled tradesmen. For

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2 While Athens was engaged in a constant, indecisive struggle with Sparta and other lesser Greek cities for military supremacy, it dominated Greece with its cultural achievements. By contrast, Sparta—Athens’ chief rival—was rigidly organised into a vast military camp and had little use for persuasive rhetoric or a humanistic education such as flourished in democratic, cultured Athens. By the mid-fifth century BC, Athens was one of Greece’s largest cities, with an empire of dependent states in the Aegean, a navy to protect and police it, extensive maritime trade throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and the prestige of having twice repelled the Persian invasion of Greece. Under Pericles (c495–429 BC), the city reached its cultural, commercial and political zenith. No other Greek city produced a host of outstanding writers of the stature of Aeschyles, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes. It was also the chief home of philosophy: the Academy, Lyceum, Stoa and Garden were all founded in Athens, and Diogenes the Cynic spent over twenty years in the city. The confluence of political power, oratory, literature and analytic thought made Athens the most congenial environment in which the systematic analysis of language could emerge.

3 The greatest statement of Athenian democracy, Pericles’ Funeral Speech, emphasises the great importance attached to participation in Athenian civic institutions: “…each [citizen of Athens] is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics—this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all.” (Thucydides 2:4. See also Plutarch Solon 20)

4 Tekhnē covered all of the practical skills necessary for the function of the state, as well as many creative arts. In The Republic, Plato has tekhnē include music, cookery, ship-building, navigation, soldiery and medicine; in Protagoras he includes carpentry, smithing, shoemaking, and the work of professionals like merchants and ship-owners.
the sons of the wealthy families there were three forms of training. First and foremost was training in athletics, discus, javelin, and wrestling aimed at developing physical perfection. Second in priority was training in dance, music, and the Greek chorus. Thirdly, and of least importance, was training in reading and writing, which involved studying the poets, copying passages, and learning poems by rote. Otherwise, the wealthy young men of Athens were left to “pick up excellence by chance”\(^5\). This aristocratic training was seen as quite different from learning tekhnē. “You [do not] learn any of those things in a technical way, with a view to becoming a professional yourself, but simply for their educational value, as an amateur and a gentleman should.”\(^6\) The point of this aristocratic education was not to learn a skill, tekhnē, nor to encourage athletics, music or literature as such, but to develop the areté necessary for the polis to function. Music lessons were aimed primarily at developing discipline and harmony amongst citizens\(^7\). Lessons in reading and writing were primarily to educate students in morality and law.

Crucially, the aim of traditional education was not to impart areté, for the Greeks believed that areté could not be taught. Rather, education was to manifest a youth’s nascent areté. Education could not implant areté where it was not born—and traditionally it was only born into the great families that lead each city.

Rhetoric, as one of the skills required to lead the polis, was grouped with areté and hence regarded as an in-born skill. The Greeks did however believe that it could be enhanced through training and emulating successful orators. “…the matter is as it is in all other matters: if it is naturally in you to be a good orator, a notable orator you will be, when you get knowledge and practice … and whatever you lack of these you will be incomplete”\(^8\). Natural skill, observation and practice would be at the core of all ancient rhetoric, and even today we sometimes think “a way with words” is a skill born rather than learnt.

The Sophists

It was in this complex social and political environment that the Sophists appeared around 460 BC. They came from all over the Hellenic world; travelling teachers of many subjects. While they lectured all over Greece, their focus was Athens: the city could not only afford their unprecedented charges, but was perhaps also the polis best able to put Sophistic theories and training into practice.

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\(^5\) Plato Protogoras 320

\(^6\) Plato, Protagoras 312

\(^7\) Writing the Laws at the end of his life, Plato blamed the lack of discipline in Athenian life on the poor state of musical training.

\(^8\) Plato Phaedrus
The Sophists presence galvanised Athens. Plato writes that students clamoured for training, hopeful for the prestige and power it would bring them⁹. One the reason for the excitement was the Sophists’ revolutionary claim that they could teach the skills of politics and law—traditionally grouped within the domain of aretē, and hence the preserve of aristocratic families—as professional skills (tekhē), and furthermore, to be able to teach them to anyone, not just the upper classes. This claim went to the heart of Athenian life, both exciting and scandalising intelligent Athenians¹⁰.

While the Sophists taught a wide range of subjects, their principle topics—and the ones that students paid for most readily—were politics and rhetoric. The Sophists showed their students how to prepare arguments and present them to persuade listeners and defeat opponents. They demonstrated how to select words to make speeches pleasant, striking and appealing, raising wordplay to unprecedented heights. They taught their students how to make weaker arguments appear stronger, and argue equally well on both sides of a dispute.

In part, the Sophists’ success was due to their introduction of orderly methods into speech making: before them, people had learnt to make speeches simply by copying successful speakers. But the new rhetorical techniques—used for their own sake, or to enhance the speaker’s prestige without concern for the social consequences—had a devastating effect on Athenian juries and the Assembly. Most citizens, untrained by the Sophists, could not emulate their dazzling wordplay and persuasive arguments, and found their own words used against them¹¹.

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⁹ Plato *Protogoras* 310–316

¹⁰ For instance, Plato *Protogoras* 319

¹¹ Thucydides reports the dismay felt by many Athenians at the paralysing effects of Sophistic rhetoric. In the following passage, he reports a savage attack made around 429 BC on the enthralled Athenians: “You have become regular speech-goers, and as for action, you merely listen to accounts of it; if something is to be done in the future you estimate the possibilities by hearing a good speech on the subject, and as for the past you rely not so much on the facts which you have seen with your own eyes as what you have heard about them in some clever piece of verbal criticism. Any novelty in an argument deceives you at once, but when the argument is tried and proved you become unwilling to follow it; you look with suspicion on what is normal and are the slaves of every paradox that comes your way. The chief wish of each one of you is to be able to make a speech himself, and, if you cannot do that, the next best thing is to compete with those who can make this sort of speech by not looking as though you were at all out of your depth while you listen to the views put forward, by applauding a good point even before it is made, and by being as quick at seeing how an argument is going to be developed as you are slow at understanding what in the end it will lead to. ... You are simply victims of your own pleasure in listening, and are more like the audience sitting at the feet of a professional lecturer [Sophist] than a parliament discussing matters of state.” (Thucydides 3:3)
Not surprisingly, because the Sophists’ training directly affected political decision-making, they became attached to political groups, particularly that of Pericles. However, even before the statesman’s death in 429 BC, the Sophists and other progressives were persecuted. They were attacked and defended in the Assembly, and their work debated in the plays by Euripides and Aristophanes. But when Athens suffered a series of disastrous reverses in the war with Sparta, the Sophists were amongst the chief scapegoats. By 380 BC, they were defeated as an intellectual force and reduced to teachers of rhetoric.

Despite their reverses, much that the Sophists had pioneered was retained. Their claim that education could improve people both morally and intellectually has rarely been challenged since: it remains at the core of modern education policy. Many early developments in philosophy explicitly rejected the Sophists’ teachings, so preserving them in a negative way. Even their greatest protagonists—Plato, Xenophon and Isocrates—established schools more in the Sophist manner rather than the traditional ‘discipleship’ of earlier philosophers. Much of the theoretical framework the Sophists developed for rhetoric and language was retained by the next generation of orators.

We know little directly about the Sophists’ ideas and rhetorical techniques, and reconstruction will always be conjectural. Probably the best picture of their handbooks on rhetoric is the summary in Plato’s Phaedrus.

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12 Pericles’ teacher, Anaxogoras, was exiled; his Sophist adviser, Damon, was ostracised; the Sophist Protogoras was prosecuted and his books burnt; Aspasia, Pericles’ mistress, was prosecuted, as was the playwright most associated with Pericles and the Sophists, Euripides.

13 While Athens was led by Pericles the war with Sparta went well for the Athenians. But after his death in 429 BC the Assembly was prey to weak leaders and Sophist-trained orators. When the Peloponnesian War ended with complete humiliation for Athens, the city turned on the Sophists and other foreigners. To govern the defeated Athenians, the Spartans established an oligarchy overseen by the ‘Thirty Tyrants’ which included several Sophists. Not surprisingly, when the democracy was forcibly restored, the Sophists were again the target of proscriptions. Amongst those executed was Socrates. Although not a Sophist, he was popularly associated with them (for instance, by Aristophanes in The Clouds). He was convicted of “failing to recognise the city gods” and “corrupting the young”—charges typically levelled at the Sophists—and sentenced to death in 399 BC.

14 Very few Sophistic texts remains. Such fragments as we have of their work are mostly from their chief protagonists, the philosophers of the fourth century BC, and few are more than a title or a brief quotation in a later work. Only a very few of the Sophists’ speeches remain, and none of the handbooks we know they wrote for their students survive.

Why so few Sophistic texts remains partially conjectural. Possibly there were very few texts actually produced, although contemporary accounts suggest otherwise. We know that the books of some authors, such as Protogoras, were burnt, although this is unlikely to account...continued on next page
There is the exordium [introduction], showing how the speech should begin, ... Then follows the statement of facts, and upon that witnesses; thirdly proofs; fourthly, probabilities ...; [Theodorus] also speaks ... on confirmation and further confirmation. ... and he tells us how refutation or further refutation is to be managed, whether in accusation or defence. ... Evenus ... invented insinuations and indirect praises; and also indirect censures, ... . But shall I “to dumb forgetfulness consign” Tisias and Gorgias, who are not ignorant that probability is superior to truth, and who ... make the little appear great and the greater little, disguise the new in old fashions and the old in new fashions, and have discovered a method of speaking on every subject either concisely or at infinite length. I remember Prodicus laughing when I told him of this; he said that he himself had discovered the true rule of art, that a speech should be neither long nor short, but of a convenient length. ... And there is also Polus, who has treasuries of diplasiology, and gnomology, and eikonology, and who teaches in them the names of which Licymnus made him a present; they were to give a polish. [Protogoras taught] rules of correct diction and many other fine precepts; for the “sorrows of a poor old man”, or any other pathetic case, no one is better than [Thrasymachus]; All of them agree in asserting a speech should end in a recapitulation, though they do not all agree to use the same word.15

What we know of the Sophists’ work suggests that most concentrated on aspects of speech, although they carried on research in other areas as well. For instance, Gorgias studied figurative and poetic words, ornaments, and the acoustics of speech: assonance, dissonance, cadence, hiatus, and so on.16 Protogoras taught grammar and began to formalise etymology. Thrasymachus wrote on rhythm.

The now-lost Sophistic handbooks instructed students on how to order material in an argument, which words to use, and how to ornament their speech. They wrote extensively on how to arouse anger, pity and other emotions amongst listeners. Students were taught for their near-complete disappearance. The most plausible suggestion is that their texts were simply made obsolete by later authors, of which the most important were Plato, Isocrates and Aristotle.


15 Plato Phaedrus 266d–267d. This list of subjects is probably an accurate summary of the Sophists’ syllabus rather than a satire: in the context of the dialogue, it would have done Plato’s case little good to misrepresent his adversaries.

16 For nearly two thousand years after, many figures of speech were known as the Gorgianic figures. From the name ‘Gorgias’ we derive our word ‘gorgeous’ in its sense of ‘ornamented’ or ‘sumptuous’.
how to make weak arguments appear strong; the ‘double argument’ (*dialexis*); the ability to argue equally well on both sides of an argument (*thesis* and *antithesis*); as well to manage grammar and acoustics.

Most ancient handbooks explained to their readers how to prepare speeches on a template, although the complex system described by Plato—introduction, statement of facts, witnesses, proofs, probabilities, conformation, and refutation—was later drastically simplified. The analysis of figures of speeches useful for ornamenting speeches, along with devising rules for good diction, remained constant interests throughout Antiquity. How to make effective emotional pleas inevitably remained an important technique in an art used primarily in lawcourts and public assemblies, although as I will show later the device attracted much criticism.

**PLATO**

We know that the Sophists’ art of rhetoric was both attacked and defended. However, no detailed criticisms survive from the fifth century BC. The earliest critique that comes down to us are by Plato, written in the early fourth century BC. Plato’s view of rhetoric has to be read in the context of his political aspirations. As I discussed in Chapter 7, the aristocratic Plato had twice been disappointed in public life: first by the tyranny of the oligarchs appointed to rule Athens after the Peloponnesian War, and second when the restored democracy condemned Socrates to death in 399 BC. Not surprisingly, Plato viewed all forms of government in his time—a aristocratic, oligarchic and democratic—as deeply flawed and, along with them, the morality and arts that contributed to their poor condition: rhetoric and sophism chief amongst them. Although Plato had been born after the noontide of the Sophists, they are the chief target in his dialogues, appearing more often than all other philosophers and intellectuals together.

The other major influence on Plato’s view of rhetoric was Socrates’ concern with morality, justice and truth. In pursuit of them, Socrates had used a question-and-answer method for interrogating his fellow-citizens, in which they jointly identified logical confusions in common beliefs and together sought the truth. Socrates referred to this as ‘dialectic’ and it was, for Plato, the only valid philosophical method for revealing truths.

The concerns and methods of the contemporary *rhetōrē* were quite unlike those of Socrates. In the lawcourts, rhetoric was used to persuade listeners of the guilt or innocence of the accused or to establish what probably happened in a particular case. In the Assembly,

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17 Athenian law placed greater emphasis on probability than evidence. The Athenians believed that all evidence could be faked; witnesses bought; oaths forgotten. In response they...continued on next page
the *rhetōrēs* sought to persuade people to follow a particular policy or make a particular decision. In Plato’s view, rhetoric was not being used to establish what *truly* happened in legal cases or develop genuinely *good* public policy, and so was a natural target for his criticism.18 And as rhetoric was one of the chief topics taught by the Sophists, they were naturally amongst the characters Plato has Socrates interrogate in his dialogues.

Plato devoted two dialogues to rhetoric: the early *Gorgias* (c.385BC) and one of the middle dialogues, *Phaedrus* (c.370BC). Both would be highly influential throughout Antiquity and again in the Renaissance.

**Plato’s Gorgias**

In *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates discuss rhetoric in an increasingly polarised conversation with three Sophists: Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. The first discussion with Gorgias focuses on the definition and scope of rhetoric; the second with Polus focuses on the use of rhetoric; and the third with Callicles deals with the society in which rhetoric is used. The main concern for ideas about communication is the first discussion with Gorgias.

The dialogue opens with Socrates asking Gorgias what ‘art’ (*tekhnē*) he is skilled in, to which Gorgias responds, ‘rhetoric’. Socrates then asks what this art of rhetoric is concerned with. Gorgias says that rhetoric is *peri logous*, “about discourse”19. Pressed by Socrates to be more specified about what sort of discourse—medical, geometric, arithmetic—Gorgias eventually responds that rhetoric is concerned with, “the word which persuades the judges of the court, or the senators in the council, or the citizens in the assembly, or at any other political meeting”20. The *rhētor*21, he says, will be more persuasive than the doctor on the subject of health, or indeed any other professional on their own area of expertise.

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18 “I have heard that he who would be an orator has nothing to do with true justice, but only with that which is likely to be approved by the many who sit in judgement; nor with the truly good or honourable, but only with opinion about them, and that from opinion comes persuasion, and not from the truth.” (*Phaedrus* 260)

19 The phrase *peri logous* does not translate neatly into English, and could also be rendered ‘about words’ or ‘about speaking’.

20 *Gorgias* 452

21 *Rhētor* is a broad term in classical Greek, and includes not only orators, but also people like politicians and advocates who spoke in order to persuade.
Is that not a great comfort?—not to have learned the other arts but the art of rhetoric only, and yet be in no way inferior to the possessors of them?  

Socrates is not at all comforted, and has Gorgias admit his claim is only true so long as the ῥητόρ tries to convince the ignorant. Rhetoric, as Gorgias describes it, produces only belief, not true knowledge about the subject. (Plato clearly sees belief as at best only randomly connected with truth, and at worst actively harmful to people who act on mistaken beliefs.)

Socrates then raises a crucial question concerning the knowledge that a ῥητόρ requires when speaking before the Assembly or in courts: does the speaker have to know what is just and unjust, or can they be ignorant of them as they are about any other topic? Gorgias concedes that the speaker must know these but adds off-handedly: “I suppose that if the pupil does not chance to know them, he will have to learn of me these things as well”.

As Plato describes him, Gorgias knows little about what rhetoric involves, although the Sophist praises it effusively. (This may be Plato’s unflattering portrait rather than an accurate reflection of Gorgias’ own position.) Gorgias also places little value on knowledge, believing that if speakers need knowledge, they can learn it as required. For Gorgias, skill in rhetoric takes precedence over knowledge of the subject.

At this point, Polus breaks in and the conversation turns to the use of rhetoric in society and away from the nature of rhetoric and communication as such. Only two points need to be mentioned concerning communication in the dialogue. The first is that Plato introduces the idea—there are no earlier references to it—of rhetoric as flattery or trickery; a counterfeit of dialectic concerned only with false opinion, not true knowledge. After Gorgias, Sophism would be forever linked with devious speech divorced from the truth: an art concerned more with how things are to be said than what is said. This accusation was the primary source of the belief that rhetoric is about dishonest, manipulative and vacuous language, devoid of scruple.

The second point of note appears toward the end of an acrimonious discussion with Callicles. Socrates is pursuing his theme that rhetoric is concerned with flattery and gratification, rather than the well-being of the listener. Callicles objects that there have been ῥήτορες concerned for their fellow-citizens: a point Socrates cannot deny. To resolve this contradiction, Socrates proposes that there is not just one type of rhetoric, but two: one ‘true’ and another ‘false’.

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22 Gorgias 459. Little could have revolted Plato more than the thought of a person ignorant of true knowledge being on the same level as one who has studied deeply.

23 Gorgias 460
one, which is mere flattery and disgraceful declamation; the other which is noble and aims at the training and improvement of the souls of the citizens, and strives to say what is best, whether welcome or unwelcome, to the audience…

He then identifies the characteristics of the ‘true’ *rhetor*, as opposed to the Sophist: he will be a good man, concerned with the welfare of his listeners’ souls, speak for the best, and always encouraging virtue, temperance and justice.

Plato does not expand on what this ‘true rhetoric’ might involve, but it would be the starting point for his *Phaedrus* fifteen years later. In the meantime however, Plato insists that the only skill in speaking that his fellow-citizens required was dialectic, the question-and-answer technique used by Socrates.

Despite Plato’s unrelentingly hostile view of rhetoric in *Gorgias* and his failure to provide a positive replacement, he makes and misses several points that have influenced Western beliefs about speech ever since.

First, by repeating the Sophists’ claims that rhetoric was concerned with words or discourse —where in practice it was limited to speech-making— Plato gave credence to the implied claim that rhetoric was a model for all communication. (Plato’s own claim for dialectic is equally grandiose, excluding other legitimate ways of communicating.)

Second is his insistence that, if rhetoric is “the art concerned with discourse”, then it has to be understood in terms of the topic not method. But, as he point out, if all of the discourses already ‘belong’ to other arts—such as medicine, gymnastics, painting, arithmetic—then there is nothing ‘left over’ for rhetoric. Rhetoric is essentially empty. In saying this, he is failing to distinguish—possibly deliberately—between the arts that have a specific object (such as medicine and arithmetic) and those that may be used across all arts (such as logic, dialectic and rhetoric). This is the starting point for a long tradition that sees language as possessing no ‘essence’.

The third assumption that Plato makes is linked with the second: the claim that the ability to speak on a topic must require a thorough knowledge of the topic—which for Plato

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24 *Gorgias* 503

25 *Gorgias* 503–504

26 Admittedly, this distinction is only first made formally by Aristotle when he distinguishes the *Organon* from the other topics. However, Plato may have been aware of it in *Gorgias*, but refused to use it, because it would weaken his case against rhetoric.
implies a knowledge of what is real. For Plato, knowledge does not come from language. He has Socrates make the extraordinary claim that, if the city needs walls, harbours or docks constructed, then the master builder will advise the Assembly while the ῥήτορ remains silent. Similarly, generals will advise the citizens on military matters, not politicians. This is precisely the inverse of sophism: the belief that ‘the expert has the answers’, and that expertise alone is sufficient to convince those listening—a belief still very much alive today. (There is no technical term for this claim, so I will refer to it as ‘Plato’s rhetorical fallacy’.)

Fourth, Plato insists that rhetoric must be moral. Socrates’ definition of the ‘true rhetoric’ starts and ends with a consideration of the listener’s soul. In the process though, he rejects the public and visible aspect of speaking and insists that a true rhetoric is a private, interior experience within the human soul. Essentially, he rejects communication in favour of psychology—and Western beliefs about communication have retained this bias ever since.

Fifth, Plato sets up a polarisation between dialectic and rhetoric, along with the followers of each. Dialectic (and by association, the philosophers) is concerned with knowledge, truth, and the good; rhetoric (and by implication, the Sophists) is concerned with opinion and belief, uninformed by true knowledge, which is at best random in its effects or simply false and misleading. Rhetoric, as Plato presents it, seeks to flatter and gratify the listener rather than attend to their genuine well-being. The ῥήτορ is unscrupulous, worldly, ambitious, and aims at personal success; the philosopher, exemplified by Socrates, admires justice, truth, knowledge, self-control and aims at spiritual purity through scrupulous self-examination.

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27 For Plato, knowledge of what is real derives from the intellectual apprehension of the transcendent Ideas or Archetypes—not from language. In Cratylus, possibly written around the same time as Gorgias, Plato rejects the two common beliefs that objects are named according to their nature (a horse is called a ‘horse’ because it is a horse) and that names are merely a social convention (a horse is called a ‘horse’ because everyone agrees to call it a horse, but they could change its name tomorrow if they collectively chose to do so). He has Socrates argue that a person’s knowledge of a thing is not based on the relationship of the thing to its name, but rather on the person’s relationship with the thing itself. The name—and by implication language—is therefore irrelevant to knowledge. Plato does not deal directly with his theory of Ideas in Cratylus, but in his later dialogues, such as Republic, he says that true knowledge only comes through apprehending the Ideas, of which things perceived with the senses are merely imperfect, distorted images. Knowledge for Plato is grounded in nature, not in language or social convention.

28 Plato does allow Gorgias one short speech in which the Sophist distinguishes between the morality of the speaker and rhetoric as an amoral force—a position accepted by the Sophists and, later, by Plato’s contemporary, Isocrates. This argument though is not taken up by Socrates in the dialogue.
To summarise the consequences for communication in *Gorgias*: Plato strips rhetoric—and, indirectly, all communication—of any ontological or moral force. Speech-making is merely a knack, unconnected with truth or knowledge. For Plato, good speaking rests on the speaker’s knowledge of the topic, personal virtue, and concern for improving the souls of those addressed—not on the speaker’s skill with words or ability to engage with others. Rhetoric concerned only with words—particularly those aimed at flattering or giving pleasure—rather than things the audience needs to hear, is for Plato a serious evil.

**Plato’s *Phaedrus***

Plato returned to rhetoric some fifteen years later in *Phaedrus*. As well as discussing rhetoric, this dialogue deals with love between men and considers the value of writing alongside speech, making it one of his most complex works.

The dialogue begins with three speeches on love—a topic which is far from irrelevant to the later discussion of rhetoric. The young Phaedrus has heard a speech by the orator and speechwriter Lysias. The premise of the speech is that a young man was being tempted sexually by another who did not love him. The aim of Lysias’ speech was to persuade the young man to accept the non-lover’s attentions rather than those of a lover. The core of the argument is that, if the young man accepts the attention of a lover then he is doing a bad thing, because when the lover’s passion has passed it will be replaced with anger and recriminations; therefore the young man does better to accept the attention of someone who does not love him because he will not suffer as a lover would. Phaedrus is impressed by the paradox and obtains a copy of the speech in order to memorise it. Socrates asks him to read it and, on hearing it, admits to being aroused. But he also objects that the speech lacks clarity, style and tone, and that Lysias has repeated himself a number of times. Phaedrus challenges Socrates to compose a better speech on the same topic, which the philosopher does (although Socrates hides his face from Phaedrus because he feels somewhat ashamed of composing a speech which advocates rejecting a lover in favour of a non-lover). Socrates’ effort is technically superior to Lysias’—and indeed is so effective that Socrates breaks off and tries to leave before finishing, lest he take advantage of the only-too-willing Phaedrus. He is only stopped by a divine voice, which accuses him of impiety and forces him to recant what he has said. Socrates admits his speech was “dreadful”, “foolish”, “impious”, “deceitful” and “untrue”, as was Lysias’ original. Love is divine, he says, and therefore cannot be evil. Socrates then makes a second, longer speech, in which he distinguishes physical love, which has the potential to drag the lovers’ souls down into hedonism, from a

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29 *Phaedrus* 234

30 *Phaedrus* 242–243

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spiritual love in which the lovers’ souls rise to a philosophical purity—the ‘Platonic love’ which was the greatest human experience as far as Plato is concerned.

The topic of love in the first half of the dialogue, while self-contained and admired in its own right for over two thousand years, is not incidental to Plato’s discussion of rhetoric in the second half. Plato uses Lysias’ speech and Socrates’ first response to illustrate the damage that immoral rhetoric can do to the soul of both the speaker and the listener. While Socrates’ response is technically superior, it is in Plato’s eyes still a bad speech. The orator, he says, has to attend to the soul of the listener and its improvement (which is what Socrates’ second speech achieved31), not just the speech’s technical aspects (which is all Socrates focussed on in his first speech). To this point, the dialogue raises the same criticisms as Gorgias, although Plato illustrates his argument with some of Antiquity’s finest speeches.

In the second half of the dialogue, Plato goes on to analyse what a ‘true’ art of rhetoric might look like, taking up the program he left unanalysed in Gorgias. He begins by having Socrates and Phaedrus consider whether writing speeches, such as Lysias has done, is good or bad. Socrates says that it is not necessarily bad:

...there is no disgrace in the mere fact of writing ... The disgrace begins when a man writes not well, but badly.32

So, they conclude, the question of true rhetoric turns on a knowledge of good and bad and the ability to distinguish between them. Furthermore, a knowledge of these things is not the exclusive domain of the rhetores or poets33. Socrates then wants to know whether knowledge alone is sufficient to be persuasive. He asserts that it is not.

In order to explore the topic further, Socrates offers a preliminary definition of what rhetoric is: “a universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments” or alternatively “a kind of leading the soul by means of words”34—a definition that places the real part of rhetoric in the soul of the listener, and treats words simply as instruments35. In a major change from the

31 At the end of Socrates’ second speech he offers a prayer for Phaedrus, that the young man will devote himself to philosophy and the spiritual ‘Platonic’ love. Phaedrus joins the prayer, signalling that Socrates’ speech has moved his soul for the better. (Phaedrus 257)

32 Phaedrus 258

33 Phaedrus 258

34 Phaedrus 261. The key term that Plato uses, psukhagōgia, has no direct equivalent in English. The root ἀγοράς is related to terms for teaching and instructing, directing and pointing out.

35 While this definition had little influence in Antiquity, it would stimulate interest amongst seventeenth-century British orators in the fledgling discipline of psychology—setting it free of philosophy, where it had been safely confined since Plato’s day.
Gorgias, Plato now says that knowledge alone is not sufficient to persuade, rejecting the ‘Platonic rhetorical fallacy’ of the earlier dialogue. Two things are needed apart from knowledge, says Socrates, if a speaker is to be persuasive. First, he notes that the chances of deceiving someone are greater when the difference between a statement and the truth is small rather than large, or when the speaker moves away from the truth by small degrees rather than in large jumps. So, he concludes, the rhētor needs not only knowledge of things, but also the ability to distinguish between truth and error. For Plato, this implies the ability to make definitions and to analyse the topic by dividing it into logical parts.

The second thing the rhētor needs is the ability to order the material and unify its parts.

You will allow that every discourse ought to be a living creature, having a body of its own and a head and feet; there should be a middle, beginning and end, adapted to one another and the whole...

Socrates says that people that have these abilities—knowledge of the truth, the ability to make definitions, to divide subjects into logical categories, and to bring the pieces together into a whole—are, in his opinion, ‘dialecticians’ (and later he adds the term ‘lovers of wisdom’, that is, philosophers). Phaedrus then objects that there is much that is taught by the Sophists which they have not discussed. To examine Phaedrus’ objection Socrates begins by summarising the Sophists’ handbooks—the list of subjects which I gave earlier. Socrates then easily demonstrates that what the Sophists and their handbooks cover does not meet his requirements of rhetoric. The Sophists’ rules are only the preliminaries of rhetoric, he says: they do not show a student how to analyse a topic or structure a speech. What is lacking, he says, is dialectic.

Having rejected rhetoric as it is described by the Sophists, Plato then has Socrates and Phaedrus explore what a ‘philosophical’ rhetoric would look like. To do this, Socrates returns to his initial definition. If rhetoric is the ‘art of leading souls’, he says, then a person who wants to be a rhētor has to learn the nature of each type of soul and the differences between them. The rhētor will then sort speeches into groups corresponding to the types of

36 Phaedrus 260
37 Phaedrus 263
38 Phaedrus 264. Plato also uses the image of speech as a human body in Gorgias (505); “a tale should have a head and not break off in the middle”, and in Laws (752) “I should certainly not like to leave the tale wandering all over the world without a head; a headless monster is such a hideous thing.” The image of a speech being a unified body, made up of different but interrelated parts, remained an important principle of literary criticism throughout Antiquity.
39 Phaedrus 266
40 Phaedrus 278

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souls they persuade. The student of rhetoric will need to begin by understanding each kind of soul at a theoretical level, then develop practical experience of each. When the student understands which type of person is persuaded by what sort of speech, and then sees a person, they will know how to address him appropriately.\textsuperscript{41}

This completes Plato’s analysis of what rhetoric should involve.\textsuperscript{42} The treatment in \textit{Phaedrus} is a major departure from the definition he gave in \textit{Gorgias}, which left almost no scope for rhetoric at all. In \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato gives his new ‘true rhetoric’ universal scope, placing it on equal terms with dialectic—although he distinguishes it sharply from what the Sophists taught. But although \textit{Phaedrus} was amongst the most admired of all Plato’s dialogues, as a manifesto for rhetoric it had little effect.

Overall, Plato’s influence on the direction of rhetoric was ambivalent. On one hand, his attack on the \textit{rhexi-\doreres} would be replayed by philosophers for another seven hundred years\textsuperscript{43} and his introduction of dialectic into rhetoric was decisive. Yet, ironically, Plato’s dialogues contributed to rather than diminished the esteem in which rhetoric was held.\textsuperscript{44}

\section*{Aristotle}

Aristotle was the foremost surviving authority on rhetoric in the generation immediately after Plato.\textsuperscript{45} He began lecturing on rhetoric while still a member of Plato’s Academy,
although his course was a supplement to the Academy’s main syllabus, not a core part of it. Some time after leaving the Academy, Aristotle and his students surveyed the existing rhetorical texts, and the resulting compilation, the *Synagogē tekhnōn*, appears to have been the main textbook on rhetoric used at the Lyceum and Aristotle’s other schools around the Aegean. It saw wide publication: Cicero cites it two hundred years later. As a compilation, it is inconceivable that it would not have drawn on Sophist sources.

But, like all of the other works that Aristotle published during his lifetime, the *Synagogē* is lost. All that survive are his ‘esoteric’ works: lecture notes and draft theories he wrote for students—including Aristotle—never agreed with Isocrates’ approach to either education or philosophy.

Like Plato, Isocrates was concerned with the overall moral and intellectual training of his students, not just their technical skill in rhetoric. But, unlike Plato, whose aim was to develop ‘lovers of wisdom’, Isocrates’ focus was developing effective leaders for Greece. The rhetor’s community, says Isocrates, has a claim on the rhetor that he cannot refuse; he must always seek to be a good citizen and to make good citizens of others. For Isocrates, education involved identifying and developing the good in men. This was a view maintained by Cicero and Quintilian and, with their endorsement, it became the leading educational principle throughout the Middle Ages and lasted well into the Modern Era.

Although Isocrates placed rhetoric at the pinnacle of his curriculum, students approached it through a range of other studies that would provide the foundations for the art. Students began with a training in the poets and grammar to give them a thorough understanding of language, history and morals. Isocrates also insisted that his students received the traditional training in music, gymnastics and literature before they attended his school. Isocrates’ ordered system of grammar and rhetoric—quite unlike the earlier, unstructured Greek education—was ultimately the basis for the medieval trivium which I will discuss in Chapter 14. Most of his training though was not theoretical: students prepared and presented mock orations, then received critical responses from teachers and other students.

There were few Hellenistic rhetoricians that did not echo some fundamental Isocratean principles (Solmsen 1941, p37). However, precisely what Isocrates taught, or even his system of rhetoric, is now lost to us. We have no textbook, much less a full curriculum by him or any of his successors. (There are some quotations purported to come from a handbook by him, but their authenticity is doubted. See Kennedy 1963, pp71–73) What we know of his rhetoric is that he taught largely the same topics as the Sophists, although he made them significantly more practical. Isocrates apparently had little patience for detailed technical, sophistic or philosophical analysis. For instance, we know he greatly simplified the Sophists’ complex rules for ordering speeches; after Isocrates, most speeches fell into four parts: an introduction, a statement of claims, a proof of those claims, and a conclusion which summarised the main points and moved the audience to the appropriate emotional state. Isocrates was also concerned with the logical ordering of subjects: some of the sentences in his speeches run for over a page, yet are easily intelligible because they are so well-structured and balanced.

Cicero *de Invenione* 2:9.
himself and his close students. Amongst these is the *Art of Rhetoric (Tekhnē Rhetorikhē)*⁴⁷. It is not a major work in the context of Aristotle’s philosophy, although it is largely consistent with his other works, and complements his treatment of logic, poetry and the soul. Unlike the *Synagōgê* though, the *Rhetoric* is not a textbook: it is a theoretical analysis rather than a practical guide. Aristotle examines rhetoric by dividing it into logical or thematic units, giving definitions for the basic parts he identifies, and enumerating the possible ways of dealing with each. Because the *Rhetoric* was not particularly influential in itself⁴⁸ I am not going to discuss the detail of Aristotle’s analysis (although I have summarised his divisions in the diagram opposite). What I want to point out are the consequences of his definitions and distinctions and what they tell us about beliefs about communication in fourth-century Greek thought. There are major inconsistencies in what Aristotle says in the *Rhetoric*, so I will begin with his analysis in Books One and Two before turning to the contradictions posed by Book Three⁴⁹.

**The function of rhetoric**

Aristotle begins by remarking that “rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic”⁵⁰. Neither rhetoric nor dialectic has any specific subject matter themselves, but can be used to address any topic. Significantly, both arts can be used to argue for both truth and falsehood. Unlike

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⁴⁷ Also preserved in the Aristotelian corpus is the *Rhetoric for Alexander*, probably written by Anaximines. Although it is consistent with the genuinely-Aristotelian *Rhetoric*, the working out is inferior. It is probably more representative of rhetorical handbooks in the mid-fourth century bc. While we have fragments by earlier authors, these two works are the earliest surviving complete texts on rhetoric. (Kennedy 1963)

⁴⁸ Kennedy 1980, p93

⁴⁹ Like many of Aristotle’s other works, the *Rhetoric* shows signs of several revisions, which lead to internal inconsistencies. Indeed, large parts of the three books that now make up the *Rhetoric* may originally have been separate texts. Writing in the third century AD, Diogenes Laertius refers to a treatise by Aristotle on rhetoric in two books (not three) and a separate and now-lost book ‘on style’ (*lexis*), which may well be what is now the third book of the *Rhetoric*. Book Two also contains an extensive section on human emotion which may also have separate origins, as rhetoric is hardly mentioned within it. The entire text was updated substantially at least once, possibly by Aristotle’s students after his death, and there is evidence of other smaller changes.

⁵⁰ *Rhetoric* §1.1, 1353a1. In practice, rhetoric and dialectic would never be treated as counterparts, and there was constant debate over the precedence of one over the other.
dialect, rhetoric is not concerned with rigorous logical proofs but demonstrating probabilities.\footnote{The Greeks and later the Romans believed that all evidence could be faked, and therefore preferred to make assessments of what happened in legal cases on the basis of probabilities rather than evidence. Even where evidence was available, the rhētors routinely treated it as, at best, only an indication of what probably happened rather than incontrovertible truth. Greek and Roman rhetoric would always involve the speakers piling up sufficient probabilities to persuade their listeners. The habit of relying on probabilities is not restricted to law, but colours the Greek approach to knowledge generally. Greek philosophy for instance was always weak in its use of evidence. Plato’s dialogues are studded with constant disclaimers "it is likely that"; and many of the middle and later dialogues rely heavily on suggestive myths and fables, rather than immediate experience. Even Aristotle’s more experimental philosophy contains glaring errors, particularly in his dissections of animals and plants, as well as the conclusions he draws from them.}

Aristotle describes rhetoric as an art that is used in courts of law, the Assembly and in public orations: its three traditional functions in Greek life and Sophistic theory—although most attention goes to judicial rhetoric. Rhetoric, says Aristotle, is concerned with modes of persuasion. “The modes of persuasion are the only true constituent of the art; everything else is merely accessory.”\footnote{Rhetoric §1:1, 1355a3}

He says there are two sources of persuasion: those that lie ‘inside’ rhetoric proper and those that lie ‘outside’\footnote{Rhetoric §1:1, 354a13f}. Those that lie ‘outside’, that the speaker merely has to use as they are needed, are evidence from witnesses or slaves under torture, written contracts, laws and oaths (clearly, Aristotle is thinking of evidence used in lawcourts). Those sources that lie ‘inside’ are the arguments that the speaker has to construct to persuade those listening.\footnote{Rhetoric §1:2, 1355b25ff} Except for one brief section on ‘external’ proofs\footnote{Rhetoric §1:15}, the Rhetoric is concerned with what lies ‘within’ rhetoric proper.

\section*{Books 1 and 2: the three sources of persuasion}

Aristotle identifies three sources of persuasion around which he organises his treatment:

\begin{itemize}
  \item the character (ethos) of the speaker
  \item the quality of the evidence (pathos)
  \item the logic of the argument (logos)
\end{itemize}
putting the audience in a certain frame of mind or emotion (pathos) and
the proof, or apparent proof, supplied by the speech itself\textsuperscript{57} (logos).

Commenting on this initial threefold division of rhetoric into speaker, audience and speech, Aristotle says, “it thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies.”\textsuperscript{58} With this, Aristotle implies that rhetoric is merely derivative: essentially everything to be said about rhetoric is already covered by dialectic and ethics.

In this division, we are obviously very close to the modern division of communication into speaker, message and audience. Ancient writers agree that Aristotle was the first to divide rhetoric into these domains: a division that would remain a permanent feature of rhetorical theory\textsuperscript{59}. While it is possible that Aristotle was the first author to make this distinction explicit, it is most unlikely it originates with him: it is too similar to the threefold division of communication implicit in communication-as-transmission.

By \textit{ethos}, Aristotle means the character of the speaker as it became apparent in their speech, in the same way an actor’s character became apparent in their performance. He says it consists of “good sense, good moral character and goodwill”\textsuperscript{60}. Although Aristotle says that \textit{ethos} is possibly the most persuasive part of rhetoric, he specifically rejects a speaker’s reputation as a valid source of persuasion (although this is because he believes that arguments should be won or lost on “the bare facts” rather than because a speaker’s reputation is an ineffective asset\textsuperscript{61}). He does not expand on how speakers could adopt a character suited to their topic or audience.

He has considerably more to say on pathos: it consists of most of Book Two. He divides the subject into two parts. First he analysed human emotion—he lists fourteen\textsuperscript{62}. Second, he describes the different kinds of human character\textsuperscript{63} and what type of speech is appropriate for each. (He does this by stereotyping people into different classes—‘young’, ‘old’, ‘wealthy’, ‘powerful’ and so on—then prescribing the types of speeches suited to each.) Aristotle’s extensive discussion of emotion and character is almost certainly a response to Plato’s demand in \textit{Phaedrus} that rhetoric has to start by distinguishing the type of human

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Rhetoric} §1:2, 1356a1f
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Rhetoric} §1:2, 1356a25
\textsuperscript{59} For instance, Quintilian \textit{Institutio} 3:4:1. Writers on rhetoric throughout Antiquity would identify three species of rhetoric—sophistic, technical and philosophical—which corresponded to a focus on the speaker, speech and audience.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Rhetoric} §2:1, 1378a6f
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Rhetoric} §1:2, 1356a9
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Rhetoric} §§2:2–2:12
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Rhetoric} §§2:13–2:17
souls and the arguments suited to each. Aristotle’s approach though has one obvious weakness: nowhere does he explain how a speaker is to address a mixed audience, as would have been normal in before the Assembly or a jury.

The last source of persuasion identified by Aristotle is supplied by the speech itself (logos). Initially he defines logos very narrowly, as an argument which the speaker is trying to prove; a definition drawn from contemporary legal practice. Proofs, he says, are the domain of dialectic—which for Aristotle means reasoning from generally accepted truths by logically valid means (rather than Plato’s more general question-and-answer sense of ‘dialectic’). Dialectic is a topic Aristotle discusses in the five books of the Organon and he refers readers to relevant sections rather than repeating the material in the Rhetoric.

Aristotle distinguishes between two types of proof available to the speaker: deductive proofs and inductive proofs, although he refers to them as enthymemes and paradigmata. (An enthymeme is a shortened syllogism. A full syllogism is an argument of the type: “Socrates is a man; all men die; therefore Socrates will die”. An enthymeme suppresses one proposition—usually the obvious one—to produce a shorter deduction, “Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates will die.” Aristotle is not consistent in including paradigmata in rhetoric: at the opening of Book One he says: “…rhetorical study, in it strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a kind of demonstration … the orator’s demonstration is the enthymeme, and this is in general the most effective mode of persuasion” Only towards the end of Book Two does he introduce paradigmata.)

Dialectic is, for Aristotle, not only a tool for arriving at sound conclusions as it is for Plato; it is also the means for persuading others. Thus the propositions of dialectic form the basis for statements in a speech. This has immediate implications for the types of arguments that Aristotle admits into rhetoric. For instance, Aristotle recommends that speakers use enthymemes rather than a full syllogism because they are shorter, easier for listeners to follow, and do not annoy people by stating facts they already know. He also uses dialectical reasoning rather than the other forms of reasoning he identifies in the Organon.

In Book One, Aristotle is scathing about other contemporary writers who do not teach dialectic and deal only with emotional appeals. Arguments, Aristotle says, ought to be...
won or lost on “the bare facts”, not on “extraneous” matters. He does however acknowledge that this is not always the case in practice, and that emotional appeals do influence listeners—although he regards this as regrettable. He puts the blame for this on the weakness of listeners, either for their inability to reason, their inability learn or their susceptibility to emotional appeals.

Books 1 and 2: the second division of rhetoric: meeting Plato’s demands

There is a second principle that Aristotle uses to arrange the material in the first two books of the *Rhetoric*, in which he appears to work out Plato’s demands on rhetoric—although Aristotle does not name his former teacher. In *Phaedrus*, Plato says rhetoric begins with knowledge: “Before there can be excellence in speech must not the mind of the speaker be furnished with knowledge of the truth of the matter about which he is to speak?”\(^69\). Once the speaker has knowledge, Plato says they must then consider the types of human souls that are to be addressed and the types of speeches appropriate to each. The third requirement for the speaker, says Plato, is the ability to reason. This establishes a ‘natural’ order in which the speaker needs to prepare a speech: develop knowledge, identify the audience, choose the appropriate genus of speech, and prepare the speech through division and definition. Aristotle follows just this order in the first two books of the *Rhetoric*. Book One deals with all of the knowledge Aristotle believes the *rhetor* would need\(^70\). In Book Two, he discusses the character of the speaker briefly (a topic Plato had not mentioned), then the character and emotions of the audience in detail (so the speaker knows the souls of those addressed)\(^71\). Aristotle concludes Book Two with the means for arguing logically and a selection of twenty-eight of commonplaces which form the basis of the most common rhetorical arguments\(^72\).

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\(^69\) Plato *Phaedrus* 259e, and also 260d

\(^70\) Political rhetoric §§1:4–1:8; ceremonial rhetoric (*epideictic*) §§1:9; forensic rhetoric §§1:10–14. Aristotle’s analysis is restricted to the three domains of rhetoric of his time, although he provides a pseudo-logical justification for this division (*Rhetoric* §1:3, 1358a36ff). This misleads him into focussing on the public and ceremonial aspects of rhetoric, rather than the activity of persuading as such.

\(^71\) *Rhetoric* §§2:2–11 and §§2:12–17

\(^72\) *Rhetoric* §§2:18–22. The last section of Book Two contains numerous references to the *Analytics* and the *Topics.*
Taken together, Books One and Two of the *Rhetoric* appear to satisfy all of the requirements that Plato put on rhetoric in *Phaedrus*—although Aristotle achieves this at the cost of stereotyping human souls and heavily summarising the types of knowledge that a speaker might need. In these two books, he also perpetrates Plato’s rhetorical fallacy: his demand that rhetoric be founded on knowledge, that arguments are to be won or lost on ‘bare facts’ not emotional appeals, and his summary dismissal of the verbal arts as lying “outside the proper business” of rhetoric.

**Transition to Book 3: the influence of transmission**

Before turning to Book Three, I want to discuss several transitional passages, almost certainly added after the bulk of the *Rhetoric* had been written. Book Two closes with an abrupt summary of how a speech is to be prepared:

> Three things must be studied in making a speech; and we have now completed the account of (1) examples, maxims, enthymemes, and in general the thought-element *[dianoia]*—the way to invent and refute arguments. We have next to discuss (2) style *[lexis]*, and (3) arrangement *[taxis]*.75

*dianoia* is, for Aristotle, ‘intelligence’ or ‘intention’—a purely mental activity performed by the rational part of the soul (*nous*). The distinction made here between *dianoia* on one hand and *taxis* and *lexis* on the other is thoroughly unfortunate. While rhetoric might be broken into two phases of work—‘thinking up’ or ‘working out’ what to say, then actually saying it—it does not follow that the first phase is a purely mental operation or that the product is a mental object (*ennoia*). It may also involve gathering evidence, hearing witnesses, and occasionally torturing slaves, as much as thinking up arguments. Unfortunately, *dianoia*, *ennoia*, *taxis* and *lexis* would become permanent part of Greek rhetorical terminology, and with them would develop an unwarranted and possibly unintended distinction between *dianoia* and *lexis*: thought and word.

73 Plato *Phaedrus* 259e

74 Plato *Phaedrus* 267d-f

75 *Rhetoric* §2:26, 1403a34f. This passage is the first in the *Rhetoric* to mention *lexis* and *taxis*. Their sudden appearance is sometimes taken as evidence that Book Three was a later addition to an original text of two books.

76 Both *dianoia* and *ennoia* are derived from *nous*, which Aristotle and his contemporaries used to refer to the intellect. In his philosophy, Aristotle distinguishes between *noesis* (scientific or rational understanding) and *phronesis* (ethical or practical judgement). As Aristotle regards proof in rhetoric as relying on facts and logical deduction, rather than language and emotion, so the working out of speeches has therefore to be located in the rational part of the soul, *nous*. 
Book Three opens with a slightly different summary of the speech-making process:

The first question to receive attention [in the *Rhetoric*] was naturally the one that comes first naturally—how persuasion can be produced from the facts themselves. The second is how to set those facts out in language [lexis]. A third would be the proper method of delivery [hypokrisis].

Aristotle did not discuss hypokrisis; he appears to have regarded it as rather low-brow. But these two passages give a clear sequence of events that Aristotle—and presumably his contemporaries—believed took place when a person spoke: first they thought, then they found words to match their thoughts, then they spoke the words. In doing this, Aristotle agrees with Plato’s claim that rhetoric has to be founded on knowledge (*ennoia*), and this knowledge must precede what is spoken (*rhēton*). This order of events would become a permanent feature of communication theory.

Along with Aristotle’s division of rhetoric into speaker, audience and speech, these transitional passages suggest that Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*—and presumably later works modelled on it—was constructed on the framework of communication-as-transmission.

There is a second habit of communication-as-transmission apparent in these transitional passages: Aristotle is caustically dismissive of the ‘arts of language’, *lexis* and *hypokrisis*; facts and dialectic are the only ‘proper’ parts of rhetoric. At the opening of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says rhetoric is concerned with persuasion and this consists of enthymemes. “Everything else”—including *lexis*, *taxis* and *hypokrisis*—“is merely accessory.” Arguments are to be on “bare facts” and reason, which lie within the realm of *dianoia*; style and delivery are “not elevated topics” and are not of “so much importance as people think.” Words and the way they are used only have an effect owing to “the defects of our hearers.”

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77 *Rhetoric* §3.1, 1403b17f. *Hypokrisis* in Greek means ‘acting’ or ‘showing’ although it also has implications of ‘elocution’; the equivalent Latin term is *actio*. Although translated as ‘delivery’ in this passage, there is no implication of conduit-metaphor ‘sending’ of messages implied by the Greek term. ‘Delivery’ is the term traditionally used in English rhetorics from the sixteenth century.

78 The first analysis of *hypokrisis* was by Aristotle’s student and successor as head of the Lyceum, Theophrastus.

79 Plato *Phaedrus* 259e, and also 260d

80 For instance, in 1955, the influential commentator on communication, Stuart Chase, uses precisely the same sequence, although in the context of adapting Shannon & Weaver to human communication: “A mother calls to her small boy, “Come here!” The mother’s brain is the source, the message is the two words, the transmitter is the mother’s vocal chords, the channel is the air which conducts the sound waves, and the receiving mechanism is the child’s ear.” (Chase 1955, p17, my italics)

81 *Rhetoric* §1.1 1354a13
It would be hard to be more disparaging. In distinguishing between rhēton and dianoia, Aristotle, like Plato before him, sides firmly with dianoia—truth, intention, knowledge and reason—contributing to the belittlement of communication. The bias away from words and speech towards thought has been a permanent feature of communication-as-transmission ever since.

**Book 3: words and style**

Most of the section on lexis in Book Three shows no signs of these transitional passages—suggesting they were added later—although they do reappear briefly in the section on taxis. Most of the material in Book Three assumes that communicating effectively involves applying particular techniques: little of Book Three is derived from the principles in Books One and Two. Indeed much of the material in this Book cannot be easily reconciled with the theoretical framework Aristotle developed in the first two Books, although there are numerous references back to them. Nevertheless, much of Book Three is sound advice. A great deal clearly derives from the experience of practising orators, and it presumably includes material from the Synagogē tekhnōn.

In the section on lexis, Aristotle implicitly expands his threefold division of speaker, speech and audience he developed in the first two books. Speech is now divided into two parts: logos, what is said (covered in Books One and Two) and the way this is presented. He divides presentation into lexis (style) and taxis (arrangement).

Style or lexis is dealt with under seven overlapping headings: good and bad style, tone, rhythm, period, ornamentation and the appropriateness of the style to the speaker, audience and subject. Some of his topics, such as the correct use of connecting words and use of inflections indicating gender and number, are specific to the Greek language. Some, such as the use of rhythm, are customs of the still largely oral culture in which Aristotle

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82 "...hypokrisis is—quite properly—not regarded as an elevated subject of inquiry. Still, the whole business of rhetoric being concerned with appearances, we must pay attention to the subject of delivery, unworthy though it is, because we cannot do without it. The right thing in speaking really is that we should be satisfied not to annoy our hearers, without trying to delight them: we ought in fairness to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts. Still... other things affect the result considerably, owing to the defects of our hearers. The arts of language [lexis] cannot help having a small but real importance... the way a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much importance as people think. All such arts are fanciful and meant to charm the listener. Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry." (Rhetoric §3:1, 1403b36ff)

83 Rhetoric §3:7, 1407a17ff
Some comments are limited to public speaking rather than written rhetoric; for instance, he sensibly says that speeches should avoid ambiguous phrasing, parenthetical comments and zeugma, otherwise they could be hard for listeners to follow.

But far from all of Aristotle’s comments are limited to the context he wrote for. Variations on some of his advice on style are still in use today. He says that the style of speech needs to match the ethos of the speaker, the pathos they wish to arouse in the audience and the logos (subject) of the speech, and therefore serious topics should be treated seriously and frivolous ones lightly. He also advises speakers to avoid ambiguity, use specific rather than general terms, avoid strange and unfamiliar words, and avoid inappropriate metaphors. Like many modern writers though, Aristotle does not explain how to decide what words are ‘specific’ and which ‘general’, or what words are ‘ambiguous’. He also appears to treat these as properties of the words themselves rather than of the way that people use them. In doing so, Aristotle shifts the location of meaning from the dianoia of the speaker to the words of the speech: another major break from the first two books.

Rules of this type have proved remarkably enduring. Below is a list of common plain English rules and similar precepts in the Rhetoric.

1. Use specific, concrete words not vague words.
   [call] things by their special names and not by vague general ones.
2. Avoid ambiguities.
   [one part of good style is] to avoid ambiguities.

Obscurity is … caused if, when you intend to insert a number of details, you do not first make yourself clear; for instance, if you say “I meant, after telling him this, that and

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84 Audiences expected speeches to be rhythmical, although not metrical like poetry (which Aristotle says would be absurd and inappropriate). This is not simply an aesthetic device: the use of rhythm helped audiences understand where phrases began and ended. Aristotle recommends the first paeon [— ] to open sentences and the fourth paeon [ — ] to close. “A sentence should break off with a long syllable,” he says, because it “makes a real close: a short syllable can give no effect of finality and therefore makes the rhythm appear truncated. … The fact that [a sentence] is over should be indicated not by the scribe or by his period mark in the margin, but by the rhythm itself.” (Rhetoric §3:8, 1409a17f)

85 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407b12f. Zeugma is a figure of speech where an adjective is associated with two nouns, or a verb with two subject or objects, but is only appropriate to one of them, as in “to wage war and peace”.

86 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407a32

87 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407a32
the other, to set out,” rather than something of this kind “I meant to set out after telling him; then this, that and the other thing happened.”

[4] Link related items.

[one part of good style is] the proper use of connecting words, and the arrangement of them in the natural sequence … Consider the sentence, “But I, as soon as he told me (for Cleon had come begging and praying), took them along and set out”. In this sentence many connecting words are inserted in front of the one required to complete the sense; and if there is a long interval before ‘set out’, the result is obscurity.


Style to be good must be clear. … Clearness is secured by using words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary.


Bad taste in language may be [caused through] … the employment of strange words.


Observe Protagoras’ classification of nouns into male, female and inanimate.

Express plurality, fewness, and unity by the correct wording.

[8] Use a tone that suits your audience.

Your language will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character, and if it corresponds to its subject.

88 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407b21f
89 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407a19f. Because Aristotle is writing before a technical language to describe parts of grammar, what Aristotle refers to here as ‘connecting words’ would, in English, normally be done with word order, clause structure, auxiliary verbs and relative pronouns.
90 Rhetoric §3:2, 1404b2f. In the Poetics, Aristotle says, “The perfection of Diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean. The clearest indeed is that made up of ordinary words, but it is mean, … On the other hand the Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms, and strange words, metaphors, lengthened terms, and everything which deviates from the ordinary modes of speech.” (Poetics 22, 1458a19f)
91 Rhetoric §3:3, 1405b34 & 1406a7
92 Rhetoric §3:5, 1407b7 & 1407b9. Because Greek is an inflected language, the suffixes in both nouns and verbs need to agree with one another. Noun suffixes indicate, amongst other things, gender (“masculine, feminine and inanimate”) and number (“plurality, fewness and unity”).
93 Rhetoric §3:7, 1408a10
Book 3: arrangement

The final section of the *Rhetoric* is concerned with arrangement, *taxis*, which Aristotle deals with by describing the sections of a speech and what each should present.

the only necessary parts of a speech are the Statement [of the claim to be made] and the Argument [which proves the Statement], and it cannot ... have more than an Introduction, Statement, Argument and Epilogue.94

Later, he includes a refutation of an opponent’s claims and a comparison of the points in common in the Argument, but otherwise, all of the other distinctions created by the Sophists are “pointless and silly”95.

The Introduction’s purpose is to secure the goodwill of hearers, remove prejudice from the speaker, and gain (or distract) the listeners’ attention. This can be done by giving a good impression of the speaker’s character or by making the audience believe that the subject is “important, surprising or agreeable”96—and that it touches them personally. Alternatively a speaker might use the Introduction to undermine their opponent and make the audience think the matter is “irrelevant, trivial or disagreeable”97. Aristotle reiterates, obliquely, that arguments ought to be won on facts, not on such emotion or irrelevant appeals.98

The Introduction is followed by the Statement: a summary of the facts to be proved in the case. Then the speaker moves to the Argument to prove their case. Aristotle’s discussion of Argument is one of the weakest parts of the *Rhetoric* because he only outlines the types of arguments that might be used99 and says nothing about how to construct such arguments.

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94 *Rhetoric* §3:13, 1414b7
95 *Rhetoric* §3:13, 1414b16. This echoes Isocrates’ reduction of the number of parts in a speech to the same four, although whether Aristotle drew on Isocrates at this point we do not know.
96 *Rhetoric* §3:14, 1415b1
97 *Rhetoric* §3:14, 1415b4
98 “But observe, all this has nothing to do with the speech itself. It merely has to do with the weak-minded tendency of the hearer to listen to what is beside the point.: (*Rhetoric* §3:14, 1415b4f )

“It is plain that such [appealing] introductions are addressed not to ideal hearers, but to hearers as we find them.” (*Rhetoric* §3:14, 1415b16)

“Introductions are popular with those whose case is weak, or looks weak; it pays them to dwell on anything rather than the actual facts of it.” (*Rhetoric* §3:14, 1415b20)
99 “The duty of arguments [in legal cases] is to attempt to demonstrate proofs. These proofs must bear directly on the question in dispute, which must fall under four heads: [1] If you maintain that the act was not committed, your main task is in court is to prove this [2] If you maintain the act did not harm, prove this. [3] If you maintain that the act was less than is...continued on next page
The speaker may conclude with an Epilogue if necessary. In it, the speaker has four tasks:

1. make the audience well-disposed to yourself and ill-disposed towards your opponent
2. magnify or minimise the leading facts
3. excite the required state of emotion in your hearers, and
4. refresh their memories.

While an appeal for sympathy or anger had become a standard part of the epilogues in his day, that Aristotle recommends the use of emotional appeals is glaringly inconsistent with his views in Books One and Two.

Aristotle’s influence on rhetoric

Aristotle’s Rhetoric had only a small influence in Antiquity. It did however enjoy interest amongst professional orators and teachers during the Renaissance, although its reappearance was too late to have much effect on Western beliefs about communication. Many parts of Aristotle’s rhetoric—such as his rules on style—are quite familiar though. But more important than any specific rules is the way that his basic categories became part of the West’s usual way of thinking about communication. For instance, with Aristotle we have the first explicit division of communication into three realms—speaker, speech and audience. Drawing on this division, Aristotle locates meaning or significance in three specific locations:

1. the speaker’s dianoia, ennoia (intellect or intention)
2. the words themselves (logos, lexis)
3. the pathos of the audience—although this is almost exclusively negative: Aristotle sees the audience’s pathos chiefly as a source of misunderstanding.

alleged or [4] justified, prove these facts, just as you would prove the act not to have been committed if you were maintain that.” (Rhetoric §3:17, 1417b21ff )

“In ceremonial speeches you will develop your case mainly by arguing what has been done is, for example, noble and useful. The facts themselves are to be taken for granted.” (Rhetoric §3:17, 1417b31f )

“In political speeches, you may maintain that a proposal is impractical; or that, though practicable, is unjust, or will do no good, or is not so important as the proposer thinks. Note any falsehoods about irrelevant matters—they will look like proof that his other statements are false.” (Rhetoric §3:17, 1417b35f )

100 Rhetoric §3:19, 1419b1of
101 Kennedy 1980, p 93
102 Unlike the contemporary Greek beliefs about communication-as-transmission, which used the same three categories of speaker, audience and speech, Aristotle does not rely on the belief that there is transference of anything from one person to another to explain rhetoric.
Like modern writers, Aristotle is inconsistent in where he locates meaning—it changes depending on the context of his writing.

We can attribute one of the most enduring problems in Western thought to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*: the fundamental division between *thought* and *word* in the division between ‘thinking up what to say’ and ‘speaking what has been prepared’. While Greek philosophers had long given priority to mind over the material world, the dichotomy between thought and word and the elevation of one over the other is first made explicit in the *Rhetoric*. It would become one of the most persistent Western beliefs about language. The distinction between the two is a direct by-product of rhetoric: no other branch of Greek thought dealt simultaneously with thought and speech.

One other feature of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is worth noting: although he discusses in great detail what a speaker has to do in order to persuade, he does little to explain why these things persuade. He gives techniques, not reasons; a dissection and taxonomy of rhetoric’s parts, not an explanation of how these parts work. Specifically, he does not explain how the speakers’ words affect the soul or intellect or emotions of those listening. Without this he cannot explain why one type of argument or choice of words is better than another. Nor is he able to explain how mistakes and misunderstandings arise, beyond blaming unnamed flaws in the audience. This absence would be a constant characteristic of rhetorical handbooks down to the Modern Age.

**LOGIC**

An influential development that took place alongside rhetoric was the formalisation of dialectic. Plato insisted that the *rhetor* should not only know the subject, but also be able to make definitions and divide the subject into logical categories. Aristotle had made deductive reasoning, in the form of *syllogism* and *enthymemes*, the core of rhetorical argument. Logic was one of the three principle parts of Stoic philosophy, with rhetoric an associated discipline. Although the details of Hellenistic logic were lost at the end of Antiquity, the importance of logic to rhetoric was never forgotten; today we still refer to the ‘logic’ of a sentence or a chapter to mean the way that the topics are brought together and related to one another.

Unlike modern logic which, for reasons I will discuss in Chapter 14, we largely think of as ‘correct thinking’, ancient dialectic was concerned with correct argumentation.

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108 The Stoic’s achievements in logic were only appreciated after propositional logic had been independently rediscovered during the nineteenth century. Philosophy of the Middle Ages depended on the older logic of Aristotle.
Consequently, dialectic and rhetoric overlapped considerably. Aristotle began his *Rhetoric* saying “rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic”\textsuperscript{104}. Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, compared dialectic to a closed fist, representing the ‘tight’ argumentation of logic, while rhetoric was a relaxed open hand, symbolising the loose ‘open’ style of rhetorical argument\textsuperscript{105}—a comparison that would be commonplace until the connection between logic and speaking was broken in the seventeenth century.

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Unlike rhetoric, dialectic never developed a canonical structure. However, Hellenistic dialectic, as it was used by the Romans, can be divided into five broad areas.

First come the definitions of words and terminology used in dialectic: *genus*, *species*, *property*, *accident*, *definition*, *part*, *whole*, *equivocal*, *univocal* and so on.

The second defines verbs, nouns and words used to link them, and how all were combined to form sentences\textsuperscript{106}. This part overlapped with grammar, but was included in dialectic to make sure that sentences were well formed.

The third part of dialectic dealt with the sentences of most interest to the philosophers: propositions. The philosophers analysed the various types of propositions that could be made—*universal*, *specific*, *indefinite*, *comparative*, *negative*, and so on—as well as how to decide whether propositions were either true or false or neither\textsuperscript{107}.

The fourth part of dialectic dealt with how individual propositions were assembled together to make syllogisms from which deductions could be made\textsuperscript{108}. It also dealt with ambiguities and contradictions caused by the incorrect coupling of propositions or the misuse of terms.

\textsuperscript{104} Aristotle *Rhetoric* §1.1, 1354a1

\textsuperscript{105} Cicero *Orator* 113–114

\textsuperscript{106} Aristotle had included a short section on the combination of words into sentences at the beginning of *On Interpretation* 16a1–17a8

\textsuperscript{107} Here was one of the chief differences between the Stoics and Sceptics. The Sceptics maintained that since no positive knowledge was possible, therefore no propositions concerning the world were conclusively true or false. Only mathematical proofs could be shown to be true or false, but even that was conditional upon the axioms that theorems were derived from. The Stoics on the other hand maintained that all knowledge derived from sensory experience. Propositions could be definitively classed as true, false or neither by comparing them with the experiences of the mind.

\textsuperscript{108} Here there is a divergence between Aristotle’s categorical logic and the Stoic’s propositional logic. Aristotle’s concern was with syllogisms of the form, “All people die, All Greeks are people; therefore all Greeks will die”, where the relationship is between the words (people, Greeks, die). Stoic syllogisms take the form “If it is morning, then it is light; But it is not light, …continued on next page
The fifth part, usually mentioned last in surviving texts although it does not fit into the cumulative pattern of the first four parts, is the process of establishing definitions (so that those arguing know what they are arguing about) and dividing the subject up rationally (so that the whole discussion can be arranged under these headings). Later writers on logic also noted how divisions could be further subdivided, until the entire topic was totally reduced to basic units. This last part of dialectic was particularly important in rhetorical invention, because it helped orators work out what points they had to prove in their speeches—particularly legal arguments.109

The parts of logic have varied in their importance over the last two thousand years. The main interest in Antiquity was the ability to take a subject and divide it into parts for treatment: Plato’s concern with definition and division remained a concern of the Romans. By contrast, the Middle Ages, working from Aristotle’s tool of logic (organon), was obsessed with syllogisms.

Ancient rhetoric was not concerned solely with methods of reasoning, but also the knowledge upon which reason operated. Aristotle distinguished two basic types of logic:

1. ‘demonstration’ when the premises were fundamental or verifiable truths. This included formal logic and scientific demonstration (apodiexis)
2. ‘dialectic’ when the reasoning was based on generally accepted opinions.110

Of the two, dialectical reasoning was the weaker, because its starting point was weaker. It was however the type of reasoning used in rhetoric, because scientific demonstrations were beyond many people111. Rhetorical arguments were therefore based largely on notions that are commonly believed rather than scientifically demonstrable facts. Even before Aristotle, these notions and opinions were called topoi or ‘places’112 (from which we have our words ‘topic’ and ‘commonplace’). The very earliest were generalisations from which probable actions could be inferred. For example, in a case where a small man was accused of assault, the accused was advised to point out that a smaller man was

therefore it is not morning” where the concern is the relationship between the propositions, not the words.


110 Aristotle Topics §1:1, 100a25f

111 Rhetoric §1:1, 1355a26

112 The origin of the term topoi is obscure. Presumably it refers to the ‘places’ in which speakers ‘found’ their arguments, although it may also refer to the ancient system of memory used by speakers, which also used a system of places to remember speeches.
unlikely to attack a larger because he would probably lose, and that a large man was
unlikely to admit to being assaulted because he would not wish to appear weak.
Commonplaces like ‘a small man would not a attack a large man’ are fairly specific
however, and an orator would need hundreds of such to provide all the material necessary
for even ordinary court trials. Under the influence of the philosophers, the topics became
more general. Aristotle lists twenty-eight common rhetorical topics, along with nine sham
arguments. Amongst his legal topics were:

[1] proving a statement by disproving its opposite: “if war is the cause of our present
troubles, peace is what we need to put things right again”

[4] if a quality does not exist where it is more likely, then it does not exist when it is less
likely: “if even gods are not omniscient, then certainly human beings are not”

[6] defining terms: “what is the supernatural? Surely it is either a god or the work of a god.
well, anyone who believes that the work of a god exists, cannot help also believing that
gods exist”

[9] logical division: “All men do wrong from any one of three motives, A, B, or C: in my
case A and B are out of the question, and even the accusers do not allege C.”

[17] if two results are the same then their antecedents are the same: “to say that the gods
had birth is as impious as to say that they die … [for both imply] there was a time
when the gods did not exist”

[22] refuting an opponent noting contradictions: “he has never even lent any one a penny,
but I have ransomed quite a number of you”

None of these types of arguments relied on evidence; they were what Aristotle called
entekhnoi, ‘within the art’ of rhetoric. In an age when documents were uncommon, no
police existed to collect and preserve physical evidence, and witnesses could easily be
intimidated, such topoi had to form the bulk of rhetorical arguments.

113 The philosophers also developed scientific topics, absolutely true claims, upon which
scientific arguments could then be established. Amongst the most important of these were
Aristotle’s Categories and Topics, which analysed the basic qualities of nature, upon which
philosophical argument could be predicated: essence, quantity, quality, relation, place, time,
position, state, activity, and passivity (Topics §1:9103b23)

114 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1397a11
115 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1397b12
116 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1398a16
117 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1398a30
118 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1399b6
119 Aristotle Rhetoric §2:23, 1400a21
ROMAN RHETORIC

We have no direct knowledge of how rhetoric developed in the two hundred years after Aristotle’s death—no handbooks survive from the third or second centuries BC. What we know of Hellenistic developments is almost entirely from later Roman sources—indeed, what the West knew of rhetoric before the fifteenth century was almost exclusively Roman, not Greek.

In republican Rome, as in Greece, prominence in the law and public assemblies was a path to social and political advancement. By the second century BC, Romans were studying in Greek schools and importing Greeks to teach Hellenistic rhetoric. Whatever native oratorical tradition Rome had, by the time of the first surviving texts written around 80 BC, Roman oratory was thoroughly Hellenistic.

There are two main differences between the Greek and Roman rhetoric. First, the Romans had little interest in philosophy or abstract analysis generally. Their rhetoric was thoroughly practical and almost entirely untheoretical. While there were quarrels between the philosophers and latter-day ‘sophists’, these would take place almost exclusively in the

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120 Kennedy 1980. We do know from later authors that the Isocratean school continued to produce Greece’s leading orators; Aristotle’s Peripatetics produced only one great speaker before the two schools merged in the late second century BC (Judd 1876, Cicero de Inventione 2:8). Although Aristotle himself remained in high esteem, the Lyceum declined in importance after his immediate successor Theophrastus, and the term ‘Peripatetic’ became more a term for a technical scientist or analyst rather than a philosopher. The Academy continued to reject rhetoric, drawing chiefly on Plato’s arguments, although it certainly produced noteworthy speakers. The Epicureans rejected rhetoric outright until the first century AD, when they reversed their policy, although by then their school was in irreversible decline (Kennedy 1980, p94). The Stoics allowed a small place for rhetoric in their philosophy, but their emphasis was on logical precision rather than oratorical magnificence. Cynic philosophy—founded by Plato’s contemporary Diogenes—had no lasting influence on rhetoric, grammar, logic or views of communication generally.

121 “A congenital lack of speculative imagination among the Romans [of the second century BC] stilled their interest in natural science, save for narrowly utilitarian purposes.” (Cary 1960, p271) “Conundrums of logic and of metaphysics they curtly dismissed as impractical, and therefore positively harmful” (Cary 1960, p271). “Despite a smattering of mathematics which was imparted [during the first century BC], in imitation of the Greek curricula, in some of the higher Latin schools, the Roman mind remained as unappreciative as ever of natural science” (Cary 1960, p476). “Philosophical studies began to enter into the curriculum of well-educated Romans of the later republic, though always kept subordinate to the linguistic and rhetorical training.” (Cary 1960, p476)
Greek world that Rome had conquered\textsuperscript{122}. The unanalytical nature of Roman rhetoric meant that most textbooks were highly prescriptive: they identified rules apparent in successful orators and told readers how to emulate them without examining why these strategies are successful. While rhetorical techniques presumably originated in experience, later Roman textbooks tended to be conservative, retaining precepts long after they had ceased to be appropriate.

The second difference was that, in Rome, oratory quickly became professionalised. Unlike Greek law, which required individuals to speak for themselves, Roman law allowed one person to speak on behalf of another. Inevitably, a body of skilled speakers developed: the first lawyers. In politics, although notionally republican Rome was a democracy, in practice all major decisions were made by the aristocratic Senatorial order, and consequently the need for political rhetoric in republican Rome was limited to the upper reaches of society. After the Republic’s collapse in the first century bc, Augustus and his successors introduced censorship, further reducing the scope of political oratory\textsuperscript{123}. Even so, Roman schools continued to turn out polished speakers for centuries after they had any political or legal function. Their only outlet was the third part of traditional rhetoric: panegyric or epideictic. Rhetoric became entertainment under the Caesars: with increasingly little of political significance safe to discuss, what was said became less important than the way it was said—leading to precisely the excesses of sophism that Plato and Aristotle had attacked. From the mid-first century AD to the decline of Roman authority in the West, the ‘Second Sophistic’ dominated rhetoric\textsuperscript{124}.

The principle sources on Roman rhetoric

From the perspective of the West in later ages, the most important books on Roman oratory were written by Cicero in the first century bc and Quintilian in the first century AD\textsuperscript{125}.

\textsuperscript{122} See in particular, Kennedy 1980, Kimball 1986, and Ijsseling 1976 on the revival of the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy. Most of the philosophers’ arguments appear to have been a resurrection of Plato’s criticisms in Gorgias.

\textsuperscript{123} Kennedy 1980, 117–118

\textsuperscript{124} Murphy 1980, p37. The writings of Seneca and the displays of the Second Sophistic in the East are the main surviving examples of this style.

\textsuperscript{125} Cicero (106–43 bc) takes the palm as Rome’s greatest orator. He trained in Greece and, as a young man, earned a reputation as a lawyer, defeating Rome’s leading advocates while only in his early thirties. He entered politics in 75 bc and was elected Consul in 63 bc, leading the defence of the respublica against the conspiracy of Cataline and later, unsuccessfully, against the triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. Pardoned by Caesar (47 bc), he was forced from public life, and spent his time writing on rhetoric and philosophy. After Caesar’s...continued on next page
While both made innovations in oratorical practice and teaching, both were, as they acknowledged, heavily indebted to the Greeks.

The chief sources on classical oratory in later ages would be Latin: Cicero’s *de Inventione* (On Invention) composed in his teens; his mature *de Oratore* (On the Orator); the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (Rhetoric for Herennius) attributed to Cicero and written about the same time as *de Inventione*; and Quintilian’s twelve-volume *Institutio*.

Assassination in 44 BC, he returned to lead the republican forces against Mark Antony—who ordered his proscription and execution (43 BC). Cicero’s literary output was huge and much of it has survived. We know more of Cicero and his times than any other figure from Antiquity. From him we have fifty-eight legal and political speeches, over nine hundred letters, introductions to Greek philosophy, and seven works on rhetoric—*De Inventione* (On Invention) c.89–85 BC; *De Oratore* (On the Orator) 54 BC; *Partitiones Oratoriae* (The divisions of speech) 52 BC; *Brutus*, a history of Roman oratory 44 BC; *Orator*, mostly devoted to oratorical style, 44 BC; *Topica*, a Latin version of Aristotle’s *Topica*, 44 BC; *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* (On the best kinds of orators) an introduction for Latin translations of two speeches by Demosthenes and Aeschines, 44 BC.

No classical author exercised greater influence on the Middle Ages than Cicero, particularly after the twelfth century. The only author Aquinas mentions more often is Augustine. It was Cicero’s moral and intellectual demands that, along with Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, most recommended the study of philosophy to the medieval mind. Even seventeen hundred years after his death, students studied Roman judicial practices and speeches, even when there was no opportunity for their use.

Quintilian’s career a hundred and fifty years later was rather less tumultuous. He rose to early prominence in the Roman law-courts but is more famous as a teacher. In 71 AD he was appointed by the Emperor Vespasian to head the first state-funded school of oratory. Over the next twenty years he gave lectures to large groups of students and reviewed their rhetorical exercises in declamation. On his retirement in 91 AD he spent about two years in research, revising his lectures, publishing them around 94 AD as the *Institutio Oratoria* (Education of the Orator), the largest and most comprehensive surviving Roman treatise on rhetoric. It became the model for education throughout Rome’s western provinces: in the fourth century AD, Jerome wrote about Quintilian with scarcely less reverence than Cicero. Quintilian himself was a firm admirer of Cicero—“Cicero is not the name of a man, but of eloquence” (*Institutio*, 10:1:112)—and drew extensively on him in his own system of rhetoric, as well as holding the murdered statesman as the ideal orator.

Other teachers of some importance in the Roman period are Mermagoras (although nothing of his work now survives), Hermogenes (part of the ‘Second Sophistic’ in the 2nd century AD), the ‘Minor Latin Rhetoricians’ (3rd and 4th centuries AD), and Donatus (a grammarian). All were Hellenes or influenced by the Hellenistic schools. Of these individuals, only one work by Hermogenes and the grammatical works of Donatus survived the barbarian invasions to become widely known in medieval Europe.

For instance, Cicero *de Inventione* 1:1–1:9. Quintilian prefaced each section of the *Institutio* with a historical survey, mostly of Greek sources.
Oratoria. Each takes broadly the same approach\textsuperscript{127}. The diagram opposite summarises the division of rhetoric in the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium}, the most detailed manual on rhetoric available between the ninth and fifteenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{127} Cicero's \textit{de Inventione}, as its name implies, deals primarily with invention, the first of the five parts of rhetoric, although it also touches on how to arrange material in a speech. It was probably written in 90–85 AD, and derives largely from an unknown Greek teacher. It is a highly prescriptive textbook, taking students through each aspect of invention. The bulk of \textit{de Inventione} is devoted to constitutio (the Latin equivalent of the Greek \textit{stasis}).

The \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} written in four books, appeared around the same time as \textit{de Inventione}. It is remarkably similar to \textit{de Inventione}: both are prescriptive, both are written for students, both are largely concerned with legal procedure, both are based largely on Greek legal procedure unmodified for Roman circumstances, both draw on the same terminology and even the same examples. It is generally agreed that the two derive from one teacher or school (Kennedy 1980, p108). Unlike \textit{de Inventione} however, the \textit{ad Herennium} deals with all five parts of rhetoric, although it treats them out of order: invention in the first two books; arrangement, delivery, and memory in the third book; the final book is devoted to style. The \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} was unknown in the ancient world until the fourth century AD: Quintilian in particular did not refer to it. The first major author to mention it is Jerome, who thought it was written by Cicero—beginning a mistaken association that would give the \textit{ad Herennium} enormous prestige until the fifteenth century.

Cicero's \textit{de Oratore} is a philosophical dialogue rather than a textbook. Unlike the other three canonical texts, it is concerned less with legal oratory and more with the political functions of rhetoric. \textit{De Oratore} was written at the height of Cicero's political influence and, not surprisingly, he takes a high view of the orator's role in society, advising and leading the state: a rather more elevated picture than that of the mundane concerns of the practising lawyer, which was the focus of contemporary textbooks. Cicero's discussion assumes that the reader is already familiar with basic rhetorical theory and practice, and correspondingly deals more with principles and less with detailed rhetorical techniques. (Cicero's mature technique was heavily indebted to both Aristotle and Isocrates. Hubbell 1913, Solmsen 1941, Kennedy 1980.) The first of the three books that make up \textit{de Oratore} replays the old battle between the philosophers and sophists about whether rhetoric is a knack or an art that can be taught, and if it is a art then what skills might be required in the perfect orator. Cicero makes no new points and the argument remains as unresolved as it ever was in Greece. The remaining two books deal with the traditional five parts of rhetoric in order, along with students' training (\textit{de Oratore} 2:22:90ff), although Cicero does not explain in detail how to apply all of the rules; he assumes his readers will be familiar with the topic.

Quintilian's twelve-volume \textit{Institutio} was written after thirty years of practical experience as a lawyer and teacher. It deals not just with rhetorical training but with the overall education of the orator from the cradle onwards. In the first two books, Quintilian begins discussing the importance of the words children hear in their infancy, then passes to their training in grammar, until they reach the school of the rhetorician. Books Three to Nine cover principles and techniques in rhetoric; Books Ten and Eleven deal with training (mostly practice in declamation with criticism from the teacher). In the last Book, Quintilian...continued on next page
The function of rhetoric according to the Roman sources

As in Greece, the function of Ciceronic rhetoric was “to secure as far as possible the agreement of [the] hearers”\textsuperscript{128}. It maintained Aristotle’s three kinds of rhetoric—judicial, political and epideictic—although without Aristotle’s rationale for these three domains\textsuperscript{130}. As in Greece, Ciceronic rhetoric focussed almost exclusively judicial oratory.

Rhetoric continued to be teamed with logic, at least in principle, and orators were also encouraged to study at least some philosophy. The oratorical ideal would be summed up for the next seventeen hundred years by the opening of \textit{de Inventione}. Reflecting on a Stoic history which held that ‘men of wisdom’ (philosophers) had withdrawn from the world, leaving its governance in the hands of eloquent but unprincipled orators, Cicero observed: “wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but … eloquence without wisdom is highly disadvantageous and is never helpful”\textsuperscript{131}. Cicero’s ideal is the marriage of eloquence with wisdom, philosophy with rhetoric\textsuperscript{132}.

discusses the requirements of the ideal orator and their on-going development as an adult. He also discusses the development of literary taste and includes an extensive discussion on literary criticism and style useful to orators. A primary concern for Quintilian throughout is the moral development of the orator: echoing the demands of Plato and Aristotle, he says a great orator must also be a good man (\textit{Institutio} 1:1:1ff, 12:1:1ff). He defines rhetoric as \textit{bene dicendi scientia} (\textit{Institutio} 2:15:34), ‘the art of good speaking’, where ‘good’ means both ‘moral’ and ‘effective’.

\textsuperscript{128} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 1:2:2. This definition is based on Hermogoras. Also Cicero \textit{de Inventione} 1:5:6, and indirectly Cicero \textit{de Oratore} 1:8:30f

\textsuperscript{129} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 1:2:2, Quintilian \textit{Institutio} 3:4:1ff. In Cicero \textit{de Oratore}, Cicero argued for many more types, as do some Greek writers of the first century AD, but this did not survive.

\textsuperscript{130} Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric} was unknown in Rome until about the early first century BC. Neither the \textit{ad Herennium nor de Inventione} mention it or draw on it, suggesting that the Greek school from which both books derived did not know of it either. However, Cicero had read it by 54 BC when he came to write \textit{de Oratore}, and modified some of his earlier views of rhetoric into a more explicitly Aristotelian form.

\textsuperscript{131} Cicero \textit{de Inventione} 1:1:1

\textsuperscript{132} “The man of perfect eloquence should … possess not only the faculty of fluent and copious speech which is his proper province, but should also acquire that neighbouring borderland science of logic [dialectic]; although speech [oratoria] is one thing and debate another, and disputing is not the same as speaking, and yet both are concerned with discourse.” (Cicero \textit{Orator} 113–114)
In Ciceronic rhetoric, the orator has three tasks or ‘offices’ (officia) they need to perform if they are going to persuade an audience.133

The whole theory of speaking is dependant on three sources of persuasion: that we prove the case to be true; that we win over those who are listening; that we call their hearts to what emotion the case demands.134

There are three aims which the orator must always have in view; he must instruct, move and charm his hearers (doceat, movaet, delectet).135

These three ‘offices’ correspond broadly to Aristotle’s three sources of persuasion—ethos, pathos and logos—although where Aristotle had insisted on logical proofs, the Romans tended more to emotional appeals.

The five parts of rhetoric

By the late second century, Greek teachers had organised rhetoric into five parts. First came invention, in which the speaker worked out their arguments and assessed the evidence available to support their case. Second was arrangement, which involved ordering arguments and evidence into a persuasive and logically coherent order. Third came style, in which the speaker selected language appropriate to their argument and audience. Fourth was memory. Both Greeks and Romans placed great emphasis in speaking without notes and with appearing to speak extemporaneously; a holdover from the time when both were oral cultures. Memory dealt with techniques to help orators recall extended speeches.136 Last came delivery137, which dealt with how to speak and gesture. It drew heavily on contemporary dramatic conventions. The Romans adopted this system138, and it remained the canonical division in the West until the decline of rhetoric during the Enlightenment.

This fivefold organisation was intended to help students plan and present a speech but, like all fundamental categorisations, it had more far-reaching consequences. It firmly established the belief that communication started with one person (the speaker) and finished in another (the audience): an entirely ‘one-way’ view of communication. As

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133 Cicero Orator 69
134 Cicero de Oratore 2:27:115
135 Quintilian Institutio 3:5:2
136 The ‘artificial’ rhetorical memory is described in Appendix 3.
137 ‘Delivery’ is the term used in English textbooks since the Renaissance and is obviously connected with the idea of communication-as-transmission. The Greek word, hypokrisis, and its Latin equivalent, actio, have no such connotations—they mean ‘acting’ or ‘performing’.
138 [Cicero] ad Herennium 1:2:3, Cicero de Inventione 1:7:9, Quintilian Institutio Oratoria 3:3:1
rhetoric became the main way the ancient world thought about communication, so it obscured other ways of thinking about it, such as dialogue and dialectic.

This division of rhetoric separated the subject of the speech and the speaker’s intentions (ennoia and dianoia) from the way they were presented (lexis). Furthermore, invention—which dealt with the subject of the speech—was understood as an act of the intellect (noesis), but style and delivery were grouped together as lexis, widening the gap between thought and word, giving priority to thought and making speech dependant upon it.

In translating their Hellenistic sources, the Romans changed the emphasis of the Greek divisions. While dianoia was rendered fairly accurately as voluntas—‘will’ or ‘intention’—ennoia was glossed as the very general and totally unmentalistic res, ‘thing’. Res included far more than ennoia or dianoia, or even nous (mind) generally—in principle, res includes every single material thing. Lexis was translated as the more general verba, which covered all aspects of words, not just the way concepts were expressed. In the process of translating Greek rhetoric into Latin, the distinction between dianoia and lexis was also altered to become the rather different and more general contrast between res and verba, things and words139. Invention and Arrangement became grouped into the domain of res; Style and Delivery within the province of verba—Memory was considered a separate faculty, not limited to rhetoric140.

Some Roman authors were aware of the problems implied in the distinction. Cicero says in de Oratore that invention and style, res and verba, “cannot really stand apart”.

Every speech consists of matter [res] and words [verba], and the words cannot find a place if you remove the matter, nor can the matter have clarity if you withdraw the words141.

... nowadays we are deluged ... with the notions of the vulgar ... [and] the opinions of the half-educated, who find it easier to deal with matters that they cannot grasp in their entirety if they split them up and take them piecemeal, and who separate words [verba] from thoughts [sententia] as one might sever body from mind—and neither process can take place without disaster...142

139 “All speech expressive of purpose involves ... a subject and words [rem et verba].” (Quintilian Institutio 3:3:2)
140 Quintilian Institutio 3:3:7, Cicero Partitiones Oratoriae 1:3
141 Cicero de Oratore 3:5:19
142 Cicero de Oratore 3:6:24. In Greek philosophy, which Cicero is alluding to here, mind and body were regarded as integral parts of a human being, but were also viewed as complementary opposites.
But just as Cicero warned against chopping up the body of rhetoric into its five parts, so he also correctly foresaw that it would indeed be butchered. For the unphilosophical Romans the looseness of interpretation would largely have been regarded as irrelevant hairsplitting; for the Renaissance and early Modern Age, the gulf between words and things would be one of the deepest of all philosophical chasms.

The first part of Roman rhetoric: Invention

Ciceronic rhetoric began with Invention and it was the largest part of Roman rhetoric. Invention also introduced the parts of a speech to show readers how to invent persuasive arguments for each. There were minor variations on this order: the two main texts known to the Middle Ages—*de Inventione* and the *ad Herennium*—divided the speech into six parts: Introduction, Statement of Facts, Division, Proof, Refutation and Conclusion.

The Introduction “prepared the hearer’s mind” for what was to come in three ways: making the audience well-disposed (*benevolus*) to the speaker, attentive to what they say (*attentus*) and easily instructed (*docilis*) by the speaker—activities that corresponded to the orator’s three *oficia*.

We can have receptive [*docilis*] hearers if we briefly summarise the cause [of the dispute] and make them attentive [*attentus*]; for the receptive hearer is one who is willing to listen attentively … We shall have attentive hearers by promising to discuss important new or unusual matters, or such as appertain to the commonwealth, or to the hearer themselves, or to the worship of the immortal gods; by bidding them to listen attentively; and by enumerating the point we are going to discuss. We can by

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143 In *de Inventione*, invention is of course the main subject, although it does include some notes on arrangements. The *ad Herennium* devotes over two of its four books to invention, and a brief look at Figure 2 will show that Invention is also far its most intricate part.

144 [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 1:3:4. Also Cicero *de Inventione* 1:14:19. Quintilian has only five parts, regarding Division as part of the Proof (*Institutio* 3:8:70. Quintilian also discusses the views of other Greek and Roman authorities until his time in *Institutio* 3:9:ff.). In *de Oratore*, Cicero returns to Isocrates’ division of speeches into four parts, echoed by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*—an introduction, a statement of claims, a proof of those claims, and a conclusion. Despite these differences, all four canonical texts work to broadly the same template.

145 [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 1:3:4
four methods make our hearers well-disposed [benevolus]: by discussing our own 
person, the person of our adversaries, that of our hearers, and the fact themselves.\textsuperscript{146}

This passage illustrates the highly prescriptive nature of much Roman rhetoric: it provides 
detailed \textit{topica} for useful sources of persuasion without explaining why these topics would 
produce the results desired.

\begin{quotation}

The second part of a speech, the Statement of Facts, set out the reasons for the dispute, and 
might also have included an attack on the opposition if appropriate. The Statement was to 
be ‘brief, clear and plausible’\textsuperscript{147}.

\begin{quote}
... the Statement of Facts [will be] brief if we start it at the place at which we need to 
begin ... and carry it forward ... to the point to which we need to go; if we use no 
digressions and do not wander from the account ... and if we present the outcome in 
such a way that the facts that have preceded can also be known, although we have not 
spoken of them. ... Our Statement of Facts will be clear if we set forth the facts in the 
precise order in which they occurred ... [T]he shorter the Statement of Facts, the clearer 
it will be and the easier to follow.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

This passage displays the another characteristic of the prescriptive Roman handbooks: they 
appeal to commonsense terms such as ‘brief’ and ‘clear’ without setting out what the 
speaker is to do in practice. Just how the speaker was to decide “the place we need to 
begin” or “the point we need to go” went unexplained. Such definitions could only be used to 
assess a complete speech, not assemble a new one. This would always be a fundamental 
weakness of prescriptive rhetoric. In practice, the Romans, like the Greeks, relied on 
exercises in declamation and practical experience to guide them: textbooks were never an 
educational tool on their own.

\end{quotation}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{146} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 1:47-8. The \textit{ad Herennium} goes on to discuss in detail the methods for securing the audience’s goodwill, although their categories are different from those discussed by Aristotle.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{147} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 1:9:14. Also Cicero \textit{de Inventione} 1:20:28. This list of virtues comes from Isocrates.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{148} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 1:9:14-15}
\end{footnotes}
In the Division or Partition the speaker listed the points on which they agreed and disagreed with their opponent. They may also have included a ‘distribution’ in which they told the audience the points they would discuss (no more than three, lest the audience become inattentive) and then summarised each they would prove. As with the Statement of Facts, what the speaker said was to be brief, complete and probable. This part of a speech had no counterpart in earlier Greek textbooks, although it was a practical tool for longer speeches: it let those listening know what they were going to hear so they could know how to interpret it. The modern injunction—“tell them what they are going to hear; let them hear it; then tell them what they have heard”—probably has its origins in this part of Ciceronian rhetoric.

The largest section of Invention in Ciceronian rhetoric was Proof and Refutation. This formed the core of the speech. In judicial rhetoric, lawyers relied heavily on Greek stasis theory to develop their arguments. (Political and epideictic oratory were usually treated as a postscript to judicial oratory by the Roman teachers, and speakers were referred to lists of topica for possible starting points rather than shown how to work out particular arguments.)

The stasis of an argument (status or constitutio in Latin) was the basic proposition that a speaker sought to demonstrate—a definition with its roots ultimately in Aristotle. Stasis was concerned with finding out what this question was, as well as the materials available to support or defeat it. It began with a controversy: for instance, a prosecutor might claim “You killed so-and-so”. The defendant had a number of options. They might:

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149 Quintilian regards the Division as a subsection of the Proof, and also function of Arrangement, not as a separate part of the speech.

150 [Cicero] ad Herennium 1:10:17, Cicero de Inventione 1:31–33

151 De Inventione and the ad Herennium treat the Proof and Refutation simultaneously, but Quintilian and the mature Cicero treat them separately. They regarded the proof as a constructive activity whereas the refutation was destructive.

152 In de Inventione, for instance, Cicero takes 140 sections to discuss judicial invention, but devotes only nine to political and epideictic together. The author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium devotes almost all of the first two books to judicial invention—54 sections in total—and only eleven sections to political and epideictic invention combined; this is placed at the beginning of Book 3, which also deals with Arrangement, Memory and Delivery.

153 Stasis was a subject Aristotle touched on only briefly (Rhetoric §3:17), and it was only first discussed in detail by Hermogoras of Temnos during the third century BC (Kennedy 1980, p99). The exact details of Hermogoras’ treatment are now lost and can only be reconstructed from later authors. We do know however that his treatment was highly complex; later examples certainly are.
reject the prosecutor’s claim, replying “I did not kill so-and-so” (‘stasis of fact’ or ‘conjectural stasis’)

admit to killing so-and-so, but claim they were acting legally; for instance, they may claim they were acting in self-defence. This type of stasis also included questions about how legal texts and terms were to be interpreted: for instance, whether so-and-so was murdered or killed legally (‘stasis of definition or ‘legal stasis’)

admit to committing the act as charged, but plead that they should not be found guilty—for instance because they intended no harm and death was accidental, or else for some extraneous reason (‘stasis of quality’ or ‘juridicial stasis’)

Each type was divided and subdivided, and the rhetorical manuals gave methods to deal with each. Once the speaker had identified the stasis, they sought out arguments to support their position and planned defences against possible attacks.

In Antiquity, conjectural and judicial stasis were largely limited to establishing guilt or innocence in legal cases and had no consequences for beliefs about communication. But legal stasis, concerned with the interpretation of legal texts, would be important in later interpretative practices. I will discuss these in the next Chapter, so they can be seen in the context of contemporary procedures for interpreting literature.

The discussion of Proofs also explained how to structure statements within individual arguments. The full argument took the form of an epicheireme, which consisted of a proposition, reason, proof of reason, embellishment and résumé. Through the Proposition we set forth summarily what we intend to prove. The Reason ... sets forth the causal basis for the Proposition. The Proof of the Reason corroborates, by means of additional arguments, the briefly presented Reason. Embellishment we use in order to adorn and enrich the argument, after the Proof has been established. The Résumé is a brief conclusion, drawing together the parts of the argument.

Most authors allowed the embellishment and résumé to be omitted: Cicero said that, at a minimum, an argument must contain a major premise, minor premise and a conclusion. In this form, the argument was a syllogism. In practice however, it is

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155 [Cicero] ad Herennium 2:18:28. The epicheireme is a development of Aristotle’s syllogisms and enthymemes; it was possibly introduced into rhetoric by Aristotle’s successor at the Lyceum, Theophrastus.

156 [Cicero] ad Herennium 2:18:28

157 Cicero de Inventione 1:34:57
unlikely that orators used either the full *epicheireme* or syllogism: the two-part *enthymeme* is common in Cicero’s speeches.

Ciceronic rhetoric pointed to four ways a speaker could refute their opponent’s argument:

1. they could reject their opponent’s initial premises
2. they could show their opponent’s conclusion did not follow from the facts
3. they could attack the logic of their opponent’s argument, or
4. they could supply a stronger argument than their opponent.

The last part of a speech was the Conclusion. In it, the speaker had to achieve three things:

1. sum up the main points of the case
2. arouse indignation and hostility towards their opponents, and
3. arouse pity and sympathy for the speaker’s case.

Ciceronic rhetoric discussed methods for arousing appropriate emotions, usually by drawing on commonplaces (*topica*). This completed the standard treatment of Invention.

Assumptions about the audience’s memory and attention span appear frequently throughout Invention. For instance, there are many directions on the maximum number of points a speaker can have in a topic. But while these limitations are presumably based in practical experience, the textbooks do not discuss what the actual limits are or why they exist, so speakers are not able, using the books alone, to tailor their speeches accordingly.

The second part of Roman rhetoric: Arrangement

Arrangement was a small part of Ciceronic rhetoric because it was dealt with in the process of inventing the speech. However, all authors allowed that the traditional order—Introduction, Statement of Facts, Division, Proof, Refutation and Conclusion—may be altered if the speaker judged that some other order might be more effective (although none of the manuals explained how to decide when some other order might work better). The other main point of Arrangement that all four textbooks agree on is that, in the Proof and Refutation, the speaker should start with the strongest arguments, fill out the middle of their proof with weaker ones, and finish with a strong argument.

158 Quintilian also recommended to use of the full syllogism (*Institutio* 5:14:6)
159 Both Cicero *de inventione* and the *ad Herennium* use *topica* similar to those used by Aristotle: *Rhetoric* §1:14.
...since what has been said last is easily committed to memory, it is useful, when ceasing to speak, to leave some very strong argument fresh in the hearer’s mind. This arrangement of topics in speaking, like the arraying of soldiers in battle, can readily bring victory.\textsuperscript{160}

The third part of Roman rhetoric: Style

After Invention, Style was the most extensive part in Roman textbooks: we know that whole monographs were written on it\textsuperscript{161}. Ciceronic rhetoric employed three approaches to style, all Greek in origin. Here, I have focussed on the approach used in the \textit{ad Herennium} as it was the most important source on style for the following fifteen hundred years.

The first approach to style was to divide it into three \textit{kinds}: Grand, Middle and Plain.

The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not the lowest and most colloquial, class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.\textsuperscript{162}

This definition originated with Aristotelian teaching in the third century BC, which associated each style with the orator’s three duties: to delight, instruct and move.

the [Simple or plain style] is best adapted to instructing, the [Grand] for moving and the [Middle] ... for charming, or as others would have it, conciliating the audience; for instruction the quality most needed is acumen, for conciliation gentleness, and for stirring the emotions, force.\textsuperscript{163}

Textbooks did little to explain when each style was appropriate or how to achieve them. Part of the difficulty with general terms like Grand, Middle and Plain was that they referred to the overall speech; they did not help the speaker prepare individual sentences or

\textsuperscript{160} [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 3:10:18. Quintilian uses the same metaphor of soldiers (5:12:14), although he did not know the \textit{ad Herennium}.

\textsuperscript{161} The \textit{ad Herennium} treated style out of order, in the last book, possibly so it could be used as an independent text. Although the \textit{ad Herennium} was the earliest surviving book in Latin to deal with style, and its approach was later superseded in Rome, it would remain the authoritative text on style throughout the Middle Ages.


\textsuperscript{163} Quintilian \textit{Institutio} 12:10:59. Also Cicero \textit{Orator} 69 and Cicero \textit{de Oratore} 2:115.
**epicheireme.** The way the *ad Herennium* avoided the problem is telling: “the examples themselves [of each style],” it says, “are enough to make clear the types of style”\(^{164}\), so avoiding any need to describe each or provide rules on how to create them. Cicero was clearly aware of the problem when he said, “In oration, as in life, nothing is harder to determine than what is appropriate.”\(^{165}\)

The second approach to style was to describe the *qualities* of good style. In Ciceronic rhetoric, this was usually done negatively: what to avoid rather than what to do. The *ad Herennium* lists three qualities of good style: taste, artistic composition and distinction\(^{166}\).

Taste involved:

1. the use of correct Latin, chiefly by avoiding barbarisms (incorrect words) and solecisms (incorrect syntax), and
2. clarity, which was achieved by using “current terms ... used in everyday speech ... and proper terms ... characteristic of the subject of our discourse”\(^ {167}\). Exactly how the speaker was to decide which words were ‘correct’, ‘everyday’ and ‘characteristic’ went unsaid.

Artistic composition involved arranging words to give the speech a uniform finish throughout. This was achieved by avoiding five faults:

1. *hiatus*, or the frequent collision of vowels between words “which makes the style harsh and grasping”
2. *alliteration*, where the same letter is repeated too often
3. *transplacement*, which is the excessive repetition of the same word
4. *homoeoptoton*, which is a continuous series of words with like case endings, and
5. *hyperbaton* or “dislocation of words”, where placing a word out of sequence makes the meaning obscure.\(^ {168}\)

\(^{164}\) [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 4:10:15

\(^{165}\) Cicero *Orator* 70. Also Cicero *de Oratore* 3:55:212

\(^{166}\) This list of qualities originates with Theophrastus although it is much changed in Roman rhetoric. The Theophrastan system had four virtues: purity, clarity, appropriateness and ornamentation—which included the correct choice of words, artistic composition and figures ([Cicero] *ad Herennium* 4:12:17 footnote e). Cicero identifies the same four qualities in *Cicero de Oratore*, although he did not discuss style in a technical way. Cicero’s main contribution to style would be in *Orator*, lost in the West between the eighth and fifteenth centuries.

\(^{167}\) [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 4:12:17

\(^{168}\) [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 4:12:18
The function of Distinction was “to render [the style] ornate, embellishing it by variety.”\textsuperscript{169} This is done, in the \textit{ad Herennium}, by using \textit{figures}—the third approach to style.

Although technically a part of grammar (the subject of the next chapter), \textit{schemata} or ‘figures’ had a lasting place in rhetoric\textsuperscript{170}. The Sophists had given the first descriptions of figures, including assonance, dissonance, alliteration, cadence, hiatus, metaphor, parallelism, and analogy. Aristotle’s \textit{Poetics} had brought some system to the analysis of figures, dividing them into those associated with good and bad style, although the only figure he dealt with in detail was metaphor. In the \textit{Rhetoric}, he discussed metaphors, similes, riddles, puns, apophthegms, proverbs and hyperbole\textsuperscript{171}. Alexandrian scholars and Stoic grammarians of the third and second centuries BC greatly expanded this list. By the end of the second century BC, over sixty figures had been identified and the number grew steadily throughout Antiquity.

The grammarians divided figures into two broad categories: \textit{schemata lexeōs} and \textit{schemata dianoia} (‘figures of speech’ and ‘figures of thought’). Cicero describes a figure of thought as an expression where, if the words were changed, the sense would remain the same\textsuperscript{172}. Examples include understatement, frankness, antithesis, and conciseness\textsuperscript{173}. Figures of

\begin{itemize}
  \item [169] [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 4:12:18
  \item [170] The term ‘figure’ was first used by Quintilian in the first century AD.
  \item [171] Aristotle \textit{Rhetoric} §3:4 and §3:10
  \item [172] See also [Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 4:13:18
  \item [173] \textbf{Figures of Thought (schemata dianoia)} “The orator … will make use of the following figures: he will treat the same subject in many ways, sticking to the same idea and lingering over the same thought; he will speak slightingly of something or ridicule it; he will turn from the subject and divert the thought; he will announce what he is about to discuss and sum up when concluding a topic; he will bring himself back to the topic; he will repeat what he has said; he will use a syllogism; he will urge his point by asking questions and will reply to himself as if to questions; he will say something, but desire to have it understood in the opposite sense; he will express doubt whether or how to mention some point; he will divide the subject into parts; he will omit or disregard some topic; he will prepare for what is to come; he will transfer to his opponent the blame for the very act with which he is charged; he will seem to consult the audience, and sometimes with the opponent; he will portray the talk and ways of men; he will make mute objects speak; he will divert the attention of the audience from the point at issue; he will frequently provoke merriment and laughter; he will reply to some point which he sees is likely to be brought up; he will use similes and examples; he will divide a sentence, giving part to a description of one person, part to another; he will put down interrupters; he will claim to be suppressing something; he will warn the audience to be on their guard; he will take the liberty to speak somewhat boldly; he will even fly into a passion and protest violently; he will plead and entreat and soothe the
\end{itemize}

...continued on next page
speech depend on the particular choice of words for their effect: examples include words with similar endings (cadences), rhymes, synonyms, and onomatopoeia.\footnote{174}

Most figures were defined in terms of their form, rather than, for instance, their meaning or use—\footnote{175}—which resulted in some odd divisions (for instance, simile was classed as a figure of thought, whereas metaphor and analogy were figures of speech). In the first century BC, a new group were distinguished from the figures of speech: tropes. In these, “the language departs from the ordinary meaning of the words and is applied in another sense.”\footnote{176} They include metaphor, allegory and hyperbole.\footnote{177} Another group to be defined were the metaplasms, in which words were altered to help them fit into rhythmical patterns by adding, deleting and transposing letters. Changes from the usual word order were also later classed as metaplasms.

\begin{quote}
F\underline{I}\underline{G}\underline{U}\underline{R}\underline{E}\underline{S}\underline{S}\underline{O}\underline{F}\underline{S}\underline{P}\underline{E}\underline{E}\underline{C}\underline{H} (s\underline{c}h\underline{e}m\underline{a}ta \underline{l}ex\underline{e}\delta\underline{s}) “words are redoubled and repeated, or repeated with a slight change, or several successive phrases begin with the same words or end with the same, or have both figures, or the same word is repeated at the beginning of a clause or at the end, or a word is used immediately in a different sense, or words are used with similar case endings or other similar terminations; or contrasting ideas are put together in juxtaposition (antithesis), or the sentence rises and falls in steps (climax); or many clauses are strung together loosely without conjunctions; or sometimes we omit something and give our reason for so doing: or we correct ourselves with quasi-reproof; or make some exclamation of surprise or complaint; or use the same word repeatedly in different cases.” (Cicero \textit{Orator} 137–139)\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\footnote{174}For example, \textit{epanaphora} occurs when the first word of each phrase is repeated: “he was loved by his family, he was loved by his friends; he was loved by his whole country”; \textit{antistrophe} occurs when the last word was repeated “Athens was lost; Greece was lost; the whole world was lost”; \textit{interlacement} combines both \textit{epanaphora} and \textit{antistrophe}. \textit{Homoeoteleuton} occurs when word endings are similar, as in Caesar’s great “\textit{veni, vidi, vici}” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”).\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\footnote{175}[Cicero] \textit{ad Herennium} 4.31-42. The word trope comes from the Greek \textit{trophein}, meaning ‘to twist’, referring to the way that the word was ‘twisted’ from its usual sense and applied to another object.\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\footnote{176}The ten tropes listed in the \textit{ad Herennium} are metaphor, allegory, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, antonomasia (replacing a phrase for a proper name, or using a proper name for a quality commonly associated with it), metonymy (naming a thing by one of its qualities or characteristics), periphrasis (replacing a word with a phrase or vice versa), hyperbaton (adding a word to a complete phrase to add emphasis), synecdoche (the whole is named by one of its parts or vice versa), and catachresis (using a word out of its normal context).\end{quote}
The lists of figures grew throughout Antiquity, climbing over two hundred in the second century AD. Their definitions would constantly change, as would the line between figures and tropes and between *schemata lexēs* and *schemata dianoias*. The main reason for the constantly shifting boundaries was the problem of defining figures in terms of their form. But although grammarians recognised that the categories and definitions were unstable and in constant need to adjustment every time new figures were identified, they did not appear to have thought this might be a symptom of fundamental problems with their definitions or the line between *dianoia* and *lexis*.

Late Roman rhetoric dispensed with the three levels of style rhetoric—Grand, Middle and Plain—and in their place became concerned with purity, simplicity, straightforwardness and brevity; qualities that probably reflecting the influence of the Stoics. Here is Hermogenes of Tarsus writing on the characteristics of Purity in style.

The thoughts that are characteristic of Purity are common, everyday thoughts that occur to everyone. ... A speech is especially pure when someone narrates a simple fact and begins with the fact itself and does not add anything that is extraneous to the topic. ...

The figure that is most characteristic of Purity is the use of a straightforward construction with the noun in the nominative case ...

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178 [Cicero] *ad Herennium* 4:12:18, footnote c. The *ad Herennium* defines and gives examples of thirty-five figures of speech, twenty-eight figures of thought, whereas Cicero lists only ten figures of speech but thirty-nine figures of thought.

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180 This approach to style finds its most important statement with Hermogenes of Tarsus, who wrote in the late second century AD. His work would be known chiefly in the Greek half of the Empire; it had little influence in the West after the third century. Influenced by Platonism, Hermogenes had a status in the East comparable with Cicero in the West. But from the mid-second century onwards the Greek-speaking East and Latin-speaking West slowly drifted apart. Cicero was regarded as the pinnacle of eloquence in the West but was almost unknown in the East; Hermogenes dominated rhetorical theory in the East but was unknown in the West until the fifteenth century. (See Kennedy 1980, p121)

Hermogenes takes the position that all good literature and rhetoric shows aspects of an ‘ideal’ style which is made up of a number of ‘ideas’. He identifies seven basic ‘ideas’ although he subdivides several of these, producing a total of twenty. They are Clarity (which includes Purity and Distinctness), Grandeur (which includes Solemnity, Asperity, Vehemence, Brilliance, Fluorescence, and Abundance), Beauty, Rapidity, Character (including Simplicity, Sweetness, Subtlety and Modesty), and Sincerity (which includes Indignation). He illustrates each of these types with examples from Greek authors, principally Demosthenes. (Hermogenes 1987)
Unusual word order or twisted and contorted sentences are also detrimental to Purity ... ... clauses that are most characteristic of Purity ... should be short ... and ... they should express complete thoughts in themselves.181

Such qualities would become hallmark of the ‘silver Latin’ of the Second Sophistic in the late first and second centuries AD, although they had begun to be used in Cicero’s time. Exemplars of this style included Seneca, Tacitus and Suetonius. In this history of rhetoric, their influence would decline by the end of the second century AD, but would be revived again by the Humanists during the Renaissance, and would become paragons of style in the early Modern Age.

The fourth part of Roman rhetoric: Memory

The fourth part of rhetoric is Memory. The Romans and Greeks placed great emphasis on speaking unaided: reading a written speech was regarded as a sign of positive decrepitude, and even using notes was frowned upon. Speech was to be ‘natural’ and show no sign of having been prepared beforehand182. This habit was a holdover from the times when both Greece and Rome were purely oral cultures and speeches were delivered extempore. Sometime in the fifth century BC, the Greeks discovered methods for reliably remembering large speeches, although just how memory came to be the fourth part of rhetoric we do not know183. The art of memory has no implications for communication-as-technique: it was lost at the end of Antiquity, revived in the High Middle Ages, only to pass out of use again with the rise of the printing press. However, it rested on physiological assumptions that paralleled those of communication-as-transmission, and probably influenced models of mind that supported it. Consequently, I have summarised the classical art of memory and its medieval variations in Appendix 3.

181 Hermogenes 227, 229, 231 & 232. Because Greek and Roman verbs differ from English verbs, there is no rule in the ancient manuals that corresponds neatly to “use the active voice”. However, when English sentences are written in subject–verb–object form, the subject (noun) is in the nominative case—which is what Hermogenes says is one characteristic of Purity.


183 Solmsen 1941. Aristotle refers to this system in a little treatise On memory and reminiscence but nowhere connects it with speaking.
The fifth part of Roman rhetoric: Delivery

The final part of Ciceronic rhetoric was Delivery. Demosthenes had said that delivery was the most important part of rhetoric ... as well as its second and third most important parts. Cicero and Quintilian enthusiastically agreed. Delivery, I assert, is the dominant factor in oratory; without delivery the best speaker cannot be of any account at all, and a moderate speaker with a trained delivery can outdo the best of them.

...delivery itself has a marvellously powerful effect in oratory; for the nature of the material we have composed in our minds is not so important as how we deliver it.

Delivery was divided into voice and gesture, both of which were used to express emotion appropriate to the speech. The orator needed vocal flexibility, in order to use different intonations: conversationally, for debate, or to amplify a point. Quintilian wrote that the qualities of voice are precisely the same as those of style—“for as our language must be correct, clear, ornate and appropriate, so with your delivery.” Style and delivery were to be linked. For instance, the voice should be quiet for the Introduction (because it was unseemly to begin a speech by shouting) but well-amplified in the Conclusion to rouse the emotions of the audience.

The problem with reducing rhetoric to rules

What is most striking about the canonical texts of Ciceronic rhetoric is their didactic approach. They are a mixture of straight prescription and examples to illustrate the precepts and make them memorable. While Ciceronic rhetoric was based on observations of successful orators, like Aristotle’s Rhetoric, it did little to analyse why they were successful. This lack of analysis made this Roman rhetoric highly conservative: indeed, the four canonical texts were out-of-date even as they were being written.

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185 Cicero de Oratore 3:56:213
186 Quintilian Institutio 2:2:2
187 Roman oratory is more concerned with using emotions than Greek rhetoric, at least when compared with Aristotle’s insistence of logic proof. “Delivery is wholly the concern of the feelings...” Cicero de Oratore 3:59:221
188 Quintilian Institutio 11:3:30
189 For instance, both de Inventione and the ad Herennium assumed that the prosecutor or defendant in legal cases would speak on their own behalf (as was the case in Greece), rather than for a client (as was normal in Rome). Even the detailed analysis of status was somewhat...continued on next page
The lack of analysis also meant that, if students were to rely on the books alone, they would be poorly placed to decide which rules were appropriate under different circumstances. In practice, this was not a problem for Roman students because study always involved training under a tutor. But problems certainly arose in the Middle Ages when the Roman educational system broke down and later generations had to rely solely on the textbooks without a living tradition to guide them.

Instead of relying on analysis, Ciceronic rhetoric tended to rely on formulae or templates: speeches fell into four, five or six parts; *epicheireme* fell into five parts; style into three types. While well suited to highly routine environments such as courtrooms, such a system is not particularly flexible. The classical rules did not explain how to adapt speeches to other environments, or even what criteria the speaker should apply when altering the rules. It is notable that political and epideictic oratory never received the detailed advice on invention that judicial oratory did: in part because it was simply too varied to reduce to rules.

The treatment of style is noticeably different from the other parts of Roman rhetoric: it was largely descriptive rather than prescriptive. Roman textbooks described the three kinds of style (grand, middle and plain) and the figures of thought and speech, but they did not explain how to create them. Descriptions of style and figures could not be turned into positive rules for communicating: they were post hoc labels for features of a delivered speech. In practice, teaching students figures would have involved showing them examples, then creating specimens in class drills. This would have given them the experience they needed, but it transferred an important part of rhetoric from ‘technical art’ to experience. The only prescriptive part of Ciceronic style concerned ways to achieve the virtues of style—taste, artistic composition and distinction—but usually in terms of things to avoid (obscure words, poor syntax, and so on) rather than what to do. The few positive rules—use nouns in the nominative form, keep verbs close to their subjects and so on—went unexplained.

It is clear that, later in life, Cicero at least came to doubt the value of reducing rhetoric to rules. In *de Oratore*, he pointed out that eloquent speakers are eloquent because they have eloquence, not because they follow rules. But he did not explore why rhetoric could not be effectively reduced to rules, beyond noting that it appeared impossible to explain in a book when one rule is appropriate and another is not.

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superfluous in Rome: legal cases were preceded by an initial hearing before a magistrate to determine whether the case should go to trial. This procedure would inevitably have covered much of the material in the discussion of *status*.

Quintilian’s aim—to develop the ideal orator, capable of moving and leading the state—was thoroughly anachronistic: in his time, Rome’s government was an autocracy which had enforced censorship for the previous two generations. In Quintilian’s Rome, emperors paid almost no attention to the Senate’s deliberations, and in any case, the desire for republican government was dead in Rome’s ruling oligarchy.
After Antiquity

Even more than in Greece, rhetoric in Rome was a highly specialised art. Its rules were intended to help a small group of professional speakers prepare and present extended, uninterrupted speeches. They assumed massed audiences made up largely of social elites, with a shared classical heritage and educational background. They assumed that the speeches would be on topics of legal, political or social importance. They were based in practical experience in this context. Speeches were constructed on fairly limited templates. They were taught primarily using repeated exercises in declaiming and criticism, rather than book-learning. Applied within this small and highly-structured domain, the rules of Ciceronic rhetoric were well-suited to the limited task set for them.

Problems with the rhetorical rules began when their educational and social milieu declined from the third century AD. After then the rules were applied increasingly out of context to forms of communication further and further removed from civic speech-making. As I will discuss in Chapter 14, the rules eventually became disconnected from speech-making altogether and came to be treated as universally valid rules for all forms of spoken and written communication.

CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNICATION

Journalism and plain English

There are many parallels between ancient rhetoric and Modern communication-as-technique. At the level of overall organisation, there are obvious similarities with journalism. In the definitive Reporting in Australia, White divides the journalist’s tasks up in ways strikingly similar to the basic divisions of Hellenistic rhetoric. In conversation, White told me she was unaware of the parallels between journalism and classical rhetoric.
The following diagram is based on her chapter headings, although I have arranged them graphically to show the divisions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>gathering news</th>
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<td>the hard news follow through</td>
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<td>arrangement, style</td>
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</table>

White says that, at the highest level, the journalist’s tasks can be divided into two kinds: “information gathering and writing”\(^{192}\)—working out what is to be said (\(res\)) then choosing the words to say it (\(verba\)), just as in rhetoric. Although writers on journalism do not reify this into a division between ‘thought’ and ‘speech’ as the Hellenistic philosophers did, many do use occasional expressions that indicate the possibility: “First the idea, then the words” says the American, Mencher\(^{193}\).

Just as classical rhetoric was divided into three kinds: judicial, deliberative and epideictic—so newswriting is usually divided into hard news and soft news. They are distinguished in both the subjects they present and the style they are written in, just as the three species of speeches in classical rhetoric were.

In working out what to say in a news story, invention, some writers on journalism still refer reporters to \(topica\)\(^{194}\)—the information they need to collect to write a particular kind of story—just as orators were.

Corresponding to the second part of rhetoric, arrangement, are the journalists’ rules for structuring news stories: a lead and a follow-through. Reporting textbooks spend whole

\(^{192}\) White 1996, p153

\(^{193}\) Mencher 1991, p97

\(^{194}\) For instance, Mencher devotes over a hundred pages to news \(topica\) (Mencher 1991, pp348–450) while Metz devotes nealy half of his 366 pages to similar commonplaces (Metz 1985, pp115–316).
chapters describing how to organise the facts into a coherent lead, and then support the lead in the follow-through. News stories, particularly hard news, are constructed on a rigid template: the ‘inverse pyramid’.

But the most striking parallel between the ancient and modern arts is in the third part of rhetoric: style. I have already given examples of where Aristotle’s rules are still used by supporters of ‘plain English’. The commonalities are even more striking between journalism and plain English with later Hellenistic and Roman rhetoric\textsuperscript{195}, which prized simplicity, brevity, straightforwardness, and short complete sentences\textsuperscript{196}. The parallels are due in part to the popularity of ‘silver Latin’ writers like Seneca, Tactus and Suetonius at the time when modern journalism was first established in the seventeenth century, and their canonisation in eighteenth century belles lettres. As the same aesthetic sensibilities were applied to writing, they became features of modern journalistic style and plain English.

\textsuperscript{195} For instance, where plain English writers urge the use of everyday English words in simple grammatical structures, they echo the \textit{ad Herennium}. The \textit{ad Herennium} says that the two characteristics of good taste are the use of correct Latin (defined as correct words and correct grammar) and clarity, “which renders language plain and intelligible”. Clarity is achieved through the use of “common terms … such as are habitually used in everyday speech” and relevant technical terms when speaking on technical subjects (\textit{ad Herennium} 4:12:17). Or else, where the plain English movement recommends precise, everyday words, simple sentence structures, and short sentences, Quintilian says, “I regard clearness as the first essential of a good style; there must always be propriety in our words, their order must be straightforward, the conclusion of the period must not be long postponed, there must be nothing lacking and nothing superfluous.” (\textit{Institutio} 8:2:22). Cicero says that, in order to be understood, the speaker’s style will involve, “talking correct Latin, and employing words in their customary use that indicate literally the meaning that we desire to be conveyed and made clear, without ambiguity of language or style, avoiding excessively long periodic structures, … not breaking up the structure of sentences, not using wrong tenses, not mixing up the persons, not perverting the order.” (\textit{de Oratore} 3:8:49)

\textsuperscript{196} “The journalists’ main goals in writing are clarity and brevity. … Fortunately brevity usually helps achieve clarity. So short words, sentences and paragraphs are the most noticeable characteristics of modern news writing.” (White 1996, p153)

“Brevity is the key to clarity. … Clarity is enhanced by simplicity of expression, which generally means short sentences, short words, coherences and a logical story structure.” (Mencher 1991, pp40–42)

“…[C]oncentrate on writing a simple, declarative sentence. All it requires is a subject and predicate—a straightforward presentation of what happened. To the subject and predicate may be added such things as adjectives, adverbs and objects. Simple eh? Not so simple for some writers. They try too hard and get all wound up in torturous, convoluted sentences. So one of the first and most basic rules of news writing is, Keep it simple. The \textit{New York Times} … has a guideline for its writers: one idea per sentence.” (Metz 1985, p93)
Although there are many similarities between ancient and modern rules, we must not overestimate just how many of the modern techniques derive from Antiquity. There are also obvious differences between them. Ancient oratory did not have the production and time constraints of modern journalism. The functions of rhetoric and journalism are different: the orators aimed to move their listeners to act; the journalist aims to inform. Ancient speech-writing drew heavily on contemporary logic, whereas journalism and plain English do not (although some plain English books do tell writers to follow ‘the logic’ of their subject). Ancient speeches start and end with the strongest arguments, so that the audience remained impressed once the speaker finished. By contrast, journalists cannot know how much of their article people will read, so begin with all of the key facts, then follow with secondary supporting information. Normally, news stories do not have a summing-up, which was the high point of an orator’s performance.

The dominance of the speaker

Another legacy of Hellenistic and Roman rhetoric was the priority given to the speaker and the speech in ideas about communication, and the virtual neglect of the audience. When the audience was mentioned at all in Roman rhetoric, it was in passing and invariably in connection with some action the speaker has to take (such as to avoid testing the listeners’ memory or patience). As I will discuss in the next chapter, the ancient world never developed an ‘art of listening’ to complement the ‘art of speaking’. The result historically was that listening was invariably treated as passive: the audience was to be entertained, instructed and moved by the speaker’s efforts.

Roman manuals included nothing comparable to Aristotle’s analysis of the types of souls or directions on how to adapt speeches to different types of people, much less address an audience of mixed abilities and temperaments. So long as orators faced their audiences—either in the classroom or the court—and could see their listeners’ reactions, this was presumably not a serious omission and the speaker could adapt themselves to the circumstances. However, when the Roman civic institutions disappeared, and the rules were applied to writing, the problem of knowing the audience became acute.

The division of words and things

One of the most profound legacies of rhetoric in beliefs about communication was the fundamental division between res and verba, things and words. It was manifested in a dozen ways in Ciceronic rhetoric, including the distinctions between:
dialectic (concerned with the res of an argument) and oratory (concerned with fluent and ornate verba) 197
philosophy (concerned with logic and wisdom) and rhetoric (concerned with expression) 198
Invention and Arrangement on one hand and Style and Delivery on the other
figures of thought and figures of speech.

The sheer prevalence of the division of res and verba in Antiquity’s most important verbal art ensured it would become one of the basic dichotomies of later Western thought concerning communication.

The interaction of rhetoric and communication-as-transmission

As well as leaving legacy of rules and techniques for later writers, classical rhetoric also influenced the development of communication-as-transmission. The two share many characteristics:

1. the division of communication into three realms: speaker, audience and speech
2. the location of meaning in the speaker’s mind or intentions, the audience’s responses, and the choice and arrangement of words
3. communication as one-way: from one the speaker to the audience
4. the speaker is active, the audience passive
5. the origin of communication in the mind, soul or intentions of the speaker
6. the dichotomy of thought (dianoia) and words (logos, lexis), or else things (res) and words (verba)
7. the aim of speech being to bring about effect (moving the audience to action), so locating the ends of communication outside communication itself.

Classical rhetoric used the framework of transmission to organise techniques learned from experience. In turn, the peculiarities of ancient speech-making influenced the development of communication-as-transmission. For instance, in communication-as-transmission, there is no necessary imbalance between the speaker and the listener: as I showed in Chapter 5, Romans often regarded listening as an active process of ‘catching’, ‘collecting or ‘gathering’. But in a public assembly or a jury, the orator was necessarily active and the audience had to remain silent. This is presumably the source of later beliefs in communication-as-transmission that the ‘source’ is active and the ‘receiver’ is passive.

197 See Cicero Orator 113
198 Cicero de Inventione 1.1.1, Cicero de Oratore 3.19:69
But although ancient rhetoric was organised within the framework of transmission, the two are not identical. It is not, for instance, possible to derive many of the rules of classical rhetoric—particularly on invention and style—from communication-as-transmission. Nor did classical rhetoric try to explain how or why communication took place: it was not an explanation in the way that communication-as-transmission was. Rhetoric never assumed something was transferred from speaker to audience, and there was no implication that the audience would end up with a copy of the speaker’s thoughts. Indeed, classical rhetoric was largely unconcerned with what the audience thought, so long as they acted as the speaker desired. Even Plato and Aristotle, explicitly concerned with the moral effects of rhetoric, treated the orator’s audience as a collection of people to be moved.

The common characteristics of rhetoric and communication-as-transmission tended to buttress each tradition. As I will discuss in Chapter 14, rhetoric provided the main account of communication throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, while transmission remained unrecognised. Only in the Modern Age would transmission displace rhetoric, and acquire many of the characteristics of good oratory.
CHAPTER TWELVE

INTERPRETATION

ABSTRACT Rhetoric was the chief art of speaking amongst both the Greeks and Romans. But the ancient world never developed a reciprocal art of listening to guide audiences in how to interpret and judge an oration. The closest the Hellenistic world came to such an art were methods for interpreting literature and written laws. The analysis of literature by philosophers and educators in the fourth century BC would prompt the development of grammar and etymology. The methods used by Greek and Roman lawyers to interpret laws and other legal documents would later be appropriated by the early Christians to interrogate the Bible, becoming permanent parts of the Church’s theological apparatus. These techniques do not form a coherent whole however, and the Modern confusions over the nature of meaning reflect the different approaches to interpretation inherited from Antiquity.

ANCIENT LITERARY ANALYSIS

The appearance of literary analysis in Greece reflects the importance traditionally attached to poets in Greek society. Even as late as the fourth century BC, poets still provided instruction on morals, social order, the gods, law, and history. Aristophanes points to their importance in The Frogs (405 BC), written in the disastrous final years of the Peloponnesian War with the Spartan army camped outside Athens. He sends Dionysius to the underworld in search of Athens’ greatest poet. “What do want a poet for?” Euripides asks him; “To save the City of course,” responds the god¹. “Schoolboys have a master to teach them, grown-ups have the poets.”²

¹ Aristophanes The Frogs 1420f. Act Two is the first surviving piece of literary criticism and, despite the humour, is an earnest plea for the poet’s traditional role of instructor in Greek society. Aristophanes writes, “A poet should teach a lesson, make people into better citizens.” (The Frogs 1009–10). “From the very earliest times the really great poet has been the one who had a useful lesson to teach.” (The Frogs 1031–32)

² Aristophanes The Frogs 1054–55
The art of memorising, reciting and understanding the poets formed the largest part of the early tekhnē grammaticē. Although its purpose was to help people read aloud, its primary focus was not speech but writing (the tekhnē grammaticē is literally the ‘art of letters’). This focus on text strongly coloured the subsequent development of grammar.

What prompted the appearance of the tekhnē grammaticē in the fifth century BC were changes in the Greek language that made understanding older literary works increasingly difficult—a problem that intensified after 330 BC when Alexander’s armies made a simpler Greek (koinē) the common language of the Eastern Mediterranean. Between the fifth and third centuries BC, the tekhnē grammaticē became divided into three broad areas:

[1] pronouncing words and phrases
[2] explaining the meaning of unfamiliar and obscure words, and

The first grew into phonology—the study of sound. The second would evolve into etymology—the search for the origins of words. The third became what we now recognise as grammar.

Phonetics for the Greeks was always limited because the only tool they had to describe language was the Greek alphabet. Consequently, Greek phonetics consisted largely in a discussion of pronunciation in different Greek dialects and various spellings used in different parts of Greece. (The Greeks took a chauvinistic attitude towards their own tongue and ignored the ‘barbarian’ languages.)

Etymology, although popular, was an erratic business. The Greeks appreciated that their language, as well as having numerous dialects, had also changed over time. The purpose of etymology was to recover the supposed ‘original’ meanings of words. Unfortunately the

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3 Robins 1997, p31
4 For instance Aristophanes on Aeschylus (The Frogs 928), Aristotle on Homer (Poetics §25, 1461a8ff). Two hundred years later, Cicero also mentions the difference in writing before and after Thucydides (d. c404 BC) (Orator 30).
5 Robins 1967, p22
6 Unlike modern European writing systems, the alphabet was the only written tool the Greeks had. As well as using it for writing words, they also used it for mathematics—which may explain why Greek number theory lagged significantly behind their geometry. Even adding and subtracting using Greek figures is complex: multiplication and division were advanced mathematics.
7 The Greek etymologists focussed exclusively on individual words, ignoring the role of grammar in meaning. They also assumed that speech was simply a collection of words, and consequently the ability of language to portray reality was a function of how each individual word reflected the object it referred to. Two thousand years of etymological research suggests that very few nouns bear any relationship to the objects they stand for. A...continued on next page
Sophists and philosophers did not think that words might have changed systematically. They examined words individually, and regarded changes as the result of random ‘corruptions’ or deliberate, conscious alterations. Most attempts at etymology involved the addition or removal of letters from words willy-nilly, producing some fanciful claims.

The development of etymology was also hindered by arguments over whether the origin of words was natural or conventional—whether meanings were innate to words, or their meanings were simply those that people agreed to give them. The Sophists mostly took the conventional position, although some suggested that the first words may have developed onomatopoeically (and hence be natural). Plato sidestepped the issue, insisting that true knowledge of a thing depended on the person grasping the true nature of the thing (its Idea or Archetype), rather than on whether names are related to things either naturally or conventionally. Aristotle believed “every sentence has meaning … by convention, not nature.” For him though, the meaning is a mental phenomenon. He also says that, although different races have different languages and different ways of writing, they all have the same mental experiences. The Stoics taught that words arose naturally—the very first had been formed onomatopoeically—but they had suffered changes since they originated. Epicurus agreed that words had their origins in nature, but that they had been modified by social convention. Although the Cynics took a deliberately anti-theoretical stance, Diogenes appears to have agreed broadly with Aristotle’s view that language was a social convention. From the third century BC, developments in etymology would be dominated by the Alexandrian scholars, whose interests were more literary than philosophical, and the nature–convention argument declined in importance.

The Greeks’ real linguistic achievement was in grammar. There is an unbroken tradition that connects Aristotle to modern linguists, via the Latin grammarians, the medieval Scholastics and the Renaissance Humanists. The same basic approaches and categories appear to have been derived onomatopoeically or phonaesthetically, but most words—or non-grammatical word stems—appear to be arbitrary sounds. The one exception is the length of words—most common words are shorter than uncommon ones; partly because it makes them easier to use, and partly because many less-common words are formed by combining more-common words.

8 Plato Cratylus 399 & 414
9 In Cratylus—Plato’s satirical response to Sophistic etymology—Socrates offers dozens of howlers, like the derivation of anthropos (‘man’) from the sentence anathrôn ha opôpen (‘animal that looks up’). He says that the name of the god of the underworld, Pluto, derived from ploutos (‘wealth’) because wealth came from under the ground. Poseidon he derives from posidesmos (‘the chains of the feet’).
10 Aristotle On Interpretation 17a1–4
were maintained for over two thousand years, and they remain the basis for modern grammar and linguistics\textsuperscript{11}.

The first steps in grammar

The earliest analysis of Greek grammar was done by the Sophists. Protagoras identified case endings in words that denote number and gender. He also argued ‘wrath’ (\textit{mēnis}) and ‘helmet’ (\textit{pēnēx}) ought to be masculine terms, even though they took feminine forms\textsuperscript{12}—presumably because both words are associated with ‘masculine’ activities. The Sophists apparently proposed the ‘correction’ of ungrammatical terms\textsuperscript{13}.

Plato sketched out the earliest grammatical categories, although in a discussion about logic rather than literature. He distinguished the parts of sentences that denote action (\textit{rhēma}) from those parts that carry out actions (\textit{onoma})—very broadly, verbs and nouns\textsuperscript{14}. Plato’s discussion though is brief. His interest is with sentences that make true or false claims, and he does not attempt a full description of all parts of speech.

The first substantial contribution to grammatical and linguistic analysis was made by Aristotle. Although he did not provide a full description of language, the first surviving grammars are all based on Aristotelian principles. His comments about language are scattered across five books\textsuperscript{15}, and what he says about language varies with to context.

At the opening of \textit{On Interpretation}, Aristotle says “speech is the image of mental life, and writing is the image of speech”\textsuperscript{16}. The first claim “speech is the image of mental life” is derived from Aristotle’s psychology and is entirely consistent with communication-as-

\begin{enumerate}
\item[12] Aristotle \textit{Sophistical Refutations} §4, 173b19f
\item[13] The Sophists’ corrections were satirised by Aristophanes in \textit{The Clouds} (411 BC). Amongst other linguistic jokes, he proposes the nonsense \textit{alektryaina} (‘roosterette’) as the female counterpart of \textit{alektôr} (‘rooster’), so that it is consistent with the other animals which have names for both male and female (ram/ewe, buck/doe, stallion/mare, bull/cow). He also asserts that feminine noun \textit{karpodos} (‘kneading trough’) is actually masculine because it takes the typically masculine termination, -\textit{os}.
\item[14] Plato \textit{Sophist} 261–263. Also \textit{Cratylus} 399. \textit{Onoma} and \textit{rhēton} are not directly equivalent to nouns and verbs, although they are often translated as though they were. \textit{Onoma} could also include articles, prepositions and some adjectives. \textit{Rhēma} might include adverbs as well as verbs.
\item[15] \textit{On Interpretation, Poetics, Sophistical Refutations, Politics, Rhetoric}.
\item[16] Aristotle \textit{On Interpretation} §1, 16a4–5
\end{enumerate}
transmission: first comes the concept, then comes the word. The second claim, “writing is the image of speech” was only true because the Greeks used an alphabet.\(^\text{17}\)

In *On Interpretation*, Aristotle confirms Plato’s distinction between *onoma* and *rhêma*, but provides new definitions which parallel the way he divided up nature in his *Categories*. *Onoma* he says have no reference to time, whereas *rhêma* involve a notion of time.\(^\text{18}\) *Rhêma*, says Aristotle, are always predicated on nouns and may have different tenses to indicate past, present and future. He also mentions *syndesmôi*, prepositions and conjunctions, but does not define them. He is also the first to distinguish formally between words and sentences. “A sentence,” he says “is a significant part of speech, some parts of which [ie words] have an independent meaning ... as an utterance, though not as the expression of any positive judgement.”\(^\text{19}\) That is: words can stand for things, but only sentences express a statement that can be judged true or false.

Aristotle’s treatment in *On Interpretation* is rather limited because, like Plato, he treats it as a preliminary to logic rather than as a description of language. His distinctions are only those he needs for his class-based logic and syllogisms. He ignores all sentences that are not propositions (such as questions, wishes, commands, exclamations, and greetings).

He takes a different approach in the *Poetics*. Without mentioning his logical-grammatical terms of *On Interpretation*, he says language can be analysed at four levels. The simplest is the letter. Syllables are the smallest units of speech, and consist of either a vowel or a vowel plus consonants. Words are formed out of syllables; some words contain one syllable, some contain several. What distinguishes words from syllables is that words stand for things whereas, by themselves, syllables do not. The largest unit of speech, says Aristotle, is the sentence, which expresses a whole thought.\(^\text{20}\) Important to note is the influence of writing in this definition. Aristotle defines the smallest units of speech in terms of letters from the Greek alphabet, although, as he notes, some of these cannot properly be sounded of themselves.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{17}\) The claim that writing is the image of speech is not true of non-alphabetic writing systems, such as cuneiform or Chinese. Nor is it entirely true of modern European languages, which use some symbols to represent concepts rather than sounds: the digits 0–9 and symbols like $, %, £ for instance mean the same thing in all European languages but are pronounced differently.

\(^\text{18}\) Aristotle *On Interpretation* §2, 16a19 & §3, 16b6

\(^\text{19}\) Aristotle *On Interpretation* §4, 16b26

\(^\text{20}\) Aristotle *Poetics* 20, 1456b20ff. Our word *sentence* is derived from this definition: the Latin word for ‘thought’ is *sententia*.

\(^\text{21}\) Aristotle *Poetics* §20, 1456b26
In the *Sophistical Refutations*, he confirms the observation of Protagoras that different case endings on nouns indicate gender and number.

Aristotle’s final comments on language would be about what were later defined as ‘figures’ and ‘tropes’, which I discussed in the last chapter. The only two he discusses in detail are metaphors and similes. In the *Rhetoric*, he says metaphor “consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else.” Metaphors are a type of analogy: “as old age is to life, so is evening to day.” Implicit in this definition of transference is the assumption that words stand in one of two relations to objects: usual or unusual—and the unusual implies a deliberate transference. Just how people create metaphors and transfer names from one thing to another, Aristotle cannot explain. Indeed, he says, “it is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others.”

Aristotle’s comments prompted several conflicting beliefs about the nature of language. Although much of what he says did not originate with him, later grammarians (particularly in the High Middle Ages) would treat him as an authority out of all proportion to his comments. He makes or perpetuates three key assumptions that would not be seriously challenged until the twentieth century.

First is his view that language is a formal system. For instance, he repeats Protagoras’s observation that different cases of nouns have different suffixes, and he says language is built up from ‘atomic units’ of sound into steadily more complex structures (rather than, for instance, out of meaningful units, morphemes). His comments on style in his *Rhetoric*, and his definitions of various figures of speech, are also based on form, not meaning. Later grammar is a development of this formal way of describing language, and it would be the dominant approach to grammar and linguistics until the appearance of transformational and generative grammars in the mid-twentieth century.

His second assumption about language is evident in the way he treats words in his logic, where he regards sentences as propositions—that is, that sentences are, in some way, reflections of the world. Words stand for things. This is reflected in his use of the term *onoma*.

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23 Aristotle *Poetics* §21, 1457b7–33
24 Aristotle *Poetics* §21, 1457b20f
25 Aristotle *Poetics* §22, 1459a6. See also *Rhetoric* §3:2 1405a7
26 The purely formal description of language, apart from any connection with the world or the way words were used, was the starting point for Structuralism, which analysed myth, sexuality and culture in broadly similar ‘grammatical’ terms.
(‘name’) to refer to nouns, and his definition of onoma and rhêma in terms of the objects they refer to in the world. Aristotle’s comment that metaphor involves transferring a name from one object to another is also consistent. This view of language parallels contemporary Greek beliefs that words were ‘naturally’ related to the world.

But the third and most original contribution was his belief that words are images of mental states. Consistent with this belief is the claim that a sentence expresses a whole thought. This ‘mental’ approach to language is consistent with Aristotle’s overall theory of knowledge and perception, and it proved highly durable. This is a crucial development for it is the root of the medieval concept of meaning. Meaning in its most ancient sense is simply what the mind knows on hearing or intends in speaking. In the Middle Ages, Scholastic grammarians sought to explain the operation of language within Aristotle’s analysis of the soul. Since, in their analysis, the soul did not know the world directly but only from sensory impression, they distinguished between the word as a physical object or sound, and the sensus of a word: what the mind apprehended. This is the origin of the concept of ‘the sense of a passage’ or ‘the sense of a word’.

Hellenistic developments and Alexandrian literary analysis

After Aristotle, there were broadly two streams in the ancient study of language. In one, the Stoics continued the analysis of language from a logical perspective. In the other, the Alexandrian scholars would analyse language as a necessary introduction to the study and appreciation of literature. Of the two, the Alexandrians would provided the only permanent contribution to interpretative methods—although the Stoics made important contributions to logic, most were lost with the decline of classical civilisation.

Alexandrian literary analysis owed its pre-eminence in the first place to Alexander the Great. Wherever he conquered, Alexander left behind Greek-speaking officials to rule. Consequently, Greek became a prestige language and a necessary skill for those seeking social advancement. In response, the teaching of Greek rapidly became codified in classroom exercises and schoolboy textbooks. Amongst the educated ruling classes, there

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27 The belief that words reflect mental states a cornerstone of early modern psychology. It is, for instance, central to Locke’s theory of language developed in the third book of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1700, 3:1:2–6). Locke’s philosophy in turn heavily influenced early psychotherapy—the ability of words to reflect mental experiences is crucial to Freudian and Jungian analysis.

28 Amongst the early modern philosophers, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, although having quite different philosophies, all firmly believe that language derives from the mind. See Chapter 14.
was also a demand for the classics of Greek literature—chiefly Athenian—and the scholarship to preserve and appreciate it.

The greatest centre of scholarship around the ancient Mediterranean was the great Library and Museum of Alexandria. One of the chief tasks that the Ptolemies set for the Library’s scholars was to establish authoritative texts for great figures in Greek literature, philosophy, religion, and science. Even at the time when the Library was first established, scholars were aware that there were many variants on major authors, including Homer and Plato. Consequently, an important activity for the Library’s scholars was identifying uncorrupted manuscripts and correcting corrupt versions. The Alexandrians knew that some errors had been caused by incorrect copying—duplication, omissions, misspellings, and so on. But they also realised some changes were due to changes in Greek itself. For instance, the ‘common’ dialect spoken in Alexandria was different from the classical Attic of Athens, and Homer differed from both. To restore the ‘lost’ language, they needed a complete description of written language, a method for deciding between ambiguous passages, and a better understanding of how words developed. In the process, they developed the first complete grammar and principles of correct usage for the Greek language, as well as ways to indicate how texts were to be read aloud.

In Alexander’s city, the study of language followed the principles of Alexander’s most famous teacher, Aristotle. These are clearly visible in the earliest surviving Greek grammar, the Tekhne grammatikē, attributed to the Alexandrian, Dionysius Thrax (fl. 100 BC).

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29 The Library and Museum were commissioned around 280 BC by Ptolemy I Soter, who had inherited the Egyptian conquests of Alexander. His successor, Ptolemy II Philadelphus gave the Library its mission of collecting a copy of every existing book in the world. Ptolemy III Euregetes wrote “to all the world’s sovereigns”, asking to borrow their books so they might be copied. He also passed laws commanding all ships entering the city to be searched for books, and those found were copied. The copies were given to those from whom the books had been confiscated—the originals went to the Library. When the Athenians lent Ptolemy III Euregetes the original texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Euregetes returned only the copies, happily forfeiting the vast sum the Athenians had demanded for the originals’ safe-keeping. Through the Ptolemies’ mania, the Library held about four hundred thousand scrolls by the second century BC.

30 Aristophanes of Byzantium (sixth Librarian, 195–180 BC) developed the now-standard symbols to indicate the pitch and aspiration of spoken Greek in texts. Unlike English, ancient Greek was accented primarily by pitch, not stress. Aristophanes’ symbols indicated the three basic pitches—high, low and falling. He also introduced symbols to indicate whether a vowel was to be pronounced with rough or smooth breathing—a sound equivalent to the English ‘h’. About the same time, the Library introduced a new system of punctuation—a valuable addition because, since the sixth century BC, Greek had been written without word spaces.

31 There is considerable disagreement, both ancient and modern, about the authenticity and date of Thrax’s Tekhne grammatikē. See Robins 1997, p37–38 and Kemp 1987, p169.
Thrax opens his little book by placing the study of language into its cultural and educational context.

Grammar is the practical study of the normal usages of poets and prose writers. Its six divisions comprise:

1. skill in reading (aloud) with due attention to prosodic features
2. interpretation, taking note of the tropes of literary composition found in the text
3. the ready explanation of obscure words and historical references
4. discovery of the origins of words
5. a detailed account of the regular patterns
6. a critical assessment of poems; of all that the art includes, this is the noblest part.

The book though deals only in passing with the first point (reading; sections 2–5), before turning to the units of speech (sections 6–11), which echoes Aristotle’s definitions in the *Poetics*. Language is constructed, says Thrax, from letters (*grammata*). Letters are combined to form syllables, which in turn combine to form words, then sentences.

A word [*lexis*] is the smallest part of a properly constructed sentence. A sentence [*logos*] is a combination of words in prose [and poetry] conveying a meaning which is complete in itself.

The remainder of the book is devoted to eight parts of speech that Thrax says are enough to describe all of the Greek language—noun, verb, participle, article, pronoun, preposition, adverb, conjugation. Each class was defined, and the categories applicable to it demonstrated. Although some of Thrax’s definitions were afterwards modified slightly, they remained the standard description of Greek grammar for thirteen hundred years. Subsequent Greek grammatical research took the form of refinements to the *Tekhne grammatikê* or comments on specific passages in it.

The same categories were adopted, with minimal changes, by the Romans. The later grammars—particularly those known to the Middle Ages by Donatus (fl. fourth century AD) and Priscian (fl.500 AD)—clearly show their debt to the Greeks, both in their purpose and terminology. Quintilian echoes Thrax in his summary of the grammarians’

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32 Dionysuis Thrax, *Tekhne grammatikê* §1, in Kemp 1987
33 Thrax calls letters *stoikheia*, ‘elements’—a term also used by contemporary philosophers to refer to the ultimate units of physical matter.
34 Dionysius Thrax *Tekhne grammatikê* §11, in Kemp 1987
35 Robins 1997, p46
36 Latin contains no article words. In their place, the Romans identified adjectives, which the Alexandrians had grouped together with nouns.
offices—speaking, interpreting, correcting. He also glosses the main parts of grammar in the usual hierarchy, from elements to complexity, beginning with the units of speech (vowels, consonants, semivowels and mutes), then letters and spelling, then syllables, then the seven parts of speech in Latin, and finally the declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs (which is concerned with the proper joining of words so they can form sentences).

Roman grammars, in turn, heavily influenced the development of grammatical descriptions of most other European languages during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. By 730 AD, Bede had developed an Old English grammar, based on the same categories as Latin—despite the differences between the two languages. Grammars for German and Scandinavian languages appeared by the eleventh century, developed like Bede’s grammar, as the Bible was translated from Latin into the vernacular.

Although grammar provided the ancient world—and later the Middle Ages and Renaissance—with a precise tool for analysing language, it would always be weak at explaining how words meant anything. Alexandrian grammar was a purely formal

37 “The profession [of the grammaticus] may be briefly considered under two heads, the art of speaking correctly and the interpretation of the poets ... But there is more beneath the surface than meets the eye. The art of writing is combined with that of speaking, while in each of these cases criticism has its work to perform. The old school teachers indeed carried their criticism so far that they were not content with obelising lines or rejecting books whose titles they regarded as spurious, but also drew up a canon of authors...” (Institutio oratoria 1.4.2–3)

38 Quintilian Institutio oratoria 1.4.6
39 Quintilian Institutio oratoria 1.4.7–17
40 Quintilian Institutio oratoria 1.4.17
41 Quintilian Institutio oratoria 1.4.17–29
42 Quintilian Institutio oratoria 1.4.29
43 Robins 1997, p41
44 The imposition of Latin grammar onto English is still the source of grammatical problems for students. Unlike Latin, Modern English is an almost entirely uninflected language, and grammar depends heavily on word order: “John killed Michael” does not mean the same as “Michael killed John”, whereas in Latin the word order is far more flexible. Latin also lacks the maddeningly complex prepositions of Modern English or its many irregular verbs. The best known grammatical anomaly caused by the imposition of Latin grammar is the rule against splitting infinitive verbs—an impossibility in Latin and so, by incorrect analogy, regarded as poor grammar in English.
system, and the aim of grammatical studies was to familiarise students with language and, through example and practice, teach them correct expression—not to provide a theoretically persuasive explanation of its nature and origins. Most ancient scholars agreed that language was a human invention, maintained by convention, but they did not explore how words meant or stood for anything. However, the belief in a human origin implied that each word had either a single meaning, or at least an unambiguous one (a rational society would hardly agree to use a system of language that routinely led to confusion). The only way the grammarians could explain misunderstandings was through corruptions of words or breaches of linguistic conventions (which they classified into ‘barbarisms’ and ‘solecisms’).

The ancients though did recognise that words could be ambiguous and misinterpreted. However, the problem of misunderstanding was studied in rhetoric, not grammar, and was originally cast as a problem specifically of written legal documents.

ANCIENT LEGAL INTERPRETATION

Early Greek legal interpretation

Alongside literary analysis, the other great collection of interpretative methods in the ancient world was used in law. As with poetry, these methods were first developed because of problems posed by writing.

Before the Greeks began to write down their laws in the seventh century BC, laws would largely be recalled as proverbs or sayings. Making a judgement would have involved recalling precedents and proverbs appropriate to the circumstances, and drawing conclusions in accepted patterns. In this environment, innovations would soon be either forgotten or incorporated into the mass of traditional oral law. For those living in such a culture, the effect is an apparently unchanging world, and not surprisingly such laws were usually attributed to the gods. This is precisely the state of early Greek law.

The introduction of writing altered this situation. Writing allowed the Greeks to identify laws made by people at a specific place and time, in contrast with the traditional timeless

45 Surviving schoolboy exercises shows lists of words in all the possible declensions and cases—even where particular words did not exist in reality.

46 For instance, Cicero—probably drawing on Stoic sources—says people were “mute and voiceless” until one man “through reason and eloquence [rationem atque orationem] ... transformed them from wild savages to a kind and gentle folk.” (De Inventione 1:3)
laws attributed to the gods. The Greeks also found that written laws could not be applied in the same way as the oral law. The traditional method of making judgements—recalling precedents and lore relevant to the case—tended to bring up only material relevant to the case, while hiding contradictions and inconsistencies. Written laws by contrast preserved detail and earlier decisions that could be taken out of context. Written laws could not be adapted to circumstances in the way oral law was. Inevitably, the preservative power of writing brought the traditional oral laws and written human laws into conflict. The Greeks though saw the conflict as being between the human and divine order (although they occasionally referred to human laws and written laws). This conflict is the origin of distinctions between human law (nomos) on one hand and ‘natural law’, ‘divine law’ or ‘justice’ (dikē) on the other.

The earliest recorded dispute between the traditional and human laws is Sophocles’ Antigone (c.441 BC). In the play, Antigone’s two brothers have slain one another in battle: Eteocles defending Thebes against Polynices. Creon, king of Thebes and Antigone’s uncle, decrees that Eteocles is to receive a full state funeral for his defence of the city; the rebel Polynices is to be left on the battlefield for the dogs and carrion birds. Anyone found disobeying his orders is to be put to death. Antigone is horrified that Creon is ordering the disobedience of the gods’ laws—which command people to bury their kin so the souls of the dead may go down into Hades. She defies Creon and upholds the traditional law:

Your order did not come from God. Justice,  
That dwells with the gods below, knows no such law.  
I did not think your edicts strong enough  
To overrule the unwritten unalterable laws  
Of God and heaven, you being only a man.  
They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting,  
Though where they came from, none of us can tell.47

Here, Sophocles is contrasting the traditional, ‘unwritten’, and ‘everlasting’ laws (which Antigone attributes to the gods) with the edicts made by a man (Creon). Creon is caught: forced to put Antigone to death to comply with his own law, he is punished by fate for transgressing the divine law, losing his son and his wife through his own actions.

Aristotle on legal interpretation

The traditional law continued to have force for hundreds of years after laws were first committed to writing in Greece—even in Athens, which made more use of written legislation than any other Greek city. A century after Sophocles, Aristotle writes, “Of

47 Sophocles Antigone 450f
political justice part is natural, part legal" and distinguishes between the ‘written law’ and the ‘universal law’. He regards customary laws as better than both a good ruler and even more than written laws, and cites arguments typically used against written laws:

The better a man is, the more he will follow and abide by the unwritten law in preference to the written.

The universal law does not change ... for it is the law of nature [dikē], whereas written laws [nomoi] often do change.

Aristotle was the first to formulate lasting principles for resolving the deficiencies in written laws, contradictions between them, or conflicts with the traditional law. These methods fall into two types. The first concern the limitations and inflexibility of written laws. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, he notes that there can only be a finite number of written laws to legislate the infinite variety of life. Laws can only achieve this by being general. To accommodate the law to cases not specifically covered by it, he proposes the principle of ‘equity’. An equitable judgement is, for Aristotle, a type of ethical act: it corrects the law in the way that a good lawmaker would.

When the law speaks universally, then, and a case arises on it which is not covered by the universal statement, then it is right ... to correct the omission—to say what the legislator himself would have said had he been present, and would have put into his law if he had known.

The equitable person is not a stickler for their rights; they choose to take less than they are entitled to, even when they have the law on their side. Equity also involves looking at the larger context rather than the individual act (although Aristotle does not develop a term for ‘context’).

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48 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §5.7, 1134b18
49 Aristotle *Rhetoric* §1:15, 1375a26. Aristotle quotes the lines of *Antigone* above.
50 Aristotle *Politics* §3.16, 1287b5–8
51 Aristotle *Rhetoric* §1:15, 1375b6
52 Aristotle *Rhetoric* §1:15, 1375a32
53 “[Legislators] find themselves unable to define things exactly, and are obliged to legislate as if that held good always which in fact only holds good usually; or where it is not easy to be complete owing to the endless possible cases presented, such as the kinds and sizes of weapons that may be used to inflict wounds—a lifetime would be too short to make out a list of these. If, then, a precise statement is impossible and yet legislation is necessary, the law must be expressed in wide terms...” (*Rhetoric* §1:13, 1374a30–35). See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 5:10, 1137b12–19.
54 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §5.10 1137b19–24
55 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* §5.10,1137b36–38
Equity bids us to be merciful to the weakness of human nature; to think less about the laws than about the man who framed them, and less about what he said than what he meant; and not to consider the actions of the accused so much as his intentions, nor this or that detail so much as the whole story; to ask not what a man is now but what he has always or usually been. It bids us remember benefits rather than injuries, and benefits received rather than benefits offered; to be patient when we are wronged; to settle disputes by negotiation and not by force; to prefer arbitration to litigation—for an arbitrator goes by the equity of a case, a judge by the strict law, and arbitration was invented with the express purpose of seeking the full power of equity.  

Here, Aristotle makes a number of important distinctions: between the words of the law and the lawmaker’s purpose; between a person’s acts and their intentions; between an individual word or act and its overall textual or historical circumstances. In later rhetorical handbooks, these would be summarised as the difference between διάνοια (intentions, meanings and context) and ῥῆτον (the word of the law, the individual statement—and by analogy, the individual act). In each case Aristotle sides with διάνοια (as he also does in his Rhetoric, as I discussed in the last chapter).

Aristotle does not explain how an orator pleading a lawsuit is meant to ‘reach past’ words and acts to find intentions: his fiction of the resurrected lawmaker is hardly a practical technique (although it was a rhetorical device used constantly by both Greeks and Romans). In practice, Aristotle appears to believe that an orator would tell the jury what was meant or intended. This incidentally illustrates an important assumption in interpretative processes: Aristotle clearly believed that written laws and writing generally was open to misinterpretation—he mentions the ‘defects’ of writing several times—but also expects that the spoken word could be used to correct it. But this requires that the spoken word be somehow immune from misinterpretation in the way that written words are not. In particular, Aristotle is explicit that equity is specifically for correcting written laws:

Equity makes up for the defects in a community’s written code of law ... People regard [equity] as just; it is, in fact, the sort of justice which goes beyond the written law.

The second type of problem with legal texts that Aristotle mentions is based on the distinction of διάνοια and ῥῆτον. The principle of equity and the type of problem its solves lie in the domain of διάνοια. A second source of problems with written laws is in the realm of ῥῆτον: the fact that words can be ambiguous. In the Rhetoric, he asserts that words may signify in more than one way.

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56 Aristotle Rhetoric §1:13, 1374a25–1374b23
57 Aristotle Rhetoric §1:13, 1374a25–1374b23
58 Aristotle Topics §§1:15–18, Rhetoric §2:23 1398a28, Poetics §25 1461a34f
What neither Aristotle nor his contemporaries appear to have explored is why documents could be routinely misunderstood while speech was immune. They did recognise that a speaker may need to defend or explain what they spoke, but they did not draw the conclusion that speech can be misunderstood—and misunderstood for the same reasons—as written documents (although they did note that documents were unable to defend themselves as a speaker could when questioned or attacked). In all ancient discussions concerning interpretation and misunderstanding, speech has a privileged status: speech is unambiguous; writing is easily misunderstood. The consequence though was that attention was directed towards written documents and how to interpret them correctly: since speech produced no problems, it required no special methods to understand and so went unexplained. In communication-as-technique, writing implicitly became the model of communication.

**Roman legal interpretation**

We do not know how Greek theories of legal interpretation developed in the two centuries after Aristotle. The next text we have which discusses the topic is Roman—Cicero’s *De Inventione*—and probably reflects Hellenistic theory of the early first century BC. In it, Cicero lists five types of ‘controversies’ or situations where legal documents need to be interpreted. Later in life, he reduced this number to three, and so the Roman tradition remained after that.

The first type of controversy is in the discrepancy between a writer’s intentions (*voluntas* or *sententia*) and their words (*verba, scriptum*)—or more generally, between the ubiquitous *res* and *verba*. (The distinction is almost the same as that between *dianoia* and *rhéton*). The second source of controversy was the ambiguity of words or passages in a text. The third arose where there was a contradiction, either within a single text, or between two related texts (such as two laws). Of the three, only the first two had a lasting effect on theories of interpretation. Each was dealt with in quite different ways.

Cicero and later Latin writers treated the discrepancy between a writer’s intention and their words in the first part of rhetoric, invention. By implication, they treated the meaning of words as what people intended to do or say. By contrast, Latin writers treated ambiguity under the third part of rhetoric, style, as the failure of words to signify or stand for the thing they were meant to represent. What a writer meant was obscure because the written statement signified two or more things.

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60 Cicero, *De Inventione* 2:40:116, and see also 1:13:17.
To illustrate how intention (voluntas) could be set against words (verba) in the first type of controversy, both Cicero and Quintilian referred to a famous legal case, the causa curiana. Coponius wrote a will stating that if he had a son, but the son died before being able to inherit, then Curius was to inherit. Shortly after making the will, Coponius died childless. Curius claimed the inheritance, as did Coponius’ next-of-kin, Marcus. Marcus argued that, since the will specified that Curius could inherit only if a son was born, but no son had been born, then the inheritance should go to the next-of-kin. This interpretation upheld the scriptum of the will: the ‘letter of the law’. Curius’ lawyer opposed this, arguing that Coponius had clearly intended Curius to be second in line to inherit, even though the will did not specifically say this. He also drew on Aristotle, arguing that a judgement in favour of Curius was the more equitable. In De Inventione, Cicero added that anyone siding with voluntas over scriptum should support their case with a claim that it is not only the correct interpretation but also an ethical one (as Aristotle had insisted):

For it would be the height of impudence for one who wishes to gain the approval of some act contra scriptum not to gain his point with the help of equity.

Cicero says there is also a second type of case, where lawyers will oppose voluntas to scriptum. Realising, as Aristotle had, that written documents may not be able to address every single situation they are intended to cover, Cicero says the lawyer upholding voluntas can argue that the words of a document have to be interpreted to accommodate a particular circumstance—for instance, when a law has to be adapted to some unforeseen event. Cicero even repeats Aristotle’s strategy, saying the lawyer can claim that, “the author of the law himself, should he return from the dead, would approve this act, and would have done the same if he had been in a similar situation.” ‘Correcting’ the text, and justifying the correction, was the main tool used by the lawyers who advocated voluntas against scriptum.

To resolve an ambiguity, the second of Cicero’s controversies, a lawyer had to examine the context it occurred in. (‘Context’ was not formally defined until centuries after, and the Latin texts use a variety of expressions.) Cicero and Quintilian say there are two types of context: textual and ‘congregational’. The textual process involves examining ambiguous words and passages in the context of the rest of the document.

It must be shown that from what precedes or follows the document the doubtful point becomes plain. Therefore, if words are to be considered separately by themselves, every word, or at least most words, would seem ambiguous; but it is not

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63 Cicero De Inventione 2:47:139
right to regard as ambiguous what becomes plain on consideration of the whole [document].

The second strategy involves examining the ‘congregation’ (congregatio<sup>64</sup>) of people, times, places, causes, means, incidents, acts, instruments and other factors that lead to a particular act being taken or document being written, then considering ambiguous passages against this background.

... one ought to estimate what the writer meant from his other writings, acts, words, disposition and in fact his whole life, and to examine the whole document which contains the ambiguity in all its parts, to see if anything is apposite to our interpretation or opposed to the sense in which our opponent understands it. For it is easy to estimate what is likely that the writer intended from the complete context [ex omni scriptura] and from the character of the writer and from the qualities which are associated with certain characters.<sup>65</sup>

In both cases, Cicero, like Aristotle, gives priority to the whole document over any isolated part of it, and the whole of the writer’s life and actions over any single act or word.

In principle, the two main interpretative methods were dealt with in different parts of rhetoric (invention and style), dealt with different objects (<i>res</i> and <i>verba</i> at their broadest), and involved different definitions of meaning (as intention and as signification). In practice, the lawyers brought the two into collision to support their case and undermine their opponents’, using whichever method was most advantageous. Cicero remarked that “every schoolboy knows how to counter an argument for <i>scriptum</i> with one for <i>voluntas</i>”<sup>66</sup>. As the lawyers prepared then presented their cases, they examined arguments in support of their case, as well as arguments their opponents might use against it. So they constantly shifted ground between <i>res</i> to <i>verba</i>, <i>voluntas</i> to <i>scriptum</i>, <i>intentio</i> and <i>significatio</i>. Although in theory <i>res</i> and <i>verba</i> belonged to separate domains, in the hands of the lawyers they actually overlapped extensively, removing any certainty from their interpretations.

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<sup>64</sup> Quintilian <i>Institutio</i> 5.10:20–52
<sup>65</sup> Cicero <i>De Inventione</i> 2.40:117
<sup>66</sup> Cicero <i>De Oratore</i> 1:57:24
The last major set of interpretative methods produced in Antiquity was developed by the young Christian Church. From a Christian perspective, the Jewish Scriptures foretold the coming of Christ and laid down God’s expectations of the faithful. The first few generations of Jewish Christians brought Jewish interpretative methods to their readings of Scripture\(^67\). These are apparent in arguments presented in the New Testament, and were mostly used to prove the divinity of Christ and establish the scope of the new dispensation. However, as antagonism grew between Jews and Christians, and the Church was increasingly made up of pagan converts, Jewish interpretative methods declined in the Church, at least in an

\(^67\) See Ellis 1989, pp699–702 and Hays 1989, particularly p12 for some of the Jewish interpretative methods used by the early Christian writers.

The Jewish Scriptures had a contradictory place in early Christian worship. To the first few generations, they were the only divine writings, and the acts of Jesus regarded as the fulfilment of prophecies recorded there.

The Christians also used the Jewish Scriptures to legitimise their status under Rome. Like all other subject peoples, the Romans permitted the Jews to continue the religious observances of their forebears. The Christians, who worshiped a god who appeared in historically recent times rather than remote antiquity, and drew converts away from State-sanctioned religions were sometimes viewed by the Roman authorities as a subversive secret society. By claiming that they observed ancient laws of the Jews, the Christians hoped to claim some of the religious immunity that the Jews enjoyed. Early Church worship also followed Jewish practice, particularly in the way that the Law and the prophets were taught then discussed by the congregation.

But the early Christians sometimes rejected their Jewish heritage. Like any emerging community, they sought to distinguish themselves from the origins they rejected or outgrew. Some early Christians believed that the Jews rejected the Christian message, and in the process rejected God.

To the Jewish Scriptures were added a steadily growing body of specifically Christian works. When, after c.60AD, Christian communities became increasingly disturbed that the promised return of the Messiah had not occurred, and the last of those who had known Jesus died out, the new communities begin to record in writing the various stories and traditions concerning him, lest their knowledge die away completely before the Kingdom was established. These eventually coalesced into the gospels. The surviving four gospels however were only part of a larger body Christian writings that appeared in the first and early second centuries AD. Other documents included a dozen gospels, pastoral letters from apostles (such as the Epistles of the new Testament) and early bishops (such as Clement, Irenaeus and Leo), collections of sayings attributed to Jesus (known to Biblical scholars as Q), early Church rules and decisions (the Didache), and various other longer narratives (such as the Shepherd of Hermas). All were read alongside the Jewish works, and the early Christian writers were at pains to emphasise the connections between the two.
organised fashion. Christians read the Jewish Scriptures with foreign eyes and classical interpretative techniques. The Church however made two crucial assumptions which transformed the Greek methods:

1. the belief that Scripture had both a public meaning and a hidden one
2. the necessity of Christian faith in order to find out this hidden meaning.

The belief that the Jewish Scriptures had a hidden meaning influenced their use by Christians from the outset. Jesus himself had said that the meaning of Scripture is given to some but not others. He also said that the Jewish religious leaders of his time “[did] not know the Scriptures” and that their interpretative methods “[had] made void the word of God”. Jesus also said that his own parables were to be understood in two ways: they too have a secret meaning. (The word *parable* comes from the Greek *parabole* or ‘mystery’.)

“He who has ears, let him hear ... To you [disciples] it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the multitudes] it has not been given.”

Paul too asserted that Scripture had a hidden meaning, but that with the coming of Christ it had been revealed. Paul said repeatedly that his mission was make known “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints.”

[the Jews’] minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

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68 Although some important Church writers such as Origen (c.185–c.254) and Jerome (c.324–420) relied on the authority of Jewish figures to justify their own interpretations and practices, this became increasingly unusual as Christians became increasingly secure in their own readings.

69 Matt 11:25

70 Sadducees in Mark 12:24, Pharisees in Matt 12:7

71 Matt 15:6

72 Matt 13:9 & 11, and see also 11:15, 13:43, Mark 4:9 & 12.

73 Col 1:26. See also Rom 16:25–2 and, Eph 3:2–12.

74 2 Cor 3:14–16. Over three hundred years later Augustine distinguishes between a ‘Jewish reading’ of Scripture that sees only the literal meaning, and a “Christian reading’ which sees the spirit of the passage.
In time, the belief that Scripture meant more than it might at first appear unleashed a vast number of allegorical readings. Allegorical readings were not new to Christianity—they were an aspect of contemporary Jewish mysticism—but what was startling in Christian allegory was the way that every passage could be read for some spiritual significance, whether confirming some point of Christ’s life, or his status as the Messiah, or else exhorting the believer to proper Christian virtues.

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> Allegorical readings of Scripture by Christian writers appeared first in the East, particularly around Alexandria, under Justin (c.100–c.165), Clement (c.150–c.215) and Origin (c.185–c.254).

> The development of allegorical interpretative methods was probably influenced by another method that the early Christians inherited from Judaism: interpreting Scripture through the use of ‘types’ (tupoi). Events in the present were given meaning through their relationship with events in the past, and events taking place in the Gospels’ present were understood as prophecies of things to come. This interpretation was not on the basis of similarities or as though Biblical events were metaphors. Rather, the early Christians believed there was a direct correspondence between God’s acts and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For instance, Paul refers to Adam as “a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14)—that is, Adam prefigures Jesus as the Messiah. Both Adam and Jesus are described as the ‘Son of God’ (Comparing Luke 3:22 with Luke 3:38). Both Jesus and Adam live in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The two are also contrasted with one another: Adam sinned whereas Jesus takes away the sins of the world; Adam died whereas Jesus rose from the dead (1 Cor 15:22). “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.” (1 Cor 15:45). Adam had long been an important ‘type’ for the Jews—there are references to him in Daniel for instance (Dan 7:9–14). Jesus was also the ‘Passover Lamb’, that consecrated the new covenant (1 Cor 5:7, Acts 8:3 and traditionally John 1:29 and Rev 5:12)—just as the Passover Lamb recalled the covenant made on Mt Sinai.

God’s earlier acts of destruction were also understood as ‘types’ with which the impending end of the world could be understood. Peter refers to the Flood and the destruction of Sodom (2 Pet 2:5–7). Jude says “Sodom and Gomorrah … which … acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7). Paul repeatedly refers to the destruction of the wicked in a great fire. Exodus—the banishment of Israel from its promised land—was another ‘type’ according to Paul (1 Cor 10:6), recorded for the instruction of the people who live in the last days of the world (1 Cor 10:11). Exodus also allowed the apostles to show the consequences of obeying God’s new covenant: a return to paradise.

A good example how even the most innocuous passage from the Bible could be turned to exhortation is illustrated in a sermon made Ambrose (c.339–397) on the meeting of Abraham and Rebecca, in which he felt obliged to explain the spiritual significance of the earings and bracelets that Abraham presented to Rebecca. “Perhaps, when you hear of this my daughters … you may be tempted to get you earrings and bracelets and say to me, ‘Why do you forbid us, Bishop, to have what Rebecca accepted as a gift and yet exhort us to be like Rebecca?’ Ah, yes, but Rebecca did not have the kind of earings and bracelets that are wont to sow disputes in the Church, the kind that often slip off. She had other earings … and other bracelets. The...continued on next page
Various interpretative modes became distinguished. By the third century, Origen (c.185–c.254) distinguished between:

1. the literal reading
2. the psychical or ethical reading, and
3. the pneumatic or allegorical reading which referred to the life of Jesus or the Church.

By the twelfth century, Aquinas and Dante distinguished between four ‘senses’:

1. the sensus literalis, the obvious or historical meaning of the text
2. the sensus moralis, or application of the text to Christian behaviour
3. the sensus allegoricus, which usually referred to a prophecy of some part of Jesus’s life as it was foretold in the Old Testament
4. the sensus anagogicus, which described some aspect of a Christian’s life after death.

Applying these four methods to, for example, the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey during the Passover produced four readings, all consistent with Christian faith. The literal sense was a historical description of how Jesus entered the city. The moral sense was the entry of Christ into the life of the Christian. The allegorical reading was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the Messiah. And the anagogical reading referred to the redeemed soul’s entry into heaven, greeted by cheering crowds.

Christian preachers and writers attached great importance to texts that could be read profitably in several different ways. They were more significant than texts that could only be read literally. Such works were particularly useful for ‘opening up’ obscure or difficult passages of Scripture—indeed, because they had no obvious literal meaning, they could safely be assumed to have a spiritual sense, and were thus more important than purely literal passages. (In practice, the lack of an obvious literal meaning probably made defending an allegorical sense rather easier). So, recondite passages in the Bible came to be regarded as more significant than easily intelligible parts. In the Middle Ages, this way of looking at Scripture was applied to many other types of literature and became the cornerstone of poetic theory. The creation of obscure texts became an end in itself.

earrings of Rebecca are the symbols of pious attention. The bracelets of Rebecca are the ornaments of good works. She had the kind of earrings that do not oppress the ears but soothe them. She had the kind of bracelets that do not burden the hand with material gold but lighten it with spiritual deeds. That is why her brother and parents are so well pleased with her adornment. Very well, you may have the earrings that Abraham left you. And here are the bracelets he bequeathed you.” (Ambrose Epistulae 1:9:89, in Rand 1957, pp88–89)
Augustine on Christian teaching

The last author on interpretation to be influential in the Middle Ages was Augustine (354–430). Although one of the most important early Christian writers, until his conversion to Christianity in his thirties, Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric—lecturing in Carthage, Rome and Milan (then capital of the western Roman Empire). Not surprisingly with this background, Augustine preserved much of the Roman educational and philosophical system in his own writings, but fused it with Christian purpose, creating something quite new. Unlike many of his Christian predecessors, he recommended the study of grammar, logic, rhetoric and philosophy although subordinated to the chief goal of understanding Scripture.

Augustine’s most important work concerning interpretation is *de doctrina Christiana* (on Christian teaching). It is not a work on either grammar or rhetoric in the traditional manner, and Augustine warns his readers not to expect them. He does however draw on them extensively, along with many other parts of classical learning. His goal is to explain how to treat Scripture, which, he says, has two parts: understanding Scripture (covered in Books One, Two and Three) then preaching (Book Four). Like the Greeks and Romans, his linguistic concerns are entirely textual.

In explaining how to read Scripture, Augustine begins by distinguishing between *things* and *signs*, echoing the fundamental distinction in philosophy and rhetoric between *res* and *verba*. Examples of *things* include logs, stones and sheep. He discusses the nature of *things* in Book One. Although what he says is important to his theology, it does not affect his interpretative method.

In Books Two and Three, Augustine turns to *signs*. Although they are the core of his method for understanding Scripture, he is not consistent in his definition or the way he says that signs operate. When he distinguishes between things and signs, he says:

[a sign is] a thing which of itself makes some thing or other come to mind, beside the impression that it presents to the senses. So when we see a footprint we think that

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78 In 394 AD Augustine began writing a series of books on the seven liberal arts. He completed one book on grammar (now lost) and sketches on some of the remainder, although only his notes on dialectic survive. Augustine’s knowledge of Greek was limited, so most of his theory came from Roman sources—Cicero, chief amongst them.

79 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 1:1
animal whose footprint it is has passed by; when we see smoke we realise there is fire beneath it.  

Thus, signs stand directly for things in the world and they make all minds think of the things they stand for. But when discusses words—the most important type of signs for Augustine—he says:

> when we speak, the word which we hold in our minds becomes a sound in order that what we have in our mind may pass through ears of flesh into the listener’s mind: this is called speech. Our thought, however, is not converted into the same sound, but remains intact in its own home, suffering no diminution from its change as it takes on the form of or words or makes its way into the ears.

This clearly parallels Aristotle’s definition of speech seven hundred years earlier: words stand for the things in the mind, not things in the world. Furthermore, says Augustine, words have their meaning from the conventions of the speaker’s language, and vary from language to language (a claim that is again consistent with Aristotle). In the remainder of *de doctrina* however, Augustine makes no reference to either minds or conventions, and he usually assumes that words stand for things.

Signs, he says, are either ‘natural’ or ‘given’. An animal’s footprint is a natural sign of the animal; smoke is a natural sign of fire. By contrast: “given signs are those which living things give to each other to show ... the emotions of their minds or anything they have felt or learnt.” Given signs, he says, are always intentional. The most important type of given signs are words, and the remainder of his treatment of signs is about words (although he continues to refer to them as ‘signs’, creating some inconsistencies).

With these definitions established, Augustine then begins to explain how to interpret Scripture. The first step is to learn the canonical texts—not necessarily to understand

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80 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:4  
81 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:6  
82 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 1:26  
83 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:93  
84 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:3  
85 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:3  
86 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:6  
87 For instance, Augustine distinguishes between ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’ signs—a distinction that can only refer to words, not natural signs. He also refers to winks, nods and movement of the limbs as ‘visible words’.
them, but at least become familiar with them. He lists four pre-requisites a reader needs when interpreting Scripture:

1. holiness, so “he does not revel in controversy”
2. a knowledge of languages, which “protects him from uncertainty over unfamiliar words and phrases”
3. knowledge of things, which “protects him from the ignorance of the significance and detail of what is used by way of imagery”, and
4. reliable manuscripts.

In the second half of Book Two, he discusses the sources of useful knowledge about things that will help readers understand Scripture. Much is drawn from the pagan educational system, although he carefully removes pagan practices. Of value, he says, are history, topography, zoology, astronomy (but not astrology), weights and measures, culture and dress, coinage and currency, the letters of language, music, logic, rhetoric, and what of philosophy was consistent with Christianity, particularly Platonism. Augustine says this knowledge is useful, but not essential: the only things a Christian really needs to know are the Scriptures.

*De doctrina* is the first major work to make explicit the importance of the reader’s knowledge in the interpretation of a text. And since, for Augustine, knowledge was intellectual in nature, he effectively transforms interpretation into a mental activity. This is not at all how the Roman lawyers had understood interpretation. For them, a text had to be understood in light of the events in which it was written or used, the intents of the writer or the lawyer, the language that had been used, and the differences or similarities between the text and other documents (such as laws). None of these things was mental.

Having dealt with things, Augustine turns to the problem of understanding signs. As a person reads Scripture, he says, they will find signs they know, signs they do not know, or signs they find ambiguous. Furthermore, signs may be either literal or metaphorical. Augustine discusses how to deal with each in turn.

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88 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:30
89 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 3:1
90 Augustine *de doctrina Christiana* 2:59-2:145
To begin with, there are many clearly expressed literal passages in Scripture in which “one can find all the things that concern faith and the moral life.” It is with this knowledge that the reader interprets ambiguous passages.

If a literal passage is ambiguous, the reader should first make sure it is punctuated and pronounced properly. If that does not resolve the ambiguity, the reader should consult the rule of faith—the fundamentals of Christian doctrine—as no passage in the Scriptures contradicts that. Finally, he says, if there are several interpretations, all of which are compatible with Christian belief, then he tells the reader to “consult the context—the preceding and following passages, which surround the ambiguity”.

As far as the books of holy Scripture are concerned, it is very unusual, and very difficult, to find cases of ambiguity which cannot be resolved by the particular details of the context—which are a pointer to the writer’s intention—or by comparison of Latin translations or an inspection of the original language.

Figurative passages need to be treated entirely differently. Augustine says it is vitally important to distinguish between literal and figurative passages. This can be done, he says, by observing a simple rule:

- Generally speaking ... anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related to either good morals or the true faith should be taken as figurative.
- If [an] expression that is a prescriptive one, and either forbids wickedness or wrongdoing, or enjoins self-interest or kindness, it is not figurative. But if it appears to enjoin wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid self-interest or kindness, it is figurative.

Having identified a passage as figurative, Augustine says that the words it is expressed in will be either similar or connected to the thing the passage is really about. He notes that some passages may appear to mean several things. If so, then the obscure passage can be understood by comparing it with the same figure in a clearer passage.
He notes that some ambiguous figurative passages cannot be unequivocally resolved using other, clearer passages from Scripture, in which case the reader may resort to logic. Augustine regards this as ‘dangerous’, and says it is much safer to work with Scripture alone. Perhaps Augustine is reflecting on the ancient claim that dialectic can be used to argue equally well for good and bad, and that oratory was concerned only with probabilities not absolute truths. If so, Augustine would certainly regard Scripture as a safer basis for interpretation: as the word of God, it is true in a way dialectical deductions were not.

For his literary-minded readers, Augustine adds that the “Christian authors used all figures of speech which teachers of grammar call by the Greek name of tropes”. He adds that studying grammar and figures helps understand Scripture (although he declines to give a course on grammar). He lists some figures used in the Scriptures, giving examples of each. He also summarises the techniques of one Tyconius, “seven rules which could be used like keys to open up the secrets of the divine Scriptures.”

In the last book of de doctrina, Augustine turns from understanding Scripture to presenting what the reader has learnt. Although he had been a student and teacher of rhetoric for over fifteen years, he is slighting of his old profession. What can be learnt about public speaking, he says, can be learnt quickly by the young, and he does not think it is important enough for older people to devote time to it. Although he glosses Cicero on the usual ‘offices’ of the orator—[1] making listeners favourable, interested and attentive; [2] using a style that is succinct, lucid and interesting; [3] moving listeners to action; and [4] inspiring fear, sadness, and elation with passionate exhortations—he does not describe any of the usual rules of rhetoric.

Of the five traditional parts of Roman rhetoric— invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery—only the first is of interest to Augustine, and that is provided solely by studying the Bible, which he discussed in the previous two books. Of three traditional sources of persuasion—the character of the speaker, the emotions roused in the listener, and the

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96 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 3:86
97 Augustine’s defence of the Bible’s language is important historically. The simple, unsophisticated style of the New Testament had been a major barrier to educated pagans converting to the new religion and was frequently criticised by them. Augustine himself had initially been repelled by Christian writings because they lacked the polish and sophistication of Cicero and Plato. (Confessions 3:5:9)
98 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 3:92
99 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:78
subject presented—only the last interests Augustine. He rejects the traditional emphasis on
the speaker’s ethos, saying that even the wicked should preach, “because good faithful men
listen with obedience not to a particular speaker, but to their Lord … [and] even those that
behave unprofitably are heard with profit”\(^{101}\). He admits that emotions are useful to “rouse
the apathetic”\(^{102}\), but does not explain how to do this.

The only real sources of Christian persuasion, Augustine appears to say, are God and the
Bible\(^{103}\). Augustine discusses the study of the Bible in Books Two and Three, and in Book
Four advises the speaker to pray to God:

[The Christian speaker] must become a man of prayer before becoming a man of
words. As the hour of his address approaches, before he opens his thrusting lips he
should lift up his thirsting soul to God so that he may utter what he has drunk in and
pour out what has filled him.\(^{104}\)

Augustine appears to rely on kharisma, the divine gift of the Holy Spirit, to inspire
Christian speaker. He quotes Matthew’s gospel\(^{105}\), saying:

Do not think how you will speak; that will be given to you at the time when you speak;
for it will not be you who speak but the spirit of the father speaking through you.\(^{106}\)

Augustine does not discuss arrangement of what the speaker has learnt in their study. And
he is scathingly dismissive of style.

…it is in the nature of good minds to love truth in the form of words, not the words
themselves. What use is a golden key, if it cannot unlock what we want unlocked, and
what is wrong with a wooden one, if it can, since our sole aim is to open closed
doors?\(^{107}\)

He says that emulating Scripture will provide speakers with the eloquence they need\(^{108}\).
“Preachers should quote from Scripture, if they cannot invent themselves, so the texts may

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\(^{101}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:152. See also 4:151, where Augustine quotes Paul: “Let Christ
be proclaimed whether in pretence or truth” (Phil 1:18).

\(^{102}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:14. See also his references to Cicero on emotion 4:74f

\(^{103}\) “For [Scripture] was not produced by human labour, but poured forth from the divine mind
with both wisdom and eloquence…” Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:59

\(^{104}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:87. See also 4:59.

\(^{105}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:89

\(^{106}\) Matthew 10:19–20

\(^{107}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:72

\(^{108}\) Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:9 and 4:12
please even if their words cannot.” Augustine devotes most of the last book to examples from the Bible and other Christian writings that show various figures of thought and speech, and the three levels of style (grand, middle and plain). He has little patience with correct usage; so long as people understand what is said, correctness is not a priority. In short, in the ancient quarrel between res and verba, things and words, Augustine sided almost entirely with res, hence his exclusive focus on invention and his dismissal of style.

Augustine says nothing in de doctrina about the last two parts of classical rhetoric, memorisation and delivery.

Augustine’s views on presentation, and rhetoric generally, are typical enough of professional rhetoric teachers of his time. Rhetorical theory had become increasingly polarised into invention and style, while the other three parts had dwindled. For the Christian preacher, Augustine effectively replaced invention with studying the Bible. That would supply all a Christian might properly want to speak about. All that was left to rhetoric was style—which Augustine deprecated. In this too, he reflected his times: style had ceased to be associated with elegance or clarity as it was in Cicero and Quintilian’s time, and was more concerned with analysing and using figures of speech—that only aspect of style that Augustine discussed. Partly through Augustine’s influence, the Christian Middle Ages neglected matters of clarity and precision and were content to “use words that are less correct, provided that the subject matter itself [was] communicated and learnt correctly.”

Along with De Inventione and the Rhetorica ad Herennium, Augustine’s de doctrina Christiana was one of the most studied works on language during the Middle Ages. Many Scholastics—including Thomas Aquinas—wrote commentaries. Augustine was instrumental in persuading later generations that rhetoric consisted primarily in matters of style, and was superfluous to communication. Except for invention, rhetoric largely died in the early and High Middle Ages, to be displaced by dialectic.

109 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:21f
110 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:31–58 (figures) and 4:96–138 (style).
111 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:66
112 Memory however forms an important part of the Confessions, written about the same time as de doctrina. See the Appendix 3 for a discussion of ancient memory techniques.
113 Kennedy 1981, p181
114 Augustine de doctrina Christiana 4:66
115 Kennedy 1984, p182

398 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNICATION-AS-TECHNIQUE

Unlike ancient methods for composing speeches, the ancient methods for interpreting texts never formed a coherent whole within the tradition of communication-as-technique—and the inconsistencies persist today.

Ancient etymologists were concerned with reconstructing earlier words that had become, as they saw it, ‘corrupted’. Although they recognised that Greek words had changed with time, they did not suspect that these changes might have been the result of systemic change rather than individual decay. This reflects their assumptions that language consists of no more than individual words, and all words were originally names for things. They overlooked all other aspects of language, such as usage, grammar, idiom, and context. Throughout Antiquity, the etymologists were divided on the question of whether a name was a natural property of the object or simply a convention of the society that used the word.

The ancient grammatical tradition was chiefly concerned with describing the parts of language on formal grounds, mainly to help students learn texts written hundreds of years before. The art of grammar was not primarily concerned with the language as it was actually spoken. In particular, the grammarians’ techniques for breaking down language into its supposed ‘elementary particles’—sentences, words, syllables and letters—were not much use for putting together elements to form speech, or explaining the ungrammatical ways in which words were really used. Grammar became a closed, self-referential, formal system.

The philosophers’ interest in language was chiefly limited to the parts of speech used in logic: words, logical operators and propositions. They neglected other types of sentences, or units larger than sentences, or reasons for using language other than logic. The function of words, as they saw it, was to stand for objects: words were signs and their function was signification.

Etymologists, grammarians and logicians assumed that words stood for things. Aristotle made a decisive and lasting modification claiming that words were not signs of things in the world but ideas in the mind. From this claim later developed the idea that words had a meaning, a mental aspect, which was the proper focus of linguistic analysis. However, Aristotle’s claim that the real nature of language was mental transformed the problem of language into two separate and harder problems: how people perceive (the relationship between the world and thoughts) and how they express (the relationship between words
and ideas). To this ‘mentalistic’ approach to interpretation, Augustine added the interpreter’s knowledge to the reading process.

The philosophers, grammarians and etymologists assumed that certainty was possible in the use of words, and that obscurities could be clarified. By contrast, the ancient lawyers claimed meaning was fundamentally uncertain. Although the ability to contest any word was a powerful weapon for the advocate—it allowed them to oppose any unfavourable document—it begged the question how it was possible to understand any text correctly.

In practice of course, the lawyer would tell the court what a document really meant, making the interpretation a product of their authority.

The orators had two fundamentally different interpretative methods. Under invention, a word was understood in terms of what the writer intended; under style, it was understood in terms of what it signified. While having two interpretative methods was an asset to lawyers—it allowed them to oppose any interpretation with an equally plausible one—it was inconsistent and made securing an interpretation logically impossible.

While ambiguity was an asset to the ancient orators, it had to be excluded from Christian exegesis. It was literally a matter of life and death that Christians believed in the right things, which meant that there must be no mistakes in the way that the Bible was read. To establish an unassailable basis for Christian belief, the Church relied on the Spirit of God dwelling within the Church to reveal the truth. This procedure established a foundation of certainty from which all other uncertainties could be resolved. Augustine and other early Church theologians then deployed the full range of grammatical, philosophical and forensic techniques in their reading, secure from the orators’ disturbing claims that all words were

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116 This problem was studied extensively by the **modistae** in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who worked out the operation of language within the framework of Aristotle’s theory of perception. From the **modistae** we have the distinction between the word (as a physical object or sound) and the sense of the word (what the mind intends or perceives). The modistic approach to language and grammar was abandoned at the end of the Middle Ages.

117 Quintilian for example wrote “there is not a single work that does not have a diversity of meanings [*significet*]” (*Institutio* 7:9:1)

118 The orators would have said that they only argued for probable interpretations, not absolute certainties, but this does not resolve the problem. For a person to know what a text *probably* means implies that it is possible to be certain what some text means. If a person says “This seems to be a horse”, this implies they must know what a horse *really* is in order to make the comparison. Similarly, if a speaker that says “This text probably means …”, this implies they know what some text *really* means—even if it is not the one in question. To make an assessment of what is probable involves making an assessment against what is certain. The orators however denied the possibility of knowing the meaning of any statement with certainty.
fundamentally uncertain and that all that can be known are probabilities. However, relying on God was a technique that could only be applied to Biblical interpretation. So long as the Bible was the only document that was important for the Christian community to understand with certainty this posed no theoretical problems, but when ancient legal, philosophical, rhetorical and scientific texts began to be recovered in the Middle Ages, new tools were required to analyse them. Ironically though, it was the Church—so desperate to secure certainty in the face of heresy—that developed the largest range of interpretative methods in the ancient world: literal, typological, allegorical, anagogical, ethical, spiritual, and the rest. In its delight in multiple readings, it raised obscurity to an artform.

All these conflicting beliefs persisted into the twentieth century. They are reflected in commonsense views of where meaning is located:

1. with the speaker’s intentions
2. with the speaker’s authority
3. in the speaker’s mind
4. with the structure of the words
5. with what words stand for
6. in the hearer’s mind.

Only in universities have any of these theories been seriously challenged by new schools—pragmatism, analytic philosophy, hermeneutics, phenomenalism, critical theory, transformational grammar, structuralism or post-structuralism. Even with these new approaches, the problem of how to listen to, read and understand words—and the nature of meaning itself—remains as unresolved now as it did in Antiquity.

Why the interpretative tradition should be so fragmented when the rhetorical tradition is so consistent is unclear. Possibly it is due to the influence of communication-as-transmission, which provided the framework within which the rules of rhetoric were organised. Ancient communication-as-transmission had little to say about listening—it was merely receiving or gathering. Lacking a coherent pattern upon which to organise theories, fragmentation would have been inevitable. The influence of communication-as-transmission on the organisation of communication techniques may explain why most ancient theories of interpretation associate meaning with the speaker (their authority or intentions) or words (in their etymology, grammar, or signification), but only occasionally with the third part of the transference, the listener or reader—the passive part of communication-as-transmission.

One final legacy to note: ancient interpretative methods were limited to the analysis of documents. Only documents were seen as ambiguous: speech was regarded as free of uncertainty and so could be employed to resolve uncertainties in the reading of texts. This belief had the effect of diverting attention away from the mistakes, misunderstandings,
revisions, hesitations and dynamics that are a normal part of speech. Lawyers, grammarians, linguists, and philosophers would focus their entire interpretative theory on texts until the twentieth century. Although speech was accorded veracity denied to texts, it was also neglected from interpretative methods—who needs a method for interpreting speech when it is perfectly obvious what speech means? All attention would be turned to the ‘problem’ posed by writing, making text the model for all other types of communication. The focus on texts in law, literature and religion probably helped establish the three-part model in the tradition of communication-as-transmission: speaker, message and audience.
THE THREE TRADITIONS IN EARLY MODERNITY

13. THE ORDER OF MODERN COMMUNITIES

14. THE FATE OF LOGIC AND RHETORIC

15. THE TWO VERSIONS OF MODERN TRANSMISSION

16. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
ABSTRACT  Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, the order of the medieval universe broke up. The feudal commune created by divine law and reciprocal oaths gave way to a society of individuals joined in a social contract for mutual benefit. This transformation took place in four steps. The first step was to re-establish a bridge between the spiritual and temporal worlds. This drew the divine nature into the natural world, leading to the second change, the belief that the world had value and worth in its own right. In particular, it gave secular political activity validity independent of the spiritual community of the Church. The third step was the breakdown of reciprocal relationships within feudalism: first as the kings overwhelmed the nobility and rose to absolute power, then later as the kings’ subjects in turn overthrew their kings to become citizens under the law, rejecting any natural social hierarchy. The final step was the appearance of the individual in the temporal world as well as in heaven—the fully autonomous person, independent of all authority and relationships with others. By the Modern Age, the individual was ascendant: society became no more than the collective will of its individual members. In these changes, communication—the process by which communities were ordered and perpetuated—was reduced to mere signalling between individuals.

Unlike Antiquity, when views of community were primarily philosophical, and the Middle Ages, when the arguments were theological, the location of most early Modern discussions of community were political and legal.

INTERNAL CONFLICTS WITHIN MEDIEVAL GOVERNMENT

The order of medieval society I described in Chapter 9 was one segment in the Great Chain that descended from God to the lowest speck of creation. Everything had a place in this order, and the loss or misplacement of a single link threatened the perfection of all. This
vision of community had two main sources: Neoplatonic Christianity and feudalism. Although both agreed that society was hierarchical, and every person had a place in which they were obliged to remain, they differed in key respects. In the early Middle Ages these discrepancies had limited importance, but they did not survive the penetrating analysis of the Scholastics in the High Middle Ages. Kings and popes exploited the increasingly refined legal and philosophical insights to support their own positions, and in the process brought the Christian and feudal traditions into conflict.

The Christian ‘descending’ government

From the Stoics and Platonists, early Christianity had inherited a division of the world into spirit (including both mind and soul) and body. In baptism, the Christian ‘died’ to the world of the body and was ‘reborn’ to the spirit. In the late Roman Empire, these two became sharply distinguished, even opposed: the spirit was exalted, the body denigrated. The ‘world of the body’ included not only the physical body, but all pleasures and social activities—what the evangelists called humanitas. In the mundane world, Christians were instructed to reject humanitas and emulate Christ, becoming fidelis: subordinating their wishes to the good of others, losing themselves in the ‘body of Christ’. But while the body was sublimated in the communal life of the Church, the spirit in heaven was entirely individual: God loved every soul. The medieval world perpetuated this early Christian identity: member of a community on earth and individual in heaven.

To this Christian identity was added a system of Christian government. Paul had commanded his followers, “obey your leaders and submit to them”:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

The demand for obedience and subjection was repeated throughout the New Testament, and by Church Fathers. The Christian (fidelis) was a subject of higher authorities, which

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1 For example Romans 6:19. The Biblical use of the term humanitas to cover ‘worldly’ and ‘material’ activities is rather different from its use by Roman authors, from whom the term ‘humanistic’ derives. Cicero used the term to refer to the educated and cultured: “We are all called men, but only those of us are humani who have been civilised by the studies proper to culture”. (De Oratore)

2 Hebrews 13:17

3 Romans 13:1–2

4 Titus 1:3, 1 Peter 2:13–14
the Middle Ages took to mean that people should be subjects of their kings—anointed by
God to rule—and obey God’s laws. Where early Christianity distinguished between
superior and inferior, between authorities and subjects, the Middle Ages evolved the idea of
a hierarchy.

Kings and the feudal system

The Germans that established kingdoms in Western Europe agreed with the Christians that
law was not made but divine in origin. But they understood it as embodied in tribal
custom, and hence belonging to the entire tribe—not solely kings or emperors. All action
under the law required the people’s consent.

The only ‘legal’ activity they recognised was judging peoples’ actions against the law: a task
undertaken by the whole community (or some competent representatives), because the
community possessed the law. Government was likewise by representation, consultation
and consent. Villages were governed by their elders; kings governed in council with their
nobles and bishops. Although the office of king was divine, the occupant was notionally
elected by the community and governed with the community’s consent. If the king was
overbearing or failed in their responsibilities, the tribe could depose them.

The order of society was not divine or a product of law: it was a pragmatic response to the
constant warfare and raiding of the early Middle Ages. Weaker members of the community
sought protection from a strong war-leader, and each pledged their support to the other. The
barons gained lands, labourers and promises of military service; serfs and freedmen gained
protection and patronage. This was a purely local arrangement, bound by oaths between
individuals. It had no significance for others higher or lower in the hierarchy: while a king
might command his barons as vassals, he could not command the baron’s vassals for they
had made no oaths to the king.

Early conflicts and the appearance of constitutional government

Almost all surviving political writings from the High Middle Ages concern the powers and
prerogatives of rulers, not ordinary people. Consequently, the conflict between the Christian

5 For example Augustine Sermo 361.3 and City of God 14:12
6 Kings could draw on Paul to support their claim of divine appointment: “But by the grace of
God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10)—that is, God makes all people and their places in
society. A person only became a king because God made them a king—not by their own
efforts.
and feudal systems of government were played out in conflicts between different notions of kings, emperors and popes. In the thirteenth century, the outcome was usually some constitutional and consultative government: a refinement of earlier feudal law. The process can be illustrated in the attempt to impose absolute monarchy in England by King John (reigned 1199–1219).

John appears to have relied on the notion current amongst some civil jurists (drawing on Roman law), that the king was appointed by God to rule over all other men and no law could run against him. The English were John’s subjects and obliged to obey him. John’s ability fell short of his ambition, however, and his handling of affairs was abysmal. He antagonised the Irish and lost all of England’s possessions in France. He quarrelled with the pope—a conflict that led to the closure of English churches, John’s excommunication, and the authorisation of a French invasion. John’s repeated and expensive efforts to recapture England’s lost territories led him to increase taxes on his barons. In 1213, a small number of nobles, aided by the clergy, issued an ultimatum demanding the restoration of feudal laws observed by John’s father, Henry II. John rejected their terms. The barons responded by seizing London. Civil war was only avoided when John feigned to agree to terms: the two camps met at Runnymede and signed the Great Charter (Magna Carta).

Most of the Great Charter’s terms were concerned with the immediate crisis. The powers of the Church were confirmed, as was its freedom to make its own appointments. Loopholes in feudal law—which John had exploited to raise taxes and punish opponents—were closed. But a few clauses—most of them standard laws observed throughout feudal Europe—became fundamental to later English ideas of justice and community. First, the king was placed under the law, not above it. Second, all other men were confirmed as free people under the law, not subjects of the king’s will. The king could not demand their submission or obedience without their consent and the support of the law, and all people were entitled to justice without hindrance. Finally, just as free men were ‘under the law’ and were ‘judged by their peers’ as in ancient Germanic tradition, so too was the king. Just as in older feudal traditions in which the king acted only with the consent of his nobles, the Great

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7 The barons may have felt they had a good basis for restoring the feudal law: John’s own succession had been disputed and not according to the rules of primogeniture. One chronicler describes John’s succession as due to an ‘election’ of the English barons—an old feudal tradition. If true, then the barons would have deduced that, since they made the king, then the king was not divinely appointed and could be legitimately challenged by the barons.

8 “No freemen shall be taken and imprisoned, or disseised or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go upon him nor send upon him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers and by the law of the land.” (Magna Carta §39)

9 “To no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay, right or justice.” (Magna Carta §40)
Charter provided for a body of twenty-five barons to oversee John’s actions. If the king acted outside the law, the Great Charter empowered the nobles and people to resist him. Although both parties abrogated its terms within months, the Great Charter was later revived to become Europe’s first written constitution.

The same pattern was repeated across Europe with varying degrees of thoroughness. As kings attempted to increase their power—mostly by appealing to the Christian form of divine government, supported by Roman imperial law—they came into conflict with their nobles. Since collectively the nobles were more powerful than the kings, they tended to win. Magna Carta was followed by the Hungarian Golden Bull (1222), the Golden Bull of Emperor Charles IV (1356) and many other statutes, by which the nobility limited the king’s powers, placed him under the law, and gave themselves power to curb him. The barons did not attempt to displace their kings: rather, they sought to uphold the ancient laws which the king (as they saw it) was breaking.

The limitations that the barons imposed were not limited to kings. In the later Middle Ages, the common people demanded precisely the same limitations be imposed upon their feudal lords. Charters established the basis for a limited democracy in the towns. For example, in 1312, the Charter of Cortenbergh brought the Duchy of Brabant into existence, granting privileges to nobility and townsfolk, and requiring the sixteen ‘Gentlemen of Cortenbergh’ to meet every three weeks for the administration of justice in the town. A similar process lead to the establishment of city and national parliaments in England and France in the later Middle Ages. The guilds and corporations that controlled the increasing economic growth in the thirteenth an fourteenth centuries were also granted charters and were organised on horizontal lines. Consultative and consensual government became the normal form of government until the fourteenth century—although the kings and nobles, being of higher ‘quality’, carried greater weight in decision-making. However, such charters

10 “...those five and twenty barons shall, together with the community of the whole realm, distress and distress us in all possible ways, namely, by seizing our castles, lands, possessions, and in any other way they can, until redress has been obtained as they deem fit...” (Magna Carta §61)

11 The reason that the expansion of royal power brought the nobles into conflict with the king was that, although the king had the power to tax his vassals (the barons) he did not usually have the power to tax his vassal’s vassals—the barons’ vassals were not usually bound by oaths of fealty to the king. Since the power of both kings and barons lay ultimately in their ability to command subordinates or extract taxes from them, any attempt by a king to increase his power involved bringing a baron’s vassals under royal control—which directly reduced the number of the baron’s vassals and the tithes he could command. Hence conflict was inevitable.

12 Ullman 1966, pp56–60
however effectively removed towns, guilds, universities and many other organisations from feudal vassalage, breaking the social hierarchy and replaced it with more ‘horizontal’ forms of government and social organisation between equals.

Horizontal, corporate forms of self-management did not replace oaths of fealty on which feudal hierarchies had been built. Nor did they displace the belief that God had ordained the place of each person in society. It did however emphasise the sanctity of law—for the right to consultation assumed equal knowledge of the law.

With society increasingly organised into self-governing communes, bound only loosely by feudal oaths, communication—as the means by which social order was maintained—consisted of [1] observing the law and [2] consulting peers when making decisions.

What eventually brought down this type of social organisation was a series of conflicts between the popes and kings about power and government in the temporal world.

THE MEDIEVAL CONSTITUTION AND THE SOVEREIGN STATE

The ascendancy of the popes

In theory, medieval Europe was a theocracy. In the fifth century, Pope Gelasius formalised its ‘administration’ in the joint rule of emperor and bishops as God’s vice-gerents. Although notionally the secular and sacred arms of government were independent, in practice, during the Middle Ages, they overlapped significantly. Bishops and abbots held feudal authority, swore oaths of fealty to secular kings, took part in the election of kings, and judged secular laws. Kings had a hand in the Church’s government, appointing bishops, calling Church Councils, and purging clerical abuse.

The kings and popes constantly jockeyed for power and control. For the most part, the popes advanced using legal arguments, gathering powers wherever they intervened in disputes.

Gelasian doctrine gave the Church authority over things spiritual and kings over things temporal. However, no one disputed that the Church required some property to achieve spiritual ends. In the High Middle Ages, Christian writers used Augustine to argue that all material things existed to achieve spiritual ends. Aquinas had used Aristotle to argue that lower things existed for the sake of the higher, and therefore lower things were subject to higher: in particular, temporal things were of a lower nature and therefore
subject to spiritual things. From this, the papacy concluded that all things—temporal as well as spiritual—were in its authority\textsuperscript{13}.

Amongst its many legal powers, the Church held authority over oaths of all kinds. The popes claimed the right to adjudicate treaties and agreements between rulers, and in particular they claimed the right to judge the fitness of all Imperial candidates and review any disputed elections—making the emperors directly dependent upon the Pope\textsuperscript{14}. This was amongst several extraordinary powers that the popes claimed over civil law. Another, which had been settled in Canon Law by the thirteenth century, was the pope's right to intervene where civil authorities had allowed a miscarriage of justice to occur. In principle, this made the papacy the final court of appeal in Europe and subordinated all secular law to the Church.

The gathering of temporal power into spiritual hands reached its high point with Pope Innocent III (reigned 1198–1216). The term Innocent used to describe his supreme authority as head of the Church was \textit{plenitudo potestatis}. The term was taken from Scholastic metaphysics, and referred to God's power in all things, including all law and government\textsuperscript{15}. Innocent was effectively claiming that, as God's representative on earth, the pope had the same legal powers as God. His \textit{plenitudo potestatis} was a unique power, unrelated to any feudal relationship between pope and kings, and in theory gave the pope absolute power to intervene in any matter. Although he did not use the term ‘sovereignty’, he was in effect claiming the power of a supreme ruler\textsuperscript{16}.

The denial of spiritual authority over the temporal world

The gathering of temporal power under the Church came to an end in the conflict between Philip the Fair of France (reigned 1285–1314) and Pope Boniface VIII (reigned 1294–1303). It began with Philip’s attempt to tax Church property within French lands—which Philip believed was legal because the bishops were his vassals and he was taxing French lands.

\textsuperscript{13} Sabine 1964, pp270–277

\textsuperscript{14} Claimed by Innocent III in the papal Bull \textit{Venerabilem} (1202)

\textsuperscript{15} Medieval physics taught that all causes—including the powers of king and popes—could be traced back through the chain of causes and effects to their ultimate source: God. God alone was a cause that had no antecedent: he was a self-motivating power, equivalent to Aristotle's ‘Unmoved Mover’. This ‘potency’ or ‘potential’ to set all things in motion, to be the cause of all things, was what was meant by the term \textit{plenitudo potestatis}.

\textsuperscript{16} The term ‘sovereign’ is derived from the Latin \textit{super} + \textit{regnum}, and meant initially simply ‘supreme ruling power’. Sovereignty is not a power that the popes claimed for some time after Boniface.
Boniface declared the tax illegal and forbade the clergy to pay without permission. In the end, Boniface was unable to enforce his will when the nobles and French clergy sided with their king. The Church’s legal power over possessions was severely constrained: it had the power to use possessions for spiritual purposes, but its claim to own the temporal world was lost.

The controversy created a huge literature on the sides. The king’s lawyers in particular undertook a searching analysis of what powers spiritual and temporal authorities had, providing the main weapons for rejecting Church authority and the independence of nations until the seventeenth century. Two arguments were important to the evolving ideas about community.

First, in 1302, Boniface issued the most complete statement of papal supremacy ever made, *Unam Sanctum*. It made two claims:

1. the pope is supreme in the Church, and that acceptance of this doctrine was necessary for salvation
2. both of the Gelasian swords—spiritual and temporal—belonged to the Church, although the kings wielded temporal power at the command and on the direction of the priesthood.

To support his claim, Boniface drew on the pseudo-Dionysius to argue the law of nature decreed that the lower was subject to the higher. Hence temporal authority was established and judged by spiritual authority, while spiritual authority is judged by God alone.

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17 “We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: ‘Behold, here are two swords’ [Luke 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: ‘Put up thy sword into thy scabbard’ [Matthew 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.” (*Unam Sanctum*)

18 “…according to the Blessed Dionysius, it is a law of the divinity that the lowest things reach the highest place by intermediaries. Then, according to the order of the universe, all things are not led back to order equally and immediately, but the lowest by the intermediary, and the inferior by the superior. Hence we must recognize the more clearly that spiritual power surpasses in dignity and in nobility any temporal power whatever, as spiritual things surpass the temporal. This we see very clearly also by the payment, benediction, and consecration of the tithes, but the acceptance of power itself and by the government even of things. For with truth as our witness, it belongs to spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgement if it has not been good. Thus is accomplished the prophecy of Jeremias…” *continued on next page*
Philip’s lawyers found arguments to deny Papal superiority¹⁹, but Philip made the argument academic by having Boniface captured, and subsequently installed a compliant Frenchman as Pope Clement V (1305). Implicit in Boniface’s defeat was a rejection of the pseudo-Dionysius. Although the consequences would not be felt until long after, the political aspects of Great Chain were shaken. Tying Church structure to the Great Chain, then failing to defend it, produced the first break in of the medieval order of nature.

The second argument which fundamentally affected ideas about community emerged amongst arguments rejecting Boniface’s claim to exercise authority over all material things. Philip’s lawyers argued that a kingdom was analogous to Aristotle’s polis: a self-sufficient political association, formed entirely by natural human instinct. Civil government was necessary for the good life, and therefore on ethical grounds civil government is a good, entirely independent of any sanctification from Christianity²⁰. Consequently, the Pope’s claim that spiritual authority was always higher than temporal authority was wrong: the temporal is good in some ways without the spiritual. The lawyers concluded that temporal things, used for spiritual purposes, were for the good of the community, and hence did not belong to the Church but the community as a whole. The king, as the ‘administrator’ of the kingdom, had a right to regulate all property for the good of the community. (What was not appreciated at the time was that danger that Aristotle held for the Church—although as I will discuss shortly, the consequences were worked out within 25 years of Boniface’s defeat.)

²⁰ Concerning the Church and the ecclesiastical power: ‘Behold to-day I have placed you over nations, and over kingdoms’ and the rest. Therefore, if the terrestrial power err, it will be judged by the spiritual power; but if a minor spiritual power err, it will be judged by a superior spiritual power; but if the highest power of all err, it can be judged only by God, and not by man, according to the testimony of the Apostle: ‘The spiritual man judges of all things and he himself is judged by no man’ [1 Corinthians 2:15]. This authority, however, (though it has been given to man and is exercised by man), is not human but rather divine, granted to Peter by a divine word and reaffirmed to him (Peter) and his successors by the One Whom Peter confessed, the Lord saying to Peter himself, ‘Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven’ etc., [Matthew 16:19]. Therefore whoever resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God [Romans 13:2], ...” (Unam sanctum)

¹⁹ Boniface’s claim that subjection to the Roman Pontiff is necessary for salvation was met by the argument that all bishops were equal in their spiritual duties, and therefore the only function of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was administrative—it was not instituted by God. The Lawyers concluded that no person was subject to the bishop of Rome.

²⁰ In this argument, the lawyers could draw some support from Augustine: in the City of God, he had said effectively that even societies that had not known God could still achieved measure of legitimacy if they respected justice and peace: civil government under such conditions would then be a good, even if an incomplete one. Examples of such societies, said Augustine, included the Greek cities, the Roman republic and the empires of Egypt and Babylon.
One final outcome of the quarrel between Philip and Boniface—although one not evident at the time—was the sovereignty of France. In declaring illegal Philip’s right to tax important vassals, Boniface had effectively claimed sovereignty, not only over Philip but all temporal rulers. His defeat implied that the French must posses authority at least equivalent to that claimed by the pope, which meant that they too must have sovereignty. This would not have been seen as royal sovereignty: the conflict had been won by the combined powers of France—king, nobility and clergy—and hence sovereignty would have been understood in a corporate sense (which would have been entirely consistent with medieval constitutional government).

**Authority in temporal government and the idea of the secular state**

At Philip’s instigation, Clement transferred the papacy from Rome to French-controlled Avignon, where it remained for another seventy-five years: a period referred to as the ‘Babylonian Captivity’. The Church was suborned to French national policy, resulting in a loss of both temporal and moral power: while many had disliked the Roman Church, the ‘Avignese Church’ was abominated by its enemies. The Captivity saw a rapid decline in the Church’s temporal power across Europe. But it did not blunt the popes’ attempts to be Europe’s final judge and adjudicator.

These powers were challenged following papal intervention in a disputed election for Holy Roman Emperor (1323)—an argument exacerbated by rivalry between France and Germany. The arguments for papal sovereignty were restated, but were again defeated. In 1338, the Imperial Electors declared that no papal approval was required, and in 1356, the Golden Bull established new electoral procedures that omitted all reference to the Pope. The papacy had no option but to concede defeat—along with its claims to sovereignty over the Empire.

The argument was important because it included demands to reform the clerical abuses that had proliferated under Avignon—a program that attracted many reforming Fransiscans. Following the spiritual teaching of St Francis, they asserted that the proper performance of the Church’s spiritual duties required the renunciation of property and the adoption of Christlike poverty. This view was declared heretical, splitting the Church within, and opening a vicious round of claims about clerical abuse—further weakening the Church’s moral authority. Driven to support the Empire, the Franciscans prepared arguments that totally rejected any role for the Church in temporal government. Amongst the most influential was the *Defensor Pacis* (1324) by Marsilio of Padua\(^\text{21}\).

\(^{21}\) This account of Marsilio’s political theory is based on Sabine 1964, pp290–304
Marsilio’s politics followed Aristotle closely, and he appears to have been trying to expand the *Politics* to include Christianity, of which Aristotle naturally knew nothing. Marsilio says that a state is a ‘living body’ composed of parts working together, and that its ‘health’ is peace and consists in all of its parts working in order and harmony. Unlike smaller social units, such as the family, the state contains all things necessary for the good life. For a Christian, the ‘good life’ means both good in this life (which was the only good Aristotle recognised) and good of the next life. Achieving each kind of good requires law: human law and divine law. Marsilio says that what distinguishes them are the types of penalties and rewards they may impose. The divine law is judged by God and he metes out punishments and rewards in the next life—but, says Marsilio, there are no divine consequences in this life. By contrast, human laws only have consequences in this life, but none in the next. Marsilio concluded that human laws cannot be derived from divine laws, because the two overlap nowhere, and thus are entirely independent (this is an extension of the argument used by Philip’s lawyers that there are temporal goods not dependent on spiritual goods). Thus whatever laws operate in this life are human laws, and exist for human good in this life—not the next.\(^{22}\)

Marsilio describes human society in Aristotelian terms, adjusted somewhat for medieval concepts of law (which he sees as in accordance with reason or innate justice). Society is a corporate body with powers to control its members in order to provide all of the goods of this life. For this purpose, it has laws, and the authority of those laws lies with the people. The people may delegate the enforcement of those laws to some executive. From a secular point of view, the state contains all that is necessary, physical and ethical, for the good life.

Marsilio recognised however that clerics posed a problem in this scheme, as the Church in his time was claiming authority over secular rulers, had grown enormously wealthy, and claimed that canon law exempted clergy from civil law. Marsilio used his theory of society to reform abuses, while securing Christianity. All people agreed on the need for priests to secure salvation. However, since the divine law carries no penalties in this life, then it followed that the clerics had no intrinsic power to coerce (unless that power had been delegated to clergy by the community). This meant that the Church had no powers as such in this world: in particular, there was no independent Canon Law, and all laws came from the human community. It also meant that, since one priest did not have a power to enforce

\(^{22}\) Marsilio’s sharp distinction between this world and next, and the laws relevant to each was typical of late medieval interpretations of Aristotle, based on the reading of his Arabic commentator, Avicenna. The most prominent theologian in this school was another of the leading Franciscan reformers, Marsilio’s colleague and philosopher William of Ockham (c.1285–c.1349). William is more widely known for his arguments rejecting the Thomistic assumption that reason could be reconciled with faith and used to illuminate religious issues. William argued that faith and reason—religion and science—belonged to separate domains, and that the methods of one could not be applied to the other.
the obedience of another on spiritual grounds, then the ecclesiastical hierarchy must be purely a human creation, and must exist only for administrative purposes—it was not divine. Consequently, the institutional Church was simply one corporation amongst many in society, and like all other groups was subject to civil law. Hence, bishops and even popes can be deposed from their offices by civil authorities. As a civic corporation, the Church’s property was no more than a kind of ‘grant’ made by the community to the Church so that it might carry out its spiritual functions. The only functions that Marsilio left the clergy, apart from rites necessary to salvation, was teaching about religious and ethical matters and admonishing wrong-doers. Effectively, what Marsilio was trying to do was save the Church from worldly bishops and popes, but transferring all of its functions to the next world—one that please the Fransiscans, but infuriated the Papacy. Marsilio was excommunicated.

Marsilio went far further than any other in working out the consequences of Aristotle’s *Politics*. Although his account did little immediate damage to the Church, it was influential in the century leading up to the Reformation, and did much to prepare the way for the secular state, supreme amongst all social institutions, independent of religion.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the idea had emerged of a secular society, independent of the Church, containing all things necessary for its member’s lives, and sovereign in itself. Order within the community was established by law—usually understood as either reason or innate justice—and enforced by kings. Kings however acted only with the consent of the people, usually in the form of some assembly, council or parliament.

The existence of the idea did not, of course, mean that it was accomplished fact. Both the Church and feudal nobility held enormous powers which attacked this notion: the nobility sought to increase their own powers against the kings, the result of which would be a society of local communities in loose alliance; the popes by contrast sought supreme power with which to unite Europe under their spiritual rule. In practice, it was the latter that prevented European nations becoming constitutional secular monarchies. The failure to impose such a government on the Church led to the fall of secular constitutionalism: threatened by the papacy, the kings suppressed their fractious nobility and assumed absolute power.

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23 When William of Ockham turned to questions of government, he argued that the Church had no business in temporal government. William concluded that the Church had no right to any material thing: like Christ, it should be poor, owning no thing (although permitted to use things for spiritual ends). It was to be concerned only with religious and moral instruction: like Marsilio, he concluded that the separation of spiritual Church and temporal kingdoms should be complete.
The rise of papal absolutism

After the Papacy was transferred to Avignon, it was reviled across Europe. Its fortunes sank to their lowest point when, in 1377, two men claimed the Papacy: Urban IV in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon. The Great Schism divided the Church until 1449, and the spectacle of two and sometimes three rival popes permanently degraded the Church’s authority. The conflict was exacerbated by the rising nationalism: the French, Spanish and Scots supported Clement; the English, Italians, Germans supported Urban.

The cost of maintaining two or three papal court was stupendous. The Curia’s overt concern became raising funds. Every possible church activity was levied. Although such abuses were hardly new, they were practiced on an unprecedented scale. The Church’s captivity to nationalistic ambitions, its rapacity and its obvious corruption produced a popular reaction culminated in great heretical movements. To heal both the Great Schism and resolve abuses, the Church attempted two general Councils: Constance (1414–1418) and Basel (1431–1449).

Although the Council of Constance ended the Schism and elected a single pope, reform proved more difficult. Amongst the reformers were Marsilio’s Franciscan spiritual heirs who sought to bring the popes under the control of a General Council of the Church, or failing that, effectively transform the College of Cardinals into a papal parliament.

Unlike the conflicts between kings and popes, the argument was between the theory of absolute monarchy (the plenitudo potestatis) and the constitutional government by which most of temporal Europe was ruled. Although all parties agreed on the need for unity within the Church, there was not a corresponding desire to change the nature of church

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24 The heretical movements were lead in England by Wycliffe (c.1329–1384) and in Bohemia by John Huss (c.1369–1415). Both sought to purge the Church of its numerous abuses, attacking the authority of prelates and popes, asserting the right to depose wicked priests, and defending the right of secular rulers to control the clergy. Here the Franciscan spirituality and its vows of poverty were enormously influential, and parallels were drawn with Marsilio’s formulation of the Church as a purely spiritual body concerned only with religion and moral instruction. At a popular level, the Hussians and Wycliffite Lollards preached a kind of primitive communism based on the Gospels, in which all people were equal, living in pious brotherhood, holding all possessions in common—a manifesto that won enormous support from the peasants and the poor. Naturally it attracted the Church’s hostility—although for a while both movements attracted the support of the nobility in its struggles with the Church.
government and it secured no popular support. When the Council of Basel became an arena for nationalistic politics, and the Council first opposed, then deposed, the pope—reviving fears of another Schism—reform was sacrificed to Church unity: the consiliar movement failed. In 1460, Pope Pius II issued a Bull denouncing any consiliar government in the Church, and implicitly endorsing the claims to absolute papal authority made by Innocent III and Boniface VII.

The success of royal absolutism

Within fifty years of the triumph of papal absolutism, medieval representative and consultative government was largely finished: the kings countered the pope by harnessed nationalistic sentiment and suppressing the nobility to claim absolute authority for themselves. Politically and legally, this outcome was inevitable: the kings could not accept renewed papal claims of supremacy without surrendering their sovereignty. They were particularly loath to submit given the degradation into which the Church had sunk in the previous century.

While the kings relied frankly on military power and their ability to harness nationalistic sentiment (an increasingly powerful force in European social thought), they also sought legitimacy for their claims in law. Beginning with the French, royal lawyers ransacked Roman law—still the most respected body of jurisprudence in Europe—eventually settling on the claim that “the king has the powers in the kingdom as the emperor does in the empire.”

This formulation meant that the Gelasian doctrine of two swords—which neither kings nor popes explicitly rejected—could be applied to the French kingdom, giving the French king equality with the pope. This allowed the king to legitimately claim a status and powers equivalent to the emperor and the popes: in particular, the kings claimed sovereignty within their own kingdoms corresponding to the papal *plenitudo potestatis*—the

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25 “An execrable abuse, unheard of in former ages, has grown up in our time. Some persons, imbued with the spirit of rebellion, not in order to obtain more equitable judgement but to escape the consequences of their misdeeds, presume to appeal to a future council from the Roman Pontiff, the vicar of Jesus Christ. ... Anyone not wholly ignorant of the laws can see how contrary this is to the sacred canons and how injurious to Christendom. ... Therefore ... we condemn such appeals and denounce them as erroneous and detestable ...” (*Excrabilis*, 1460)

26 The application of Roman law to medieval kingdoms had to be justified, because the French kingdom was not legally a descendant of the Roman Empire. Indeed none of Western Europe’s kingdoms were legal inheritors of Rome: only the Holy Roman Empire (and its legitimacy, established by the Donation of Constantine, was subsequently shown to be fraudulent).
absolute power over all things within their domain. However, the use of Roman law initiated new ideas about law and citizenship that were foreign to medieval institutions.

First, Roman jurists regarded law as a creation of the people and, even under the Empire they maintained the belief that the people had vested that power in the emperors. Roman law was not the custom of the people, known from time immemorial, as it was in medieval Europe. As a human creation, Roman law required enactment by some competent executive before it could have force: such as by a plebiscite or decree of the Senate, or later by the will of the Emperor. When the kings employed Roman law to gain absolute power, the lawyers also claimed the power of enactment for the king. This located the origin of all law in the person of the king, making him the well-spring of all social order and national identity. This principle also made the law a product of the king: recognition of a process that had been under way for centuries—the law was not solely given by God but was supplemented with laws made by people. (This would leave a lingering problem about whether there was law—such as moral law—apart from that which was made by the king, and if there was, how it had it power and whether people were obliged to obey it.)

Second, as the source of law, the king could hardly be subject of the law—contrasting with earlier medieval traditions which placed the king under the law. The king was thus absolutely free in the kingdom, and was unique in this status.

Third, the king’s right to command and the peoples’ duty to obey were emphasised. The early Middle Ages had always understood the office of king as divinely instituted. This notion was sharpened by applying the demands of submission in imperial Roman law along with a renewed emphasis on the Pauline doctrine of obedience to appointed authority. This transformed the free citizens of medieval Europe into subjects of the king’s will.

The types of prerogatives that the kings achieved were not substantially different from those King John had claimed three hundred years before—both relied on Christian obedience and Roman Law. But where John and other medieval rulers had been ‘bridled’ with law and

\[\text{27} \] The power of enactment was not a new concept in the later Middle Ages. In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas had argued that “in order that a law obtain a binding force which is proper to law, it must be applied to the men who have to be ruled by it. Such application is made by its being notified to them by promulgation.” (2(1), q.90, art.4 resp.). Aquinas does not imply however that laws are made by people: all law comes ultimately from God, and by ‘promulgation’, Aquinas means “that God instilled it into man’s mind so as to be known by him naturally” (2(1), q.90, art.4 rep.1). The theory of royal absolutism entailed that laws were not made by God (or, at least, not by God alone), but made by kings—another divine power that became transferred to the human world.
with representative, consensual governments, the Renaissance kings suppressed such institutions with the aid of a wholly new force in society: the middle class.

In the Middle Ages, poor transport and the dangers of travel meant that most trade was conducted locally, and was limited to fixed routes, ports and markets. Such trade was easily monopolised by trade guilds and city councils. In the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, transportation improved, particularly in the design of ships and navigation, making seaborne trade easier and more cost-effective. It also freed traders from fixed routes and markets. A new breed of ‘merchant adventurer’ appeared, able to travel to carry any commodity to any market that would yield a return. They sidestepped local monopolies, generating huge profits for themselves and their suppliers. Profits were reinvested in manufacturing and banking, further eroding the medieval corporations and winning support of the townspeople (the burghers or bourgeoisie). Early beneficiaries were regions with easy access to the sea: Italy, England, and the Low Countries.

Such trade depended on several factors: political stability and peace between countries; strong defensive capacity of trading regions; capacity for international monetary exchange; standardisation of goods and prices to ensure that orders could be met. All of these were beyond the capacity of local medieval trade institutions—the guilds and cooperatives—and favoured national governments. The need for stability also made the middle class the natural enemy of the nobility and the disorder that baronial rivalries created. Consequently, the wealthy new middle classes across Europe supported strong, centralised government, and found a natural ally in the kings. Middle class merchants and bankers financed the royal ascent. The middle class—which could not yet aspire to control parliament against the nobility—were content to see representative bodies subordinated by royal power, at least until their own interests were threatened.

With their new powers, the kings gathered all military forces under their centralised control, and used them to suppress the remaining feudal estates. In turn, royal governments adopted policies to promote and protect trade: encouraging manufacturing and mining, establishing tariffs, regulating employment, and standardising products. By 1500, the kings and the middle class had effective wrecked the institutions of representative government. (The exception was England, where the relatively brief century of Tudor absolutism allowed parliament and the jury system to survive. In France and Spain by contrast, such institutions were lost entirely: even citizen juries were replaced by royal magistrates.)

28 For example, in France, the entire national military was transferred to royal authority in 1439, and the king was permitted to raise taxes to support it. With this newly centralised force, the English were expelled and, by 1500, the French kings had won the submission of the last great feudatories—Burgundy, Brittany and Anjoun. (Sabine 1964, pp335)

29 From Sabine 1964, pp331–333
For ideas about communication, the rise of absolutism removed most community activities concerned with social order. In theory, all order derived from the person of the king, and the idea of ‘consent of the people’ was extinguished. People were required to obey their king’s dictates. Absolute monarchy had the effect of freezing society into a hierarchical form, with each person performing the functions required by the king. In practice of course, it was impossible for a single person to direct the affairs of anything so large as a nation state, but this did not affect the theory.

An important development however was the idea that the law is made by humans. Although under an absolute monarchy, this involved solely the king acting as he saw fit —and hence entailed no communication—when absolute monarchy collapsed, law-making remained a human activity and it passed into the hands of the people, and with it law-making became a principle part of communication-as-order.

NATURE AND THE REVIVAL OF ANCIENT VIRTUE

The Church’s continuing attempts to control temporal affairs and the national resistance it met marks a change from the attitude of early Christianity. In theory at least, the primitive Church held contempt for the ‘world of the flesh’: body, community, government, honours, wealth, and prestige. At best, Augustine conceded that secular government had a small measure of good if it approximated the peace and order of heaven, but the only true good was with God. The ideal community for the early Middle Ages was the monastery, with its vows of celibacy, poverty, abstention and silence (denying the body), its life of meditation (vita contemplativa, giving attention to God) and its iron discipline and obedience (proper to Pauline government). But the attempts of the Church not only to intervene but to rule the temporal world implied that the world had become a thing of value, not contempt.

Interest in the natural world began to reappear in the eleventh century. Cathedral schools began to teach the appreciation of literature in its own right—not just for technical instruction. New literary genres, featuring courtly love, replaced earlier epic forms. In the visual arts, naturalistic portraiture displaced iconography, and landscape painting appeared in the twelfth century. Realistic sculpture followed. Naturalism was well established when the works of Greek and Muslim scientists—Aristotle, Ptolemy, Galen, Strabo, Avicenna, Averroës—reappeared in Western Europe: indeed, the swiftness of their adoption reflects how far the medieval mind had become attuned to the natural world.

30 Southern 1967, pp209–244, Colish 1997, pp183–222
In the High Middle Ages, Scholastics applied Aristotelian physics and metaphysics to illuminate Christian mysteries, reconciling faith and reason. But in the process, they destroyed the great division in early Christianity: between spirit and flesh, Creator and creation, heaven and earth. All things were links in the single Great Chain of Being, ruled over by a single divine law from God. The boundary between heaven and earth dissolved into a gradual shading off of the divine into the material: angels and humans did not belong to fundamentally different categories of existence, but different levels in the one order. The effect was to draw the spiritual into the temporal world. Just as the spiritual world had value, so the Scholastics increasingly saw value in the natural world.

The quarrel between the popes and nations also drew the divine into the world. In Scholastic philosophy, God alone was sovereign: he was the single cause without antecedent: the Christian Unmoved Mover. In the twelfth century, the popes claimed this same power as God’s vice-gerent. The kings countered, claiming sovereignty for themselves as ‘executives’ of their nations, further distributing the divine power of sovereignty in the temporal world. As I will discuss below, within two hundred years, sovereignty had become a universal property of all human beings. Where the Middle Ages saw people primarily as units of society, the early Modern Age would see them as autonomous, self-directing, self-determining individuals.

The Scholastics provided the bridge between the spiritual and natural worlds, but they never doubted the priority of heaven over earth, and the dependence of the material on the immaterial. That the natural world held worth in its own right was first systematically argued by the Renaissance Humanists.

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31 See Ullman 1965, pp112–119, for the appearance of the ‘natural’ sciences and naturalism generally in Scholasticism.

The rise of the ‘natural person’ in Scholastic thought can be seen in Aquinas’ treatment of virtue. Early Christian theologians had joined the four ‘cardinal’ virtues of Hellenism (justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude) with the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity). They also argued that any virtuous act must have been prompted by one of the theological virtues. Aquinas rejected this conclusion, distinguishing between the natural person and the Christian. The four cardinal virtues could, he said, be called ‘political virtues’ because they are appropriate to the life of a political creature (Summa theologiae 2(i) q61 art5). He also says that human virtues are independent of Christian virtues— which implies that the four cardinal virtues are sufficient for life in society (although not enough for salvation, which requires the three theological virtues as well). The implication is that it is quite possible to live a moral life in society independent of any spiritual concerns.
The Humanists

Humanism appeared on the eve of the Black Death and the subsequent collapse of the High Middle Ages, and gained enormous momentum and moral purpose with Petrarch (1304–1374), scholar and the first poet laureate in a millennium. Petrarch looked back on the history of Europe since the fall of Rome, and saw in it a ‘dark’ age, in which literary excellence and public virtue had steadily declined. By contrast, he saw in Greece and Rome a golden age, lit with eloquence, creative genius, and a clear sense of moral virtue. Petrarch called on scholars to revitalise contemporary Europe through the recovery and study of ancient texts: a call taken up across Italy and then Europe.

The Humanists' focus on enthusiasm for all things classical was to be different from the Scholastics use of ancient texts. The *studia humanitas*—the study of the grammar, rhetoric, poetry, belle lettres, history, moral philosophy and biography—was to be conducted without Christian modification, entirely worthy on its own terms. The recovery of the past was not a furtherance of Scholasticism, using logic and science to illuminate Christian faith. Nor was the revival of classical poetry, letters, and oratory to be a mere imitation of classical life. The real task was to grasp the genius of Antiquity, and by understanding it, expand and deepen the human spirit, lighting up the ‘Dark Ages’ by undoing the effects of a thousand years of moral and inventive decline.

The Humanists greatly accelerated Europe’s recovery of its forgotten past. Within fifty years, almost all of the surviving works on Greek and Roman rhetoric had been recovered, along with hundreds of letters, speeches and books. Plato's complete dialogues—virtually unknown in the Middle Ages—were recovered and translated, and Platonism again became a direct influence in European thought. Greek scholarship was revived. The

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32 *The Republic* had been translated with a commentary by Averroes, and the *Timaeus* had survived in the West—providing important support for Christian philosophy concerning creation. A few dialogues had been returned to Europe after the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders, and *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* were translated to Latin by Leonardo Bruni between 1396 and 1400, along with several speeches by Demosthenes and Aeschines. Apart from a few isolated dialogues, they had been known to the West only via Neoplatonic Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Plotinus.

Once the Greek texts had returned from the East, they were quickly translated by the Florentine Academy. The establishment of the Florentine Academy—inspired by Plato's Academy—was a major milestone in the Humanist program. Established in 1462 under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, it collected, translated, published and commented works from Latin and Greek. It also contributed to debates on the place of rhetoric, eloquence and style with an influence far beyond its small size.

33 Greek scholars from Constantinople and their precious manuscripts had begun arriving in Italy in the fourteenth century, driven westward by the threat of Turkish invasion. When the...
study of grammar and rhetoric were re-established on classical models. Schools of ‘Humanities’ were slowly established in European universities.

At first the Humanists adopted a mode of life that merged Christian asceticism with the ideal of the Stoic sage gleaned from Cicero—aloof from society, public duties and worldly care, living in harmony with nature—which in practice was little different from the *vita contemplativa* of medieval monasteries. But by 1400, a vigorous ‘civic Humanism’ had emerged in Italy and other Italian city-states, based on a new reading of Cicero and other sources from Republican Rome. This rejected the ‘selfish’ withdrawal into scholarship and meditation, and instead praised the *vita activa*. The Humanistic ideal combined study of the *humanitas* and active participation in civic life, serving others in the state. The best life was not that of the sage but of the citizen, active in family life and public office.

In the internecine warfare between the Italian states in the fifteenth century, the Humanists enlisted Roman orators and historians such as Cicero, Caesar, Seneca, Livy, and Tacitus to encourage civic involvement and patriotism. Roman virtues—bravery, loyalty, steadfastness, patriotism, and independence—were held up as models of civic virtue. Combined with the Humanists’ new-found mastery of classical oratory, the Humanists were powerful propagandists for a new vision of human life. In works such as Mirandolla’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), the nobility of the human spirit would be taken up.

**Machiavelli**

The writer most explicitly brings naturalistic methods to the conflict between disintegrating medieval institutions and the rising ‘middle’ class and absolute monarchs was Niccolò Machiavelli (1468–1527). Both his great political works—*The Prince* (1513) and *Discourse*...
on the First Ten Books on Titus Livius (1513)—aim to present “things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined [by philosopher]”\textsuperscript{38}, and in doing so provide practical advice to rulers. He does not however present a systematic account of society and government: his immediate concern was to end the disastrous situation in Italy, and this coloured his outlook. Nonetheless many of his principles held good for all of Europe in his time, and Italy represented only an extreme situation. Although Machiavelli is remembered chiefly for recommending the use of force, subterfuge, murder and violence by governments, these were merely a means to an end: his ultimate goal was a strong and moral state something like an expanded Roman republic.\textsuperscript{39}

At the bottom of Machiavelli’s analysis was the assumption that human beings are constitutionally greedy and aggressive. However, while there was no limit to human desires, there was a definite limit to the possessions and power available\textsuperscript{40}. This meant that people were in competition for these things, and competition led to conflict. Machiavelli assumed that government was born out of the inability of individuals to secure themselves and their property from the depredations of others. Governments achieved security by threatening the use of force greater than any individual could muster\textsuperscript{41}. With this implicit threat,
governments established laws, and law in turn established virtue amongst citizens. Amongst virtuous citizens, the need for force within the state disappeared (although it remained necessary to secure and expand the state\textsuperscript{42}).

Machiavelli recognised that the conditions for good government had broken down in Italy in his time. He pointed to two sources. The first were Christian virtues, which he said made citizens and states weak, not strong.

Our religion places the supreme happiness in humility, lowliness, and a contempt for worldly objects ... These [Christian] principles seem to me to have made men feeble, and caused them to become an easy prey to evil-minded men, who can control them more securely, seeing the great body of men, for the sake of Paradise, are disposed to endure injuries than avenge them.\textsuperscript{43}

Influenced by Livy, Cicero and other Roman writers, Machiavelli said that what Italy needed was the traditional Roman virtues—what Italians referred to as virtù: “grandeur, courage, sobriety and strength”\textsuperscript{44}. (Here the Humanistic influence is emphatic in Machiavelli’s thought, displacing Christian morals with Roman virtues.)

The second source of Italy’s corruption that Machiavelli identified was the conflict between burghers and nobles\textsuperscript{45}. The rising commercial and mercantile interests, particularly in northern Italy, had wrecked the checks and balances of the medieval communes. But although the process of consolidation under royal control had begun as it had elsewhere in Europe, its full development was arrested Italy. The Papacy was particularly to blame: not

\textsuperscript{42} Machiavelli remarked that there was less corruption in France and Spain than Italy in his time, not because the people were any more virtuous, but because the law and the kings were strong. “...when goodness [amongst the people] does not exist, no good is to be hoped for, as can be hoped for in those provinces which, in these times, are seen to be corrupt, as is Italy above all others, even though France and Spain have their part of such corruption. And, if in those provinces, there are not seen as many disorders as arise in Italy every day, it derives not so much from the goodness of the people (which in good part is lacking) as from having a King who keeps them united, not only by his virtù, but by the institutions of those Kingdoms which are yet unspoiled.” (Discourses 1:55)

\textsuperscript{43} Discourses 2:2

\textsuperscript{44} Prince §19. Other characteristics of virtù that Machiavelli mentions elsewhere include “generosity, greatness of spirit, riches, and nobility” (Discourses 1:2), “reputation or rank” (Discourses 1:8). He advises the Prince to “appear a man of compassion, a man of good faith, a man of integrity, and a kind and a religious man” (Prince §18).

\textsuperscript{45} Prince §19
strong enough to unite the peninsula, it prevented any other state from doing so. Italy lay in the hands of the fractious nobles, the chief opponent of the rising bourgeoisie, and was prey to all of the disturbances contending nobles brought. By 1500, Italy was divided amongst five major states: the tyrannical Duchy of Milan, aristocratic Venice, the Kingdom of Naples, the Republic of Florence, and the Papal States. Divided politically, each was too weak to resist foreign invasions by France, Spain and Germany which ravaged Italy in the fifteenth century. The despots employed force and terror to secure their positions but, unlike the rest of Europe, Italy did not experience the security and prosperity that were the compensations for despotism.

In Italy, the law and all conventional morality was routinely violated by despots and ‘robber barons’. Human behaviour descended into what Machiavelli regarded as its naturally aggressive, selfish state. Cruelty and murder became commonplace; force and deception the keys to success; honesty and scruples simple naivety.

...the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation. The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous.

Without law, Machiavelli said that virtù disappeared and with it all possibility of good government. When society became corrupt, it could not reform itself and required the intervention of a lawmaker. In Machiavelli’s analysis, the re-establishment of security, law and virtù required extreme measures, which necessarily lay outside the normal lawful processes of the state. Since the force and faithlessness which characterised the Italian princes could only be overcome by still greater force and faithlessness, Machiavelli entrusted the restoration of civil society to the despot and sanctioned the use of all force, terror,

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46 Discourses 1:12
47 “Princes should not complain of any fault that is committed by the People who are under their authority, for such faults result either from their negligence or because they are stained by similar faults. And whoever discusses those people who in our time have been given to robberies and similar faults, will see that these arise entirely from those who govern them, who were of a similar nature.” (Discourses 3:29)
48 Discourses 1:20
49 Prince §15
50 Machiavelli insisted that the establishment and restoration of states could only be achieved by an individual. In this, he reflects the high value placed by Roman authors like Cicero and Livy on individual leaders. He had an exaggerated faith in what a single prince could achieve: building armies, establishing a new constitution, and single-handedly rebuilding virtù amongst citizens.
violence, cruelty, dishonesty and deception necessary to secure that goal. These measures are the source of Machiavelli’s evil reputation, but in reality, he saw it as no more than an emergency measure. He insisted that they be used only to ensure the security and strength of the state, only when legitimate means would be ineffective, and even then employed as secretly as possible. He tells rulers to prefer gentle rule wherever possible, use violence with moderation, and not to outrage the customs of the people unless necessary. Although Machiavelli’s advice appalled contemporaries, his methods were frankly employed by successful monarchs: Louis IX of France (reigned 1461–1483), Ferdinand of Spain (reigned 1479–1516), and Henry VIII of England (reigned 1509–1547).

Machiavelli saw despotism and immoral methods as a purely temporary measure, necessary to restore the state and its laws, but unable to secure them. Without civic virtù the people were ungovernable. Making the state permanent, he insisted, required the people to be admitted to their own government, and the government itself subject to the law in its ordinary activities. (Although Machiavelli’s inspiration was Roman, his usage shares much with medieval constitutionalism.) He has a higher opinion of the judgement and virtue of an uncorrupted people than any prince. He also preferred elections over hereditary as the means for selecting rulers.

For Machiavelli, communication—as the process by which states are established and maintained—is primarily an application of the law. Through it individual and civic virtù is established. Force is only a temporary measure: necessary and valid because normal communication in the state has failed.

Machiavelli’s advice is a mixture of ancient, medieval and modern. In many ways, he offers a shrewd portrait of the Modern state as the supreme institution in society: independent of church, nobility, corporations and guilds, but controlling all of them. Much else is characteristically medieval: particularly the way he gives priority to the state over the individual, subordinating all other questions to it—to the extent that individuals may be sacrificed for the good of the whole (always troublesome in communities that value the

51 In particular, Machiavelli warned rulers from taking the possessions and women of their subjects, for these more than anything else would lead to resistance and rebellion. (Prince §19)

52 “…a Republic cannot exist without Citizens of repute, nor govern itself well in any way.” (Discourses 3:28)

53 “…even if one [man] is adept at organizing, the thing organized [the state] will not endure long if its [administration] remains only on the shoulders of one individual, but it is good when it remains in the care of many, and thus there will be many to sustain it.” (Discourses 1:9, and see also 1:20)

54 “[One] thing merits to be noted and observed by any citizen who finds himself counseling his country; for where the entire safety of the country is to be decided, there ought not to exist
individual first). Notable also amongst Machiavelli’s assumptions is the Aristotelian claim that it is society and law that make individuals virtuous—not virtue that makes law possible (Machiavelli would doubtless have agreed with Aristotle’s claim that human beings are the worst of creatures when separated from law and justice\(^55\)). Finally, from Antiquity, he drew the belief that society was the greatest human good, and that law was made by people for their own benefit—medieval accounts of society as the product of sin, and law derived from God or nature are entirely put aside.

The most significant omission in Machiavelli’s account—and the one that made it both irrelevant and invited condemnation—was religion: at best, it was simply one of the tools to be used and manipulated by the despot. Although the Modern state would eventually become indifferent to religion, this was emphatically not the case for the two hundred years after *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Within five years of their publication, the Protestant Reformation detonated in Germany, instilling new life and purpose in churches, but also proving the greatest threat to Europe’s social stability since the Black Death.

### THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL

The Church Councils of 1419–1449 had ended the Great Schism but had been unable to reform the Church. Popes continued to interfere in Europe’s internal politics and, in seeking to extend the Church’s temporal power, imperilled its spiritual authority. The papacy remained as rapacious as it had been when supporting three papal courts—funding massive construction works (such as the new St Peter’s basilica in Rome). The Church also provoked tension between traditionalist and Humanist churchmen: the pre-Reformation Church was a major sponsor of the Humanist recovery of classical, pagan authorities and was one of its greatest beneficiaries. But the ostentatious display of pagan arts and thought, particularly in Rome and Italy, prompted deep misgivings in the poorer parts of Europe. The disparity between the poverty of the faithful, and the social and economic privileges of the priesthood; the simple faith of the laity and the sophisticated, secular preoccupations of

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\(^{55}\) Aristotle *Politics* §1.2, 1253a37
the clergy; the sceptical Hellenic impulse of Scholasticism, compared with the pious, morally sincere faith of the Gospels—these tensions could not be contained indefinitely.

The Reformation of the Church began in two independent attacks: in Switzerland under Zwingli (1485–1531) and in Germany under Luther (1483–1546). Although each was initially concerned with religious problems, their attacks quickly broadened to embrace the reform of the Church, relations between Church and states, and the nature of the Christian community. Although the reforms began in Switzerland, they soon fell under the influence of the Germans, and it is simplest to consider the latter’s development, particularly through its chief provocateur, Luther.

Luther’s concerns began and remained religious—he had little interest in intellectual, theological or moral problems. Luther was profoundly troubled by his sins—not for themselves or their moral consequences, but because they attracted God’s awesome wrath. Luther’s all-consuming desire was to escape from God’s damning judgement and to win salvation. With complete faith in Catholic teaching, Luther had joined a monastery to purge his sins—performing good works that the Church taught would earn him the necessary merit to attain salvation.

In Catholic doctrine, salvation depended on two things: faith and good works. Through faith in Christ, a person became a Christian, transforming them morally, giving them potential to redress their sins. With faith secure, a person could purge their sins, one by one, through good works and penances. The Church taught that no person was too sick to be healed because to all people God gave some measure of grace. Through hard work, the faithful could build up the merit necessary for salvation.

Despite strenuous efforts, Luther found no release as a monk. His sense of his sin was profound, matched only by his terror of not being able to meet God’s judgement. He could not convince himself that he could earn his salvation. Even if individual sins could be erased through penances or good works, he believed no penance could remove humanity’s essentially sinful nature. Luther found peace only when he abandoned any belief in his own merit and threw himself on God’s mercy. This sudden release from fear convinced him not only that he had potential for salvation, but that he was actually already saved.

56 “As wrath is a greater evil than the corruption of sin, so grace is a greater good than the perfect righteousness … For there is no one who would not prefer (if this could be) to be without perfect righteousness than without the grace of God.” (Luther, Against Latomus)

57 Luther found support for this transformation through faith in reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans. It said that man did not earn salvation, but rather God gave it as a gift to those that had faith. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, … For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’.” (Romans 1:16–17). God could

...continued on next page
This experience fundamentally changed the nature of salvation for Luther. It consisted in nothing more than winning God's favour, and the transformation of his wrath into love. Seen this way, a person was either entirely forgiven or not forgiven at all—they were certainly not saved one sin at a time. Indeed, sin and good works were irrelevant to salvation. Luther believed his own salvation was open to every human being, and that it was achievable in this life—not deferred until the next. All people needed was faith in God.

Faith depended upon knowledge of Christ. For Luther the only source of that was the ‘Word of God’, which might be had by reading the Bible or hearing the word preached. Through this came the revelation of God’s grace in the heart of the believer. The reformed Lutheran church was therefore to be based upon ‘faith alone, grace alone and scripture alone’, and swept clean of anything not sanctioned by the Bible.

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58 McGiffert 1961 p26. “Now it follows that these two, anger and grace, are so constituted when they are without us that they act as one whole, so that he who is under [God’s] anger is wholly under [his] anger, and he who is under [God’s] grace is wholly under [his] grace … For whom God receives into grace he receives wholly, and whom he favours he favours wholly. On the other hand, with whom he is angry he is wholly angry, for he does not divide his favour or grace as gifts are divided, nor does he love the head and hate the feet, or favour the soul and hate the body” (Luther, Against Latomus)

59 Luther insisted that the revelation upon which faith depended came from God, not the individual. In this, he was consistent with his belief that salvation owed nothing to human merit. In Scripture, God reveals himself in Christ as a loving, forgiving God. The person that is aware of their sins and their need for forgiveness, finds in this revelation the answer to their need, and their faith is inevitable. This revelation is however entirely God’s action: he discloses himself where he does for his own inscrutable reasons. (McGiffert 1961, p28)

60 Luther’s major inconsistency in purging all things not found in the Bible concerned the sacraments. Since faith depended on Scripture alone, sacraments were not effective in themselves of preaching the word, although they were vivid testament of events recounted in the gospels. Nonetheless, Luther retained baptism and the Lord’s Supper, while discarding the other five Catholic sacraments— penance, confirmation, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction—arguing that the former had been instituted by Christ whereas the remainder had no certain basis in Christian Scripture. (Luther justified the rejection of marriage from the Church on the grounds that it was not strictly a Christian observance, as it had been instituted by God in the Garden of Eden, and so applied to the Jews and Muslims, as well as Christians.) The retention of some sacraments brought him into conflict with Zwingli, who had rejected all of them—a conflict that permanently divided the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Luther’s case for retaining the baptism and the Lord’s Supper are made in The Babylonian captivity of the Church (1520)
An immediate consequence was that many of the Church’s functions became irrelevant. Since every person could have faith, they did not need priests to intercede for them before God. Nor did people need to earn their salvation by participating in Church-imposed activities—sacraments, penances, and good works—or submitting to the Church’s intellectual and moral dictates. Since all people could find favour with God, and there were no ‘degrees’ of salvation, it followed that priests were no more sacred than any other Christian. Since all people were equally saved and had equal access to God, the spiritual demarcation between clerics and laity disappeared. The office of priest existed only through the normal division of labour, and was not in the least sacred. Luther’s church was to be a ‘priesthood of all believers’. Since neither pope nor priestly hierarchy, nor Scholastic theology, nor most Church ritual found any justification in the New Testament, they were dispensed with. At a stroke, the Catholic Church, descended by direct succession from the apostles, supreme spiritual and cultural authority over Western Europe, suddenly found itself declared irrelevant to humanity’s spiritual well-being.

The fact that salvation was accessible in this life had major ramifications for Christian life. Luther denied the need for withdrawal into a monastery or nunnery in order to practice asceticism and rigorous self-discipline, for centuries considered the holiest form of life. Devotional exercises did not better fit a person for the life to come. Luther repeatedly stressed the sacredness of this life: the individual with faith is already saved, and his life on earth is as sacred as it will be in heaven. A Christian does best, Luther said, not by cutting themselves off from friends, family and daily work, but by taking part in the world with faith in God. He repeatedly praised ordinary occupations, labour, trade and business as worthy and potentially sacred activities.

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61 What stung Luther into rebellion was the corrupt use to which indulgences had been put. Since the Great Schism, they had been sold not only to remit penalties imposed by the Church, but also for those ordained by God in the hereafter—and for a few coins, even offered immediate release from Purgatory. Following his revelation, Luther realised that indulgences were useless: he himself had been saved while remaining a sinner. That the Church persisted in actions that Luther repudiated meant he had to oppose the Church. Luther’s initial quarrel with the Church over the indulgences was not that they were immoral, but that they were irrelevant to salvation, and the Church’s continued use of them was pernicious.

62 “…between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, or … spiritual and temporal persons, the only real difference is one of office and function and not of estate.” This was one of the three arguments Luther mounted in his *Open letter to the Christian nobility of the German nation concerning the reform of the Christian state* (1520).

63 Luther main argument for the ‘priesthood of all believers’ is made in *A treatise concerning Christian liberty* (1520), although he employed the concept widely in other publications.

64 McGiffert 1961, p33
It looks like a great thing when a monk renounces everything, goes into a cloister, lives a life of asceticism, fasts, watches, prays and the like. Works in abundance are there. But God’s command is lacking, and so they cannot be gloried in as if done for him. On the other hand it looks like a small thing when a maid cooks, and cleans, and does other housework. But because God’s command is there, even such a lowly employment must be praised as a service of God, far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns. 

Once saved, a Christian had nothing else to fear either in life or death. They were absolutely free. Although Luther did not use the term ‘sovereignty’, he repeatedly used other royal prerogatives to describe the saved: a Christian is “lord of all things” and “all things are subject to him”, a state which is “a lofty and eminent dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual empire”. This absolute freedom did not, for Luther, entail that Christians would no longer bother themselves with good works. Quite the contrary, once freed of the need to win salvation, they would be no longer distracted by their fears: they would do good because it is good, not out of selfish hope for personal salvation. Salvation, he

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Luther Works, vol 5, p100. Calvin followed Luther faithfully on this point, writing “It is an error that those who flee worldly affairs and engage in contemplation are leading an angelic life...We know that men were created to busy themselves with labour and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than each one attends to his calling and studies to live well for the common good.” 

In On Christian Liberty (1520), Luther writes: “… all we who believe on Christ are kings and priests in Christ, as it is said, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” [1 Peter 2:9].

“These two things stand thus. First, as regards kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, in spiritual power, he is completely lord of all things, so that nothing whatever can do him any hurt; yea, all things are subject to him, and are compelled to be subservient to his salvation. … Not that in the sense of corporeal power any one among Christians has been appointed to possess and rule all things, … That is the office of kings, princes, and men upon earth. … [Rather] this is a spiritual power, which rules in the midst of enemies, and is powerful in the midst of distresses. And this is nothing else than that strength is made perfect in my weakness, and that I can turn all things to the profit of my salvation … . This is a lofty and eminent dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual empire, in which there is nothing so good, nothing so bad, as not to work together for my good, if only I believe. And yet there is nothing of which I have need—for faith alone suffices for my salvation—unless that in it faith may exercise the power and empire of its liberty. This is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

“Nor are we only kings and the freest of all men, but also priests for ever, a dignity far higher than kingship, because by that priesthood we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to teach one another mutually the things which are of God.”
says, is the precondition of a Christian life—a complete reverse of the Catholic position, which regarded a Christian life as the precondition for salvation.

“Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works”; “Bad works do not make a bad man, but a bad man does bad works.” Thus it is always necessary that the ... person should be good before any good works can be done, and that good works should follow and proceed from a good person.67

The chief ‘good works’ that Luther sees Christians free to perform are to love God and to love one’s neighbours. Again, Luther reversed the Catholic emphasis on worshipping God, to focus on this life in the material world: Christians are made to live in society and work for the good of their neighbours.68

What is it to serve God and do his will? Nothing else than to show mercy to our neighbour. For it is our neighbour who needs our service, God in heaven needs it not.69

While other reformers would disagree with Luther about precisely the extent of human sinfulness and independent capacity for good, and the manner in which Scripture was to be interpreted, all would agree on his basic claims about salvation and Christian life:

[1] salvation is available to all people while in this life
[2] salvation is based on faith, grace and Scripture
[3] life in this world is as sacred as life in the next, and hence professions can be a service to God
[4] since all people are saved equally, the Church is a ‘priesthood of all believers’—removing the distinction between clerics and laypeople, and placing defence of spiritual matters firmly in secular hands
[5] the individual is sovereign in all spiritual matters
[6] all people will participate in society, doing good to their neighbours, out of gratitude to God and in obedience to his laws.

The Reformation completed the transfer of the sacred into the temporal world that had been under way for centuries and gave sovereignty to every person. But the Reformers did

67 Luther On Christian Liberty
68 “For man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body, in order to work on its account, but also for all men on earth; nay, he lives only for others, and not for himself.... in all his works he ought to entertain this view and look only to this object—that he may serve and be useful to others in all that he does; having nothing before his eyes but the necessities and the advantage of his neighbour”. Luther On Christian Liberty.
69 Luther, Works vol 6, p395, in McGiffert 1961, p35
not appreciate the problem of binding autonomous individuals into a community. They had nothing to fear and consequently could not be coerced; nor did they have anything substantial to gain by participating in society. Luther himself expected that people would follow Christ’s injunction to love their neighbours out of gratitude for their salvation; indeed, he thought their gratitude would be so great they would help others without thought of return. In believing that people would live together in Christian society, even when they had no obvious reason to, Luther and other Protestants appear to have assumed that communal life is the natural state of humanity.

The Protestants believed that the laws of their reformed society would be those of the Bible. This however implied denying many long-held views about order in European society. A major casualty was the idea of a ‘natural law’ as the basis for social order. The term appears nowhere in the Bible, and was primarily a Scholastic invention, based on Roman law and Greek philosophy—sources unacceptable to the Protestants. Not that the natural law was a particular interest for the Reformers: where the Scholastics had regarded nature as an expression of God’s reason, the Protestants were concerned with God’s will. This focussed attention on the laws in the Bible rather than the natural order revealed by reason and experiment. Where the Scholastics tended to see humanity and nature as part of a single continuum, the Protestants focussed more narrowly on humanity and God: nature was cut off and subordinate to both. When Protestants did refer to ‘natural law’, they usually meant the second half of the Ten Commandments.

Another casualty of the rejection of all post-apostolic sources was the pseudo-Dionysius. Although some reformers—including Luther—had been tempted to retain it on the basis of its believed antiquity, the Dionysian spiritual hierarchy could not be reconciled with the Protestant ‘priesthood of all believers’. Along with it went the Great Chain of Being that the Scholastics had erected on the Dionysian hierarchies. (The Great Chain did not disappear immediately—it had become a part of commonsense views about creation independent of theology and still dominated everyday beliefs about society two hundred years after Luther. In Appendix 9, I have summarised the main features as they were at the beginning of the seventeenth century).

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70 “…from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbour voluntarily, without taking any account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss. Its object is not to lay men under obligations, nor does it distinguish between friends and enemies, or look to gratitude or ingratitude, but most freely and willingly spends itself and its goods, whether it loses them through ingratitude, or gains goodwill.” (On Christian Liberty)

71 For example, the Calvinist writer Althusius and French political philosopher Jean Bodin (1530–1596). In Sabine 1964, p416–417.

72 Belief in a natural social hierarchy was the first part of the Great Chain to disintegrate, destroyed by the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century, and...continued on next page
Effectively, the early Reformers did not have a coherent account of community—and hence of communication. What they left was the problem of binding autonomous individuals into a unified society.

The Protestant influence in European politics

While initially a few writers—such as Erasmus (c.1466–1536)—preached religious toleration, this option disappeared with the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which launched the catholic Counter-Reformation. Both catholic and protestant Churches found themselves powerless to enforce their doctrines themselves, and so turned to secular rulers to enforce their teachings. As the dispute deepened, secular rulers in turn recognised that the restoration of public order depended on the resolution of religious disputes. So, effectively, both church and state agreed that the problem of determining Christian doctrine lay in the hands of secular rulers—completing the transfer of authority from God to the State. In practice, this contributed to the consolidation of royal power that had already been under way for a century.

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In practice, success went to the group that secured support from powerful rulers. In Germany and England, where the rulers supported the reformers, state churches appeared (Lutherans and Anglicans). In France and Spain, where the reformers aligned themselves with the minor nobility, free cities or provinces, royal power carried the day, and consequently those countries remained Catholic. But whichever sect lost, the kings won. Supporting the king became an article of all national churches, and defence of alternative religious principles was constituted to be an attack on the king. However, although church allied with royalty, neither could expunge dissidents. Across Europe there were large communities of religious minorities, too large to suppress without endangering public order. It would take over a century and the slaughter of the Thirty Years War (1614–1645) to demonstrate the impossibility of imposing a single religion within a country by force, and the realisation that common political loyalty was possible for people of different religious beliefs. In the meantime, religious differences were a potential source of civic disorder, and hence a political issue.

The churches took two opposing policies, depending on whether they were aligned with or opposed to royal authority. Where religious groups had royal support—Catholics in France, Italy and Spain, Anglicans in England, Lutherans in Germany—their churches preached passive obedience to royal authority, building on the Pauline doctrine of obedience and the theories of papal and royal absolutism established in the previous century. Where religious minorities opposed royal power—particularly the Catholics in England, Huguenots in France and the Netherlands, and Calvinists in Scotland—a theory of resistance evolved.

All religions agreed that they had an obligation to see the true teaching enforced, but the dissenters took the view that, where the king was a heretic, then the people were obliged to correct or, if necessary, repress him. God did not require obedience to a heretic that imperilled the souls of his subjects. The question of tyrannicide—although long a part of theoretical discussions amongst jurists—became a practical problem. Implicit in the right of resistance was the assumption that the people were not in fact subjects of the king.

1524. This tended to align the Reformers with the middle classes, and both in support of royal power.

75 Sabine 1960, pp354–355

76 Although circumstances forced Luther to sacrifice private conscience in religious matters to secular authority, he realised early in his reforming career the futility of force in religious disputes. "Heresy can never be kept off by force. For that another tool is needed, and it is another quarrel and conflict than that of the sword. God’s word must contend here. If that avail nothing, temporal power will never settle the matter, though it fill the world with blood." (Luther On Secular Authority, 1523)

77 The question of whether it was legal to kill a tyrant was one inherited from Roman law. It first appeared in medieval arguments in John of Salisbury’s Poli Craticus (1159), drawing chiefly on Cicero and Seneca and the Roman lawyers.
bound to obey his will whether just or not, but rather, as in the Middle Ages, that people consented to be governed by a king for their own good government, and were obliged to obey only so long as the king ruled well and justly. The problem with applying the medieval theory of consent was that the dissenters could not claim to be ‘the community’—they were only ever a minority. In dissenting, they placed their individual consciences above the will of the community. Dissenting leaders, realised that, if applied consistently, giving conscience priority over community could end only in anarchy. Although they tried to limit the right of resistance to certain church and civic leaders, the general conclusion was eventually drawn that every person had a right to resist a ruler they believed was heretical or else profoundly unjust. Since legally the only person that could oppose a divinely appointed sovereign was another sovereign, even posing the question of opposition was to imply that every dissenter was themselves a sovereign power—not only in spiritual matters but political matters as well, indeed, on any matter of conscience. (This was an inevitable conclusion in a time when religious questions automatically became political questions—autonomy in one implied autonomy in the other.)

Faced with religious dissenters claiming that political power belonged to the community, and that the community that installed a ruler could legitimately removed him, royal parties and state churches countered with the claim that the king’s power came from God, not the community, and obedience was due to the king as to God—resistance was not merely rebellion but sacrilege. Never a precise doctrine, it combined the ancient belief in the divine origin of law and authority with the Pauline doctrine of obedience, and statements like Luther’s obligation to passive obedience.

The collision between the divine right of kings and the right of dissent brought into sharp relief two concepts of community. Although the divine right of kings was initially intended to prevent religious war, it became the supreme statement of absolute royal power: the law was entirely ‘in the heart of the king’ and subjects were bound to obey as a religious duty: a degree of majesty that not even the medieval popes had claimed. All social order, law, security, and national identity were located exclusively with the king. Opposing this view, the right to religious dissent was harnessed to older medieval notions of the right of consent and representation—and by loose association, the freedom of all people and their subjection only to the law. Framed this way, arguments originally concerned only with religious matters became employed by supporters of parliamentary and representative forms of government. The argument was eventually lost by the kings: first in the English Civil War and the beheading of Charles I (1649), then the French Revolution and the guillotining of

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78 For example, the Calvinist leader in Scotland, John Knox (c.1513–1572), drew the analogy with Roman law, where the people as a whole were obliged to obey the dictates of Senate and Emperor, but certain minor officials, the tribunes, did have the power to oppose for the good of the people.
Louis XVI (1793), and later the liberalisation of German, Austrian and Russian autocracies in the mid-nineteenth century. Where royal power survived at all, it was severely limited by constitutions which placed ultimate power in the hands of the people.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CRISIS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The century 1550–1650 was one of profound intellectual and social dislocation, and its resolution marks the beginning of the Modern Age proper. A century of religious warfare—beginning with the three Huguenot wars from 1562 and ending with the appalling slaughter of the Thirty Years War—eventually demonstrated the impossibility of reconciling religious differences by force. But it also destroyed any possibility of grounding social order on divine principles. From the mid-seventeenth century, theories of law, government and society were based on secular consideration. The conflict was not exclusively religious and political however, for the same period saw extraordinary intellectual turbulence, and the intellectual methods and resources that emerged became distinctive parts of Modern theories of human identity and social order.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Humanist program reached its culmination: the bulk of ancient texts had been recovered, edited and published. But the recovery of over a thousand years worth of ancient philosophy, ethics, rhetoric, history and legal theory within a century—initially with only limited understanding of the debates between various schools and sects, the evolution of philosophical arguments, and developments in ancient politics—posed massive challenges to European thought. Scientific, moral, theological and political thought was both expanded and confused as, along with the original versions of Plato and Aristotle, the works of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers became available. Rhetoric was in demand: the full rhetorical works of Cicero and Quintilian were amongst the first non-religious books to be published with the newly invented printing press. Also returned was the esoteric Hermetic corpus: a collection of late ancient and Muslim works dating from the third century AD on astrology, alchemy, divination, Gnosticism, and sundry occult arts, all destined to have a major impact on the development of both magic and science in Renaissance Europe.

During the late Renaissance, the ancient authorities upon which Scholastic philosophy depended had come increasingly under challenge. The great astronomer Ptolemy was first found wanting as a geographer, following the discovery of the Americas (1492), the circumnavigation of Africa, and the sea route to India (1497). So his reputation was already weakened when his astronomy began to be challenged from 1512 by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Newton. In medicine, Galen’s authority was steadily eroded by a century of anatomists from Vesalius to Harvey. Aristotle’s place within Christian theology—disputed even in Aquinas’ time, and severely attacked by William of Ockham and Duns Scotus—was profoundly challenged by the recovery of the original Greek texts,
unmodified by their Muslim translators: intense scrutiny showed that many medieval disputes had been based not on Aristotle’s words but his interpreters’.

There were broadly three responses amongst Europe’s educated to the influx of ancient texts. The earliest was a determined effort to synthesise the new discoveries, just as the Scholastics had attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy with Christian revelation. The second response to the increasingly bewildering array of ancient material was scepticism—a response that became particularly pervasive in France after 1562, with the republication of Sextus Empiricus’ classic defence of ancient Skepticism, which taught that happiness was to be found through the suspension of judgement. This was immensely appealing to late Renaissance thinkers, beset on all sides by incompatible claims to religious, philosophical, scientific and social truth. Amongst the most influential of Renaissance sceptics was Montaigne (1533–1592). The third response—one that reflected on the increasing difficulty of synthesis and the uncertainties provoked by scepticism—was to

79 Amongst the most spectacular of these attempts was the one made by the astronomer, Neoplatonist and mystic Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). His response to the diversity of ancient learning was to assert that all philosophies and religions should live together in tolerance and mutual understanding. He also taught that the Bible should be read for its moral teachings, not its claims about nature—particularly not for its astronomical claims, which Bruno rejected. Contrary to the medieval Ptolemaic cosmology, Bruno’s astronomy combined Neoplatonic, atomistic and Copernican theory and claimed that the universe was infinite, centreless and motivated by an all-pervasive God—a claim that raised lowly nature to the status of the divine. He also speculated that there were infinitely many other worlds, populated by other races. This was a particularly unsettling claim for the Catholic Church, for it raised the question of whether Christ had been incarnated on other planets, and whether his appearance on earth may not have been unique. If Christ had not been saved on other planets, then it followed that God damned the bulk of creation. But on the other hand, if Jesus had lived on other planets, then the doctrine of the Trinity must be incorrect. In either case the Church’s claims to universality and infallibility must be wrong—as Bruno pointed out in his extensive lecture tours. The Inquisition, seized with the need to suppress Protestant heresies, was hardly sympathetic to Bruno’s message of tolerance of religion and philosophical views. After a trial of seven years, Bruno and his books were burned in 1600. The fate of Bruno demonstrated the increasing impracticality of synthesis in late sixteenth century Europe, polarised between Protestant and Catholic camps, both of which were unwilling to tolerate the other or accommodate dissenting views.

80 Sextus (fl. 200 AD) had written to refute the claims of rival philosophical schools in the second century AD. All of their claims to the truth, he said, depended upon criteria that themselves depended upon other criteria, and so on ad infinitum. There was simply no basis for establishing the truth or falsehood of any claim. A person that attempted to seek the truth was destined for frustration and unhappiness. Peace of mind, said Sextus, could only be achieved through the suspension of judgement and the recognition that no belief was necessarily valid. Sextus’s Outline is a method for freeing the mind of dogmatism and preparing it to face life with equanimity.
dispense with the apparent confusions of the past, and instead construct philosophy anew on
firm foundations. Although Antiquity would continue to provide moral and literary
inspiration to Modern Europe, its authority in philosophy and science would decline in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In its place, the intellectuals of early Modern
Europe—the newly emerged scientists in particular—would increasingly rely on their own
reasoning, discoveries and speculative systems. Chief prophet of the new age was
England’s Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon (1561–1626).

The processes of synthesis, scepticism and final rejection in the intellectual response to
ancient texts was symptomatic of the larger political and religious mood of Europe between

81 The willingness of the new sciences to put aside authorities and speculative philosophy and
instead rely on experiment and experience as the basis of truth is summarised in the motto of
the Royal Society of London, established in 1660: Nullius in Verba. An allusion to Horace
(Epistle 1:13–15), it means loosely ‘by experience and not on the say-so of authorities’. The full
quotation runs Ac ne forte roges quo me duce, quo lare tuter, nullius addictus iurare in
verba magistri, quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes. “And lest by chance you ask
by which leader, by which household god [by which school of thought] I am sheltered, I,
bound to swear according to the dictates/prescribed formula of no master, am carried off as
a guest, whithersoever the storm takes me.”

82 Bacon was sceptical of all received doctrines, whether in science or religion. He criticised
previous philosophers for lacking an unbiased, empirical basis for their claims. He was
particularly scathing of Aristotle and the Scholastics, likening their philosophy based on
pure reason to a flimsy spider’s web spun out of the body of the spider itself. They depended
too much on logical deduction, and their premises might be entirely spurious—abstract
definitions and verbal distinctions with no necessary counterpart in the real world. He
rejected the Aristotelian assumption that nature moves toward some final goal, along with
the Platonic doctrine of Forms that infused medieval Christianity. He also rejected the
Scholastic doctrine that God permeated his creation, moving it, and giving it an intrinsic
order and structure. A true philosophy, he insisted, had to be based on observations of the
real world, not abstract definitions. Careful experiments would be coupled with cautious
inductive reasoning to produce general conclusions about the operation of nature. A
crucial first step however was for the scientist to purge their mind of distorting
assumptions in order to see the world as it really is. The scope of this new material, empirical
philosophy was to be universal. In The Advancement of Learning (1605), Bacon reorganised
the entire educational system; in the Novum Organon (1620) he gave himself the role of the
New Aristotle, replacing the old Organon (Aristotle’s tools of logic and analysis); in The
New Atlantis, he described a utopian society whose happiness and prosperity derived from its
mastery of the sciences and the construction of machines. While Bacon’s program contained
serious flaws—he underestimated the place of mathematics in science along with the role
of theory in the generation of observations—he was nonetheless a forceful spokesman for
the new scientific world, purged of the failure and obscurities of the past. Less than forty
years after his death, the Royal Society of London was established, modelled directly on his
House of Solomon; the French Académie des Sciences was established six years later on the
same principles.
the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. The Catholic Church’s initial response to
the Protestant reformers—once they had grasped the scale of the revolt—was to engage
with the Protestants. The papacy under Paul III (1534–1549) admitted many abuses and
began internal reforms. It also engaged with the Protestants, finding some agreement on
doctrinal issues. A sense of spiritual mission was restored to the Papacy, and the worldly
ambitions of earlier popes rejected. But during the 1540s, the two sides hardened in their
mutual opposition. Catholic princes began to win local wars against Protestant uprisings,
and in 1550 the policy of allowing the publication of Protestant materials in Catholic lands
was reversed. (It had been believed that reading books by apostates would actually prevent
further defections and heresy). Under Paul IV (1555–1559) the Roman Inquisition was
given ruthless powers. The Council of Trent (1545–63) launched a vigorous Catholic
‘Counter-reformation’, including a massive educational program under the Jesuits
combining both humanistic and scholastic training. In 1557, the first Index of Forbidden
Books was published and Protestant texts were burned publicly. With papal support,
Catholic Spain launched an armada against Protestant England in 1588, and fought an
unsuccessful war to hold the Calvinist Netherlands.

But by 1600, Protestant churches were established in England and Scandinavia, many
parts of Germany, Switzerland and northern France, with the newly-freed Netherlands
adopter a policy of religious toleration. Initially, there existed sufficient toleration of the
kind espoused by Erasmus and Montaigne to prevent universal conflagration. But by the
second decade of the seventeenth century, key voices for stability were dead—particularly
Elizabeth I of England (d.1603) and Henry IV of France (d.1610). Europe slid into
anarchy. Thirty years of war, several Church Councils, and even the deaths of a third of the
German population were not sufficient to resolve the differences between the Protestant
reformers and the Catholic Church. As Europe’s intellectuals realised, the Peace of
Westphalia in 1648 was no more than a stalemate, with the crisis still unresolved (with the
unsettling spectacle of one of Europe’s chief powers, England, without its divinely appointed
monarch and the people in the hands of republicans). What was needed was certainty. And
certainty became the chief goal of Europe’s intelligentsia for the second half of the
seventeenth century—in politics, theology, philosophy and science.

Descartes

The philosopher that, more than any other, addressed the crisis of certainty at the end of the
Renaissance and entrenched individualism in Western thought was René Descartes
(1596–1650). His epoch-making solution to contemporary scepticism, dissension and
doubt radically redirected European thought, both in scope and method83.

83 This section is based on the works in Descartes Philosophical Writings 1954.
Descartes felt acutely the scepticism and uncertainties of his time. As a young man, he had been promised “clear and assured knowledge in all that in useful in life”\(^8^4\), but despite the best education available, he had ended up doubtful. He came to suspect almost all of what he had been taught: Greek, Latin, ancient literature, poetry, history, rhetoric, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and medicine—all were open to dispute and contradiction. None could provide what he had been promised: clear and certain knowledge. Almost no part of his education—the Jesuit mix of scholastic and humanist training—was free from criticism. The only subject of his schooling to escape was mathematics, “because of the certainty and self-evidence of its reasonings”.

Mathematics began on with clear, self-evident first principles, and from them drew increasingly complex truths by using strictly deductive methods. If the starting points were true and the reasoning sound, then the conclusions were also certainly true. Descartes took the methods of arithmetic and geometry as the basis of his philosophical method. But just as mathematics had to begin with axioms whose truth was clear and self-evident, so Descartes had to find some unassailable fact, which presented itself clearly and distinctly before his mind, upon which to establish his philosophy.

Descartes’ search for truth began with a rejection of all that appeared false or open to doubt. Influenced by Montaigne’s scepticism, he began by doubting everything. First he doubted all that he had been taught—ancient authors, Church Doctors, and the opinions of the past. Then he doubted the evidence of his senses as potentially mistaken or hallucinated, or else the work of some malicious demon. Then he doubted imagination and memory\(^8^5\). All he found himself left with was that he could not doubt the fact that he doubted: that much at least was certain. From this one unassailable fact he deduced that the thinking “I” that doubts must exist—\textit{cogito ergo sum}.

\(^8^4\) Descartes \textit{Discourse on method}, 1976, p9

\(^8^5\) Descartes appears to be using, knowingly or not, the basic medieval pattern for the mind, which operated at three levels. In Scholastic philosophy, the three levels of the mind were linked with the three levels of the soul (which derived ultimately from Plato): \textit{appetitive} which was concerned with the body and sense, \textit{emotional} which was located in the heart along with memory and imagination, and finally \textit{intellectual} which was associated with the head. At the lowest level were the five senses. In the middle was imagination, memory, and the common sense (which organised the data provided by the five senses). The middle order provided the materials for the highest order: reason, which was divided into understanding and the will. Descartes rejects the bottom two levels entirely as the basis for certain knowledge, leaving only the topmost level, reason. In prizing reason and the intellectual parts of the soul only, Cartesian philosophy and the rationalist tradition that developed from it implicitly rejected emotional, sexual, sensual, spiritual, and aesthetic parts of the classical and medieval soul.
The *cogito* is the absolutely certain fact upon which Descartes built the rest of his philosophy, using scepticism and the methods of mathematical reasoning. For instance, the fact that the self can doubt means that it is not perfect—it has limitations. However, Descartes notes that there is nothing in nature that appears absolutely higher or entirely complete than himself; some things are better than others in some respects, but none is better in *all* respects, much less perfect. However, the idea of perfection could not have come from nowhere. Asserting that “a cause must possess as much reality as the effect,” Descartes concluded that the idea of perfection must come from some perfect source—which by any other name is God.

For Descartes, the existence of God secured the existence of the objective world and the possibility of certain, objective knowledge. God, being perfect, would not deceive human beings in either their observations or in their use of reason. The fact that human beings perceive things other than themselves implies that things apart from themselves must exist. Therefore, says Descartes, there is a world apart from the mind, and people can be certain that everything they see is not a hallucination.

Descartes recognises that there is a fundamental division in the universe as he has described it, because the mind’s experience of itself is entirely unlike its experience of the physical world. On one side of the divide is the mind, *res cogitans*, thinking substance, subject of its own awareness, experienced internally, and knowing no spatial location or physical boundaries. Its nature is primarily rational and intellectual. On the other side of the divide is *res extensa*, extended substance, things which have physical dimensions and boundaries, known to the mind only as objects outside itself—which for Descartes included all matter, the human body, and the physical universe.

Everything in the outer world lacks soul, self-awareness or any of the rational characteristics that make people human. Everything in the universe, apart from that with mind, is made up of lifeless, purposeless, inert matter, which operates only on the laws of mechanics. The universe is imbued with no ‘vital’ principle of any kind, and so must lack purpose. Descartes also rejected key claims of Aristotle’s metaphysics—everything moves towards some final goal, perfecting its form in the process—upon which the Scholastic view of the universe was based. Such a claim, Descartes said, is not only wrong, but also impious, for its attributes souls to objects where God had not placed them.

The idea of a purely material universe, operating under entirely mechanical laws was one increasingly popular amongst the ‘new philosophers’ of the seventeenth century—although

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86 Descartes *Third meditation*, p81.
87 Descartes *Sixth meditation*, p116–117
88 Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, O-54, p193
its roots lie in the increasing sophistication of mechanical inventions in the previous century. Mechanical thought is implicit in Galileo, and becomes explicit in the work of many seventeenth-century philosophers such as Bacon, Gassendi and Hobbes. In this view, the workings of nature could be understood in the same way as a machine: reduced to its constituent wheels and levers, and the interaction between the parts and their movements analysed. Within Descartes’ lifetime, the belief in an atomistic, non-vital universe ruled by mechanistic laws would be the standard scientific view of nature—a belief permanently cemented into scientific thought by Newton thirty years later.

Descartes wrote nothing on communication, but his philosophy was pivotal in the directions taken in all three traditions of communication in the Modern Age. In the case of communication-as-order, by making the universe an entirely soulless machine running on predetermined mathematical laws, Descartes helped strip creation of religious and spiritual qualities—accelerating a process that had been under way for a century. He did particularly spectacular damage to the basic assumptions of the Great Chain of Being, and hence in any belief in the essential unity and order of the cosmos. Since the connection between the physical and mental universe was at best obscure—and certainly not mechanical—conclusions about human life could no longer be drawn from nature. The ancient correspondence between human body and cosmos was fatally wounded. Descartes significantly widened the gap between the human and material worlds.

Descartes also cemented individualism in Modern thought. Where Luther demanded the absolute priority of individual conscience in religion, and Locke would later assert the natural rights of the individual in politics, Descartes established the individual self-aware mind as the universal arbiter of truth. After the seventeenth century, beliefs in society as an organic whole were in retreat before beliefs in the essential individuality of human nature. The political consequence of Descartes’ cogito was to shift emphasis from collective communion to individual political experience. In a universe composed of islands of awareness separated by oceans of insensible matter, society could amount to no more than a collection of individuals. ‘Society’ and ‘Community’ could be no more than two myths without empirical foundation. The Christian belief in souls communing within the body of Christ, or the medieval idea of society ordered by law was increasingly displaced by a theory of society made up of self-interested individuals voluntarily acting together for their own rationally-calculated profit.

**HOBDES**

Hobbes (1588–1679) was the philosopher that first put Cartesian scientific method and geometrical reasoning to use in building a rationally defensible theory of community. He
wrote at the end of a century of religious and political strife that had seen a huge volume written on politics, government, law and society, searching for release from the uncertainty and disunity of religious conflict. Like science and philosophy in the same period, most sought to synthesise the diverse range of medieval institutions, Roman law, reformed Christian doctrine, ancient political philosophy and modern scientific method. But despite the sincere efforts of writers to grapple with the conceptual problems thrown up by the Reformation and the Humanists, their efforts involved a large measure of salvage, without recognising that much they tried to rescue had been fundamentally damaged in the religious and intellectual wars of the sixteenth century. In trying to save the past they were attempting a delicate balancing act, reconciling historical origins of social order with a divine source, civil obedience with religious conscience, absolutism with consent, natural law with independent nations, human-made law with traditional law, sovereign individuality with the sovereign state. Progress beyond these dilemmas required a fundamentally new approach, and that would be first supplied by Hobbes.

Hobbes applied the methods of the new sciences and geometrical reasoning to the problem of political philosophy, beginning with axiomatic statements about human nature and working up to government and society. He postulated that the world was a mechanical system, and so everything—human behaviour and human society included—could be explained as the motion of bodies. Effectively he sought to reduce psychology and politics to a physical science. This approach involved a sharp break with all previous approaches to social philosophy—he did not start with religious beliefs as the Scholastics and Reformers had, nor empirical observations like Machiavelli's, nor legal precedents, nor long-held custom. He set out to demonstrate logically what government needed to be from first principles. Hobbes' approach also broke with the two main contemporary assumptions

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89 Hobbes discovered geometry only at the age of forty, and never mastered it or scientific method. But he grasped the principle and its revolutionary potential in philosophy. Despite flaws in his reasoning at crucial points, he nevertheless set a high standard in reasoning about human society. Although his conclusions were reviled by most of his contemporaries and successors, the sheer clarity of his arguments helped his opponents isolate their objections and formulate precise responses.

90 Hobbes anticipated that the analysis of society would need to be done in three stages, and he planned three great works dealing with each topic, each building on the foundations of the previous as in geometric proofs. The first, De Corpore, would deal with physical principles, particularly those relevant to the operation of the human body. Second was to be De Homine, which dealt with individual human beings. The third, building on the first two, was De Cive, describing how individual human beings came together to form society and establish governments. In the event, Hobbes altered his program, and wrote several other works, although addressing the same topics using the same principles. The most important here are his masterpiece Leviathan—which summarised parts of De Homine but was chiefly concerned with government—and The elements of law natural and politic.
about law and government. First was the understanding of law as a standard against which people’s actions could be judged. In seventeenth century legal thought, law had largely lost any connection with divinely ordained order of the universe, but nonetheless maintained a kind of eternal existence and truth akin to mathematics or the Platonic Ideas. Second was the belief that law and government had the purpose of improving or perfecting people. Seen this way, both were teleological—a belief which showed the lasting influence of Aristotle, particularly the Politics and Ethics. Hobbes’ method made both Platonic idealism and Aristotelian teleology unintelligible: in his view, nature—including society—was a mechanistic system of causes and effects. Human life is controlled by causes—not ends or standards. For Hobbes, society could not become secure through pursuing justice or obeying morals dictates, but only by establishing the causes that would bring about cooperative behaviour.

Hobbes began with the axiom of material science: everything consists of bodies in motion. In people, the senses detect this motion and transfer it to the head or heart, where it is experienced as sensation. This internal motion either aids or retards what Hobbes calls the ‘vital motion’, which is responsible for all human action. This produces two primitive feelings: desire and aversion. Accompanying them is a movement either towards or away from the object causing the sensation. Hobbes says that desire and aversion, advance and retreat, are the basis for all other emotions and motivations. Objects that attract are loved;

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91 The most prominent example of legal theory being modelled on mathematics was by Grotius (1583–1645) in his monumental work on international law: the Law of War and Peace (1625). He saw himself doing for law what Galileo had done for physics. (Sabine 1964, p425–429). “I have made it my concern to refer the proofs of things touching the law of nature to certain fundamental conceptions which are beyond question [like the axioms of geometry], so that no one can deny them without doing violence to himself. For the principles of that law, if only you pay strict heed to them, are in themselves manifest and clear, almost as evident as are those things which we perceive by the external senses”.

92 Sabine 1964, p460

93 “… concepions or apparitions are nothing really, but motion in some internal substance of the head; which motion not stopping there, but proceeding to the heart, of necessity must there either help or hinder that motion which is called vital; when it helpeth, it is called delight, contentment, or pleasure, which is nothing really but motion about the heart, as conception is nothing but motion within the head; and the objects that cause it are called pleasant or delightful, … and the same delight, with reference to the object, is called love: but when such motion weakeneth or hindereth the vital motion, then it is called pain; and in relation to that which causeth it, hatred…” (Hobbes The elements of law natural and politic, §7:1)
objects that repel are hated. Experiencing the former produces joy, experiencing the latter produces grief. Anticipating something loved gives hope, while anticipating something hated causes despair.

Given a favourable stimulus, a person tries to secure its continuation; given a painful stimulus, a person tries to avoid it, particularly if it may cause injury. From this, Hobbes deduces that the basic rule of human life is to preserve its ‘vital motion’ or heighten it —although self-preservation takes priority. People call a thing ‘good’ when it secures self-preservation, and ‘evil’ when it defeats it.

Hobbes realises that, defined this way, self-preservation is not an occasional activity: it is activated every time the body is stimulated. It has to be pursued at every moment, using all means, and it knows no bounds. Hobbes also recognises that, because people have similar desires, they are in competition with others for goods. Since these goods are limited, but people’s desires are not, competition naturally brings people into conflict, which threatens each person’s security. However, each person has a ‘natural right’ to preserve themselves, and are ‘entitled’ to use whatever means necessary to achieve this—even using the bodies of others if necessary. So the desire for security cannot be separated from the desire for power (which, for Hobbes, is a means for obtaining future security). The right to use whatever means are necessary for personal security also means that, in nature, every person has a perfect freedom of action: ‘liberty’.

94 “This motion, in which consisteth pleasure or pain, is also a solicitation or provocation either to draw near to the thing that pleaseth, or to retire from the thing that displeaseth. And this solicitation is the endeavour or internal beginning of animal motion, which when the object delighteth, is called APPETITE; when it displeaseth, it is called AVERSION, in respect of the displeasure present...” (Hobbes The elements of law natural and politic, §7:2)

95 “Seeing all delight is appetite, and appetite presupposeth a farther end, there can be no contentment but in proceeding: and therefore we are not to marvel, when we see, that as men attain to more riches, honours, or other power; so their appetite continually groweth more and more; and when they are come to the utmost degree of one kind of power, they pursue some other, as long as in any kind they think themselves behind any other.” (Hobbes The elements of law natural and politic, §7:7)

96 Hobbes notes that ‘natural rights’ are not rights in any legal sense. In the natural state, there are no laws and hence no rights or wrongs—only survival or destruction. Hobbes’ natural rights are ‘rights’ only insofar as they are necessary for personal survival.

97 “I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained; or that he cannot be content with a more moderate power: but because he cannot assume the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.” (Leviathan chapter 11)
Competition and the unending desire for power leads inexorably to a “war of every man against every man” \(^{98}\). But, since every person has roughly equal strength and intelligence, no person can be sure of defeating their competitors, and so no person can be secure from others \(^{99}\). In this state of competition, insecurity and fear, each person threatens every other, and so there can be no cooperation between people: civilisation is impossible. There can be no industry, navigation, farming, building, arts or letters \(^{100}\). Life in nature is, in his famous phrase, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” \(^{101}\).

Hobbes does not intend this as a historical description of humanity before civilisation, but rather, a logical deduction of what life without civilisation must be like. Moreover, such a state could reappear at any moment if the forces that hold it back are removed, and so provide a constant threat to civilised life \(^{102}\).

Hobbes explains that human beings are not like this because, along with the desire to satisfy immediate sensations, they also possess reason. Although reason also seeks personal preservation, it possesses foresight, and therefore acts as a brake on desire, replacing immediate gratification with a more calculating—and rewarding—selfishness.

From reason, says Hobbes, come the ‘Laws of Nature’. Hobbes’ natural laws owe nothing to medieval or Stoic ideas of a pervasive cosmic reasoning \(^{103}\). It consists of those laws of

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\(^{98}\) *Leviathan* chapter 13

\(^{99}\) “Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of the body, and mind; as that though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet, when all is reckoned together, the differences between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself.” (*Leviathan* chapter 13)

\(^{100}\) *Leviathan* chapter 13

\(^{101}\) *Leviathan* chapter 13

\(^{102}\) Almost all of Hobbes’ illustrations of the ‘natural man’ are taken from ‘civilised’ life—such as hunting privileges, honours and power. Hobbes clearly believed that humanity’s natural state could reappear at any moment—it was not merely a now-completed phase of humanity’s social development.

\(^{103}\) Except for polemical purposes, Hobbes could have dispensed with the term ‘natural law’. His main purpose in using it, apart from the important place it traditionally had in political philosophy, was to correct what he saw as grave errors in the ancient use of the expression.

...continued on next page
behaviour which, with perfect foresight, ensure the individual’s constant security. The two most important ‘natural laws’ are:

1. Peace and cooperation are more effective than violence and competition for achieving self-preservation.¹⁰⁴

2. Peace requires mutual confidence.¹⁰⁵

Hobbes points out that peace and cooperation will require people to give up some of their natural rights and liberties—especially the liberty of one person to do what they please to another.¹⁰⁶ Since all people are in competition, it is pointless to expect them to respect one another’s rights spontaneously—and unless all people respect the rights of others, it is unreasonable for any individual to do so. Hobbes’ solution is for all people to surrender their natural rights against one another and submit to a sovereign (either individual or collective), making an agreement with every person of the form: “I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that you give up thy right to him, and authorise his actions in like manner.”¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁴ "It is supposed from the equality of strength and other natural faculties of men, that no man is of might sufficient, to assure himself for any long time, of preserving himself thereby, whilst he remaineth in the state of hostility and war; reason therefore dictateth to every man for his own good, to seek after peace, as far forth as there is hope to attain the same; and to strengthen himself with all the help he can procure, for his own defence against those, from whom such peace cannot be obtained; and to do all those things which necessarily conduce thereto." (The elements of law natural and politic, §14.14)

¹⁰⁵ Hobbes gives several inconsistent lists of ‘natural laws: in Leviathan Chapters 14 and 15, The elements of law natural and politic, §§16–17, and De Cive §§2–3. But while Hobbes does not appear to have been concerned overmuch in working out exactly what these laws were, that such laws existed was, for him, quite certain.

¹⁰⁶ The ‘second law of nature’ that Hobbes gives in both the Leviathan and De Cive (§2.2). “[each person should be] willing, when others are so too, as far forth, as for peace, and defence of himself he shall think necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and to be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.” (Leviathan Chapter 14). Hobbes notes that the last clause is no more than a general version of Gospel’s command, ‘do to others as you would have them do to you’.

¹⁰⁷ Hobbes Leviathan chapter 17. Hobbes says that there are some ‘inalienable rights’: things that no person can give up, even if they chose to do so. These include people’s right too live, the right to defend themselves if attacked, the right to freedom, and the right to defend the lives and freedom of others.
This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortal God, to which we owe our peace and defence.\footnote{108}

So, logically, society is established on a contract. However, for a contract to hold good, each party must trust the other to abide by its terms. But since all people are in competition and would cheat if they saw advantage in it, the only way to make them cooperate—to make them do something they not desire to do—is to threaten them with consequences they dislike even more.\footnote{109}

the bonds of words are too weak to bridle man’s ambition, avarice, anger, and other passions, and without the fear of some coercive power.\footnote{110}

For the threat to hold good, society must have the power to enforce its threats, and some agency capable of enforcement. Hobbes insists that power must be wielded by a single will—a sovereign. Furthermore, in the formation of the Leviathan, each person must agree to obey the sovereign—dissent and rebellion are unjustified.\footnote{111} Hobbes’ society cannot be ruled by the principle of consent, for natural competition would lead to disunity, which imperils the entire state. Unity is necessary, and therefore all people must be subject to the Leviathan. As subjects, people must obey—for their own good. To ensure peace and cooperation, the sovereign makes such laws as reason dictates will be necessary, and punishes offenders as a lesson to all.\footnote{112}

Defined this way, there is no distinction between state, society and government: without the Leviathan, security is impossible and society will cease to exist. There is also no difference between laws and morals in the Leviathan or the sovereign: there is a single set of rules governing human relations, issued from a single source and enforced by a single will.\footnote{113}

\footnote{108}{Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} chapter 17}

\footnote{109}{Sabine 1964, p469}

\footnote{110}{Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} chapter 14}

\footnote{111}{Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} chapter 18}

\footnote{112}{Hobbes draws a sharp line between natural and civil laws. Natural laws, upon which the state is founded, are bankrolled by force; civil laws demand obedience as dictates of reason, necessary to secure peace, cooperation and security. Since reason is not in conflict with desire—it simply regulates it, but otherwise has the same goal—there is no conflict between civil laws rightly framed and the laws of nature.}

\footnote{113}{For this reason, Hobbes rightly called the Leviathan a ‘Mortal God’, for it held both secular and moral authority. Hobbes also gives the sovereign supreme religious power as well. He devoted over half of the \textit{Leviathan} to ecclesiastical questions, but in his treatment he regarded the Church as simply one ‘corporation’ amongst many within society. He thought it as an error to think of the Church as the Kingdom of God, which therefore possessed an authority independent of the state. Within the Leviathan, every aspect of religion—doctrine, ...continued on next page}
Consequences for communication

Hobbes was the first major philosopher since Plato to present a complete, systematic theory of society based on individuals. Although chiefly known—and reviled—for its defence of absolute monarchy, absolutism was simply a conclusion that followed from his assumption of individuality. Individualism was the more important part of his thought. Hobbes faced squarely the problem created by the Reformation of forming a society when every person had sovereignty in religious and political matters. Although his appeal to enlightened self-interest as the basis of society was unacceptable to contemporaries, it became the standard argument in the Modern Age—a more plausible motivation than Luther’s dream of disinterested service. However, in establishing individualism in the way he does, Hobbes—and an important strand of thinkers after him—shifts the basis for individuality from religious conscience or legal sovereignty to what the mind senses: what makes people individuals is that each is unaware of what others sense.

Hobbes’ analysis led him to reject most principles of medieval social order. His natural law owed nothing to the Scholastics’ pervasive universal order nor to Biblical commandments. It consisted of the principles discovered by enlightened self-interest that would ensure an individual’s continuing survival. Hobbes also brought all religious authority under the sovereign’s power, uniting law with morality—although both God and religion were unnecessary for the creation of the Leviathan. Government did not require the continuing consent of the governed; it depended quite frankly on fear and force. Custom had no role, unless endorsed by the Leviathan. Hobbes was indifferent on whether power should be exercised by a single ruler or many—all were legitimate so long as they were effective. The Stoic idea of society as a thing in its own right, or Aristotle’s argument that society pre-existing the individual, were rejected. In Hobbes’ analysis, society existed only as a means

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religious books, teaching, observances, morals and church government—only had authority if sanctioned by the sovereign. Hobbes envisaged that the Church, like any other corporation, would require a head—otherwise it would be unable to act—and in the case of religion, this head is identical with the sovereign. So, in the Leviathan, temporal and spiritual powers are united in the sovereign, and there is no conflict between sacred and secular law. (Hobbes was trying to bolster the King of England in his position as head of the Anglican Church, and the Anglican Church as the sole faith in England—which led him astray in joining temporal and religious powers.)

114 “... the subjects cannot change the form of government ... they [the people] that have already instituted a commonwealth, being thereby bound by covenant [to obey the sovereign] ... cannot lawfully make a new covenant, among themselves, to be obedient to any other in any thing whatsoever [without the sovereign’s consent].” (Leviathan chapter 18)

115 “When long use obtaineth the authority of a law, it is not the length of time that maketh the authority, but the will of the sovereign...” (Leviathan chapter 26)
for each person to be secure from one another: it is merely an ‘artificial body’, and ideas like ‘public good’ and ‘public will’ are superstitions.\textsuperscript{116}

Hobbes’ extreme conclusions about society are intelligible given his times: he lived at the end of a century of religious conflict which had seen the wreckage of most medieval institutions—religious, secular and economic—and the rise of powerful states ruled by absolute monarchs who relied on military force and legal force. Hobbes recognised that anarchy lurked within individual sovereignty, and concluded that individuals had to forgo liberties and rights for society to be possible. The strength of Hobbes’ political thought was its clarity and the rigour with which he (mostly) worked out his premises. Its weakness was that it was based on general principles, not observations of how people actually dealt with political and religious questions or how power is wielded.\textsuperscript{117}

There is almost no function for communication in the Leviathan. As in Descartes’ philosophy, Hobbes’ scientific method extinguished any role for communication-as-order. The only form of communication left was speech. Although the Leviathan was established with a contract, it had value only when backed by force: “covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man”\textsuperscript{118}. This contract was not arrived at by discussion and negotiation: it was no more than an acknowledgment of natural law, which each person discovered by applying reason (which Hobbes regarded as a natural faculty).

Since the maintenance of social order depends upon the observance of law, there is a small role for edicts made “by word, writing or other significant sign of the [sovereign’s] will”\textsuperscript{119}. But the making and judging of the law belongs solely to the sovereign\textsuperscript{120}. Hobbes specifically rejected arguments for the consent of the people in making laws or a place for custom in judging law. (Had custom been given a place in law, there would have been implied a role for communication in preserving the community’s traditions.) Since both consent and custom were irrelevant, there was no place for either parliaments or juries in the state’s laws.

Although Hobbes wrote a small amount on speech and words, they had no function in the foundation or maintenance of society—the active principles he recognised were reason

\textsuperscript{116} Sabine 1964, p467

\textsuperscript{117} The gap between Hobbes’ principles and people’s actual behaviour is most painfully obvious in \textit{Behemoth} where he uses his principles to analyse the English Civil War. The result is an account that repeatedly misses the point of the conflict and demonises various people’s motives.

\textsuperscript{118} Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} Chapter 17

\textsuperscript{119} Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} Chapter 26

\textsuperscript{120} Hobbes \textit{Leviathan} Chapter 26
backed by force. The philosopher that first advanced consistent theories of community and communication was Hobbes’ countryman, John Locke (1632–1704).

**LOCKE**

Where Hobbes tried to create a metaphysically defensible account of society, Locke’s contribution was made to defend a political position in a specific quarrel—the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Although his treatment went well beyond the immediate needs of his argument, its function as an occasional performance marred its coherence philosophically.

The Revolution was the final episode in half a century of political crisis in England. It had begun in the collision between the Stuart kings’ claims to divine appointment and the Parliamentarians belief that government was only legitimate with the consent of the people and their representatives. As the crisis between the two parties deepened, the arguments of both parties became more extreme. (It was in this time that Hobbes wrote the *Leviathan* to defend the king—although royalists probably could have done without such support.) The royal position was lost in 1645, and Charles I beheaded in 1649. Although initially Parliament attempted to rule, it proved so ineffectual that it was dissolved by Cromwell, head of the army, and the country slid into military dictatorship (fulfilling Hobbes’ prediction that government depended on the capacity to enforce itself and, without power, there was only anarchy). After Cromwell’s death (1659) rapprochement between Parliament and the exiled royalists led to the restoration of the monarchy and installation of Charles II. However, Charles attempted to rule as autocratically as his father had, dismissing several parliaments and ruling alone. He openly favoured religious tolerance and Catholicism. His successor James converted to Catholicism, raising Protestant fears of renewed religious conflict and subjugation to Catholic France. Other acts made clear his determination to overthrow the constitution and Anglican Church. Parliament asserted itself and, in a bloodless coup—the ‘Glorious Revolution’—James was replaced by William of Orange (1688), although William was permitted to rule only within constitutional limits. Like the Parliamentarians, Locke saw the Revolution as a return to England’s ancient constitution: all people free and subject only to the law; government exercised by a king who governed with the consent of the people; and people’s right to representation (in the form of Parliament).

Locke’s immediate target in his *Two Treatises on Government* was a pamphlet by the royalist Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha or the natural right of kings*, written thirty years before during the Civil War, but republished by the Royalists in 1680. Filmer called on broadly two arguments to support the divine right of kings, the duty of passive obedience, and the illegality of rebellion. The first was that the king’s power is derived from the ‘natural’ authority of parents over their children. Since all people were descended from Adam, therefore all people were subject to Adam’s direct descendants, of which “present
kings are, or are to be reputed, next heir to him.” Critics quickly made this argument absurd with two counterstrokes: [1] no one knows who Adam’s direct successors are, so kings have no more claim to authority than anyone else, and [2], by the laws of primogeniture, there could only be one legitimate royal descendant of Adam, whereas there were numerous kings in Europe all claiming legitimacy. It was this part of Filmer’s pamphlet that drew the attention of critics (including Locke), chiefly because it was easy to mock. Filmer’s second line of argument—largely ignored by critics—was far more dangerous. He attacked the claims of his opponents that political power lies with the people and that government can only exist with their consent. Filmer showed the absurdity of such claims, questioning who ‘the people’ actually is, how the entire population entered into a contract, how they consented to anything at all, and when was this contract made. In his argument, he drew heavily on Hobbes, arguing that a community logically required a sovereign to function, and that concepts like representation, election and majority-rule were meaningless, except in a legally constituted community under a sovereign.

Locke’s position would have been easier if he could have argued against Filmer (and Hobbes) and for constitutionalism, but circumstances forced him to adopt key assumptions of both sides. Even without Hobbes, the drift of legal theory in the previous century had been towards individualism, and the idea that society was formed from individuals—Hobbes’ key assumption from which absolute power and passive obedience derived. So Locke was forced to explain the origins of society in individual action. But, in supporting the Revolution, Locke also had to assume for the reality of society (not simply as an ‘artificial body’ as Hobbes had) in a number of ways:

[1] the forced removal of a sovereign did not void the legitimacy of English society
[2] in the Revolution’s claim to be restoring the ancient constitution (which implied that it had existence independent of king or government)
[3] that there were moral laws that transcended government and civil law, and
[4] that in replacing one form of government with another, government exists for the well-being of society and that governments which abuse this trust may be removed by the people.

Locke starts, like Hobbes, by considering the state of humans before society, in the ‘state of nature’. In nature, every person has the liberty to act as they think fit. However, says Locke, they are not free to act fully as they wish: nature has laws that oblige every person in the state

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121 Filmer, in Sabine 1964, p513
122 Sabine 1964, p513
of nature. The law of nature is reason. Although people have liberty to act, they must not act contrary to reason. The law of nature establishes the basic rights people have in the state of nature. Amongst the primary requirements of the natural law is for every person to preserve themselves. Therefore, life is a natural right of every person, along with liberty. A third right, which Locke discusses in the detail, is the right to private property.

The Bible says that God had “given the Earth to the Children of Men and given it to mankind in common.” People may make use of the earth and its fruits to support themselves: since people need to eat and drink to survive, the need for self-preservation therefore sanctions each person’s right to “Meat and Drink, and other such things, as nature affords for their Subsistence.” However, Locke says that, before people can make use of them, they need to transform them into private property.

Locke says that what transforms things common to all into private property is an individual’s labour. A person’s labour belongs to them alone, as much as their body and life does. ‘Mixing’ or ‘adding’ labour with what nature provides creates personal property. Applying labour—such as collecting apples, catching fish, drawing water—does not require the consent of any other person. “Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg’d in any place where I have a right to them in common

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123 Locke, Second Treatise §6

124 The seventeenth century was heavily influenced by the Stoic concept of reason as the law of nature—known chiefly through Seneca and Cicero. It was, of course, already a position established in medieval thought (which drew on Stoic and Neoplatonic sources), but renewed contact with ancient writers intensified the belief—especially once the new sciences and Reformation had done significant damage to the traditional order of nature.

125 Locke, Second Treatise §22 “Freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the Law of Nature.”

126 Locke, Second Treatise §25. For Locke, the Bible is a relevant source of argument—although one he appeals to only occasionally. He sees reason as consistent with the will of God: God would not will something that was unreasonable, and hence Biblical revelation—which records God’s will—is consistent with the laws of nature.

127 Locke, Second Treatise §25

128 “The Earth, and all that is therein, is given to Men for the Support and Comfort of their Being. And though all the Fruits it naturally produces, and Beasts it feeds, belong to Mankind in common ... yet being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular Man.” (Second Treatise §26)

129 Locke, Second Treatise §27

130 Locke, Second Treatise §28
Reason sets limits to how much a person may take from the commons: enough to sustain their life, but not so much that it goes unused or spoils. In a time when there were few people and plentiful provisions, the bounds set by reason ensured that there was “little room for Quarrels or Contentions about Property so establish’d”\textsuperscript{132}. Apart from collecting what existed, tilling, planting, improving and cultivating land, could also create private property from land previously held in common\textsuperscript{133}. Since a person has a natural right to their labour, they have a natural right to the property they create with their labour\textsuperscript{134}.

The three main rights that Locke says that the law of nature gives to individuals are “life, liberty and estate”\textsuperscript{135}. One of the most important laws dictated by reason—and one Locke introduces first—is reciprocity. Locke says that all people are equal. By this, he does not mean, as Hobbes did, that all people are roughly equal in strength and intelligence, but rather, all power and justice is reciprocal: what hold good for one person holds for all, and no person is set above or below another in the state of nature\textsuperscript{136}. Applying this principle of equality to the basic right every person has to their life, Locke deduces that every person should also secure the preservation of other people as well (so long as they do not endanger themselves in the process)\textsuperscript{137}. More generally, whatever rights one person has in society must therefore both be held by every other and also respected by every other. Consequently,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[131] Locke, Second Treatise §28
  \item[132] Locke, Second Treatise §31, and also §§33, 36. This is presumable a slap at Hobbes who had said that in the state of nature, competition between people and scarcity of resources would bring them into open warfare with one another. Locke— influenced by the colonial experience in America— took the opposite point of view: where there were huge resources and few people, there was little cause for war. Presumably tilting at Hobbes’ view of the state of nature being one of “war of every man against every man”, he writes “the plain difference between the State of Nature, and the State of War, which however some Men have confounded, are as far distant, as a State of People, Good Will, Mutual Assistance, and Preservation, and a State of Enmity, Malice, Violence and Mutual Destruction are one from another.” (Second Treatise §19)
  \item[133] Locke, Second Treatise §32. Locke adds in justification that he thinks 99 per cent of the value of agricultural products is due to labour (Second Treatise §40).
  \item[134] Locke, Second Treatise §45
  \item[135] Locke, Second Treatise §§6, 25–51. Locke frequently refers to ‘property’ when he appears to mean rights in general (§123). It is however, not at all clear that he understood all rights as being generated in the same way as property rights.
  \item[136] Locke, Second Treatise §4
  \item[137] Locke, Second Treatise §6
\end{itemize}
“Reason teaches all mankind ... that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions.”\textsuperscript{138}

The laws of nature are not unbreakable. Just as a person can reason badly, they can break the laws of nature. Where a person acts against the natural law in their dealings with others, Locke says that those others are naturally entitled either to punish the transgressor to prevent further offences \textsuperscript{139}, or to extract reparation for injuries done\textsuperscript{140}. From this, Locke infers that each individual has executive power: that is, they can execute the law of nature\textsuperscript{141}.

Man being born ... with a Title to perfect Freedom, and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the Rights and Privileges of the Law of Nature, equally with any other Man ... hath by Nature a Power, not only to preserve his Property, that is, his Life, Liberty and Estate, against the Injuries and Attempts of other Men; but to judge of, and punish the breaches of that Law in other, as he is persuaded the Offence deserves, even with Death it self, in Crimes where the heinousness of the Fact, in his Opinion, requires it.\textsuperscript{142}

While Locke says that the state of nature is good, it is not perfect\textsuperscript{143}. Although everyone has the right to decide when the law of nature has been flouted, “Self-love will make Men partial to themselves and their Friends”, and “Ill Nature, Passion and Revenge will carry them too far in punishing others”\textsuperscript{144}. The result will be confusion and disorder. For this “Civil Government is the proper Remedy for the inconveniences of the State of Nature”\textsuperscript{145}.

\textsuperscript{138} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §6

\textsuperscript{139} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §7. “In transgressing the Law of Nature, the Offender declares himself to live by another Rule, than that of reason and common Equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of Men, for their security: and so he becomes dangerous to mankind, the tye, which is to secure him from their injury and violence, being slighted and broken with him.” (\textit{Second Treatise} §8)

\textsuperscript{140} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §9

\textsuperscript{141} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §8.

\textsuperscript{142} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §87

\textsuperscript{143} Locke says that life in the state of nature and enjoyment of its rights and freedoms "is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the Invasion of others. For all being Kings as much as he, every Man his Equal, and the greater part no strict Observers of Equity and Justice, the enjoyment of property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure.” (\textit{Second Treatise} §123)

\textsuperscript{144} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §13. Locke says that a state of war exists when one person tries to take from another their life or freedom—their basic rights under the law of nature (\textit{Second Treatise} §16–17).

\textsuperscript{145} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §13 & 21
Locke see the purpose of political society as to ‘preserve property’ (by which he means “life, liberty and estate”)\textsuperscript{146}. The functions of government are to make up for three defects in the state of nature:

1. to make explicit laws so that everyone knows how they are to behave (unlike the reason, which through ignorance or bias may be misapplied)\textsuperscript{147}

2. to have impartial judges to judge the law (in the state of nature, each person is both judge and executor of the law, but because they are biased in their own interests and negligent of others’, they may do harm)\textsuperscript{148}

3. to give power to judgements (in the state of nature, injustice can go unpunished because it is dangerous for people to punish offences against them, even though they are entitled to do so.)\textsuperscript{149}

To achieve these goals, every person surrenders their right to judge and punish others to society as a whole. Society appoints authorities to judge offences against civil laws that apply equally to all\textsuperscript{150}. People also agree to lend their force to civil government to enforce laws and punish offenders\textsuperscript{151}.

Society has no rights other than those that individuals surrender to it. It certainly has no intrinsic rights. The rights that people surrender to society are their personal right to preserve themselves and others by whatever means and their personal right to punish offenders, along with some of their liberty to act as they please\textsuperscript{152}. However, people are only required to surrender so much of their rights as is necessary to make up for the three defects in the state of nature\textsuperscript{153}. The only function of government is “the Peace, Safety, and publick good of the People”\textsuperscript{154}—anything outside that is unjustified.

\textsuperscript{146} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §87
\textsuperscript{147} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §124. Elsewhere Locke refers to “standing rules ... by which every one may know what is his” (\textit{Second Treatise} §137).
\textsuperscript{148} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §125. ”...the Law of Nature being unwritten, and so no where to be found but in the minds of Men, they who through Passion or Interest shall mis-cite, or misapply it, cannot be convinced of their mistake where there is no establish’d Judge” (\textit{Second Treatise} §136)
\textsuperscript{149} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §126
\textsuperscript{150} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §87
\textsuperscript{151} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §88
\textsuperscript{152} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §129–130
\textsuperscript{153} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §131
\textsuperscript{154} Locke, \textit{Second Treatise} §131
In the state of nature, no one is subject to the political power of another. The creation of a civil community and government, where people are subject to others, therefore requires their consent\textsuperscript{155}.

Creation of society takes place in two stages. First, every individual consents to surrender some of their rights to society, in return for greater security. This establishes what Locke calls a ‘common-wealth’\textsuperscript{156}. In such a state, the community is not, by itself, able to make up the defects of nature: it requires a government to act. Government can take several forms: either all people can take part in making laws (using a majority vote\textsuperscript{157}) in which case the government is a democracy, or else the people may entrust government to one person or a few (in which case government is a monarchy or oligarchy). Locke also says that the people can combine these types of government in whatever form they think good\textsuperscript{158}.

Constituted this way, government is required to comply with the laws of nature: it exists only to secure the rights each individual has in the state of nature, and its powers are those delegated to it by individuals, which consist of those necessary to defend the laws of nature.

People are obliged to obey government as the means to secure peace, security, life, liberty and estate. Government however may not act arbitrarily: it only has the powers transferred to it by people. Since individuals did not have arbitrary power over the lives, liberties and property of either themselves or others—only the powers consistent with the law of nature—government cannot have such powers either. “The obligations of the Laws of Nature cease not in society” \textsuperscript{159}. The immediate consequence is that the laws created by society must conform with the laws of nature\textsuperscript{160}.

Although people ordinarily are obliged to obey those that make, judge and enforce society’s laws, they do have the power to remove any authorities that abuse the trust placed in them.

\textsuperscript{155} Locke, Second Treatise §95
\textsuperscript{156} Locke is using the term ‘commonwealth’ in its ancient sense, where ‘weal’ means ‘well’ or ‘good’—the commonwealth is literally the ‘common good’. He specifically distinguishes it from any political function—particularly as the term had been used under Cromwell’s Protectorate. (Locke, Second Treatise §133)
\textsuperscript{157} Locke, Second Treatise §132 and §§95–99. Although the establishment of society requires the consent of every individual, once established, Locke makes decision-making in democratic societies by a majority vote. He sensibly recognises that seeking unanimous support for every decision that society faces is unlikely, and unless people agree to be led by the majority, society will be broken, defeating its purpose.
\textsuperscript{158} Locke, Second Treatise §132
\textsuperscript{159} Locke, Second Treatise §135
\textsuperscript{160} Locke, Second Treatise §135

\textbf{458 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT}
by the community. Since society exists to secure, amongst other things, the preservation of each member, any government that neglects that purpose is acting contrary to the laws of nature, and the people—from whom all power derives—have the right to secure themselves when their authorities will not. This is a crucial point for Locke, as he seeks to defend the Revolution, and he devotes a large part of the Second Treatise to delineating the conditions under which trust is abused, power misappropriated, and the natural rights of people can be restored. Although important in the history of politics, these arguments do not affect ideas about communication. What is important however is that he can argue that the commonwealth will legitimately continue to exist even when a particular government is removed—a position contrary to Hobbes, who insisted that society depended upon the existence of a sovereign, and hence dissolution of government ended society.

As a work of philosophy, Locke’s Second Treatise has three major problems. The first is that his attempt to synthesise the ideas of individual and society—in particular, that the public good coincides securing private rights—is unsuccessful. While forced to argue that society is formed from individuals, Locke does not escape the long shadow of Aristotle and his claim that society pre-exists the individual and is necessary for the individual’s improvement. To carry his argument, Locke quietly redefines his ‘fundamental law of nature’, so that it is concerned with “the preservation of society”.

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161 Locke, Second Treatise §149

162 Locke explicitly distinguishes between the dissolution of government and the dissolution of society (Second Treatise §211)

163 Locke, Second Treatise §3

164 Locke recasts the most fundamental law of nature, from the preservation of the individual to “the preservation of the Society and (as far as will consist with the public good) of every person in it” (Second Treatise §134). Locke does not explore the situation where securing the well-being of the majority will harm the interests of an individual. He recognising in passing that, for example, soldiers may have to be ordered by their government into near certain death, but says that it is necessary for soldiers to obey “for the preservation of the rest” (Second Treatise §139). This is not consistent with the goal of defending the rights of every person: he does not explain how a government can legitimately require one person to surrender their rights completely—indeed, Locke has a problem of logical consistency on this point because elsewhere he says that people simply cannot give up some rights, such as their lives, even if they consent to do so.

Presumably Locke is thinking probabilistically (although it is not how he argues): every individual stands a better chance of enjoying their natural rights in peace and security if they are members of society than in the state of nature, and the risk of suffering some ill in society is less than whatever they might suffer in nature. While this is true on his account of the state of nature, it voids his argument: he wants to establish a society based on natural
Second, he does not explain why individuals in nature would trust one another to surrender their rights in order to form a commonwealth—a problem that Hobbes examined closely. Locke merely remarks off-handedly that trust is a natural attribute of individuals: “Truth and keeping of faith belongs to Men, as Men, and not as members of Society”\(^{165}\).

The third problem comes in a conflict between his concept of natural laws and his masterpiece, the *Essay concerning human understanding* (which I will discuss in Chapter 15). In the *Essay*, Locke had argued that all ideas arose from sensory experience, and that the mind had no ‘innate ideas’. Yet the concept of the ‘law of nature’ being what reason dictates—indepenent of any sensory experience—implied that all natural rights were innate ideas. Following Locke’s own logic, Hume demonstrated that there could be no such thing as natural rights, and the concept collapsed in political philosophy. The loss of natural rights also dethroned reason as the ruling principle in social life. In its place emerged a theory which bore many similarities with Hobbes’, although modified by Locke’s psychology: human beings were motivated either by pleasure or pain, and government consisted in arranging circumstances to deliver the greatest good to the greatest number\(^{166}\).

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rights, whereas the probabilist argument is based on effectiveness (which is blind to rights). The probabilist argument holds true of a benevolent dictatorship as under consensual government—not an argument that Locke would have supported.

\(^{165}\) Locke, *Second Treatise* §14

\(^{166}\) The leading exponent of this move was Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). In Bentham’s thought, the individual is supreme: individuals are the ‘atoms’ from which society is composed. What motivates these individuals in their dealings with others is self-interest and their own well-being. At the root of these interests says Bentham is the desire for pleasure and the fear of pain. (Reason in Bentham’s view was subservient to emotion; it was simply a tool for securing the individual’s well-being.)

“Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off their subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.” (Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*)

Seen this way, pleasure and pain not only define what makes people act, but what is good: they are not simply biological facts but the basis for morals and values.

Because pleasure and pain are both objective states of the human body, Bentham said that they could be measured and quantified—in terms of ‘intensity, duration, certainty, proximity, fecundity and purity’. Once measured, different people’s levels of pleasure and pain could be compared. It therefore becomes theoretically possible to calculate what course of action would produce the greatest pleasure to a group of people—what he called the ‘hedonistic calculus’. Bentham, having identified what is good with what is pleasurable, argues that whatever course of action produces the most pleasure is therefore the best morally as well. People therefore have a moral obligation to seek, in his famous phrase, “the

...continued on next page
But as controversial pieces, the Two Treatises were enormously successful. They played an influential role in the American and French revolutions, providing arguments for the freedom from absolute and arbitrary power, legitimate removal of monarchs, right to independence, rights of individuals, personal liberty, equality of citizens, government with the consent of the people, freedom to acquire and enjoy property, and no taxation without representation. Even some of his more dubious ideas—such as the separation of powers and the inevitable wisdom of a majority vote—became unshakeable tenets of democracy. These ideas did not originate with Locke, but the simplicity and force of his arguments made them readily accessible—especially in France where, by the time of the Revolution, all representative bodies had been suppressed for over three hundred years.

167 It is striking, for example, just how much of the American Declaration of Independence owes directly or indirectly to Locke. In the selection below, the passages italicised paraphrase Locke’s words.

“When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.”
In his theory of society and government, Locke implied a fairly large number of functions for communication:

1. consent of people to the formation of the commonwealth and the type of government
2. debating forms of government
3. “the Freedom of debating, and the Leisure of perfecting, what is good for the Society”
4. elections of representatives, where governments are democratic
5. the duty of parents to educate their children, improving their understanding and knowledge (these are the basis for reason, and hence necessary for discovering the laws of nature).

However, since in Locke’s view all society is based on individuals, all of these types of communication do not rely on communication-as-order, which always assumed the unity of the community or of nature. Even the ‘laws of nature’, which for the Middle Ages provided the order of society, had become the discovery of individual human minds. Locke was the first Modern philosopher to provide a complete theory of communication that assumed individual minds and political volunteerism. This however was a variety of communication-as-transmission, which I will introduce in Chapter 15.

With the rise of societies based on individualism—such as revolutionary France and America—the idea of natural order disappeared. Communication increasingly became limited to speech taking place between individuals.

**CONCLUSION: THE DEMISE OF COMMUNICATION-AS-ORDER**

The group of ideas about community that eventually dominated the Modern Age emerged from the Germanic system of government upon which the Western kingdoms were established in the fifth and sixth centuries. Chief amongst these ideas were:

1. society was created and ordered by law
2. law was given by God to the people, transforming them into a community
3. law is embodied in the custom of the people
4. all people are subject to the law, and hence all are responsible for learning and teaching it
5. since all people in the community possess the law in common, they—or some competent representatives—have a right to be consulted in matters of law (in juries or assemblies)

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168 Locke, Second Treatise §222
169 Locke, Second Treatise §215
170 Locke, Second Treatise §216
171 Locke, Second Treatise §56
enforcement of the law in the community is devolved to the king, an office created by God as part of the law. The king rules with the consent of the people, and if unjust may be removed by the people.

From the outset, community based on this collection of ideas was merged with a system of reciprocal protective arrangements—the origin of the feudal system—in which weaker individuals promised aid to the barons in return for protection. Although unrelated to the system of tribal law, this system became part of the customary social order and completed the medieval social hierarchy: kings, barons and commons.

Alongside this system of community existed another, derived from Christianity:

human beings are divided into body and soul; creation is divided into heaven and earth
heaven, spirit and the next life take priority over body, world and this life
in becoming a Christian, a person ‘died in the flesh’ to be ‘reborn in the spirit’. In the world, Christians were to subordinate themselves to the needs of others, so becoming part of the ‘body of Christ’. By contrast, in heaven they were an individual before God
the laws of the Christian community are those revealed by God in the Bible
God appoints authorities to rule over the community; Christians are to obey the directions of these authorities.

By the High Middle Ages, the Scholastics had integrated the Christian community into the order of nature, the Great Chain of Being, established as an outpouring of God’s reason. Reason gave each person a place in the great hierarchy of society, and each person was required to remain in their place, and obey the directions of those set over them by God, nature and reason.

These two systems of ideas came into conflict several times in the later Middle Ages. First when kings and nobles tried to assert authority over the people, demanding obedience as laid down by God. This attempt failed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with the result that freedom of all people subject only to the law was reasserted—usually by imposing representative councils on rulers or communities. Applied at all levels of medieval communities—villages, towns, corporations, guilds and the royal court—this began to break down the feudal hierarchy and introduce horizontal forms of government based on consent. At the same time, recognition grew that law was made by people (although human and natural law continued to coexist until the eighteenth century). So the means for ordering the community—communication—increasingly involved consultation and representation, but guided by law, custom and morality.

The growth of constitutional government was checked when attempts to impose a governing council on the Church failed. This allowed the popes to reassert their earlier claims to supremacy in all matters concerning Christian government. Europe’s kings —traditionally Christendom’s co-rulers alongside the popes—asserted equal powers of sovereignty. With the
economic support of the rising ‘middle class’, the kings suppressed the constitutional limits imposed upon them by the nobility, and gathered national power into their hands. Representative institutions—parliaments, states general, juries, corporations—were suppressed or limited, and along with them the corresponding idea of communication. As Machiavelli recognised, absolute government relied on force and obedience to secure its claims, extinguishing any function for communication in the ordering of society. In theory, law became no more than the will of the king (although in practice tradition continued to play an important function, albeit one that declined in importance as autocracy became entrenched). In the absolute monarchies, the king was appointed by God and placed above the law, and therefore due obedience without resistance.

In time, the claims of absolutism were defeated. Monarchs were either completely replaced with representative institutions (France, America) or limited by legal constitutions and the consent of the people (England, Austria, Germany). This establishment of representative government was not however a return to the traditions of medieval Europe. They had to be accommodated to [1] the theory of individual sovereignty, and [2] the collapse of the natural law as a basis for society. These were not isolated innovations, but the outcome of a tremendous shift in European thought over the previous millennium: the transference of the divine into the temporal world.

Drawing on Stoic and Platonic philosophy, early Christianity had sharply separated heaven and earth, body and soul, matter and spirit. But this division was slowly subverted: naturalism increased and otherworldliness expelled. In the fifth century, although Augustine still regarded life in heaven with God as the only true human good, he said that secular governments provided a measure of good in this life if they approximated the peace and harmony of heaven. In the twelfth century, Aquinas regarded society and government as part of the greater order of nature, divinely instituted (although lower on the Scale of Being than the angelic, and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and subject to human sin). Human government was good in as far as it achieved God’s purposes for humanity in this life, but was still incomplete without Christian revelation. Within a century, lawyers drawing on Aristotle had argued that civil society possessed goods independent of any spiritual function. In the fourteenth century, Franciscan reformers had developed a theory of a completely self-contained, self-ruling secular society, and stripped the Church of all powers in the temporal world. From the mid-fourteenth century, Humanism, the call to reject the *vita contemplativia* for the *vita activa*, and the revival of ancient Greek and Roman political philosophy, hastened the growth of naturalism and secularism. Machiavelli’s political writings present a high point of secular political writing, presenting an account of government and society based on observation and Roman virtues, and largely unconcerned with religious power. Although the Reformation gave renewed influence to religion in political affairs, the Protestants announced that salvation was attainable in this life (not delayed to the next) and stressed the sacredness of worldly callings (including business, trade and family life). According to the Reformers, life in this world was as sacred as life in
In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the divine order of nature—the Great Chain of being—was mortally wounded by the scientific revolution, although its social aspects had already been damaged in the previous two hundred years of religious and political conflict. After Descartes, nature had no divine order or purposes: nature was understood on mechanistic and mathematical principles. The first complete mechanistic theory of human society was provided by Hobbes, who assumed a law of nature identical with reason (but unconnected with divine law). Forty years after Hobbes, Locke could ignore religion in his account of government, which would be based entirely on rights derived from reason and the needs of life in the natural world. By 1700, the idea of entirely natural human communities had evolved—providing all the goods of human life, created by consent, ordered and governed by human laws, maintained by purely human effort. By the Modern Age, the law of nature, and all belief in an intrinsic or divine order to society was extinguished.

The idea of individual sovereignty followed the same path: beginning in heaven and ending up as a universal human attribute. Sovereignty began as a property of God alone. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was claimed by the popes as God’s vice-gerent. In their conflicts with the popacy, the kings claimed the sovereign power for themselves as co-rulers of the Christian world. Their claims though were not initially for themselves as individuals, but as the leader of their kingdoms. Only when joined with their claim to absolute monarchy was sovereignty located entirely in the person of the king, and not the nation as a whole. With the Reformation and the appearance of subjects dissenting from the rule of their sovereign, the position emerged that every person was a sovereign individual, self governing and bound to obedience only with their consent.

By 1700, the group of ideas that most Western societies adopted in some form in the following two hundred years had evolved into a stable form:

1. all people are sovereign individuals, with innate rights
2. people voluntarily form communities to protect themselves and their rights
3. people collectively appoint governments to establish, judge and enforce laws which protect these individual rights
4. governments rule with the consent of the people, and if they fail to rule justly or well, they may be replaced.

The problem with this view of society was that, although popular, it was internally incoherent, trying to secure the rights and powers of both individuals and society.

These tremendous shifts between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries had major consequences for ideas about communication. First, with the severance of religion and government, and the dominance of individualistic secular society, people ceased to be joined in communion, but only in speech and writing. Communication-as-order—the ordering principle of nature as it was envisaged by Aquinas—collapsed with the demise of the order of nature. As I will discuss in Chapter 15, the task of linking individuals in a mechanistic
universe was taken up by communication-as-transmission, which came to dominate ideas about communication in the Modern Age.

The idea of an inherent order—particularly in society and culture—never entirely disappeared. The belief in a natural hierarchy of creatures persisted in biology until the nineteenth century. Christianity and mathematics, both imbued with a Platonic spirit, continued to influence Modern ideas about society, although both declined sharply at the end of the Modern Age in the mid-twentieth century. It was from the ideas of this tradition that structuralism—effectively a loose application of Platonic concepts to linguistic and cultural problems—emerged in the late nineteenth century, to become the main theoretical rival for communication-as-transmission in the later twentieth century.
ABSTRACT  During the Middle Ages, rhetoric—the chief form of communication-as-technique in Antiquity—lost its function in civic life and its position as the crowning point of a liberal education. It had a part in writing and preaching but, overall, it was slowly stripped of all functions concerned with subject matter and logic. Interpretative functions were transferred to grammar and the study of poetry. Invention and arrangement were transferred to dialectic—leaving rhetoric with only style and presentation. Although the Humanists restored rhetoric to its ancient position for a time, their achievements were overtaken by the New Philosophers of the early Modern Age, who broke with both ancient rhetoric and dialectic. The language of the new sciences and the new communities was to be simple and plain, while the new logic was modelled on mathematics, not verbal argumentation. Reforms during the early Modern period removed rhetoric from the curriculum and reduced its scope to the art of letters.

RHETORIC IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Classical rhetoric had evolved amongst the urban elites of Greece and Rome. It was the highest point of a free citizen’s education, enabling them to speak well in the Assembly, or before a jury of fellow citizens, or to public gatherings generally. During the later Roman Empire, rhetoric’s political and legal functions were increasingly curtailed, as civic administration was centralised within the imperial bureaucracy and the military, and local government was stripped of its decision-making powers. But even in these circumstances, urban life did still provide some opportunities for displaying oratorical prowess: in eulogies and panegyrics, and later in Christian preaching. The end for classical rhetoric came with the decline of the Western Empire, when the sophisticated urban society and educational program upon which it depended were swept away, and life in towns gave way to life in small communities and farming estates. Along with other fragments of classical education, rhetoric only survived in the Christian monasteries as a formal art, shorn of its old civic functions.
The survival and revitalisation of rhetoric during the Middle Ages can be divided into four broad stages:

1. the fifth to the eighth centuries, when rhetoric was limited almost entirely to the monasteries
2. the ninth to the eleventh centuries, when the Carolingian renaissance saw the re-establishment of schools and the slow restoration of the ancient educational program
3. the flowering of Scholasticism during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries
4. the Humanist revival from the mid-fourteenth century, which I introduced in the last chapter.

From the perspective of ideas about communication, what is important about development in each period is not the survival or creation of individual rules, but the overall arrangement of rules within rhetoric, and the relationship of rhetoric to the other two arts of speech: grammar and dialectic.

To help illustrate the changes that occurred, below is a summary of the main divisions of each of these disciplines, in the form they were best known in the ancient world. Rhetoric reached its canonical form with Cicero and Quintilian, in their treatment of judicial rhetoric\(^1\). Their system of forensic rhetoric divided speech-making into five stages:

1. invention (\textit{inventio}) concerned with working out what to say. Textbooks took the orator through the parts of a speech, explaining how to develop each:
   (a) an introduction (\textit{exordium}) to make the audience well-disposed, attentive and easily instructed by the speaker
   (b) statement of the facts (\textit{narratio}) of the court-case
   (c) a division of the facts (\textit{partitio}) into those issues that will be addressed—usually by distinguishing where the speaker agrees and disagrees with their opponent
   (d) proof of claims (\textit{confirmatio}) and refutation (\textit{refutatio}) of their opponent’s arguments. Sources of proof were either ‘external’ to rhetoric (witnesses, torture, evidence) or ‘internal’ (deduction, argument, persuasion). Internal proof relied heavily on either lists of topics (\textit{topica}), or on \textit{stasis} theory, which helped the speaker work out the types of arguments to be made and defended. This part of

\(^1\) The main sources on classical rhetoric available to the Middle Ages before 1200 were the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} attributed to Cicero (also called the \textit{Rhetorica nova}); Cicero’s \textit{De inventione} (also called the \textit{Rhetorica secunda}); and Quintilian’s \textit{Institutio Oratoria}, although after the ninth century it existed only in a mutilated form. Style was also dealt with in Horace’s \textit{Ars Poetica}. The main Christian source on rhetoric was Augustine’s \textit{de doctrinia Christiana} (On Christian Teaching).
rhetorical manuals also illustrated how to organise arguments logically, such as
through the use of syllogisms and enthymemes.

(e) a conclusion (peroratio) to sum up the speech, create animosity to the opponent’s
case and sympathy for the speaker’s.

[2] arrangement (dispositio), usually a small part of Ciceronic rhetoric, because the
organisation of material in the speech was dealt with under invention.

[3] style (elocutio), which was treated in three ways:

(a) division of the kinds of speeches into Grand, Middle and Plain (occasionally linked
to the duties of the orator: the Plain to instruct the listeners, the Middle to delight
them, and the Grand to rouse them to action)

(b) characteristics of good style: taste (clarity, use of correct Latin, avoidance of
incorrect words and syntax), artistic composition, and distinction of language

(c) lists of figures of thought (schemata dianoias) and figures of speech (schemata
lexeis)

[4] memory techniques (memoria)


Under the later Empire, rhetoric was reduced mainly to the analysis of stasis and ever-
increasing lists of figures. Memory techniques were discarded in the first century AD, and
delivery declined in the third and fourth centuries as the opportunities for speech-making
disappeared.

The two primary authors on grammar during the Middle Ages were Donatus (whose Ars
Minor provided an introduction) and Priscian (for a lengthy treatment). Initially the ‘art of
letters’, the primary task of grammar was to teach students how to read, speak and write.
It was divided into:

[1] the parts of language: letters, syllables, words and sentences

[2] the parts of speech (which varied slightly between Greek, Latin and vernacular
languages, but in the West included nouns, adjectives, articles, pronouns, verbs,
adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions.)

[3] reading aloud correctly and elegantly

[4] interpreting poems (including the analysis of figures, although Donatus says that
figures of speech are the realm of grammar while figures of thought belong to rhetoric)

More advanced students and scholars might also engage in literary criticism and etymology,
although neither function survived as a living activity in the first half of the Middle Ages.
Dialectic did not settle into a firm pattern in Antiquity, and the orators and philosophers taught it in different ways. In any case, there was no direct continuity in the study or use of dialectic between Antiquity and its major revival during the High Middle Ages, a fact reflected in their very different interests: the Middle Ages were obsessed with syllogisms, whereas the main ancient interest in logic was with classification and division. The main source on logic during the High Middle Ages—Aristotle—was lost between the sixth and eleventh centuries except for translations and commentaries on several works by Boethius (particularly *De Topicis Differentiis*). The main topics that were taught in ancient dialectic included:

1. classifying objects, and using the terminology of dialectic (*genus* and *species*, *differentia*, *property* and *accident*, and so on)
2. defining nouns and verbs, and how they are combined into the types of sentences used in logic
3. classifying the types of statements that can be made about objects (the most important classification scheme was Aristotle’s list of nine categories: quantity, quality, relation, position, place, time, state, action and affection.)
4. methods for interpreting statements
5. types of ambiguities and how they can be resolved.
6. how sentences are related to propositions
7. how to judge if sentences are true or false or indifferent
8. deductive and inductive logic.

**The monastic survival of the trivium: fifth to eighth centuries**

After the decline of Rome, classical rhetoric almost disappeared entirely for some five hundred years. That it survived at all was due largely to the Benedictine monasteries—chiefly those influenced by Cassiodorus (c.490–c.580), former Roman senator and colleague of the philosopher–logician Boethius. When Cassiodorus retired to his monastery around 540 AD, he took with him his extensive library and made study and the copying of books part of his monastic discipline—activities adopted by many other monasteries. He also wrote one of the most influential medieval books on study, an *Introduction to Divine and Human Readings* which organised study under seven headings: the Seven Liberal Arts.

The origins of the Seven Liberal Arts was in the educational programs of the Sophists, Plato and Isocrates intended for free citizens (in Latin, *liberales*), as distinct from the manual arts or the physical labour of slaves. By the second century BC, these arts were recognised by the Romans, although the number of subjects varied. In the late Republic the number had

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2 Rawson 1985, p.142
stabilised at seven—grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, musical theory and astronomy (although others were sometimes included: medicine, law, architecture, theology, history and philosophy)\textsuperscript{3}. The \textit{artes} were not a school curriculum as such—only grammar and rhetoric were routinely taught to young students\textsuperscript{4}. Rather, the \textit{artes} formed a program of leisured study for adults interested in intellectual improvement, without any practical purpose\textsuperscript{5}. The organisation of the \textit{artes} became canonical in the mid-fifth century with Manuitius Cappella’s \textit{Marriage of Philology and Mercury} (a laboured allegory on the joining of wisdom with eloquence—the Ciceronian definition of the ideal rhetoric). The \textit{artes} were subdivided into the \textit{trivium} (grammar, dialectic and finally rhetoric) and the mathematical \textit{quadrivium}.

Despite Manuitius’ paganism and obscure allegory, the book became enormously popular throughout the early Middle Ages\textsuperscript{6}: Cassiodorus cites him in the organisation of his own system of study. To Cassiodorus, the liberal arts would have been an appropriate kind of activity for monks. As I discussed in Chapter 9, by the fifth century AD, control of the monasteries had also fallen largely into the hands of the Roman aristocracy, who persisted in their disdain for manual arts\textsuperscript{7}. Consequently, once purged of their pagan associations, the liberal arts—traditionally the intellectual training of Rome’s leisured elite—were almost ready-made for monastic education. Like Augustine, Cassiodorus saw liberal studies mainly as an aid to understanding the Bible, and not worthwhile in itself\textsuperscript{8}.

\begin{itemize}
\item[3] Rawson discusses the organisation of ancient \textit{artes} in \textit{Intellectual life in the late Roman Republic} (1985)
\item[4] Cicero says in his \textit{Respublica} (1:30) that the study of the mathematical \textit{artes} such as astronomy is useful for ‘quickening the wits’ of young people before they began studying more important subjects, particularly politics.
\item[5] For example, the study of music was based on musical theory, not playing instruments or musical criticism. Arithmetic was chiefly number theory rather than the types of calculations used by merchants. This practical counting appears to be have been taught to young boys early in life (Horace, \textit{Art of Poetry} 325–330).
\item[6] There are 243 surviving manuscripts of the \textit{Marriage}, either complete or partial (Kennedy 1980, p176). The book’s popularity may be due to its allegory and obscurity, rather than in spite of it. The Middle Ages delighted in multiple readings: about the same time as Manuitius was writing the \textit{Marriage}, his fellow-Carthaginian Augustine was praising the multiplicity of scriptural interpretation in \textit{de doctrina Christiana}. See Chapter 12.
\item[7] Brown 1974, p110
\item[8] “Beyond any doubt, knowledge of these matters ... is useful [for a monk] and not to be avoided, since one finds this knowledge diffused everywhere in sacred scripture.” In Kennedy 1980, pp177–178
\end{itemize}
Cassiodorus and his Benedictine successors ensured a limited intellectual life continued in the monasteries. It was at a limited level though: such classical works that the monks quoted in their own work tended to be short or introductory works (Donatus’s grammar, Cicero’s schoolboy *De Inventione*, and the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*). Although the monks copied longer and more complex works, they rarely studied or quoted them.

Theologians were more concerned with tight argument than with eloquence; more with *res* (things) than with *verba* (speech). In part this is because most proofs rely on methods ‘external’ to rhetoric—such as quotations from scripture, patristic authority, or (in the case of legal trials) confessions extracted by ordeal. This lack of interest in the organisation and presentation of speeches is reflected in the few early works on preaching—the only real function left to rhetoric produced in the period. As I discussed in Chapter 12, Augustine focussed largely on understanding the Bible, and for style advised preachers simply to quote

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9 Amongst the ‘ignored survivors’ were all of Cicero’s mature works on rhetoric with Quintilian’s twelve-volume *Institutio Oratoria*, known only in a mutilated form between the ninth and fifteenth centuries.

The main forms of scholarly output in the early Middle Ages were the ‘encyclopaedias’ of ancient learning, not new systems of thought. For instance Manutius’ comments on rhetoric are drawn chiefly from Cicero’s schoolboy work, *de Inventione* and a late Rome account of figures of speech. Cassiodorus uses the same material, even quoting Manutius, along with Cicero (*De Inventione, De Oratore*), Quintilian, Augustine and several late Roman authors. Cassiodorus’ grammar was a summary of the already very short introduction to the eight parts of speech by Donatus, and rhetoric he presents in its emaciated late Roman form: *stasis* theory (for invention) and figures (for style). He also shifted rhetoric from third to second place amongst the liberal *artes*, removing it from the symbolic high point it had held in classical education.

Half a century after Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville (c.570–636) wrote the largest of the early encyclopaedias, the *Etymologiae*, a work that would be a standard reference until the tenth century. Although he summarises the Seven Liberal Arts, his contribution is little more than a compilation of quotations from other works, based on Cassiodorus.

The main contribution in the verbal arts made by the only real philosopher of the period, Boethius (c.480–524), were his commentaries on Aristotle’s rhetoric, and a work on topics (*De topicis differentiis*), which displaced works by Cicero and Aristotle on the same subject in the twelfth century.

10 Isidore’s only real contribution is to strip rhetoric of some of its parts. For example, in his discussion of grammar, he drew on Donatus, but added four new components: *prosa, metra, fabulae and historia* (Lanham 2001, p112). *Fabulae* he associates with *res ficta* (fictitious things) and *historia* with *res facta* (factual things), a distinction that was traditionally made in the second part of rhetoric, arrangement (*Fabula* is a term used by Augustine in *de doctrina Christiana* to refer to those types of speech intended to delight the senses.). So effectively, Isidore transferred the practice of artistic writing—both prose and poetry—from rhetoric to grammar.
or emulate it. The influential *Pastoral Care* of Pope Gregory the Great (reigned 590–604) tells priests what topics to address in their sermons, but not how to prepare a sermon.

The consequences of the Carolingian revival: ninth to mid-twelfth centuries

A transient renaissance took place under Charlemagne (reigned 768–814). Charlemagne’s goal was religious revitalisation, embracing clerical and civil reform, with a particular emphasis on education. Clerical abuses were curbed; the monastic Benedictine Rule was enforced—particularly rules concerning study and teaching. For the laypeople, Charlemagne tried to improve preaching and called for intense instruction in Christian faith amongst children and converts.

Charlemagne recognised that achieving his goals—such as placing a corrected copy of the Latin Vulgate Bible in every Frankish church—required considerable scholarly and educational resources. He invited scholars and monks from the famed British and Irish monasteries to his imperial courts to oversee the program of restoration. They took a largely Augustinian approach to Biblical study and education, agreeing that understanding the Bible was aided by an education in the ancient liberal arts. Consequently, the British scholars reinvigorated and taught the Seven Liberal Arts recommended by Manutius and Cassiodorus. At the same time as they corrected the error-riddled Bible, the British monks also collected, corrected and copied texts by ancient authors. From their labours emerged a considerable variety of scholarly and teaching aids: dictionaries, glossaries, bilingual word lists, spelling handbooks, commentaries, and compilations—all of which would be of immense value in the later study of language and its use.

Charlemagne and his successors also sought to ensure that the fruits of scholarship would be known by all people in the Holy Roman Empire. To achieve this, he needed to improve the intellectual quality of the clergy—particularly their capacity to read and preach. This is reflected in his edict of 792 requiring the clergy to be taught grammar and rhetoric.

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11 In part both the existence and continuing survival of the Frankish kingdom depended on religion and the support that Charles Martel, Pepin and Charlemagne had won from the Church. Pepin secured the support of the Pope to displace the Merovingian dynasty. Charlemagne’s support of the Pope against the Lombards had won him the title of Holy Roman Emperor.

12 Colish 1997, p68. It is to the efforts of these scholars that we owe virtually all of the surviving Latin works. The earliest surviving manuscripts we possess—or indeed, that were available to the Scholastics and the Humanists—were almost entirely Carolingian: virtually no original Latin manuscripts survived in the West.

13 “... we exhort you not only not to neglect the study of letters, but also ... to study earnestly in order that you may be able more easily and more correctly to penetrate the mysteries of the...continued on next page
Education did not end with the clergy: monasteries and cathedral schools were instructed to teach students not destined for the cloister. Although the impetus of the Carolingian restoration was religious, the interests of the scholars and their students quickly broadened. “The overall attitude to the liberal arts, especially those of the trivium, conveyed by the Carolingian authors shows them to be well beyond the utilitarian application of them to biblical exegesis and Christian education, as ordered by Charlemagne, to a personal appreciation of the arts.” This interest is reflected in the great increase in the amount of poetry, both religious and secular, produced during the Carolingian period.

Although all seven of the liberal arts were taught during the Carolingian renaissance, emphasis went to the trivium—grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Books on these three topics form the bulk of educational texts produced by the Carolingian scholars. Their chief classical source on rhetoric was Cicero. Even with imperial support for the revival of the artes, rhetoric did not reach anything like the influence it had in the ancient world: the ancient conditions for public oratory—urban communities, popular participation in government and law—simply did not exist in Europe outside Italy. Also, it was Augustine’s rather limited view on rhetoric rather than Cicero’s that predominated. Until the eleventh century, serious interest in the organisation and presentation of material is low.

(divine Scriptures. Since, moreover, images, tropes and similar figures are found in the sacred pages, no one doubts that each one in reading these will understand the spiritual sense more quickly if previously he shall have been fully instructed in the mastery of letters. ... we desire you [priests] to be, as it is fitting that soldiers of the church should be, devout in mind, learned in discourse, chaste in conduct and eloquent in speech...” In Munro 1900, pp 12-14.

Charlemagne appears to have doubted the effectiveness of teaching alone, and so ordered the compilation of sermons by the Church Fathers for use on feast days: preachers could either model their own sermons upon them, or if they lacked ability in composition they could simply read out the words of the Fathers.

14 Colish 1997, p67. The effectiveness of these reforms is reflected in the rising comprehension of Latin amongst people outside the Church.
15 Colish 1997, p70
16 Colish 1997, p68
17 so dependent was Alcuin—Charlemagne’s chief scholar—on Cicero’s De Inventione that his own dialogue concerning rhetoric dealt entirely with judicial rhetoric as Cicero had done, even though the Carolingian legal system was entirely different and held no real opportunities for rhetoric.
18 The Benedictine Rule, reinforced during the Carolingian renaissance, forbade the use of oratory for purposes other than devotion. (Rule 52)
Ultimately the Carolingian renaissance did not last. It had been legislated into existence by Charlemagne, and depended heavily on imperial power to survive. What it lacked was the economic basis needed to make it permanent. When the power of the Emperors failed, so too did their revival. In the tenth century, when the office of Holy Roman Emperor passed to Otto IV and German remnants of Charlemagne’s empire, there were efforts to restore earlier reforms, but they proved equally transitory. The Carolingian and Ottonian revivals did however restart scholarly activity in Western Europe and revive teaching of the Seven Liberal Arts, particularly the trivium. This increased familiarity is reflected in the use of classical rhetoric in the formation of three new communication arts in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: the *ars dictaminis* (the art of letter-writing), the *ars praedicandi* (the art of preaching) and the *ars poetica* (the art of poetry). (I have summarised each in Appendix 7.) Each started by modifying the precepts of classical rhetoric to their particular needs: to structure arguments and narratives, to urge action, or to ornament texts artistically. By the thirteenth century, all three were arts fully independent of classical rhetoric—indeed, the *ars dictaminis* became far more widely taught and practised in the High Middle Ages than rhetoric proper. However, none of the three arts survived the appearance of the printing press in the fifteenth century and changes to preaching that followed the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, and had no lasting influence in ideas about communication. Nonetheless, they demonstrate the need for techniques to guide routine and formulaic communication—and the continuing relevance of rhetoric to meet that need.

**THE FLOWERING OF DIALECTIC IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES**

The universities and the *summae*

The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed an extraordinary outpouring of intellectual and creative activity that fundamentally altered the balance between grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. This was due to several factors. As I discussed in Chapter 13, improvements in agriculture in the eleventh century saw a general increase in prosperity. Coupled with increased security, this led to greater social complexity, which in turn generated demand for professional administrators in courts, estates and towns. Increased prosperity also gave the Church more resources to complete Augustine’s task of mastering ancient learning in order to understand and explain Christian revelation. There is also evidence that, at the same time, laymen began to seek out education and were increasingly able to afford extended study. The rising number of students created demand for competent teachers. Although

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19 Southern 1967, p187. In the twelfth century, there was a large movement of students from Italy to the cathedral schools of northern France. Other evidence for the scale of lay...
some masters taught independently, most attached themselves to the security of the cathedral schools—so tipping the balance of education away from the monasteries.\textsuperscript{20}

In the second half of the twelfth century, groups of cathedral and abbey schools began to coalesce into Western Europe’s first universities: Paris, Montpellier, Salerno, Oxford, Bologna. These were corporations of students and teachers, with legal rights guaranteed by charter from the town or local prince. These charters gave the universities powers of self-government, but they also effectively cut them free of the civil law and direct interference from the Church—which gave them enormous intellectual freedom, accelerating the development of new ideas. The existence of large groups of scholars also meant that programs of study were pursued by several people in concert, and could also persist beyond the lifetime of any individual. The development of medieval learning and high culture became a corporate affair rather than an individual one, greatly increasing the depth, acuity, and scope of medieval thought.

The rise of collegial scholarship is reflected in changing patterns of scholarship. The characteristic product of post-Carolingian scholars was the \textit{florilegium}: an individual scholar’s collection of quotations culled from years of reading. Although a few were studied by later readers, most did no more than a record of an individual’s interest, following no method or organisational principle. From the twelfth century, study and teaching became more systematic. For example, Hugh of St Victor (1096–1141) rejected the use of \textit{florilegia} in the study of literature, and required his students to study entire poems and orations, not just excerpts. He wanted his students to appreciate them as works of literature, not just as illustrations of compositional rules.\textsuperscript{21} A generation later, the influential John of Salisbury

\footnotesize{education in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is in the appearance of the first popular heresies since Antiquity.}

\textsuperscript{20} The rise of the cathedral schools owed little to the Carolingian and Ottonian educational reforms, which had been most effective in the monasteries. Although the Empire had attempted to reform the cathedrals and require them to run schools, the cathedrals were too independent to control from outside, and lacked anything comparable to the monks’ Benedictine Rule with which to discipline them from within. Until the twelfth century, education was usually a small part of the cathedral’s activities, and was often no more than a finishing school for young noblemen. Even after the Lateran Council of 1179 required cathedrals to provide teachers and a basic curriculum, they largely directed their own educational activities. But it was precisely this lackadaisical administration that led to the rise of the cathedral schools in the twelfth century. As the demand for teachers grew outside the church, individual masters began to attach themselves to cathedrals, rather than monasteries with their iron discipline and limited time for study. Teachers at the cathedral schools were usually unconstrained in what they taught, giving them much greater latitude to develop intellectually. By the mid-twelfth century, the cathedral schools had outstripped the monasteries in the students, teachers and intellectual activity.

\textsuperscript{21} Colish 1997, p177
(c.1115–1180) went one step further in his *Metalogicon*, objecting to the fragmentation of study in liberal arts, and calling for education to be integrated. Citing Cicero’s ideal of virtue combined with eloquence, he called for the systematic application of the liberal arts (which provided eloquence) to the study of theology (which discovered all virtue)\(^\text{22}\).

By the mid-twelfth century, scholars began to feel confident in their mastery of the ancient texts, both classical and Christian\(^\text{23}\). This produced a desire to consolidate what had been learnt, so creating the first *summae*, the great medieval summaries of all knowledge\(^\text{24}\). The *summae* represented a major advance over the *florilegia*. They were intended as complete treatments of a subject, divided by dialectic into their natural units, examined rationally, and defended with both reason and faith. Because the *summae* collected and integrated all that was essential about a subject, they became primary sources in their own right, alongside the works of Christian Fathers and ancient philosophers. Like the ancient works, they became the starting point for new inquiries and disputes. They were also adopted as textbooks in the new universities. Unlike previous medieval texts, they enjoyed an extraordinarily long life, and their undisputed usefulness lasted until the seventeenth century\(^\text{25}\).

Just as the texts studied by the scholastics evolved rapidly in the twelfth century, so did the medieval curriculum. Initially study was undertaken to prepare scholars for Biblical interpretation, preaching and theology, but as the High Middle Ages progressed, study was increasingly undertaken in its own right, independently of theology\(^\text{26}\). At first, it was organised within the traditional Seven Liberal Arts\(^\text{27}\), but by the mid-twelfth century two subjects had taken the ascendancy: dialectic and, to a lesser extent, grammar\(^\text{28}\).

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\(^{22}\) Colish 1997, pp177–178

\(^{23}\) John of Salisbury famously quotes Bernard, Chancellor of Chartres, that “a modern scholar, compared with the ancients, is a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant”—the medieval scholar may be humble set alongside Aristotle or Cicero, but by collecting and studying their works, the Christian scholar could see further than them.

\(^{24}\) Peter Lombard says in the preface to his *Sentences*—the first *summa* in theology—that his goal had been to compile the important words (sententiae) of the Christian Fathers in a single volume, so that subsequent scholars could find easily what they sought without having to work through many books.

\(^{25}\) Southern 1967, p196

\(^{26}\) Colish 1997, p175

\(^{27}\) Many commentaries on traditional authors—such as Cicero and Priscian—survive from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, indicating their continued importance until the mid-twelfth century.

\(^{28}\) The emphasis of study differed between universities. The universities of Salerno (the very first university) and Montpellier specialised in medicine, owing to their closeness to Muslim...continued on next page
The transformation of dialectic in the High Middle Ages

The reasons that dialectic dominated scholastic attention are complex. The study of dialectic since the tenth century had sharpened the critical faculties that the scholars employed when reading ancient works. Coupled with the growing continuity in scholarship, this revealed many inconsistencies, contradictions and gaps in Christian writings. The scholars also became increasingly aware that medieval law and government were disorganised and fragmentary: varieties of feudal law operated in northern Europe; a much-diminished descendant of Roman Law persisted in Italy and southern France, while the Church was governed by a canon law that was increasingly regarded as incomplete. But logic did more than help scholars identify where and what types of gaps and inconsistencies each contained: it also suggested how they might be resolved. “Logic was an instrument of order in a chaotic world.” Dialectic was first applied on a large scale in theology, and from there was extended to other subjects. In the twelfth century, there was a definite move in theology from a basis in faith to one based on reason.

lands where medical practice was more advanced than in the West. Paris emphasised theology. Bolonga specialised in law after a copy of the Roman Corpus of Civil Law was discovered in Tuscany. The Seven Liberal Arts provided the basis for later specialisations.

In part, the gaps in patristic works were inevitable. These had been written as occasion demanded, usually in response to some threat. Systematic theology would not appear until the mid-twelfth century.

The first summa concerning canon law appeared around 1140: the Decretum or Concordance of Discordant Canons by Gratian.

The growing confidence in reason’s capacity in theology can be illustrated in the work of four early scholastics.

The earliest major defence of Christianity on rational grounds was by Anselm (c.1033–1109)—although in his Proslogion, systematic theology was still interleaved with prayer.

A generation later, the logician Abelard (1079–1142) illustrated the importance he attaches to dialectic in theology in his Dialogus between a Jew, a Christian and a philosopher, in which he criticised both the Christian and the Jew for relying on faith alone, and being unable to defend their beliefs using rational methods. Implicit in his criticism was the assumption that Christian faith is not merely enhanced by rational philosophy, but is incomplete without it. Although his heretical and plainly Neoplatonic theology were unacceptable, his claims about reason were supported by later Scholastics. Also important was his Sic et Non (Yes and No), a collection of 158 philosophical and theological questions about which there was dispute, which he intended as a workbook to show students how to resolve theological problems using reason.

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Usefulness was not the sole reason for the dominance of dialectic by the thirteenth century. The use of formalised disputes as the chief teaching method in the cathedral schools and universities was also crucial. The origins of this practice were Roman schoolboy exercises in declamation, which the Middle Ages transformed into the chief formal engagement between scholars. These disputations were rigidly structured, and took the form of:

1. a disputed point
2. a list of objections raised by opponents
3. a statement of the speaker’s own position
4. a citation of evidence in support of the speaker’s position
5. a refutation of each point raised by opponents.

As a method of analysis, the rigidity of this method favoured logical and terminological precision over oratorical prowess. It was used in all forms of higher education in the cathedral schools and later at the universities, giving logic priority over literary studies.

Training in dialectic during the High Middle Ages has to be divided into two phases: before and after the return of Aristotle’s works on rhetoric in the mid-twelfth century. The ‘old

In *On the Sacraments of human faith*, Hugh of St Victor (1096–1141) distinguished between the two kinds of knowledge: revelation, which was accessible by faith, and the natural world, which was accessible by reason. Theology, he said, combined both forms of knowledge: “the theologian draws on God’s revelation of himself in the Bible, and orders it rationally, combining it with the knowledge of God obtainable from the natural world” (Colish 1997, p281).

Hugh’s division between faith and reason was even sharper in the first theological *summa*: the *Four Books of Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1100–1164). It dealt with the entire scheme of God, creation, human nature, sin, the Fall, Christ, Christian virtue, redemption, sacraments and last things. He explicitly rejected the Neoplatonic trend in Christianity and the claim that God can only be known in terms of what is not. Rather, he said that God can be known through positive metaphysics. He insisted that God does not generate creation through emanation, and therefore his creation does not participate in the divine essence. God does not constantly intervene in the created universe. Nature is not sacred—a move that Peter believed is important in the doctrine of humanity’s free will and its sole responsibility for the Fall. In this argument, Peter both reasserts God’s absolute transcendence over his creation, but he also provides a way for creation to be studied validly, independently of God, using the tools of natural philosophy.

Most of the books that come down to us from the Scholastics are actually edited transcripts of these disputations. It is striking that, even amongst Western Europe’s most literate communities of the time, oral methods took priority over writing in academic discussion.

This is also the form used in most surviving medieval textbooks, particularly the *summae*.
logic’ (logica vetus) depended almost exclusively on the translations and commentaries of Boethius (c480–524). Students started with his translation of Porphyry’s introduction to logic (Isagoge), which explained the terms used in logic. Next they studied Boethius’ translations of Aristotle’s Categories and On Interpretation which described the how objects could be classified and ordered, their relationship with words, and how words were formed into sentences and propositions. Next they usually met Cicero’s Topica with Boethius’ commentary on it37. The last work in the logica vetus was Boethius’ commentaries and works on logic, which discussed definition, syllogisms, and logical analysis38.

By the mid-twelfth century—the time when the first summae were being composed—the Scholastics had not only mastered all the surviving works on logic, but they had identified areas where Aristotle’s and Boethius’ commentaries were inadequate, and began to advance dialectic beyond what they had inherited39. A crucial development in this period was the transformation of logic from an argumentative art into a formal one: a move which turned Scholastic logic away from its classical sources. At the beginning of the Topica, Cicero complained that the Stoics had focussed on the validity of formal reasoning while overlooking the real problem faced by orators of inventing arguments40 (a problem that orators usually resolved by referring to lists of ‘topics’). The scholastics reversed the direction of Cicero’s criticism. They began to separate dialectic from argumentation, and saw dialectic in terms of valid reasoning not persuasive argument—so cutting dialectic free from speech and evidence. Logic became an art concerned with concepts and propositions whose validity was established on formal grounds, not a science concerned with facts derived from reality and whose conclusions were verified in terms of that reality41. This transformation would never be completed during the Middle Ages for two reasons. First, the scholastics’

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37 Although Cicero claimed that his Topica was to be a translation of Aristotle’s Topics, there is little in common between them. Cicero’s concern is with the invention of rhetorical argument, and he criticises aspects of dialectic taught in his day. Cicero also introduced aspects of Stoic philosophy only developed after Aristotle’s death.

38 From Southern 1967, p168 & 172. Boethius’ works on logic are the Introductio ad syllogismos categoricos, De Syllogismo categorico, De Syllogismo hypothetico, De Divisione, and De Differentiis Topicis.

39 Colish 1997, p275. One important innovation was the development of propositional logic by Abelard—a type of logic that had been developed by the Stoics, but lost at the end of Antiquity (although Cicero’s Topica presented a garbled and incomplete account of it). Propositional logic was put aside after the return of Aristotle’s missing works on logic in the mid-twelfth century, and was only rediscovered independently in the nineteenth century. See Kneale & Kneale 1964, pp200–224, for a discussion of Abelard’s contribution to logic.

40 Cicero Topica 54–57. Also see Kneale & Kneale 1964, p179.

41 Colish 1997, p275–276
Chief method of teaching and scholarship remained verbal disputation, not mental activity. Second, the scholastics did not rely on reason alone in their training and disputes, but also had to demonstrate their mastery of ancient sources, along with the reasons they agreed or disagreed with them\textsuperscript{42}. Only when verbal disputation and the veneration of ancient authorities were abandoned in the early Modern Age was logic severed from disputation and evidence (an event that took place most decisively in Descartes’ philosophy).

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After the return of Aristotle’s lost texts, the effort to extend his logic to cope with identified deficiencies was put aside for the task of mastering the new works—the Prior and Posterior Analytics, the Topica and the Sophistical Refutations. The Scholastics admired Aristotle’s achievement precisely because they understood the limitations of the old texts and could recognise the quality of the newly recovered works, and had immediate uses for them\textsuperscript{43}.

By the thirteenth century, Aristotelian logic comprised the new logic (logica nova) that dominated the universities of northern Europe until the Modern Age. The impact of the returned texts can be appreciated in two medieval university curricula, a century apart. The first, from the School of Chartres in 1142, was organised around the traditional Seven Liberal Arts, although dialectic had been replaced by the new translations of Aristotle’s logic (rather than Boethius’ commentaries), and the mathematical quadrivium had been supplemented with new authorities on geometry, abacus and astronomy.

The second curriculum from c.1230–1240 reflects the total reorganisation of the medieval curriculum along ‘rational’ lines prompted by the study of Boethius. In his commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge, Boethius had distinguished philosophy from other knowledge, then divided philosophy into speculative, natural and moral (equivalent to the Stoic division of philosophy into logic, physics and ethics). This became the standard division of subjects in medieval universities, and is reflected in the curricula, which replaced the Seven Liberal Arts. Natural philosophy covered metaphysics, physics and mathematics\textsuperscript{44}. Moral philosophy was organised around Aristotle’s Ethics. Speculative philosophy was a

\textsuperscript{42} Colish 1997, p265

\textsuperscript{43} See Kneale & Kneale 1964, pp224–246 for the development of logica modernorum in medieval universities after the return of Aristotle’s texts. See Colish 1997 for a non-technical summary of this movement.

\textsuperscript{44} Mathematics comprised all of the old quadrivium, although it was chiefly concerned with geometry and theoretical astronomy. The chief sources were Euclid and Ptolemy, whose texts had returned from Muslim sources at the same time as Aristotle’s.
development of the old trivium, but over two thirds of it consisted of dialectic, chiefly the ‘new logic’ of Aristotle.45

Grammar

The rise of dialectic was shadowed by speculation in grammar and linguistics. The importance of grammar can be explained by the scholastics’ focus on texts, particularly the Bible. Grammar provided them with tools to interpret these texts correctly, and understand them in all their richness. They significantly improved methods for analysing and criticising texts. For example, in the prologue to *Sic et Non*, Abelard recognised various sources of dispute that arise from misunderstanding texts, rather than what the texts themselves say. To counter these he provides methods to ensure the correctness of the received texts, before discussing how to resolve apparent conflicts between them.

Because grammar was used as an introduction to logic, developments in dialectic were paralleled by advances in grammatical theory. As logic became a formal art and the core of speculative philosophy, so there evolved a speculative grammar, divorced from the concrete task of teaching students their letters or interpreting ancient texts.

The thorniest problem faced by grammatical theory was posed by the appearance of nominalism in the twelfth century, and its challenge to realism. Realism treated all words as names or ‘appellations’ of things, a theory illustrated by the Biblical account of how the animals got their names: in the Garden of Eden, God had brought each of the animals to Adam, and Adam had given them their names.46 Language in this view is simply a collection of words, and these words name things, and their meaning lies in the relationship between word and thing. Implicit in this account is the belief that not only do concrete things exist, but so too do ‘universals’—things corresponding to general terms. So, for example, in the sentence “Socrates is a man”, both the individual ‘Socrates’ and the

45 The two curricula are summarised in Tester 1987, pp102–103. In the thirteenth-century curriculum, seven pages was sufficient to list all of the materials covered by both natural and moral philosophy, whereas forty-two pages were required to cover rational philosophy—although admittedly this section does contain over 160 supplementary questions and illustrations.

46 The Scholastics were divided on why Adam used the names he did. Some, relying on Jerome’s translation of the Bible, held that before the Fall, Adam had known the proper names of all things, and so he was not inventing new names for the animals but simply calling animals by the names it was proper for them to have. This view implied that the source of all names was God. Others however took a less orthodox view and held that Adam had applied such names as he thought fit, and these owed nothing to God. Words were then no more than a human invention existing only for human convenience.
general class ‘man’ are equally real. This claim was broadly consistent with Christianity’s Neoplatonic heritage, which held that every object in the material world was an image of some Platonic Idea in the Divine Mind. These Ideas were universals and were fully real.

Nominalism rejected the reality of universals. Individual things were real, but universals were simply products of the human mind and corresponded to nothing in creation. This theory could not be easily reconciled with a theory that words simply named things, for if universals did not exist, just what was it that words named? The problem was commonly illustrated with the problem of ‘name of the rose’: if the objects we know as roses were named with the word ‘rose’, and then all roses subsequently destroyed, what would the ‘name of the rose’ refer to? (In modern terms, the ‘name of the rose’ is a sign which stands for an unknown or possibly non-existent thing.) There were various solutions posed. The most important was the claim that words do not stand for things in the world, but for some kind of mental concept or image. The meaning of the word ‘rose’ would survive the destruction of all roses, because the concept remained, and the word had its meaning through reference to it. Similarly, when a person hears the word ‘man’, or any other universal, the meaning of the word is in concept, not in the existence of a real universal thing, man.

This ‘modistic’ view of language transformed the meaning of words into a problem of psychology: in appellation theory the meaning of words lay in the object they named, in modistic grammar the meaning lay in the relationship between the word and the concept it stood for. For this the modistae could call on the authority of Aristotle, who said that “spoken words are symbols of mental experience.” The Scholastics also drew on Aristotle’s On the Soul to integrate this theory into medieval psychology: the interpretation of words was explained in the same way as sensory perception.

The conflict between realism and nominalism first emerged in the late eleventh century, and would plague Scholasticism until its demise in the sixteenth century. Led by William of Ockham (c.1285–c.1349), late Scholastic Nominalism did tremendous damage to Thomistic theology, which relied on the existence and reality of the Ideas in the Divine Mind. One particular casualty was the theoretical basis for the Great Chain of Being, for it implied that there could be no natural order in a universe composed exclusively of individual things. Nominalism however was an essential step in the emergence of empirical science from the fifteenth century.

Aristotle On Interpretation §1.16a4

About the same time, the term ‘meaning’ shifted sense from its early medieval sense of ‘intention’ (“What was meant to happen was...”) to the mental signification of words. Meaning is one of a large group of words in Indo-European languages that link speech, intentions, memory and mind, although the path of their development and their relationship to one another remains unclear. Although all have the roots √men- or √min-, their senses are diverse. With some generalisation, we can identify five broad groups.

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Modistic grammar was never entirely successful, and never fully displaced appellation theory. Although it declined at the end of the Middle Ages, the belief in words as sign of things in the mind was sufficiently entrenched for it to be incorporated unquestioned into early Modern theories of language.

The function of rhetoric in the reformed curriculum

The rise of dialectic in the twelfth century took place at the expense of rhetoric. Before the return of Aristotle’s works and the reorganisation of university curricula, rhetoric held its own as one of the Seven Liberal Arts, although it was usually taught as a bridge between grammar and dialectic; an introduction to the harder and—in the scholastics’ view—more interesting subject of logic. After the reorganisation of philosophy during the thirteenth century, rhetoric was entirely subordinated to dialectic: even the *ars dictaminis* had a higher priority.

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First are those words related to speech, as in the modern *mention*, Latin *minae* (threat), Greek *memphomai* (reproach) and Sanskrit *a-manāv* (mention). A second and larger group is related to memory, as in the Latin *meno, memor and memoria*, Old Norse *minjar*, and Old High German *gaminthi*. The root *vmen-* is occasionally doubled as in the Greek *mimnēskō* (to remind) *mnema* (memorial) and Latin *memini* (remember), and the modern *momento*. There is a close relationship between this group and the previous—many of its terms are related to speech. This may be because oral culture—including Homer—treated memory as a function of speech. (Also related are several words for grieving, an act with connotations of both speaking and remembering.)

The third group of words is less obviously connected to the first two, and concerns intentions, will and desire, as in the Greek *memona* (I yearn) and Sanskrit *mana* (desire, envy), Welsh *mynu* (will, wish). This is probably the immediate origin of ‘meaning’ in the sense of “what I meant to say”. The fourth group is concerned with skill and ability, and appears linked with the third as both are concerned with people’s potential. In this group are Sanskrit *manās* (mood, skill), Greek *menos* (power, plan, but also desire and design), Old Italian *mena* (work, task) and *menare* (do, put, work), from which we have the Latin *minister* (helper, servant) and *administrere* (help with). It is also the source of Minerva, the Roman goddess of arts and crafts.

The last group is the source of the modern word ‘mind’ and ‘mental’: Latin *mens* and *mente*, and Middle High German *minde*. This is a late group of words, which suggests that it was developed as a back-formation to explain the source of words, intentions, skills and memories. Important to note is that none but the last group are intellectual, private ‘inner experiences’ in the way we usually use ‘mind’ and ‘mental’ today. They appear to have originated in concrete human activity and only in the last two thousand years become interiorised.
This subordination is illustrated in the way that Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* was used. (It was one of the works recovered with Aristotle’s logical treatises, and might be expected to receive the same veneration as Aristotle’s other works—especially as Thomas Aquinas had specifically requested a new Latin translation around 1270). Although the *Rhetoric* was studied, the Scholastics’ main interest was in Aristotle’s analysis of morality and emotion, not his discussion of style and organisation. Similarly, the art of memory—the fourth part of Ciceronic rhetoric—was revived in the thirteenth century, but as part of scholastic ethics, not to help an orator remember a speech.

The newer arts of writing, poetry and preaching provided the Middle Ages with all the techniques they needed to guide communication practice, although as I noted earlier, their methods did draw on classical rhetoric, chiefly for style.

**RENAISSANCE HUMANISTS AND PROTESTANT REFORMERS**

Outside the Church and universities, rhetoric was not entirely ignored, but its survival depended on local circumstances. Most important in the development of ideas about communication was the revival of both forensic and political oratory in the thirteenth century Italy. Medieval Italy was unusual in the Middle Ages because many towns and cities maintained a living connection with their Roman past. Associations with great Roman figures such as Caesar and Pompey were matters of civic pride. The communes were ruled by a descendant of the Roman law—one revitalised after a copy of the Justinian Code was discovered in the mid-twelfth century. The Italian communes were governed by councils of citizens, not kings and barons. So, more than any other part of medieval Europe, Italy’s urban and legal conditions came closest to matching those of ancient Rome, and an so afforded an environment well-suited to the revival of Roman oratory. So, not surprisingly, it was in Italy, wealthy with the burgeoning trade and wealth of the High Middle Ages, that the Humanistic movement appeared, making the re-establishment of rhetoric one of its primary goals.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Humanists, like the Scholastics, revered the past and sought to recover ancient texts. But they rejected the Scholastic’s abstract analysis and intellectualisation which, by the fourteenth century, had dominated Europe’s high culture for two centuries. For the Humanists, the past was not simply a quarry of scientific knowledge and dialectical method to be integrated within Christian revelation.

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51 See Yates 1966, pp73–92
52 Colish 1997, p176
They saw the age since Rome’s fall as a period not only of intellectual loss but of moral decline. The Humanists believed that this decline could not be overcome through logical analysis and Aristotelian physics, but required a reinvigoration of the human spirit. This involved resuscitating the moral, creative and imaginative powers of humanity: a task the Humanists felt was to be achieved through the study of ancient literature and re-establishment of ancient standards of virtue. The path that the Humanists took was enormously influenced by Cicero’s definition of the ideal orator in *De Inventione*: a person who combined wisdom with eloquence. The *studia humanitas* therefore demanded both a knowledge of the human condition (from history, biography and moral philosophy) and of eloquence (from grammar, rhetoric, literature, and poetry). The Humanists insisted that the study of eloquence was to be pursued as it had been in Antiquity, not in its arid medieval form.

For the tradition of communication-as-technique, the most important consequence was the re-establishment of classical rhetoric, particularly in the form described and practiced by Cicero in his maturity. Despite new translations of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and intense admiration of Plato’s dialogues, no genuinely Aristotelian or Platonic rhetoric appeared. With the recovery of Cicero’s mature *De Oratore, Orator, and Brutus*, the Humanists relied less on the dry schoolboy works *De Inventione* and the *ad Herennium*, which had been the staples of Scholastic rhetoric. Cicero himself had said in *De Oratore* that what makes an orator eloquent is eloquence, not merely following the rules of rhetoric—which led the Humanists away from the Scholastics’ ruled-based rhetoric. It also led them to

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53 Major collections of Cicero’s letters were discovered in 1345 and 1392. (See Bishop 1963 for Petrarch’s response on his discovery the first collection of letters and see Baron 1955, pp97ff on the recovery and reception of the second collection by the Florentine Humanists in 1392). In the early 1400s several of Cicero’s most important legal speeches—*Pro Roscio*, *Pro Murena*, and *Pro Cuenio*—were recovered by the Florentine Humanists and soon emulated. In 1416, a complete copy of Quintilian’s *Institutio* was discovered, providing the Humanists with the complete and idealised Roman educational system, from birth through to the literary studies of the mature orator. The climax of the Humanist program came in 1421 with the discovery of Cicero’s *De Oratore, Orator, and Brutus*, completing the recovery of major lost works on classical rhetoric. Greek works were not ignored, especially after 1453, when the fall of Constantinople gave added impetus to their preservation. Latin translations were made of speeches by Demosthenes and Aeschines, Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, and sermons by the Greek Christian Fathers. New translations of Aristotle’s *Rhetorikhē teknē* appeared in the fifteenth century. In the first decade of the next century, other influential Greek texts re-appeared in print: Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *On Composition; On Ideas* by Hermogenes; *On Style* by Demetrius; and *On the sublime* by the ancient literary critic ‘Longinus’. Texts on classical rhetoric were amongst the first non-religious works printed using the newly-invented press. *De Oratore, Orator, and Brutus* appeared in 1465, within a decade of Gutenberg’s first Bible; the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *De Inventione*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio* were published five years later (Kennedy 1980, pp198–199).
study Cicero’s speeches and letters as models of eloquence. The Humanistic cult of Cicero
grew so extreme that some refused even to use a word not in Cicero’s vocabulary.

The early Humanists saw the study of the *litterae humanitatis* as a lifelong pursuit—a
view for which they had solid classical support: Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* described
the continuing literary studies appropriate to the mature orator, and Cicero had stressed
the importance of mature judgement, experience and wisdom in the orator-statesman. For
over a century, the wealth and political independence of the Renaissance Italian cities
made this a plausible objective, but the project came to an end in French, German and
Spanish invasions of the sixteenth century, which destroyed the political economy that
supported Humanistic political oratory. Most of the Italian Humanists remained as they
had begun: notaries, chancery officials, professional writers, poets, and students.

With the end of political and economic independence, rhetoric declined in Italy after 1500.
The loss of wealth meant that adult study was a rare luxury, and consequently grammar
and rhetoric were again studied chiefly by the young: usually boys between the ages of six
and sixteen. The consequence of teaching rhetoric exclusively to young students was that
Cicero’s lofty ambition of eloquence married to wisdom became largely unachievable. The
teaching of rhetoric was again reduced to methods that young students could learn and
remember, making the schoolboy *De Inventione* and the *ad Herennium* more attractive for
schoolteachers than Cicero’s mature *De Oratore* or *Brutus* (although they were used in
advanced studies). Still, the Humanists had firmly re-established rhetoric within the
curriculum of sixteenth century schoolboys—higher in prestige that under the Scholastics,
although far short of their lofty goals. So the classical rules of invention, arrangement, style
and delivery became commonplace in the late Renaissance amongst even people of only
modest incomes, establishing a new body of commonsense views about communication.

The Protestant influence

The rise of Humanism in Northern Europe coincided with the beginnings of the Protestant
Reformation. The relationship between the two is complex: sometimes conflicting,
sometimes coinciding. On one hand the Humanists preached a tolerance foreign to most
of the Reformers, and they had a higher estimation of the worth and ability of human
beings. Most Humanists did not join the revolt—like Erasmus, they preferred to reform the
Catholic Church from within, rather than break away entirely. But the two groups shared
much as well. Both sought to re-establish high standards of civic virtue. Both were hostile to
Scholastic speculation and the assumption that human improvement was to be achieved
through abstract logical analysis. Many of the leading Reformers, including Luther,

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54 See Kimble 1986, pp91–102 for a summary and further references.
Melanchthon and Calvin, counted themselves Humanists and expressed admiration for Cicero and Quintilian. The philological methods of the Humanists, initially employed to recover the world of the Greeks and Romans, were employed be the Reformers to reinterpret the Bible and restore what they understood was the true message and practice of Christianity. Preaching was enormously important to the Protestants and to support it they drew heavily on the Humanistic trivium.

In 1524, Luther savagely denounced Scholastic educational institutions, and called upon Protestant town leaders to rejuvenate education, recommending the study of the liberal arts in place of the scholastic curriculum. Melanchthon took on the enormous task of reorganising schools and universities, modelling their syllabuses on the Humanistic arts program. He elevated rhetoric above philosophy, and made Cicero and Quintilian the model of Protestant eloquence. The goal of Protestant educators was ‘wise and eloquent piety’: an ideal obviously derived from Cicero. Melanchthon’s students became leaders for most of the major schools in central Europe, and so the new arts program became standard throughout Protestant Europe by the mid-sixteenth century, making the humanities faculties a major forces in Renaissance universities.

The Catholic Church responded to the Protestants with a massive educational program of their own, with the twin goals of improving the quality to the clergy and reinvigorating the faith of the laity. One of the most effective measures taken was the establishment of the Jesuit Order, with the explicit purpose of educating the young. Despite doctrinal differences with the Protestants, they adopted a similar program of liberal arts.

The result of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation was that, although Humanism had declined in Italy after 1500, it became established in the north, becoming entrenched in the universities from the mid-sixteenth century. Rhetoric eclipsed philosophy for a time, and scholasticism retreated. But no new form of rhetoric emerged: instead the Reformation sponsored a massive ‘neo-Ciceronian’ movement, based firmly on Roman models. However, the Protestant support of Humanism against Scholasticism damaged dialectic: as I will discuss below, Cicero and Quintilian became quoted as often as Aristotle in sixteenth-century textbooks on logic, and the quality of formal logic declined. The tight dialectical reasoning of the Scholastics gave way to the Humanists’ looser rhetorical argumentation.

Baldwin 1944 describes in enormous detail the English version of the Protestant educational system in the mid-sixteenth century. The program was broadly divided into ‘lower’ or introductory schools, and ‘higher’ education at universities. The lower or petit schools taught grammar, dialectic, logic, poetry and history—effectively the trivium plus the humanistic sources of morality. From this we have the English term ‘trivial’ meaning elementary or simple.
Despite the full-scale adoption of the Humanist program, there were forces within the Reformation that worked against Ciceronian oratory, and worked to establish a much simpler style and mode of presentation. Luther began reforming the German church by asserting that every soul should confront God directly, rather than through the intermediary of Church ritual. It followed that every Christian needed to know precisely what God expected of them. This in turn implied that every Christian needed a first-hand knowledge of the Bible, which meant that every Christian needed an accurate, intelligible translation. (The Latin Vulgate, written in the fifth century was still the Bible used throughout Catholic Europe in the fifteenth century, even in the German-speaking north). So a new translation was a high priority for the new Protestant churches. Luther was first urged to prepare a translation in 1521—the same year as the first Protestant Mass was celebrated. When the huge task was completed, Luther found he had to defend himself against charges of heresy. One of the main grounds he used to defend himself was the language he had used. “I have constantly tried,” he wrote, “to produce a pure and clear German...”

We must not ... ask the Latin letters how we are to speak German; but we must ask the mother in the home, the children in the street, the common man in the marketplace about this, and look them in the mouth to see how they speak, and afterwards to our translating...

Luther’s virtues of pure, simple and clear language, and the speech of ‘the common man’, became accepted standards for style by many later Protestant translators. For example, the committee responsible for the King James Bible (1611) wrote that in their translation they had “aimed to walk in simplicity and integrity before the Lord”.

Just as important as translation was preaching. One of the chief Protestant criticisms of the Catholic Church was the low quality of preaching. In part, this was not surprising: with Western Europe converted to Christianity in the High Middle Ages, the impetus to secure the faith had diminished. Medieval preaching became either formulaic or else an

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56 The Protestant desire to see every person read and know the Bible was a radical break with Catholic tradition. Luther’s greatest opponent in then-Catholic England, Sir Thomas More, wrote in 1545 that the bishops alone should decide who was to read the Bible: “one man, he suggested, might be permitted to read some of the Gospels according to his individual disposition, but not all four of them; and others, ‘busy-bodies’, should be forbidden the ‘meddling with any part at all.’” (Romer 1988, p317)

57 There had been a number of translations made before Luther—Wycliff’s in fourteenth century England and Valla’s critique of Jerome’s translation in the late fifteenth century. They had been largely uninfluential because they were written before mass printing had been developed in Europe. As the Catholic Church and governments across Europe realised too late, the printing press was pivotal to the success of Luther’s revolt.

58 In Romer 1990, p307
opportunity to show mastery of the rules of ornamentation and amplification. But with the appearance of the Reformers, there was strong competition between Catholics and Protestants to win converts and defend the faith. The Protestant appeal to every single Christian soul—not simply the educated and nobility as had been the focus of medieval preaching—meant a far greater emphasis on using language that was intelligible and meaningful to the general population. So, as in translation, ‘clear’ and ‘plain’ language became a hallmark of both religious and secular language in the Protestant countries of northern Europe and, later, in their American colonies. The cult for simplicity was greatest where the Calvinists or Puritans were strong: Switzerland, northern France and particularly England. Their rejection of ostentation and display of all kinds, and their demands for strictness, simplicity and purity were applied to rhetorical style. In a sermon read in 1667, Bishop Stillingfleet commended apostolic preaching for its plainness and simplicity, rejecting the lush Renaissance style with its ornaments and metaphors:

nothing here of the finger of the North-star … nothing of the door of angel’s wings or the beautiful locks of cherubims; no starched similitudes, introduced with a “thus have I seen a cloud rolling in its airy mansion,” and the like.

The struggle between rhetoric and dialectic

There was constant tension between Scholastics and Humanists throughout the Renaissance. The Scholastics held the universities when the Humanists first emerged, and successfully excluded the bulk of Humanists until the mid-sixteenth century. One major source of conflict between them was how the verbal artes should be taught: both agreed that students should begin with grammar, but they were sharply divided on rhetoric and dialectic. (Neither group disputed the need for both; in the Renaissance “logic and rhetoric

59 The University of Paris, bastion of Scholasticism, invested in a single chair of Greek in 1458, and would not expand its Greek studies for over seventy years. Greek scholarship in France only began in earnest with the establishment in 1526—seventy five years after the fall of Constantinople—of the Collège de France with chairs in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and the simultaneous founding of the Royal Press. Even with these advances though, Scholasticism overshadowed Humanism in France throughout the Renaissance.

In England, the early Humanists did not perceive any fundamental difference between the Humanism and Scholasticism, although this would change later by the end of the sixteenth century. Corpus Christi College, established at Oxford in 1517, was the first English centre devoted explicitly to Humanistic scholarship. Although Greek had been studied at Oxford since 1504, it was suppressed intermittently because of internal politics until 1533. It was only “by the age of Elizabeth the convergence of the aims of the [English] Humanist education and the needs and demands of the [English] gentry as an emergent governing class had made knowledge of Latin a prerequisite for social advancement” (Padley 1976, p.7).
[were] the two great arts of communication, and ... the complete theory of communication [was] largely identified, not with one, not with the other, but with both.\(^{60}\)

The Scholastics regarded rhetoric as an introduction to the more important subject of logic. Consequently, Scholastic rhetoric tended to focus on those parts that it shared with dialectic: invention and arrangement. Matters of style were dealt with in the analysis of figures of thought and speech. For the Scholastics, rhetoric was not a practical art: those functions were adequately covered by the \textit{ars dictaminis, ars praedicandi} and \textit{ars poetica}. The Scholastics’ real concern was with dialectic, which continued to be based on Aristotle and verbal disputation, although by the late Middle Ages it grown into an enormously sophisticated formal art.

The Humanists’ goal by contrast was eloquence, and they treated dialectic as an introduction to rhetoric (the order that these subjects had been taught in Antiquity). Humanistic logic relied primarily on Quintilian and Cicero’s \textit{Topica} for invention and arrangement, although Aristotle’s \textit{Categories} and \textit{Topics} found some use. The Humanists were less concerned with logical exactness than the Scholastics. They rejected all three medieval \textit{artes} as unsophisticated and inelegant, and referred to Roman rhetoric, poetry and literature for guidance on style and delivery.

The balance of the argument between Humanists and Scholastics differed across Europe. In Italy, where Humanism was established earliest and most thoroughly, and where the Italian republics had immediate use for political oratory, the Humanistic rhetoric gained the upper hand, at least for a while. In France, where Scholasticism was most entrenched, dialectic won—with important consequences for ideas about the relationship between logic and rhetoric. The most influential northern dialectician was Peter Ramus (1515–1572).

Ramus trained and taught in Paris, and in 1551 was appointed royal lecturer in eloquence and philosophy. Although his interests were wide—including mathematics, theology, logic, rhetoric, astronomy, and pedagogy—he lasting impact was in educational reform and the debate between rhetoric and dialectic. Throughout his life, Ramus’ primary target was Aristotelian philosophy, which he regarded as badly flawed\(^{61}\). He particularly objected to the way that Aristotle and Scholastic philosophy allowed different \textit{artes} to treat the same subject matter and teach the same body of knowledge\(^{62}\). For similar reasons he also objected to Quintilian’s definition of the art of rhetoric as “the knowledge of speaking well” (where ‘good’ here means not only effective pleading, but also moral goodness), arguing this

\(^{60}\) Howell 1956, p4

\(^{61}\) Ramus’s Master’s thesis, completed at the age of 21, was entitled “Whatever Aristotle has said is false”, giving us a good idea about his future directions.

\(^{62}\) Padley 1976, p80
could not be an ideal, because training in goodness is the purpose of moral philosophy, not an art of speaking. In response, he proposed a thorough reorganisation of the entire arts program, in part to make it more logical, but also to make it easier for students to learn.

To replace the Scholastic program, he proposed a new dissection of the arts, based initially on the traditional Seven Liberal Arts. He began at the most general level of the arts program, dividing and subdividing the subjects, ensuring that each art would teach one and only one topic. Inevitably, when he came to dialectic and rhetoric, which had overlapped since Aristotle’s time, there would have to be major changes. Given Ramus’ determination to replace Aristotelian logic with his own, it is not surprising that dialectic won. He noted that the first two parts of Cicero’s five-fold division of rhetoric—*invention, arrangement, style, memory* and *delivery*—were duplicated by dialectic. His response was to transfer to logic everything concerned with *inventing* material and *arranging* it in a coherent order. Classical memory techniques were increasingly neglected except in esoteric practice; Ramus ignored *memory* on some occasions and transferred it to dialectic on others. He left rhetoric with *style* and *delivery*. Even style was plundered: Ramus proposed to transfer figures of thought to dialectic; rhetoric would be left with only the figures of speech and the tropes—and these he reduced to only four: metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and irony. What Ramus effectively did was to sharply separate the ancient parts of communication associated with the mind (*ennoia, dianoia, res*) from words and speech (*lexis, verba*), and sharply curtailed those parts concerned with words. Ramus contributed considerably to Plato’s ancient complaint of rhetoric as being concerned with false, ornamental words. The result was that “rhetoric came increasingly to be regarded—and condemned by seventeenth-century empiricists—as a mere added ornament to matter under discussion.”

Although nakedly critical of Scholasticism, Ramus’ logic derived much from Aristotle—and in many cases, involved little more than rearranging the old material. Logic he says consisted of invention and arrangement, and he devoted one book to each in his

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63 Amongst his many reforms, Ramus insisted that different subjects should be taught in different classrooms so that students would associate the location with the subject, rather than the practice in his day of placing the students in one room, and sending different teachers to lecture them on all topics in the one room. It is primarily because of Ramus that modern universities now locate separate disciplines in separate buildings.

64 The standard text on the ancient memory arts from antiquity to modern age remains Francis Yates’ *The Art of Memory* (1966).

65 Padley, 1976, p80

66 The distinction between invention and arrangement is implicit in Aristotle’s *Topics*, where the first seven books deal with invention and the last book with arrangement. Cicero and Boethius are explicit in the distinction.
Dialectique (1555, the first work in French on logic). In the first book, Ramus entirely rejected Aristotle’s categories and topics, which had been the basis for Scholastic invention, saying they were useless and confused. In their stead he gave ten loci or ‘places’ where logical arguments could be found. Nine were ‘artificial’ (that is, found with the aid of logic technique)—cause, effect, subject, adjunct, opposite, comparative, name, division, and definition. The final tenth ‘inartificial’ locus comprised material that the logician simply found (he gave the usual example of a witness’s testimony in a legal trial, which the counsel has to make use of as they found it). Apart from the organisation of the material, none of this first book was particularly new: the distinction between artificial and inartificial was one made explicitly by Aristotle and Cicero, and most of Ramus’ loci were the same as Aristotle’s. The second book concerned the arrangement of material, in he followed the rule that the more general should be presented first, then divided into more specific parts.

Ramus published widely in his day, attracting many converts, and his works remained popular for a century afterwards. But his reforms may not have become entrenched it he had not converted to the Protestantism in 1561, and been brutally murdered during the Massacre of St Bartholewem—an event which claimed over five thousand lives. Ramus was amongst the most prominent of those to die and became something of a Protestant martyr. Ramist logic and education would become established in most Protestant countries—particularly Holland, Germany and the newly-founded colonies of America, and to a lesser extent in England and Northern France. Ramism was particularly welcomed by the Puritans with their emphasis on plain speech and plain thinking.

With the shift in the intellectual centres of Europe to the north after the counter-Reformation, the Ramist separation of ratio (reason) from sermo (discourse) came to dominate the view of language in the early Modern Era. This is a major development; in Antiquity, dialectic had been seen as a verbal art (lectio, ‘speech’), not an intellectual one. Although Ramus himself saw both logic and rhetoric as verbal arts, he laid the foundation for a rigid separation of thought (ratio) from speech (oratio) and things (res) from words (verba). Ramus’ works were familiar to the next generation of philosophers: chief amongst them Francis Bacon and René Descartes, both of whom firmly kept words and things separate.

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67 From Kneale & Kneale 1964, pp300–303
68 The Ramist heritage is complex and often contradictory. I am only focussing here on the one problem of dividing logic from rhetoric, and the consequent breach of res and verba. The standard text on Ramus remains Walter Ong’s Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue (1958). See also Kennedy 1980, pp210–213, and Howell 1956, pp146–172 for his influence on rhetoric, and Baldwin 1944, Chapter 31 for a general background of grammar school logic and rhetoric.
69 Kennedy 1980, p212.
THE NEW SCIENCES AND DECLINE OF RHETORIC AND DIALECTIC

The transformation of dialectic and the rise of mathematical logic

By the end of the seventeenth century, intellectuals understood themselves as living in the Age of Reason. Yet their concept of reason differed sharply from earlier ages—even a century beforehand. They rejected the Christian-Platonic identification of Reason (Logos) with God, along with the Stoic identification of reason as the order of nature. In the previous century, there was a notable neglect of formal logic as had been taught by the Scholastics. It is striking for example, that few of the major seventeenth century philosophers or scientists wrote much on logic. At the same time, the Humanistic influence began to be felt in textbooks on logic: Cicero was quoted as often as Aristotle in seventeenth century textbooks purporting to deal with logic—reflecting a decay in rigour. To the decay in teaching and the impact of Humanism was added the growing influence of the new physical sciences.

The influence of the sciences had the effect of making mathematics—not disputation—the model of scientific reasoning. Throughout the Middle Ages, Euclid had remained a model of rigorous demonstration, but it had always been believed that Euclidean methods were limited to geometry. In the fifteenth century, geometry began to be applied to problems of physical science, dramatically improving both their reliability and predictive power. Galileo (1564–1642) in particular used geometrical and algebraic tools to such effect in the study of physical phenomena that he was moved to claim that “the book of Nature is written in the language of numbers”. Mathematicians came into demand from the late sixteenth century to solve increasingly complex engineering and military problems, such as ballistics. At the same time, accounting and fiscal policy began to change as ministers recognised they could apply the tools of algebra and mathematical analysis to economic problems. In the mid-seventeenth century William Petty (1623–1687) produced the first mathematical treatment of economics. Practical problems in turn led to spectacular developments in mathematical theory—Cartesian geometry, infinitesimal calculus, statistics, probability theory—greatly expanding the scope and power of mathematical tools. The result was that the rigour of Euclidean geometry was extended first to the physical and then to the human sciences, producing results that were more accurate and more useful than the medieval dialectical methods based on Aristotle.

The neglect of formal logic is reflected in the fact that the universities still taught the same curriculum as they had two and three hundred years before (Kneale & Kneale 1964, p300). Kneale & Kneale also comment, “it is clear enough from the learned works of the time that logic ... no longer attracted the best minds” (p300).
The rise of the sciences coupled with the scepticism I described in the last chapter demanded new philosophical tools, of which the most important for logic were supplied by Bacon and Descartes—although historically Descartes would be the more influential of the two. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes outlined an approach to analysis that differed sharply in two ways from traditional dialectic. First, he sought a method that would be useful in practice, not only as a tool of speculative theology. He wanted a method that would reveal new truths, not simply remind people of what they already knew and had learnt from Antiquity. This for his required a logic that began with basic observations or certain truths and built upon them inductively—completely the reverse of Scholastic dialectic which began with general truths and reasoned deductively from them. This entailed rejecting the traditional sources of invention and its methods of arrangement.

Descartes required a method of *inquiry* whereas, as he realised, traditional dialectic formed a method of *communication*, used for disclosing what a person knew to another:

...on examination I found that so far as logic is concerned, syllogisms and most of the other techniques serve for explaining to others what one knows; or even ... for talking without judgment about matters one is ignorant of; rather than of learning anything.

The reason that Scholastic dialectic disclosed nothing new was because of its mode of invention. Invention was divided into things ‘inside’ the art (chiefly *topoi*) and those ‘outside’ (which were found). So discovering something unknown required beginning with material from *outside* existing knowledge. This led Descartes to reject all of the traditional *topoi*: both the Scholastic categories and the Humanistic canon of literature, history, philosophy, and rhetoric. His new method was to be based on things that the philosopher discovered—either observations or certain facts. This led Descartes to consider what would provide an absolutely certain basis upon which to reason. Adopting an attitude of complete scepticism, he rejected not only the traditional *topoi*, but also all sensory experience as open to error and doubt. After a process of examination and rejection, Descartes found that almost every potential source of evidence was doubtful—except for the fact that he doubted. The certainty of his own doubting, or more generally the experience of his own thinking self, was to become the basis of all knowledge. Upon this foundation he then proceeded to validate the knowledge revealed by reason and the senses. It was this newly-grounded sensory experience that was to provide the material for his new method. This led

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72 Descartes 1954, *Discourse on method* §6 p.46. “I saw that one may reach conclusions of great usefulness in life, and discover a practical philosophy in the place of the speculative philosophy taught by the Schoolmen; one which would show us the energy and action of fire, air, and stars, the heavens, and all other bodies in our environment, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, an could apply them in the same way to all appropriate uses and thus make ourselves masters and owners of nature.”

73 Descartes *Discourse on Method* §1
to his second break with the past: he insisted that the criterion of truth should be experiment, not disputation (Bacon had made the same point in the *Advancement of Learning*). In saying this however, Descartes made the material of logic ideas, not speech.

Descartes' method replaced traditional invention with introspection and experiment. Arrangement, which combined facts and claims into rigorous proofs, Descartes replaced with mathematical reasoning.

considering that of all those who have hitherto sought truth in the sciences, the mathematicians alone have been able to find any demonstrations, that is, any certain and evident reasons, I did not doubt but that such must have been the rule of their investigations.74

Descartes was in no doubt that the method of geometry and algebra, once cleared of their specific subject matter, would provide a method for arriving at absolutely certain outcomes. (Descartes was himself an accomplished mathematician and was deeply impressed by the certainty of its proofs.)

Those long chains of perfectly simple and easy reasonings by means of which geometers are accustomed to carry out their most difficult demonstrations had led me to fancy that everything that can fall under human knowledge forms a similar sequence…75

Although Descartes did not specifically set out to establish a new logic, the drift of the *Discourse* was to sever logic and speech. The material that logic worked upon were ideas, not words. Logic became a tool of analysis and discovery, not for presenting and explaining discoveries to others. It took as its method the model of geometry. And it no longer had any role in disputation. Indeed, Descartes appears to have believed that a person who had their ideas clear and in order would communicate better than another trained in the old arts:

Those who reason most powerfully, and whose thoughts are best digested so as to be made clear and intelligible, are still the best able to urge their proposals, even though they speak only bas breton and have never learned rhetoric.76

The new method was cemented with the appearance of the *Port Royal Logic* in 1662, a work which owed much to Descartes and the new geometric method77. The *Logic* is cool

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74 Descartes, *Discourse on Method* §2. Reflecting on his the subjects he had been taught as a youth, Descartes wrote "I was especially delighted with the mathematics, on account of the certitude and evidence of their reasonings; but I had not as yet a precise knowledge of their true use; and thinking that they but contributed to the advancement of the mechanical arts, I was astonished that foundations, so strong and solid, should have had no loftier superstructure reared on them." (§1)

75 Descartes *Discourse on Method* §2

76 Descartes *Discourse on method* §1
towards much of Scholastic logic and rejects key aspects of Ramism. Like Descartes, the 
bulk of the Logic regards logic as a mental activity. It defines logic as “an art of managing 
one’s reason aright in the knowledge of things for both the instruction of oneself and the 
instruction of others”—although instructing others forms only a very small part of the 
work. Indeed, it was originally published under the title La Logique ou l’Art de Penser, a 
description that appears to have been controversial as later editions were renamed and 
defended the description of logic as ‘the art of thinking’.

The Port Royal Logic is divided into four books. The first deals with conceiving: how the 
mind forms ideas and attaches words to them—in which it follows Descartes closely both on 
the nature of ideas and in methods to ensure that ideas are clear and distinct. It also agrees 
with Descartes on the importance of a logic that would be useful in life (although it did not 
agree that the sole use of logic was inquiry). On the grounds of usefulness, it rejected all 
topoi, whether Aristotelian or Ramist, or even the rhetorical topica of Cicero and Quintilian 
—displacing almost all of classical invention. The first book also implicitly confirmed the 
claim of medieval linguistics that words were simply images of what was in the mind. The 
second book dealt with judging, in which the mind put ideas together, formed propositions, 
and judged whether they were true or false. As for Descartes, the criterion of truth is the 
whether the proposition agreed with reality or evidence of some kind, not the capacity of a 
proposition to be defended in argument. The third book dealt with reasoning—which it 
again treated as a mental activity. Most of its methods of reasoning were derived from 
geometry, which led the Logic to reject other methods: it regarded most of the Scholastics’ 
sophistications as useless, and it describes inductive methods as unreliable (even though 
they were being used with spectacular success by contemporary scientists). Even when the 
Logic turned to the security of syllogisms, it said they were less useful than earlier 
generations had claimed. In line with its desire for a useful logic, the third book also 
contained many illustrations of logical fallacies taken from everyday life. The final book 
discussed how the mind disposes or orders ideas, judgements and reasoning so that 
knowledge could be derived from them. Again, much of the material was drawn from

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77 An important reason that the Port Royalists relied on Descartes was religious rather than 
philosophical. The Jansenists were a strict Catholic sect which rejected the synthetic 
tendency in Scholasticism and the liberal Humanistic trend of Renaissance Catholicism, 
exemplified by their bitter rivals, the Jesuits. Instead, they supported a severe Augustinian 
notion of predestination and the absolute sinfulness of humanity. Descartes’ philosophical 
approach had many similarities with Augustine—in particular in the insistence that the 
cogito was the one certain fact known to the human intellect. Cartesian philosophy 
appealed to the Port Royal Jansenists as a way of securing their own position philosophically.

78 Kneale & Kneale 1964, p315
mathematical reasoning, and the Port Royal Logic acknowledges its debt to Descartes’ Discourse on Method and Pascal’s Esprit Géométrique. The Port Royal Logic dominated European logic until the late nineteenth century and was the source for most later manuals on formal logic. Although it had allowed a small role for instructing others, the Port Royal Logic effectively marks the final divorce of thought from communication. It marks the end of the transformation of reason into a purely mental activity concerned with the formation, combination and assessment of ideas. Despite its rejection of Ramus, the strict Ramist separation of res from verba was complete by the eighteenth century, and has remained entrenched in Western thought ever since.

The ascendancy of the new mathematical logic, and the Cartesian emphasis on the intellect over the senses radically reduced the scope of communication. If communication was to be at all certain, it had to be objective and rational, abandoning all sensual, emotional and imaginative appeals. The fifty-year quest for certainty in the seventeenth century combined with Protestant suspicions of language to produce a sharply limited scope for language. The topics of communication had to be identical with those of reason itself: demonstrable claims, logical relations, truth and falsehood. This was far from a new claim: indeed, since Aristotle’s time, there are many parallel demands in rhetoric and grammar. Aristotelian grammar in particular was concerned only with the language needed to support logic and analysis—words for things (nouns and verbs) and the logical relations between them (prepositions). But in the process of turning attention to reason, the Cartesian revolution turned attention away from other potential uses of language. It was only when the Age of Reason was challenged by the Romantics from the late eighteenth century that hegemony of reason was broken and a broader role emerged for language and communication—one that embraced beauty, passion and imagination.

The fate of rhetoric in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

The new logic of Descartes and the Port Royalists was based firmly on the method of geometry. However, theories about reason, mind and communication were also influenced by a second group of mathematical methods, drawn from accounting—an approach most forcefully employed by Descartes’ chief protagonist, Hobbes. Hobbes used the model of accounting to organize his system of thought. This approach, which he called “natural philosophy,” emphasized the importance of mathematical reasoning and the role of the intellect in understanding the natural world. It was this emphasis on reason, combined with the growing influence of mathematical logic, that led to the final divorce of thought from communication.

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79 From Howell 1956, pp351–363; Kneale & Kneale 1964, pp315–320. Pascal was one of the most important seventeenth century mathematicians and a member of the Jansenist community at Port Royal.

80 Kneale & Kneale 1964, p320
accounting or ‘reckoning’ in several works—most extensively in De Corpore (subtitled Computatio sive Logica), and most famously in his masterpiece, Leviathan, where he says:

[Reason] is nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts; I say ‘marking’ them when we reckon by ourselves, and ‘signifying’, when we demonstrate or approve our reckonings to other men.81

Although Hobbes fancied himself (rather inaccurately) as a geometer, he did not use geometrical methods to construct arguments. Rather, he understood reasoning in terms of accounting: adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing.82 Such a conception tended to regard logic as a purely mental activity, one with no obvious function in disputation at all—a fact supported by his placement of reason in the Leviathan within a consideration of individual psychology (although Hobbes allowed logic a small role in presenting ideas.)

The greatest weakness in this account of reasoning, as Hobbes understood very clearly, was in its dependence upon words 83. Words, he says, are simply names; groups of words when properly ordered show the connections between those things. The whole function of words, in his view, is to represent thoughts 84, either so that a person can remember their own thoughts or else so they can signal their thoughts and feelings to others. He identifies four

81 Hobbes Leviathan §5
82 "When a man reasoneth, he does nothing else but conceive a sum total, from addition of parcels; or conceive a remainder, from subtraction of one sum from another; which if it be done by words, is conceiving of the consequence from the names of all the parts, to the name of the whole; or from the names of the whole and one part, to the name of the other part. And though in some things, as in numbers, besides adding and subtracting, men name other operations, as multiplying and dividing, yet they are the same; for multiplication, is but adding together of things equal; and division, but subtracting of one thing, as often as we can. These operations are not incident to numbers only, but to all manner of things that can be added together, and taken one out of another. For as arithmeticians teach to add and subtract in numbers; so the geometricians teach the same in lines, figures (solid and superficial,) angles, proportions, times, degrees of swiftness, force, power, and the like; the logicians teach the same in consequences of words; adding together two names, to make an affirmation and two affirmations to make a syllogism; and many syllogisms to make a demonstration; and from the sum, or conclusion of a syllogism, they subtract one proposition, to find the other. Writers of politics, add together actions, to find men’s duties; and lawyers, laws, and facts, to find what is right and wrong in the actions of private men. In sum, in what matter soever there is place for addition and subtraction, there also is place for reason; and where these have no place, there reason has nothing at all to do.” (Leviathan §5)
83 Indeed, Hobbes also objected that Descartes’ philosophical method was prey to the misuse of words, something that Descartes himself had not touched upon at all.
84 “The general use of speech, is to transfer our mental discourse, into verbal; or the train of thoughts, into a train of words” (Hobbes Leviathan §4)
specific uses for speech: [1] to stand for what the mind has discovered and so help the person remember it, [2] to teach and advise others, [3] to make the speaker’s will and intentions known to others, so that people can help one another, and [4] as entertainment.

Corresponding to the four uses of words are four misuses: [1] to misapply words to thoughts or use words inconsistently, so that the person does not know what they have discovered and ends up deceiving themselves [2] using words metaphorically “that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for”, which deceives the listeners, [3] misrepresenting the speaker’s intentions, and so causing harm to others, and [4] using words to wound others.

Hobbes says that a person understands what another says when, on hearing the words, they have the same thoughts and connect them together in the correct way: “understanding being nothing but conception caused by words”. Used correctly, words will help people become wise; used improperly they create fools and madmen. In order to be understood, therefore, a speaker has to use words consistently and literally, and avoid lies and metaphors. In short, to make his system of logic work—and make communication possible—Hobbes has to insist on a very narrow way of using words. Hobbes was one voice amongst many in his time that railed against the potential dangers of language, particularly in the use of tropes and metaphors. If language was to function properly, it needed to be literal: the use of metaphors—and indeed all of the stylistic tools of rhetoric—could only deceive or wound. Where the sixteenth century had employed the interpretative methods of poetry and rhetoric to expose multiple meanings, the seventeenth century sought to render language unambiguous.

85 Hobbes Leviathan §4. “...as men abound in copiousness of language, so they become more wise, or more mad than ordinary.

86 The seventeenth century was an enormously fertile period for theories about language, most concerned with securing words against ‘abuses’. Amongst the more unusual was the proposal to abolish words for communication altogether. Since, it was generally believed, the purpose of words was to stand for things, then communication would be much better served by using those things directly. The scheme—along with several other linguistic projects—was mercilessly satirised by Jonathan Swift in Gulliver’s Travels (1726). Swift was himself an avid campaigner for linguistic improvement, although rabidly opposed to contemporary philosophers, who are the target of his Great Academy of Lagado:

“We next went to the school of languages, where three professors sat in consultation upon improving that of their own country.

“The first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one, and leaving out verbs and particles, because in reality all things imaginable are but nouns.

“the other project was a scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever; and this was urged as a great advantage in point of health as well as brevity. For it is plain, that every word we speak is in some degree a diminution of our lungs by corrosion, and consequently contributes to the shortening of our lives. An expedient was therefore offered, that since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for

...continued on next page
Hobbes’ psychology and theory of words were particularly influential forty years later in John Locke’s philosophy, which presented the first explicit theory of communication. I will discuss it in detail in the next chapter.

The rise of mathematical logic and accompanying criticism of words were instrumental in the decline of rhetoric. The reconstruction of reason along mathematical lines helped transfer reason from its association with rhetoric (in the form of dialectic) to science. The Cartesian treatment of logic continued the reforms of Ramus a century before, which had seen the transfer of the first two parts of rhetoric—invention and arrangement—to logic. Rhetoric would be left only with those parts of communication to do with emotional, sensual and imaginative language: style and presentation. But, unlike the Ramist scheme, which left some small role for rhetoric, the Cartesian revolution had no use for it at all. Mental experience and thought alone were important in post-Cartesian philosophy and science. As Aristotle had presciently written, “No one uses fine language to teach geometry,” so when geometry became the model for logic, sciences and philosophy, rhetoric’s days amongst intellectuals were numbered. This was doubly so, since the influence of Ramus had seen rhetoric increasingly identified with figures of speech and stylistic ornament—precisely those aspects of language coming under criticism. In any case, the sciences proved stony ground for rhetorical writing. Bacon and Hobbes inveighed against rhetoric; Descartes dismissed it. Thomas Sprat, historian to the newly established Royal Society of London, congratulated the Society’s members for their:

all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on. ... many of the most learned and wise adhere to the new scheme of expressing themselves by things, which hath only this inconvenience attending it, that if a man’s business be very great, and of various kinds, he must be obliged in proportion to carry a greater bundle of things upon his back, unless he can afford one or two strong servants to attend him. I have often beheld two of those sages almost sinking under the weight of their packs, like pedlars amongst us; who, when they met in the streets, would lay down their loads, open their sacks, and hold conversation for an hour together; then put up their implements, help each other to resume their burthens, and take their leave.” (Gulliver’s Travels, Book 3, Chapter 5)

87 In his brief notes on words and understanding, Hobbes has most of the elements here necessary to create a symbolic version of communication-as-transmission—a concept I will discuss in the next chapter. He did not however put the pieces together to explain communication: that ‘honour’ goes to Locke.

88 Rhetoric §3:1, 1404a13
constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things, almost in an equal number of words.\(^89\)

The growing scale of Europe’s intellectual life—always the main home of oratory—also counted against rhetoric. The new nation states, the international empire of science and the society of letters were all too large to address verbally. They were increasingly served by the press—the journal, the handbill and the broadsheet—and the newly established postal services. Some of the old rhetorical and grammatical rules found a home with the new professional writers; many however did not fit the new medium. The last great work on rhetoric, Hugh Blair’s *Lectures of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), illustrates the decline: only nine of the forty-seven lectures deal with rhetoric, the remainder were concerned with written style.

Displaced as a tool of reason, shorn of invention, under attack on stylistic grounds, rhetoric became the target of educational reformers who eventually removed it from the liberal education of the Enlightenment. Deprived of students, rhetoric was slowly strangled. First-hand knowledge of rhetoric was increasingly lost in the general population, and became the province of scholars and experts. This was a slow process: curricula proved enormously resistant to change. Only with the rise of mass education in the nineteenth century and the creation of an entirely new syllabus for the children of tradespeople, factory workers,

\(^89\) Sprat 1667, *History of the Royal Society*. Sprat’s equation of the ‘number of words’ with ‘the number of things’ reflects the belief that words stand direct for things—and hence when their use is correct their numbers should be equal.

"There is one thing more about which the Society has been most solicitous; and that is the manner of their Discourse: which, unless they had been only watchful to keep in due temper, the whole spirit and vigour of their Design had been soon eaten out by the luxury and redundance of speech ... And, in few words, I dare say that of all the Studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtai’nd than this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, this volubility of Tongue, which makes so great a noise in the World ... It will suffice my present purpose to point out what has been done by the Royal Society towards the correcting of excesses in Natural Philosophy, to which it is of all others, a most profest enemy. They have therefore been most vigorous in putting in execution the only Remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that has been a constant Resolution to reject all amplification, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native eas’ness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants before that of Wits or Scholars"
shopkeepers and labourers would rhetoric finally be excluded from the core curriculum in most countries. The opening salvo however was fired two hundred years before by Locke in *Some thoughts concerning education* (1693)\(^90\).

In it, he was concerned with the training of young gentlemen: making them virtuous, disciplined and rational; capable of rational thought and then taking action on the results of their reflection. Achieving this goal required two things according to Locke: “a sound mind in a sound body” \(^91\). The *Thoughts* begins with the development of a healthy body, before dealing with, in turn, virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning \(^92\). Locke objects to the teaching of subjects merely because they are customary: he is far more concerned that children should learn things that will be useful in their adult lives \(^93\). For this reason, he placed emphasis on morality, good habits and polite manners: acquiring knowledge was of much lesser importance to him. In particular, he rejected teaching students the rules of either rhetoric or logic “because of the little advantage young people receive by them” \(^94\). He warned his gentlemen readers:

> be sure not to let your son be bred up in the art and formality of disputing, either practising it himself, or admiring it in others; unless instead of an able man, you desire to have him an insignificant wrangler, opiniator in discourse, and priding himself in contradicting others; or, which is worse, questioning every thing, and thinking there is no such thing as truth to be sought, but only victory, in disputing. \(^95\)

One of the most important functions of education according to Locke was to help students distinguish truth from falsehood and to act accordingly on that knowledge. This was more important than knowing the terms, modes and figures of disputation. Truth, for Locke, is to be founded not on ‘equivocal sounds’, but on the real things that words stand for.

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\(^90\) In 1697, Locke wrote another influential but very different work on education, *On Working Schools*. It was concerned with eliminating poverty, which he attributed to a decline in discipline and ‘manners’. He proposed that each parish in England should build a ‘working school’ for the children of the poor. At these schools, children would be taught useful skills such as spinning or knitting, which would fit them for productive employment as adults. Children from the working schools were also to be taken to church each Sunday to make them God-fearing souls. Locke also insisted that half of all youths apprenticed in each parish should be selected from the working schools. Such an education was strictly utilitarian and designed to eliminate poverty—it is hardly necessary to add that it included no lessons in grammar, logic or rhetoric.

\(^91\) Locke *Some thoughts concerning education* §1

\(^92\) Locke *Some thoughts concerning education* §134

\(^93\) See Locke’s comments on learning Latin, §§163–166

\(^94\) Locke *Some thoughts concerning education* §188

\(^95\) Locke *Some thoughts concerning education* §189
Truth is to be found and supported by a mature and due consideration of things themselves, and not by artificial terms and ways of arguing; these lead not men so much into the discovery of truth, as into a captious and fallacious use of doubtful words, which is the most useless and most offensive way of talking, and such as least suits a gentleman or a lover of truth of any thing in the world.96

So rhetoric and formal logic were largely excluded from Locke’s vision of a good education. Locke’s fame as a philosopher, along with the commonsensical approach of much of his educational advice made *Some thoughts on education* enormously influential. It was read in France, Germany, Switzerland and the Low Countries in the early eighteenth century, and was finally displaced only by another work that drew heavily upon it: Rousseau’s novel *Émile* (1762).

As I discussed in the last chapter, central to Rousseau’s vision of human nature was that people were born virtuous and in such a state were happy, but society corrupted virtue and so destroyed happiness. “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things, everything degenerates in the hands of man” 97. Happiness therefore lay in living a life as close to nature as possible, and avoiding the opinions of others. There are however things that people lack at birth: “We are born weak, we need strength; we are born lacking everything, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment” 98: the gift of education is to supply these lacks so that the child can grow into the adult, while preserving the child’s natural perfection. Rousseau points to three sources of education:

... education comes to us from nature, from men, or from things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of this growth is the education of men, and what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things.99

The growth of the Émile, the boy at the centre of Rousseau’s novel, is the framework around which the other two types of education have to be formed, as natural growth is wholly beyond the control of parents and tutors. Rousseau therefore divides the education into stages corresponding to Émile’s psychological development. Émile progressively learns to master his wants, develop his physical faculties, then his reason, before being introduced into society and finally being prepared for marriage. At each stage, he is shown only what is

96 Locke *Some thoughts concerning education* §§188–189

97 Rousseau *Émile* Book 1, §10

98 Rousseau *Émile* Book 1, §14

99 Rousseau *Émile* Book 1, §15
appropriate for his age, and is left entirely ignorant of later stages of his development (lest this knowledge form habits and opinions that might corrupt his natural state). In his first two years, Émile is given freedom to do as he wishes. Rousseau says that by “accustoming [infants] from the first to limiting their desires to their strengths, they will scarcely feel the deprivation of whatever is not in their power.” In the first two years of the child’s life, it should be taught no habits, and “letting his body keep its natural habit.” The ages of two to twelve, Rousseau calls the ‘Age of Nature’. It is the time when Émile’s natural faculties and senses are to be developed, guided only by experience and emotions. This is not the time for mental development says Rousseau, and he forbids moral and verbal instruction. The mind should be left undisturbed until its faculties have developed. Émile is to develop naturally, without introducing subjects which are beyond his capacity—a principle that Rousseau applies throughout the novel. Between twelve and fifteen years of age, Émile is like the ‘noble savage’ of the Social Contract. The body is growing rapidly and the desire for activity stimulates mental growth. But even so, Émile is not to be instructed. “our real teachers are experience and feeling, and man will never feel what is suitable for man except in the relationships in which he finds himself” (It says much of Rousseau’s goals that he permits Émile to read only one book in this stage, Robinson Crusoe: the sort of solitary, self-sufficient individual that Rousseau was trying to create.) By the age of fifteen, Rousseau believes that Émile’s reason will be well established and that he can be instructed in moral and religious issues, and slowly introduced into society. This introduction is to be gradual however: Rousseau wants to limit social influence so that Émile’s ‘natural inclinations’ continue to develop uncorrupted. The final stage of the young man’s education prepares him for adulthood: he is taught about love and marriage and introduced to his future partner, Sophie.

With his emphasis on natural development, Rousseau is hostile to any training in the ‘arts’—such as rhetoric or logic. Following Locke, he regards reason as an entirely natural faculty that can only be warped by introducing a child to opinions and notions beyond its capacity to grasp. Rhetoric he regards as entirely futile: both as a teaching method and as a subject to learn. The young, he says, have no use for rhetoric, and are not swayed by the use of words but by experience and emotion:

100 Rousseau Émile Book 1, §174
101 Rousseau Émile Book 1, §145
102 Rousseau Émile Book 2, §271
103 “A child knows he is made to become a man; all the ideas he may have as to man’s estate are for him opportunities for instruction, but of those ideas which are beyond his reach he should remain in complete ignorance. My whole book is nothing but a continual proof of this fundamental principle of education.” (Rousseau Émile Book 3 §613)
104 Rousseau Émile Book 3, §613
I am never weary of repeating: Put all the lessons of young people in actions rather than in speeches. Let them learn nothing from books that experience can teach them. How absurd to attempt to give them practice in speaking when they have nothing to say, to expect to make them experience at their school desks the energy of the language of passion and all the force of the arts of persuasion when they have nothing and nobody to persuade! All the rules of rhetoric are a mere waste of words to those who do not know how to use them for their own purposes.\textsuperscript{105}

With his stress on nature, intuition, experience and emotion, Rousseau is often claimed as a precursor of the Romantic movement, and it is with the Romantics that we can see the effects of Rousseau’s system of education on ideas about communication-as-technique in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like Rousseau, the Romantics said that humanity had become estranged from nature, and they attributed the ills of the world to industrialisation and the great new cities. Humanity’s redemption, they said, lay in a return to its natural state. They rebelled against reason, convention and order, and in their place established a new pantheon: love, beauty, passion. Truth and knowledge were not to be gained from facts or cold logic, but through insight, empathy, intuition, experience. It was in this spirit that Keats announced, “truth is beauty, and beauty truth”. Art in particular was not longer to be artefact—a creation of skill and training—but to be set free as a mirror or nature: spontaneous and passionate. The forms of communication that most appealed to the Romantics were spontaneous, sensual and imaginative: poetry before everything else. Their paragon in the verbal arts was the suffering, sighing Byronic poet, or else the nature-loving Wordsworth. A training in Classical rhetoric—with its formal structures, rigid dialectic, rules for analysis, and endless lists of tropes—was the very antithesis of the Romantic spirit\textsuperscript{106}.

**THE LEGACY OF RHETORIC IN JOURNALISM**

As rhetoric began its decline, there emerged the first distinctively Modern communication profession: journalism. Although news-sheets had appeared soon after the invention of the

\textsuperscript{105} Rousseau \textit{Émile} Book 3, §889

\textsuperscript{106} At the end of the nineteenth century, after a century of Romanticism in the arts, the poet Lord Macauley could write in all seriousness: “Give a boy \textit{Robinson Crusoe}. This is worth all the grammars of rhetoric and logic in the world … Who ever reasoned better for having been taught the difference between a syllogism and an enthymeme? Who ever composed with greater spirit and elegance because he could define an oxymoron or an aposiopesis? I am not joking but writing quite seriously when I say that I would much rather order a hundred copies of \textit{Jack the Giant-Killer} for our schools than a hundred copies of any grammar of rhetoric or logic that was ever written.” (Macauley 1893, p296)
printing press in the late-fifteenth century, and journals in the sixteenth, a distinctive group of journal writers did not appear until the seventeenth century. Unlike the medieval *ars dictaminis*, journalism did not become a formal profession until the late eighteenth century, and manuals on journalistic writing did not appear until the twentieth. Journalists adopted the conventions of writing of their time—which, for the first two hundred years were chiefly those of rhetoric. However, many of the classical rules did not survive. Of the five parts of Ciceronian rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—the last two were irrelevant to a literary form, and were eliminated at the outset. The other three underwent significant changes, so that they survive only in outline, not in detail. Today the ‘art’ of journalism is divided into two parts: *investigating news* (corresponding to invention) and *writing news* (arrangement and style).

The survival of rhetorical invention in journalistic investigation

When journalism first appeared in the seventeenth century, Europe was undergoing a massive Ciceronian revival. Despite massively changed circumstances, rhetoric maintained its ancient connection with legal oratory: with mounting and defending arguments. This was almost never a function of journalism. The purpose of much early news writing was either moral or political (even the reporting of murders, hangings and natural disasters were opportunities to lecture on morality and the punishments awaiting outlaws). The political function of newspapers was particularly prominent in the English-speaking world, where the news-sheets had achieved a limited freedom to print during the English Civil War (1642–1648), and once gained was successfully held. In America, the colonial newspapers had been instrumental in whipping up nationalistic and anti-British fervour before the War of Independence (1776), and despite attempts to suppress them after independence, freedom of the press was enshrined in the Constitution of the United States. For these purposes, classical epideictic and Renaissance preaching provided ready means for praising policy, excoriating opponents, and exhorting morality.

Seen from the perspective of classical rhetoric, political and moral invention lay ‘within’ the art of journalism. However, as the new sciences and Modern philosophy gained influence, journalistic invention increasingly sought its material from outside—in reports, evidence, and quotations. In the process, journalism became transformed into ‘reporting’. By the mid-nineteenth century, reporters began to see themselves as objective and independent observers of events, rather than active creators of news.

Contemporary journalism shows a mixture of its heritages in invention. First, journalists use *topoi* to direct them where to look for information and what information to gather. These

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107 See Eisenstein 1979 for a history of the growth of printed materials and their social impact.
can be divided into: [1] ‘news rounds’ (police, courts, business, government, accidents and disasters) and [2] the standard questions that journalists ask (‘who, what, when, where, how, and why’). These topoi owe nothing to Aristotelian and Ciceroian topics, and reflect nothing more than the continuing use of commonplaces as a method of invention. Second journalists use a method of inquiry, which reflects the Cartesian influence on logic and philosophy, as well as the belief that the material to be investigated lies ‘outside’ the journalist’s art. Journalistic method can be divided into: [1] sources of information (including speeches, conferences, media events, press releases, meetings, leaks) and investigative skills (such as interviewing, observing, note-taking, researching backgrounds, corroborating claims, seeking alternative viewpoints, managing sources).

Arrangement

The rules of classical arrangement, initially devised for speech-making, were abandoned by journalists almost from the outset. The first journal articles took either the form of letters (from which we derive the term ‘correspondent’ to describe a reporter), or else essays, reflecting the influence of Montaigne. Stories did however retain the rhetorical introduction—often sensationalised—with the traditional goal of securing the attention and sympathy of the readers. Journalistic arrangement was heavily influenced by typography, which gave editors new ways of organising material not available to speech makers. For example, type allowed editors to add headings to catch the attention of readers.

With the rise of mass production in the nineteenth century, the conventions of letter and essay disappeared as the need to assemble articles at speed emerged. Since space was at a premium in the new daily newspapers—and news had to compete with advertising—articles frequently had to be shortened. The simplest way to do this was to cut them from the end. In response, journalists and editors developed the ‘inverse pyramid’: the article began with the most important points, followed by items of decreasing importance. (This new style entrenched the view of the journalist as a reporter of facts, since the order of facts could be altered quickly, whereas the order of propositions in an argument could not and was therefore avoided). Most of the rules of formal logic were never explicitly adopted by journalists—which may reflect the view from the late-seventeenth century that reason was a faculty possessed by all people, and not a formal science or an art of argumentation.

Classical grammar and style in journalism

The largest body of rules that journalism adopted from the classical trivium concern style, which incorporates elements of grammar and rhetoric. The journalistic analysis of language into a hierarchy of words, sentences, paragraphs and stories has obvious parallels with the
basic division of grammar (except for the appearance of paragraphs, which is a product of printing and has no counterpart in the speech).

Although early journalists were influenced by neoclassical rhetorical style in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the dominant influence in journalistic style in the English-speaking West was Protestant rhetoric—particularly the Puritan rejection of ornament and amplification—which prevailed in the first century that journalists flourished. Amongst the most basic rules of the journalists’ creed are:

1. prefer simple words (a rule often recast as ‘prefer shorter words’, euphemism for avoiding more complex, Latinate or technical terms)
2. avoid pompous, abstract words
3. use everyday language that readers themselves use.

There are many rules specific to journalism which owe nothing to rhetoric. Most rules developed in the last century—long after rhetoric had ceased to be a standard subject in Western schools. Although regarded as rules of style, many actually reflect the technology and process involved in producing news at speed. For instance, the need for editors to reorganise sentences quickly means that journalists try to avoid pronouns and auxiliary verbs that refer to terms in other paragraphs: they aim to make each sentence self-contained. Another example: newspapers are traditionally set in narrow columns, which puts pressure on journalists to use short words and sentences because they are easier to typeset.

Like the three medieval artes, journalism started with the rules of rhetoric, but adapted them to its needs and circumstances, eventually emerging as a self-contained profession. Most of what survives of rhetoric and grammar are the broad divisions: the detail is largely unrecognisable—mostly because, unlike the medieval artes, the rules of journalism were not codified in writing until long after its ties with rhetoric had been forgotten.

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108 In his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Hugh Blair praises the style of Addison, editor of the London journal The Spectator: one of the first newspapers in the Modern sense.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE TWO MODERN VERSIONS OF TRANSMISSION

ABSTRACT  The ancient version of communication-as-transmission based on human physiology persisted until the early Modern Age. In the High Middle Ages, a second version involving the transfer of symbols appeared, marrying grammatical theory to transference. Words became understood as symbols of things in the mind. Symbolic transference became established in philosophy as a part of Locke’s theory of knowledge and human understandings—and simultaneously the first explicit explanation of human communication. At the same time, physical transference evolved when mechanics displaced the human body as the source of metaphors to describe transference, so forming the modern Conduit Metaphor.

THE APPEARANCE OF SYMBOLIC TRANSFERENCE

The physiological model I described in Chapters 2–5 persisted with only minor variations throughout the Middle Ages in the idioms of everyday speech. In Appendix 8, I have repeated the analysis using Shakespeare’s plays to show that a version of the same physiological model was in widespread use at the beginning of the early Modern Age—although the details reflected the sophisticated anatomical knowledge that had emerged in the Renaissance. Between Rome and the Renaissance, expressions consistent with the metaphor of communication-as-transmission appear to have been commonplace, judging by their use in surviving literature1. Speech continued to be identified with breath, and

1  Beowulf, composed around the ninth century, contains several phrases consistent with the ancient metaphor of physical transference. In the expression wordes ord breosthord thurhbraec, meaning “words from his breast-hoard broke” (2792, and see also 1719), the bard locates the source of words in the chest. Other expressions in Beowulf suggest that many aspects of consciousness, including memory, were located in the chest. Four hundred years after, in The House of Fame, Chaucer writes, “Soun ys nought but eyr ybroken/ And every speech that ys spoken,/ Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair,/ In his substance ys but air.” (3:765–768).
thought with speech. Consciousness, emotion, memory and most kinds of thought continued
to be located in the chest—the source of breath and speech. Communication was still
largely understood as the transfer of speech from one soul to another. There were also strong
parallels between medieval concepts of memory and perception (I have discussed these in
Appendix 3).

But as well as perpetuating the ancient model, the Middle Ages also saw the appearance of
an important variation. I cannot pinpoint just when this development occurred, but it
appears fully worked out in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* (1266–1273).

In Chapter 9, I showed that Aquinas used the term ‘communication’ to refer to two
different activities, related to the two kinds of knowledge that the Scholastics recognised
they had from God. The first was in the form and order of nature: since creation was the
realisation of the Ideas in the Divine Mind, then a Christian scholar could comprehend
God’s mind by studying nature. The second was revelation, which was disclosed by God
using speech to those creatures with the capacity for language: the angels and humans.
God reveals himself to the highest rank of the angels, who then address those below them in
the hierarchy, and the lowest rank of angels then speak to humans.

In his discussion of the angelic hierarchy, Aquinas discusses how angels and humans can
speak to and understand one another. He notes the ancient claim that there is not one form
of speech, but two: “interior, whereby one speaks to oneself; and exterior, whereby one
speaks to another.” 2 For Aquinas, ‘interior speech’ included all types of intellectual
knowledge and acts of consideration; those moments when people ponder silently to
themselves 3. External speech, the act of speaking to another person, says Aquinas, “means
nothing other than to make known the mental concept to another.” 4

Both internal and external speech have a role to play in communication between angels
and humans. However, because angels and humans have different natures, each uses
slightly different ways of speaking. Angels are creatures of pure intellect, whereas human
beings combine intellect with a physical body. In both, the ‘internal speech’ of the mind is

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2 Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.1, obj.2. Plato had made a similar claim in *Theatetus*
(190a) although this particular text was unknown in Western Europe during Aquinas’
lifetime.

3 ‘Internal speech’ is possessed only by rational creatures: Aquinas excluded memory and
sensory experience for ‘internal speech’ as they belonged to a separate faculty of the mind
which was shared with the animals.

4 Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.1, resp.
the same, but external speech differs: in angels it is an intellectual activity, in humans a physical one.

Speech in both angels and humans begins when they frame a concept, which Aquinas describes as an act of the will which orders the mind. To make their concept known to another, a human then has to exercise their will a second time to create a physical sign of the concept—a word—which can be perceived by the listener’s physical senses. The appearance of symbols in Aquinas’ explanation derives ultimately from Aristotle’s claim that “speech is the image of mental life and written words are the symbols of spoken words,” although his immediate source was probably Augustine’s *de doctrina Christiana*.

By contrast, because angels do not have physical bodies, they do not have to use physical sounds or create signs. Like human beings, angelic speech begins when an angel exercises its will to order its mind and so form a concept. When the angel speaks to another, says Aquinas, it directs its will to order the other’s mind. Being purely intellectual creatures, angels do not ‘hear’ one another in a physical sense, but rather “the mental concept of one angel can be perceived by another when the angel who possesses the concept refers it by his will to another.” Unlike human ‘external speech’, which depends on sound and is therefore limited in location, angelic communication is unaffected by distance as it involves only the exercise of will.

As the angels are the highest of God’s creatures, so this form of communication represented the best that the Middle Ages could conceive: the direct influence of one mind upon another without words, without intermediate barriers, and regardless of distance. This belief remained the ideal form of communication long after Aquinas. For instance, in the *Divine

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5 Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.1, rep.1

6 Aristotle *On Interpretation* §1, 16a4–5.

7 Aquinas wrote a commentary on *de doctrina Christiana*, and he incorporated Augustine’s theory of signs elsewhere in this *questionae* of the Summa. Aquinas’ formulation of symbols in communication is quite similar to Augustine’s when he says that, “exterior speech takes place by some sensible sign, as by voice, or gesture, or some bodily member, as the tongue, or the fingers” (*Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.1, rep.2)

8 “For one angel to speak to another angel means nothing else, but that by his own will he directs his mental concept in such a way, that it becomes known to the other.” (*Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.2, resp.)

9 Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.5, resp.

10 “The angelic speech … is interior; perceived, nevertheless, by another; and therefore it exists in the angel who speaks … But as local distance does not prevent one angel seeing another, so neither does it prevent an angel perceiving what is ordered to him on the part of another; and this is to perceive his speech.” (*Summa Theologiae* I q.107, art.4, rep.1)
Comedy, Dante meets Adam in Heaven, and he says he wants to ask the ancestor of all humanity three questions. Even before Dante has said what he wants to know, Adam tells him that he can see Dante’s desire in his soul; Dante too can see directly Adam’s soul and know that the spirit is eager to answer.

“Devoutly as I can I supplicate thee
That thou wouldst speak to me; thou seest my wish;
And I, to hear thee quickly, speak it not.”

Sometimes an animal, when covered, struggles
So that his impulse needs must be apparent,
By reason of the wrappage following it;
And in like manner the primeval soul
Made clear to me athwart its covering
How jubilant it was to give me pleasure.11

Three hundred years later again, Shakespeare has King John wish for a form of communication that did not involve words, but would allow him to transfer his thoughts directly to the heart of another without the use of speech.

...if thou couldst see me without eyes
Hear me without thine ears, and make reply
Without a tongue, using conceit [thought] alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words—
then ... I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts.12

The Summa Theologiae marks a major split in communication-as-transmission into two distinct branches: ‘physical transmission’ and ‘symbolic transmission’. All modern models of communication-as-transmission fall into one or the other: the Conduit Metaphor is a variant on ‘physical transmission’; Weaver’s transmission model depends on the transference of symbols of mental concepts.

In ‘physical transmission’ one person has a thought or concept or feeling or ‘internal word’ ( ★). It is transferred bodily to another person, where it ends up in their mind—a perfect copy of the original. In ‘symbolic transmission’, the speaker makes a purely physical symbol (✩) stand for a purely mental concept. Being physical, this symbol can pass through the physical space between people, and be perceived by their physical senses. Once perceived, the symbol calls to mind the speaker’s concept.
Medieval symbolic transference was a blend of physiological transmission and Augustine’s symbol theory—which was in turn based on ancient grammatical theory. Aquinas followed both Aristotle and Augustine in regarding concepts as purely mental in nature, having no physical nature. Communication between humans therefore demanded the use of symbols. However, this new model assumed that the hearer would end up with the same concept as the speaker. Just why a person, on seeing an object, would automatically recognise that it is a symbol and know for certain what it stood for, Aquinas did not explain. This assumption did not come from ancient accounts of symbols: indeed, most Roman authors from Quintilian to Augustine—all available to Aquinas and later Scholastics—had insisted that all words were ambiguous. It is an assumption derived from the belief that communication is transference, and involves no interpretation or uncertainty.

**ESTABLISHING SYMBOLIC TRANSMISSION IN MODERN THOUGHT**

As I discussed in the previous chapter, by the seventeenth century the belief that words were symbols of the mind had become one of several commonplace views of language. Yet at the same time, they became victims of the profound intellectual uncertainty caused by religious conflict, by controversy between Humanism and Scholasticism, philosophical scepticism, and the rise of the new sciences. The causes of uncertainty were analysed using the ubiquitous division of res and verba, things and words. If the mind was uncertain, then
the source of uncertainty was in what the mind knows of things (religious truths, nature, philosophy, or morality) or else how the mind used words to stand for what it knew (assuming that words stood for things).

Implicit in this assessment was a development from Aquinas’ time. He presumed that words either named objects or stood for concepts, and that the relationship between them was unambiguous. If however, words were uncertain as the late Renaissance believed, then the relationship between words and thoughts must be looser than Aquinas had assumed. In particular, there could be no natural relationship between words and things which speakers passively employed when they spoke. Rather, when people spoke, they must actively form a link between their concepts and the symbols they chose to represent them—and the uncertainty of words was due to the weakness of this link. It is on this assumption that Hobbes gave his advice that correct understanding depended upon using words consistently and literally while avoiding lies and metaphors.

Yet the efforts of seventeenth-century reformers like Hobbes dealt only incidentally with words. If were words were simply symbols, then fixing them alone would leave the real causes of uncertainty untouched: what the mind knew (knowledge) and the ways it acquired that knowledge (thought). In the Middle Ages, these problems had been addressed comprehensively by the Scholastics, but the combined effects of the Humanists, Protestants and the new sciences fatally weakened Scholastic methods: in the conception of nature, the sources of valid knowledge, the operation of the mind; and in the formation of certain knowledge. This failure prompted a massive reformulation in most branches of Western thought—religion, society, law, science, morality, and philosophy. Pivotal in this movement was Descartes’ philosophy. It had an electrifying effect on scientists and philosophers in the second half of the seventeenth century, and in many ways it established the program for Modern thought down to the nineteenth century. But there were nonetheless problems that Descartes left unresolved and new ones he created. It was in solving these problems that the first complete theory of symbolic communication-as-transmission was laid out.

**Problems with Cartesian rationalism**

One of the outstanding problems created by Descartes’ was how the mind could exist in a material universe and have certain knowledge of it. The dualism of body and soul was not a new concept: it was a problem in Greek philosophy and had become a part of Christianity from the second century AD. Augustine was acutely aware of the problem presented by an immaterial soul lodged in a material body and, like Descartes, he ascribed it to the will of
God\textsuperscript{13}. Descartes however made the problem more complex than Augustine by insisting that the mind was purely rational. Although the mind received impressions from the senses, the senses themselves were distinct from the mind proper and operated on entirely mechanical principles. The senses, said Descartes, were projected within some inner theatre, to be observed by the mind. Just how the mind perceived these impressions he did not explain\textsuperscript{14}. The addition of the senses as a layer between the mind and the outside universe is also a development from medieval psychology, which regarded the senses as much a part of the mind as reason (along with imagination, memory and the will).

Another philosophical problem was Descartes’ over-simplification of reason. As the next generation of philosophers recognised, he had failed to distinguish between conclusions that reason could reach by itself from first principles (\textit{a priori} knowledge), and conclusions which depended upon observations or factual claims (\textit{a posteriori} knowledge). Descartes had claimed he established his philosophy and scientific method entirely on reason—on ideas that were innate to the mind. This claim was rejected by post-Baconian empiricists who believed that all knowledge was based on experience. This ignited a debate over the nature and sources of knowledge, and just what the human mind was fit for.

A closely related philosophical problem that rationalists after Descartes were unable to resolve was how the mind had certain knowledge of nature if all certain knowledge was based on reason. Descartes’ answer was to rely on God. God created both the world and the human mind, so the deductions of reason match the operations of nature because they both sprang from the same source. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, passive reliance on God was no longer an acceptable philosophical argument for the increasingly materialistic and scientific thinkers. In 1772, Immanuel Kant summed up the by-then well-established argument, writing that “a \textit{deus ex machina} in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge is the most preposterous device that one can choose; and, besides the vicious circle in the sequence of inferences from it, it has the further disadvantage that it fosters every pious or brooding whim”\textsuperscript{15}. Descartes himself had done much to undermine reliance on God in philosophy, stripping nature of spiritual qualities. By the late seventeenth century, a divine or transcendent bridge between nature and knowledge was rejected by many intellectuals—particularly those that followed the

\textsuperscript{13} Augustine had arrived at his own version of the \textit{cogito} (\textit{De Trinite} 10:10) although Descartes says he was unaware of it until after publishing his own version (\textit{Correspondence} No 219, written in November 1640). Augustine regarded it as one of the outstanding problems of philosophy, one he recognised that he could not solve.

\textsuperscript{14} Descartes himself proposed that the pineal gland served some kind of transforming function, relaying impressions of the body to the mind, located in the brain: a solution which failed to satisfy his critics or establish any following. (Porter 1997, p218)

\textsuperscript{15} Cited in Cassirer 1951, p97
empiricism of Bacon. If the mind had genuine knowledge of the world—and even the most severe scepticism had never seriously believed that all sensory experience was false—the mind had somehow to participate in the material world. And the only type of participation the mechanical world was capable of was direct influence. So many thinkers rejected rationalism in favour of the view that mind had knowledge from the senses, not reason. At best, reason acted on sensory impressions, but it could not generate anything by itself.

It was in the context of these debates that the last fundamental philosophical contribution to communication-as-transmission was made by John Locke in his seminal *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690). In it he made the first explicit theory of symbolic communication-as-transmission. With it, communication-as-transmission achieves the form it has retained in popular belief for the last three hundred years.

The *Essay* is not primarily a theory of communication, although Locke deals with the problem of language throughout and devotes all of Book Three to *Words*. Locke works out the problem of how words come to mean what they do within the larger problem of human understanding, which attempts to resolve the conflict left by Bacon and Descartes, as well as the achievements of the emerging sciences. Although Locke himself had little faith that science could deliver genuine understanding, he was friends with giants such as Newton and Boyle, and the theory of knowledge that he developed in the *Essay* became the philosophical justification of the scientific method. The *Essay* was an instant success, and remained the last word on psychological theory until the mid-eighteenth century.

**Locke’s empiricism**

Locke’s philosophical starting point for the *Essay* is Bacon’s empiricism, the rejection of metaphysical speculation, and the achievements of contemporary scientists. Locke’s first target is the rationalists’ claim that certain knowledge could only be established on reason alone, on ideas that were innate to the mind and not derived from observation or experience. He devotes Book I of the *Essay* to this convincing demolition. None of his lines of attack concern us here, except one: his argument that if there were ideas innate to the human mind, then they should be found amongst all peoples: a claim that was simply not supported by observation. This argument however set up a problem that Locke had to resolve in his account of communication, which he develops in Book Three. He has to explain how certainty in both communication and their knowledge is possible, even though people have different thoughts and speak different languages.

For all his distrust of rationalism, Locke retains several crucial Cartesian assumptions. He maintains a sharp distinction between the mind and body—although, perhaps wisely, he leaves the problem of their relationship to others. He distinguishes sharply between the
mind and the senses: between internal reflection and external sensation. And he assumes that the basic operations of the mind were mechanistic.

After demolishing the rationalist argument, Locke constructs his own account of how the mind acquires knowledge. He reasons that, if the mind has no ideas innate to itself, then at birth it must be blank—what he calls a \textit{tabula rasa} (a blank page). If the mind subsequently acquires knowledge, but it cannot arise from pure reason, then the only remaining source must be from outside the body, that is, through the senses. Locke sees the processes by which the mind acquires knowledge in terms of a commonplace of his time:

\begin{quote}
...methinks, the Understanding is not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or Ideas of things without...\footnote{Locke was no mathematician and did not appeal to mathematical logic in his philosophy.}

...external and internal Sensation, are the only passages that I can find, of Knowledge, to the Understanding. These alone ... are the Windows by which light is let into this \textit{dark room}.\footnote{Locke \textit{Essay} 2:11:17, also 1:2:15. The metaphor of a closet was presumably derived to the medieval metaphor of the memory as a cabinet or chest. See Appendix 7 for a summary of this theory.}
\end{quote}

In these passages, Locke uses the word ‘idea’ to mean a mental image or a copy.\footnote{Descartes and Locke together are largely responsible for the Modern sense of ‘idea’—although Descartes did not provide a formal definition of his \textit{idée}. Where Aquinas had defined an idea as existing in the Divine Mind, Descartes implicitly and Locke explicitly referred to them as products of the \textit{human} mind, entirely shorn of any Platonic connection.}

Elsewhere in the \textit{Essay} however, he uses the term far more broadly to mean all mental concepts, not simply sensory input. He claims that the origins of all moral, religious, and legal ideas could be traced to sensory impressions. To explain how, Locke divides ideas into two kinds: simple and complex. Simple ideas result from the operation of the senses. They include colours such as red and green, and the taste of an oyster or a pineapple.

Complex ideas are formed when the mind reflects upon simple ideas, comparing them, combining them, abstracting common properties from them.

\begin{quote}
the Acts of the Mind wherein it exerts its Power over its simple Ideas are chiefly these three, 1. Combining several simple Ideas into one compound one, and thus all Complex Ideas are made. 2. The 2d. is bringing two Ideas, whether simple or complex, together; and setting them by one another, so as to take a view of them at once, without uniting them into one; by which way it gets all its Ideas of Relations. 3. The 3d. is separating
\end{quote}
them from all other ideas that accompany them in their real existence; this is called Abstraction: And thus all its General Ideas are made.\footnote{20}

Examples of complex ideas include “Beauty, Gratitude, a Man, an Army, the Universe; which though complicated of various simple Ideas, or complex Ideas made up of simple ones, yet are, when the Mind pleases, considered each by it self, as one entire thing, and signified by one name.”\footnote{21}

Locke says that simple ideas are drawn from direct experience, and are therefore impossible for the Mind to misunderstand. But because complex ideas are formed by the actions of individual minds, they can become confused in a number of ways. The ways that ideas can be confused is the starting point for his discussion of words.

**Locke on language**

Locke says that words and language had not been part of his original plan for the *Essay*, but as he progressed, he found “there is such a close connexion between Ideas and Words ... that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our Knowledge, which consists of propositions, without considering first, the nature, use and Signification of Language”\footnote{22}. Locke approached the problem of language with several assumptions that sharply coloured his theory (as well as the later developments he inspired).

First, he had a Puritanical mistrust of rhetoric and ornamentation—they were, he said, only intended to deceive men, stir the passions, and confound the understanding\footnote{23}. Rhetorical devices had a place in entertainments and delights, but had to be strictly excluded from serious discussions concerned with information and improvement\footnote{24}. Locke himself writes with Puritan plainness and directness. Plain words, clear thought, honest dealing, simplicity and humility are all stamped on his philosophy.

Second, he is firmly convinced of the fallibility of language, and the difficulties of speaking unambiguously: he mentions the contending interpretations of the Bible that had lead to schism, religious wars and Europe-wide slaughter in his own lifetime\footnote{25}.
Third, as I discussed in the last chapter, many intellectuals in England in Locke’s time had argued strongly that language ought to be purely representational—that its only function was to stand for things—and that anything else amounted to ‘the cheat of words’.

Fourth, as we will see, Locke regarded language as the ‘common Tye of Society’.26 As language has such a crucial place in the operation of society, Locke’s politics of consent and private conscience which I discussed in Chapter 13 committed him to a view that the meaning of language must also be private and voluntary.

Locke frames his theory of communication in Book III as part of his discussion of words and language (he uses the terms almost interchangeably). Communication is a necessary part of human life, says Locke, because God designed human beings as social creatures that both want and need the company of their own kind. However, “the Comfort and Advantage of Society, [is] not to be had without Communication of Thoughts”27. But thoughts and ideas, as he repeatedly stresses, are only ever found within people’s minds: invisible and incapable of appearing to others. Therefore, the “communication of thoughts” requires that people create some outward signs of the ideas in their minds. The signs that are best fitted for the task, says Locke, are the “articulate Sounds, which we call words”.28. He is quick to add that the ability to create articulate sounds does not imply an ability to use language: parrots and other birds are able to create the sounds of words; what makes words into language is the ability “to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions”.29

When speaking properly, says Locke, a person makes a word stand for an idea in their minds. The relationship between word and idea is however, entirely arbitrary, as Locke emphasises repeatedly:

> we may conceive … how Words … come to be made use of by Men, as the Signs of their Ideas; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular Sounds and certain Ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all Men; but a voluntary Imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an Idea. The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of Ideas; and the Ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification.30

When a person hears a word spoken, it “excites an Idea in the hearer”. Exactly how physical sounds come to ‘excite’ ideas in the mind, Locke does not explain—although at the beginning of the Essay, he had said that he would not explore the relationship between the

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26 Locke Essay 3:1:1. Locke used the same expression about justice in the Second Treatise
27 Locke Essay 3:2:1
28 Locke Essay 3:1:1, and see also 3:2:1
29 Locke Essay 3:1:1
30 Locke Essay 3:2:1
body and the mind. (He probably had in mind the ridicule that Descartes had earned in postulating the pineal gland as the interface between mind and body.) What he does say however is that the connection is established through constant use:

there comes ... to be such a Connexion between certain Sounds, and the Ideas they stand for, that the Names heard, almost as readily excite certain Ideas, as if the objects themselves ... did actually affect the senses.  

Communication with another person takes place when words:

... excite, in the Hearer, exactly the same Idea, they stand for in the Mind of the Speaker. Without this, men fill one another’s heads with noise and sounds; but convey not thereby their Thoughts, and lay not before one another their Ideas, which is the end of Discourse and language.

To this point, Locke’s theory is little different from Aquinas’ of four hundred years before: a speaker’s words stand for concepts in their mind and excite the same concepts in the hearer. But there is a crucial difference. Locke recognised the problem with this model that Aquinas did not: there is no necessary reason why the listener, on hearing a word spoken, should have the same idea as the speaker. The bulk of Locke’s discussion about words is concerned with demonstrating how this might happen sufficiently well to permit communication. Locke’s task was made considerably harder by his insistence that both the ways people associate simple ideas to form complex ones, and choose words for ideas, are voluntary and arbitrary. He divides the task of demonstration into simple ideas, complex ideas, and particles (which are words that correspond to the various actions of the mind, and so do not properly correspond with ideas).

As Locke argued in Book II of the Essay, all people have the same simple ideas, so long as they have been exposed to the appropriate experience. To know the meaning of a word that corresponds to a simple idea—a ‘simple term’—a person has to observe the object, form the idea, and grasp the connection between the sound and the idea in their minds. Simple terms cannot be defined by other words, because other words (unless they are identical in meaning) cannot excite the corresponding ideas in the hearer’s mind. That is, the word ‘red’ stands for the idea red, and no other words can summon up the idea red, and hence the word ‘red’ cannot be defined using other words but only by the experience of red. But

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31 Locke Essay 3:2:6
32 Locke Essay 3:9:6
33 Locke may well have known of Aquinas’ discussion, for there are several similarities between their two accounts. In particular, Locke discusses the problem of communication between angels, only to reject the possibility of human understanding ever being able to answer the question competently. (Essay 2:23:36)
34 Locke Essay 3:4:11
Despite the impossibility of defining simple terms verbally, Locke says they are the words least susceptible to misunderstanding.

Because [simple terms] standing only for one simple Perception, men, for the most part, easily and perfectly agree in their signification: And there is little room for mistake and wrangling about their meaning. He that knows once, that Whiteness is the name of that Colour he has observed in Snow, or Milk, will not be apt to misapply that Word, as long as he retains that Idea...\(^{35}\)

The names of complex ideas are altogether more liable to be misunderstood. The mind forms complex ideas by putting together simple ideas that it already has. It does this in three stages, says Locke: “First, it chuses a certain Number [of Ideas]. Secondly, It gives them connexion and makes them into one Idea. Third, It ties them together by a Name.”\(^{36}\) The formation of complex ideas, says Locke, is primarily for the purposes of communication. Grouping together simple ideas into complex ones and giving the group a name significantly quickens communication\(^{37}\)—complex terms are a shorthand way of referring to a large number of ideas. Complex ideas do not necessarily conform to the structure of reality—for instance, murder or sacrilege are purely human inventions with no relation to nature—but are made to serve communication and the uses that people have for ideas.\(^{38}\)

To illustrate his point that the formation and naming of ideas is voluntary, and not forced upon us by nature, Locke points to the differences between languages. Simply comparing dictionaries from different countries reveals that “though they have Words, which in Translations and Dictionaries, are supposed to answer one another; yet there is scarce one of ten, amongst the names of complex Ideas ... that stands for the same precise Idea”\(^{39}\).

Which plainly shews, that those of one Country, by their customs and manner of Life, have found occasion to make several complex Ideas, and give names to them, which others never collected into specific Ideas. This could not have happened, if these [names of complex Ideas] were the steady workmanship of Nature; and not Collections

\(^{35}\) Locke Essay 3:4:15

\(^{36}\) Locke Essay 3:5:4

\(^{37}\) Locke Essay 3:10:23

\(^{38}\) “[complex Ideas] ... are always made for the convenience of Communication, which is the chief end of Language. ... In the making ... of [complex ideas], men have had regard only for such Combinations [of Ideas], as they had occasion to mention to one another. Those they have combined into distinct complex Ideas, and given Names to; whilst others that in nature have as near an union, are left loose and unregarded [ie unformed into complex Ideas and named].” (Essay 3:5:7)

\(^{39}\) Locke Essay 3:5:8
made and abstracted by the mind, in order to naming, and for the convenience of Communication.\textsuperscript{40}

The problems of naming complex ideas can be divided into those associated with ideas that reflect things in nature, and those ideas that do not. An idea like ‘gold’ for instance, which is meant to correspond to something in nature, is a complex combination of many simple ideas: colour, weight, malleability, ductility, and so on. Locke says that, in many cases, it is unclear what the essential characteristics of things like gold are. This is particularly true in the case of things like gold whose essential characteristics we do not know with any certainty: we have the word ‘gold’ but are unsure about what ideas it corresponds to. A child might recognise only the colour of gold, and so apply the word ‘gold’ equally to a wedding ring or a peacock’s tail. But as the child grows, it adds other impressions to the group of ideas known collectively as ‘gold’. But because the formation of a complex idea depends on [1] the person having experiences from which to form simple ideas, and [2] connecting those ideas together in their mind, it follows that different people may have different complex ideas that they might nonetheless call by the same name. The more simple ideas that a complex idea is made up of, says Locke, the greater is the chance that the name of that complex idea will be misapplied and misunderstood.

These types of complex ideas do however have the standard of nature against which they can be checked. This is not true of moral, legal and religious ideas, which correspond to nothing in nature. This problem is made worse because most people learn the words before they learn the ideas those words correspond to. “What one [person] of a thousand ever frames the abstract \textit{Idea} of \textit{Glory} or \textit{Ambition}, before he has heard the Names of them?”\textsuperscript{41}

These moral Words are, in most men’s mouths, little more than Sounds, or when they have any [Ideas], ’tis for the most part but a very loose and undetermined and consequently obscure and confused signification.\textsuperscript{42}

Locke says that, any discussion involving terms such as “ Honour, Faith, Grace, Religion, Church etc”—all of which had been crucial terms during the Reformation and wars of religion—or “the interpretation of Laws, whether Divine or Humane”, can only result in interminable confusion.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Locke \textit{Essay} 3:5:8. This is the earliest passage that I am aware of which suggests that the meaning of words depends on use that their speakers have for them and the type of life they lead—what in the twentieth century came to be called ‘linguistic relativism’.

\textsuperscript{41} Locke \textit{Essay} 3:5:15, see also 3:9:8

\textsuperscript{42} Locke \textit{Essay} 3:9:8

\textsuperscript{43} Locke \textit{Essay} 3:9:9
There is one final challenge in the formation and use of words: as Locke rightly points out, most words are general—apart from proper nouns, they do not refer to specific objects. It is beyond human ability, he says, for a person to remember individually all of the impressions and ideas they have, then assign names to each. Even if it were possible, it would not aid communication, because each person would have to learn all of the names that every other person gave to their vast personal stock of ideas. And even if this gigantic task were possible, it would still be of little use, because human knowledge, says Locke, is based on generalisations not on individual observations. So words are necessarily general, and may be applied to many different things, making them potentially even more ambiguous.

As Locke is at pains to point out throughout his treatment of language, the way that words signify ideas—particularly complex ideas—makes it almost unavoidable for many of them to be doubtful and uncertain. Nonetheless, people do understand one another, and not just when they use simple terms—a fact that demands examination. Locke’s solution has much in common with his political philosophy. There are for him parallels between the meaning of words and the political constitution of a community. The meaning of a word—that is, the connection between the idea and the word—is entirely the choice of the individual speaker. Even the authority of Augustus could not make a new Latin word. In tones strikingly similar to the Second Treatise, he says that, “every Man has so inviolable a Liberty, to make Words stand for what Ideas he pleases, that no one hath the Power to make others have the same Ideas in their Minds … when they use that same Words.”

However, like a community, the freedom of individuals to choose the meanings of their words leaves language open to anarchy. Caught between authority on one side and anarchy on the other, both the commonwealth and communication are rescued by ‘common use’ and ‘consent’:

’Tis true, common use, by a tacit Consent, appropriates certain Sounds to certain Ideas … which so far limits the signification of that Sound, that unless a Man applies it to the same Ideas, he does not speak properly.

Men learn Names, and use them in their Talk, with others, only that they may be understood: which is then only done, when by Use or Consent, the Sound I make … excites in another Man’s Mind, who hears it, the Idea I apply it to in mine, when I speak.
There are however limits to how far ‘use and consent’ can stabilise the meaning of words, says Locke. They are adequate for ordinary conversation, where the concepts are rarely complex and the words in frequent use. But use and consent are inadequate for “philosophical discourse”, where far greater exactness is required in the use of words, and where the ideas are more complex and less familiar than everyday speech—especially because many complex ideas cannot be adequately defined. (Precisely what Locke means by ‘philosophical discourse’ is unclear, but it is certainly broader than its modern technical sense, and appears to embrace science, religion, law and possibly all moral reasoning.)

Consent and use can mitigate some of the inevitable “imperfections of Words”, but they are of no use in correcting a number of “Wilful Faults and Neglects” which only make words even more unclear than they are naturally:

[1] Speaking without clear and distinct ideas in the mind—so that, whatever ideas may be excited within the hearer’s mind, they will not coincide with whatever ideas the speaker had. This abuse is particularly pernicious when people use familiar words in unfamiliar ways—“an unpardonable negligence, they familiarly use Words, which the propriety of language has affixed to very important Ideas, without any distinct meaning at all.”

[2] Using words “inconstantly”—making a word stand for one idea at one moment, and a different idea later on.

[3] “Affected Obscurity, by either applying old Words, to new and unusual Significations; or introducing new and ambiguous Terms, without defining either; or else putting them together, so they may confound their ordinary meaning”—an abuse that Locke says was particularly common amongst the followers of Aristotle and the Scholastic philosophers.

[4] Believing that words stand for things, rather than ideas in the mind—this fault leads to the assumption that words exactly match things in the world, and therefore whatever distinctions or classification a philosopher makes will necessarily be found in nature. Locke points to the assumptions of the Scholastics that are persuaded, for instance, of the existence of “substantial Forms, vegetative Souls, abhorrence of a Vacuum, intentional Species”, simply on the basis of words.

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49 Locke Essay 3:10:2
50 Locke Essay 3:10:3
51 Locke Essay 3:10:5
52 Locke Essay 3:10:6
53 Locke Essay 3:10:14. Locke may also have had in mind the nominalist controversy that plagued late Scholasticism, which turned essentially on the question of whether general terms really corresponded to universal characteristics or whether they were simply names of concepts.
Using words to stand for things that they cannot signify—a problem that becomes apparent when words are inappropriately used in logical demonstrations and lead to false conclusions.  

Assuming that words stand for one and only one idea, and therefore that words cannot be misunderstood.

Locke’s theory of language allows him to propose remedies to all of these abuses, although he is not positive about people’s willingness to apply them. Speakers have to be careful to have clear and distinct ideas in their minds when they select their words and speak. They must use words sanctioned by common use, and create new words only cautiously (and then being sure to define the term clearly). The speaker should define all complex ideas they use, particularly when the ideas are unfamiliar. Both the speaker and the listener should check that each is using words to refer to the same ideas. The speaker should only use words to refer to ideas or operations in their own mind; they must be aware that words do not correspond to things in nature, and that conclusions drawn from words may not follow in reality. And finally, speakers should avoid figurative and rhetorical language as they do not signify ideas in the mind.

After Locke

Locke’s empiricism found immediate success in Britain and the Netherlands; the Essay was one of the crucial documents that lit the Scottish Enlightenment. In France, some thinkers remained loyal to Cartesian rationalism, but after Voltaire began to introduce English thought within France from the 1730s, most of the philosophes were committed empiricists. Germany remained largely rationalist until the revolution in philosophy initiated by Kant in the 1780s.

Locke’s account of words dominated Enlightenment thought and ranked alongside the ancient rhetorical explanations of the operation of language. A century after the Essay’s publication, the last great writer on neoclassical rhetoric, Hugh Blair, combined Locke and Quintilian to explain the purposes of language:

... all that can possibly be required of language, is, to convey our ideas clearly to the minds of others, and, at the same time in such as dress, as by pleasing and interesting them, shall most effectively strengthen the impressions which we seek to make. When

54 Locke Essay 3:10:17
55 Locke Essay 3:10:22
both these ends are assured, we certainly accomplish every purpose for which we use writing and discourse.56

Locke’s theory of words presented for the first time all of the elements of modern theories of symbolic communication-as-transmission:

1. the mind exists within but independently of the body
2. the mind contains ideas
3. in speaking, the mind causes the body to create signs to stand for ideas in the mind
4. symbols are purely physical and may travel through physical space
5. as physical objects, signs impinges upon the hearer’s senses
6. the senses excite ideas in the mind of the hearer—although these may or may not be identical to the ideas in the speaker’s mind.
7. communication occurs when the ideas in the hearer’s mind match those in the speaker’s mind.

The process of communication described by Locke can be summarised as:

![Diagram of communication process](image)

This description of language was virtually duplicated 250 years afterwards, when Warren Weaver interpreted Shannon’s model of electromagnetic signal transmission as a description of human communication.

With Locke also, the separation of speech and mind is complete. Where, for example, Hobbes still treated thinking as a kind of internal speaking only fifty years before, Locke regarded all mental concepts as purely private images or collections of images. The function

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56 Blair 1819/1993, p92 (3/4/2001). Blair is quoting Quintilian in the second clause. The link between Quintilian and Locke may have been suggested by another sentence in the *Institutio*: *Sic velut media vox, quem habitum a nobis acceperit, nunc iudicum animus dabit* (11:3:62). “The voice, which is the intermediary between ourselves and our hearers, will then produce precisely the same emotion in the judge that we have placed in it.”
of words by contrast was purely public and external. Their sole function was to stand for things in the mind—which meant that speech was entirely dependant on mind and ultimately contributed nothing to human knowledge (except confusion).

Locke’s psychology dominated European thought for half a century. Most eighteenth century theories of mind—by thinkers as diverse as Berkeley, Hume, Voltaire and Condillac—all started with Lockean assumptions, even if they came to reject them. Much that Locke had claimed about the mind became commonplace, even after his philosophy came under sustained attack: concepts are ideas, knowledge is entirely mental, ideas are generated from sensory experience; human experience is individual and known only to the interior soul—and hence later philosophers regarded communication is little more than signalling between isolated individuals. And they recognised, as Locke had, that communication between isolated individuals unaware of each other’s experiences could only ever be profoundly uncertain. In such a world, genuine understanding of another person could only be enormously difficult.

The alienation people felt from one another, the difficulty they had getting others to understand them, and the loss of real connection became dominant themes in European literature and drama in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The closed individual personality, the enigma of others, the loss of understanding, and the impossibility of communion are all dominant themes in authors as diverse as Rimbaud, Zola, Shelley, Lord Byron, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Poe, Whitman, Henry James, Proust, Satre, Camus, Kafka, Ibsen, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Patrick White. In Ulysses, James Joyce took language to the breaking point trying to portray the inner experiences of his characters. With Beckett, Joyce’s friend and successor, the breakdown became complete.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL TRANSMISSION

The end of human physiology in communication

While symbolic transmission was being established amongst philosophers, physical transmission was also being transformed by the same forces that characterised the new sciences: mechanisation and mathematics. From the mid-fifteenth century, Europe saw an extraordinary increase in mechanical innovation, particularly in the German-speaking north. Both popular and scholarly imagination became entranced with machines. When Francis Bacon nominated the greatest improvements in European society, he did not name the Protestant Reformation or the vast improvements made in trade—both of which had revolutionised society in northern Europe—but he followed fashion and named four inventions: the printing press, the mechanical clock, gunpowder, and the compass. The increasing complexity of machines had direct effects on intellectuals: as mechanical
complexity increased, so too did the need for trained experts that could design and operate them. Mathematicians were in particular demand: in navigation and cartography; in civil engineering; in solving military problems from ballistics to fortifications; and in advising on hydraulic problems in mines and waterways. The invention of the printing press had brought university scholars into the print room to help prepare new editions of classical texts. From the late sixteenth century, university scholars were exhorted to go into the towns and factories to learn from them.

Not surprisingly, as intellectual confidence in solving mechanical problems grew, scientists and philosophers began to see parallels between the operation of machines and nature. By the seventeenth century, scientists began to explore many natural phenomena on the assumption that they were mechanical—the clock in particular became a popular metaphor. The crowning achievement of the new mechanical physics was Newton’s cosmology (1687), which explained the workings of the entire universe in mechanical terms.

Even living things—long regarded as entirely unlike physical matter, endowed with life by God—began to be explored and mimicked using mechanical principles. Artisans also began to create mechanical imitations of animals and humans, using wires, pulleys, hinges and levers in place of muscles, tendons, joints and bones. Detailed dissections of human bodies began around 1235 at the University of Salerno followed by public dissections a century later, although they were prohibited by the Inquisition until the mid-sixteenth century.

Dissections were initially carried out by Humanistic-inspired artists keen to understand the human form better, but later were undertaken for scientific and medical purposes. Philosophers and scientists began to explain the construction and operation of the body in mechanical terms. Galileo demonstrated the impossibility of giants on physical principles. Descartes—himself a student of anatomy—drew extensively on the mechanical explanations in his philosophy, although he went beyond the findings of the contemporary

57 Crombie 1964, p123ff; Mokyr 1990, pp74–75.
58 Eisenstein 1979, p520–574
59 Crombie 1964, p122–123
60 The clock was a pivotal invention in the development of Western technology and science. There was enormous civic pride attached to clocks, particularly large municipal clocks. This generated demand for ever more accurate and elaborate machines. This in turn spurred improvements in tool-making and construction on one hand, and algebraic and geometric problem-solving on the other.
61 The great anatomist Vesalius was condemned to death by the Inquisition in 1564—although the sentence was commuted to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was only through Protestant influence that the Royal College of Physicians in London was given legal authority to dissect human corpses.
62 Crombie 1964, p221
anatomists, claiming that not just this or that bodily function was mechanical, but that the entire body was a machine. He cheerfully referred to the body as such in his Meditations in crucial passages without apparently feeling any need to justify the metaphor:

I may consider the human body as a machine [like a clock] fitted together and made up of bones, sinews, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in it, it would still carry out all the operations that, as things are, do not depend on the command of the will, nor, therefore, on the mind63.

As the anatomists’ experience and skill advanced, their results became increasingly difficult to reconcile with the writings of ancient surgeons and healers. The turning point in the mechanical understanding of the human body was Harvey’s account of the blood’s circulation in the body (1628)—the culmination of nearly a century of anatomical experimentation and theorising. At the core of his description was the claim that the heart was no more than a mechanical pump64. This contradicted the great ancient anatomist, Galen, as well as medieval medical theory, which suggested that blood moved in the body like tides in the ocean. But it is a measure of how willing European thinkers had become to put aside ancient authorities and embrace mechanical explanations that Harvey had the unusual fate for a scientist of seeing his findings largely accepted within his lifetime. Within thirty years, his insights and methods had been used to explain the operation of several other major bodily processes, including the lymphatic system and aspects of digestion, which in turn paved the way for the chemical descriptions of bodily processes65.

Harvey’s demonstration that the heart was nothing but a muscular pump ended older medieval beliefs about the role of the heart in the body. Popular imagination at the beginning of the seventeenth century still located consciousness, the emotions, the memory and some thinking processes in the heart. Although the source of this belief was ultimately Aristotle, it had been repeated so often in Antiquity and the Middle Ages that it was a

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63 Descartes Sixth meditation, p120

64 Harvey himself was no supporter of the mechanical philosophy: he personally saw the movement of the blood as somehow related to the ocean’s tides. But his scrupulous experimentation permitted no other explanation but a mechanical heart.

65 Crombie 1964, pp221–235
commonplace in the early Modern Age\textsuperscript{66}. (See Appendix 8 for a summary of physiology in late-sixteenth century beliefs about mind and communication-as-transmission.)

For beliefs concerning communication, Harvey’s discoveries destroyed the possibility of the heart as the location of the soul, the senses, or the source of words. These functions were swiftly transferred to the brain. Between the empirical anatomists and the mechanistic philosophers, the head and the brain remained the only part of human physiology to have anything to do with communication-as-transmission; everything else—including the human body—became mere vehicles for mechanical transference.

The mechanisation of communication

The mechanisation of the human body and the loss of the heart as the seat of the soul had the potential to completely undermine the coherence of physical communication-as-transmission, grounded as it was in human physiology. But quite the opposite happened: mechanics freed communication from the human body—indeed, in time it freed communication from human beings altogether. By the early nineteenth century, people began to talk of machines communicating with one another; by the twentieth century, with the invention of computers, ‘machine communication’ became commonplace. Weaver and Wiener advanced the idea in the 1940s:

The word communication will be used [in The Mathematical Theory of Communication] in a broad sense to include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another. … In some connections it may be desirable to use a still broader definition of communication, namely, one which would include the procedures by means of which one mechanism (say automatic equipment to track an airplane and compute its probable future positions) affects another mechanism (say a guided missile chasing this airplane).\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{66} Today, popular imagination still locates memory and some emotions in the heart. We use the heart as a symbol of love and send love-hearts to our sweethearts. As children, we cross our hearts when we make promises, and we might lay a hand on our hearts when we try to show sincerity—as Americans still do when swearing an oath or standing for their national anthem. Until recently, it was common in most Western cultures for people to put a hand on their chest when referring to themselves, especially when the self was under threat, although the gesture was widespread in Roman times. Oddly, even though today the head has taken over most of the ancient functions of the heart, we do not usually point at our heads when we refer to ourselves, although we may point to the middle of our chests.

\textsuperscript{67} In Shannon and Weaver 1949. During World War II, Weaver worked on the problem of improving anti-aircraft gunnery systems.
It is the thesis of this book [The human use of human beings] that society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between man and machines, between machines and man, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part.  

From the seventeenth century, machines and mechanical processes became the basis of new metaphors for explaining human communication-as-transmission. Physiological expressions were replaced with either mechanical metaphors, or else neutral disembodied terms. Notable is the development of metaphoric expressions to explain the process of transference between people: something that was only a small part of physiological models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>physiological</th>
<th>mechanical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He spat out his words</td>
<td>Jane gave her ideas away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She sighed, “goodbye”</td>
<td>Send me your thoughts on the matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John blurted out the truth</td>
<td>The rumour leaked out within days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He breathed out his last words</td>
<td>Don’t to broadcast how you feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His jealousy oozed out of him</td>
<td>He launched his theory at the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her words flew to their mark</td>
<td>The letter carried the Board’s instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John’s oratory soared</td>
<td>Convey my best wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He put his argument across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His ideas do not come across well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The news flashed through the office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo gobbled up everything Max said</td>
<td>John let the idea sink in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He drank in her praise</td>
<td>A new theory arrived that morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her words penetrated his heart</td>
<td>The delegates brought a new proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason’s lies stabbed at Joan</td>
<td>The idea caught on fast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The disembodiment of communication also implied that, once words had been sent, they could float about in physical space until they somehow found their way back into people’s heads—something that was not consistent with communication grounded in the human

68 Wiener 1954, p16

69 The earliest description of communication as ‘transmission’ I know of is from Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682), who writes of the difficulties that being a doctor creates for writing “though [our Profession] leadeth us into many truths that pass undiscovered by others, yet doth it disturb their Communication and much interrupt … our Pens in their well-intentioned transmission.” His usage though suggests the expression was commonplace.
*body. Doubtless the widespread appearance of the printed word from the mid-sixteenth century contributed to the belief that words could be separated from people. The development of bookshops and libraries may also have suggested that ideas could be stored independently outside of human heads. In the Modern Age, a new set of metaphorical expressions appeared consistent with the belief of autonomous ideas:

I saw the idea in Tom’s book. That idea has been floating around for centuries. Rumours began to circulate. The story reached the papers a week later. Pete and Dave kicked around some ideas.*

**Transportation and communication**

The trend to mechanisation left a second mark on mechanical communication-as-transmission. Machines concerned with movement and transport became a prominent basis for new metaphors. It was only in the Modern Age that the metaphor of words as ‘vehicles’ for thoughts appeared.

Most of these metaphorical expressions are water-based, which suggests their connection with the historical development of transport. Land based transport lagged sea-based movement until the nineteenth century, when railways began to make the mass movement of passengers and goods economic. Before then, the development of both roads and carriages was slow. The main impetus for road-building in the seventeenth century was military, and the only obvious metaphor for communication based on roads comes from the army: supply and transport routes are still called ‘lines of communication’.

In the early Modern Age, the most important developments in transport were water-based. In the sixteenth century, the Dutch lead innovations in ship-building. For instance, the *fluytschipt* (1595) was cheap to build, required only a small crew, but could carry large volumes, allowing Dutch traders to undercut the costs of their French and British competitors by thirty to fifty per cent, sparking intense rivalry. In the 1660s the French reformer Colbert estimated (probably inaccurately) that the Dutch accounted for three-quarters of European trade—and in response set about building up a rival French fleet. British sea-trade began to expand in the mid-seventeenth century, exploiting its growing colonies in America, the Carribean and Africa. The invention of heavy naval cannon in the late sixteenth century also saw an arms race develop in specialised military ships.

But the form of transportation that attracted most attention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the construction of canals. Although canals had criss-crossed

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[70] Mokyr 1990, p68
northern Italy during the Middle Ages, most were for irrigation. The Dutch led canal-building, hydraulics and pumping technology from the mid-fifteenth century, employing their skills from the English fen country to the Loire valley. German mine engineers, faced with the constant problem of pumping deep mines clear, also contributed expertise in the management of water. But the force which launched large-scale canal-building in Europe was the French military. Transport by river was vastly cheaper and quicker than by road in the seventeenth century, and far less susceptible to weather conditions. The first great French canal, opened in 1642, ran fifty-nine kilometres joining the Seine and Loire rivers. In 1684, the massive Languedoc canal was opened, joining the Mediterranean with the Atlantic. In 1699, the genius of French military engineering, Vauban, had proposed 190 water routes, based on canals and improved riverways, primarily to speed French armies and bind the country together.

Although other countries later developed military canals, the main force behind the subsequent growth of canals was trade. The poor quality of roads, along with the expense of feeding draught animals made canals and coastal trading far more cost effective. Most European countries built canals to service manufacturing, industry and trade, although the British and Russians lead by volume. Spurred by demand for coal, England was covered

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72 See Mattelart 1996, pp6–8 for a discussion of the connection between French canal construction and ideas about communication.

73 The rise of large nation states required transport networks capable of allowing people to travel and communicate. Not surprisingly, transportation became a minor metaphor in communication-as-community from the eighteenth century. For instance, Alexander Hamilton, one of the founders of the American republic, explicitly linked transport and community in 1788 while arguing for a union of the thirteen former colonies: ‘… the intercourse throughout the Union will be facilitated by new improvements. Roads will everywhere be shortened and kept in better order; accommodation for travelers will be multiplied and meliorated; an interior navigation on our eastern side will be opened throughout, or nearly throughout, the whole extent of the thirteen States. The communication between the Western and Atlantic districts, and between different parts of each, will be rendered more and more easy by those numerous canals with which the beneficence of nature has intersected our country, and which art finds it so little difficult to connect and complete.” (Hamilton The Federalist No 14, p103. In Hamilton, Madison & Jay 1961). When Hamilton was writing in 1787–1788, canals were virtually unknown in the Americas—he was presumably referring to the English experience.

74 Development of canals in France and Spain was hampered by central government apathy. Prussia had to wait until the 1780s for the support and funding of Frederick the Great to see major canal building. Areas where terrain made canals impossible, like the Balkans, were unable to compete in Europe’s burgeoning markets and industrial development, and subsequently languished.
by nearly seven thousand kilometres of canals by 1750. In 1800, England had twice the length of canals as France, despite having less than half the land area\textsuperscript{75}.

The canals in Britain were also prominent in the public imagination for a second reason, apart from scale. Most British canals were built by private entrepreneurs, and were funded by public subscription. Because canalways were enormously profitable in the early Industrial Age, there was consequently great public interest in them in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They became omnipresent in the developing industrial areas\textsuperscript{76}.

From waterways come many of the metaphoric expressions that replaced physiological terms to explain human communication. Locke—who repeatedly rejects the physical transmission of ideas between people—nonetheless refers to communication as:

\begin{quote}
... the great conduit, whereby men convey their discoveries, reasonings, and knowledge, from one to another, [and] he that makes an ill use of it, though he does not corrupt the fountains of knowledge, ... yet he does ... break or stop the pipes whereby it is distributed to the public use and advantage of mankind.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Possibly the attraction of water-based metaphors was related to its use in ancient rhetoric and Latin metaphors. The Renaissance was familiar with fluent speakers from whom sprung or poured flowing words, which listeners drank in. Ineffective speakers might also be said to gush, dribble, or spray their words. But what is new to the Modern Age are metaphors of communication channels and conduits—along with the concept that messages might be directed. Although the Renaissance occasionally referred to empty words, it was only after the seventeenth century that expressions implying words were containers developed, like packing words with thoughts, or unpackaging the meaning of the sentence. The connection of packing, containing, cramming before sending suggests a connection with transport and trade.

Transport came to provide many mechanical expressions that displaced the physiological metaphor as the basic way of explaining physical communication-as-transmission; all that remained of human physiology was the source and goal of words—the brain. By the early eighteenth century, the basic elements of the mechanical Conduit Metaphor had been

\begin{itemize}
\item Andrews 1970, p108
\item From the eighteenth century, trade came to be regarded as an important force in binding communities and nations together—especially the emerging English empire, which depended heavily of trade. [Grenville]. The link between trade and communication is taken up by the great Encyclopédie in its definition of commerce: “By commerce we mean a general sense a reciprocal communication. It applies more particularly to the communication that men have with each other in the productions of their lands and their industry.” (From Mattelart 1996, p7)
\item Locke, Essay 3:11:5
\end{itemize}
assembled. Older metaphorical expressions continued to be used however, particularly as different metaphors provided richer sources of expression than others, as the table below illustrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>physiology</th>
<th>mechanics</th>
<th>transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a speaker</strong></td>
<td>heart, head, soul</td>
<td>brain, mind, source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puts ideas</td>
<td>thoughts, arguments, beliefs, feelings, emotions, stuff, information, facts</td>
<td>thoughts, arguments, beliefs, feelings, emotions, stuff, information, facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>insert, capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>breath, air, wind, cloud,</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and sends them</td>
<td>breathe, sigh, gasp, vent, pour out, ooze, blurt out</td>
<td>distribute, disperse, broadcast, give, bring, present, put over, put out, slip out, throw out, get across, transmit, circulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through space</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a hearer</td>
<td>heart, head, soul, mind</td>
<td>target, receiver, brain, mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who hears the words</td>
<td>catch, drink in, eat, grasp, enter, pierce</td>
<td>pick up, take in, enter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takes ideas from the words</td>
<td>ruminate, digest</td>
<td>extract, expose, reveal, take from, draw from, lay bare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and affects the mind</td>
<td>fill, swell</td>
<td>fill, impact, sway,</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**THE TWO TRADITIONS OF COMMUNICATION-AS-TRANSMISSION**

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, all of the key elements that make up Modern theories of communication-as-transmission were in place. The trend towards political, religious and philosophical individualism combined with the belief in a material mechanical universe—stripped of intelligent and rational qualities—combined to produce the idea of human beings as isolated points of mental experience and self-awareness, lodged
in a physical body and cut off from one another. The human condition was essentially that of a lonely soul struggling to establish true contact with others and acquire certain knowledge of the world. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasised the rational intellect over public, social or religious experience, leading to philosophical positions that located knowledge and ideas entirely within the mind where they were invisible to others.

For those unburdened with the need for philosophical coherence, physical transmission continued to describe communication-as-transmission adequately, although mechanics provided a new source of metaphors to explain the process. Mechanics freed communication from physiology, then the human body, and eventually from human beings entirely. Physical communication-as-transmission either became (literally) disembodied or else described primarily in terms of transport—the origin of the Conduit Metaphor.

For philosophers though, faced with the problem of bridging brute matter to link autonomous intellects, communication had to be reduced to mere signalling between individuals. But signalling between people without certainty that they had the same ideas meant genuine understanding was always elusive. Alienation was the logical consequence of this belief. Longfellow epitomises the human experience as:

Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing;
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and a silence.78

In the process of its philosophical development, symbolic communication-as-transmission became associated with empiricism, the physical sciences, political and religious individualism, mechanisation and mathematics. As these become pre-eminent in Modern European thought, so alternative views of communication—grounded in beliefs about community and natural order, and the techniques of rhetoric and logic—lost ground. When contemporary theories of communication-as-transmission were formulated in the 1940s, they were launched by mathematicians, engineers, scientists, and behaviourist psychologists—such as Warren Weaver, Norbert Wiener, and Harold Lasswell. In this environment, it is little wonder that Shannon’s model of signal transmission, couched in statistical probability theory, was so quickly taken as a model for human communication. His model matched the architecture of Locke’s symbolic transference, and was largely consistent with everyday metaphors for talking about physical communication-as-transmission. Moreover, Shannon’s model could be neatly meshed with the mechanistic, behaviourist psychology that prevailed in the United States. And finally, it was a model that agreed most strongly with the individualistic values of the culture that described it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT

ABSTRACT  This final chapter summarises the historical development of the three traditions of communication down to the seventeenth century, along with their interactions and connections with other fields—such as psychology, physiology, philosophy, and religion. It illustrates how some of the key sources of fragmentation within the field result from the existence of the three traditions. Understanding the development and interaction of the three traditions helps explain current disputes over the ontological status of communication and its relationship with other fields, particularly its subordination to psychology.

COMMUNICATION-AS-TRANSMISSION

For most of its history, communication-as-transmission was grounded in beliefs about the human body and human personality. Changes in beliefs about the body’s organs and relationships between people affected ideas about communication. They in turn influenced ideas about the body, mind, and society.

Homer

The oldest version of communication-as-transmission appears in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In Homer, there is no human body, only an amalgam of limbs and organs. The most important organs to communication are the lungs (*phrenes*) and breath (*thumos*—also the life substance that animates a person).

Communication in Homer occurs when air from the speaker’s *phrenes* is breathed out as words, and placed in the *phrenes* of the listener. The process is purely physical. It divides communication into speaker and listener: words have no existence apart from the momentary breath they are spoken with.
Everything that we, today, would regard as mental or emotional is either physiological—sweating, shaking, heat—or explained as speech. There is virtually no active thought in Homer. A character’s phrenes or thumos may speak, instructing the character, or else some god might ‘put a thing’ into the character’s phrenes. Rare examples of reflection portray a person debating with their thumos, which responds as a fully independent agent. Lying is holding one word in the phrenes while speaking another. Speech dominates knowledge, although a character might occasionally report what their phrenes ‘sees’ (although the sight, noos, is located in the chest or phrenes, not in the head). There is no internal ‘space’ in which a character might think or envision things—the closest things in Homer are the phrenes, the organs of speech.

### Greece down to the fourth century BC

By the fourth century BC, beliefs about the body changed and the concept of mind appeared. The Greeks increasingly saw a person’s limbs and organs as an integrated whole, a body, rather than a collection of autonomous agents. Correspondingly, the phrenes and thumos ceased to speak for themselves, and their importance declined. Thumos lost all sense of life substance, and its functions became limited to emotion. The phrenes lost their connection with the lungs, and consciousness became located more generally around the heart. But even after the phrenes’ physical nature was forgotten, the notion remained of an internal space within which people may speak and see visions.

The psukhē and nous took over and expanded the functions of thumos and phrenes. The nous lost its immediate meaning of ‘sight’, and ‘sights’ within the phrenes became ‘in-sight’, eventually evolving into knowledge and wisdom. Nous became the faculty of thought; knowledge was ennoia. Knowledge shifted from speech to sight: what the nous knew were not words but ‘images’ (idein). As these ‘ideas’ became the basis of knowledge, speech declined in importance as a form of primary knowledge.

The Homeric life substances—thumos and psukhē—merged to become a single, more abstract life force, psukhē, responsible for all intellectual and emotional activity. Philosophers identified three parts: rational (nous), emotional (thumos), and appetites (such as lust and hunger).

Communication-as-transmission followed the basic pattern in Homer, worked out within this more complex framework. Air in the lungs was ‘stamped’ with images of things in the
psukhē, then breathed to the psukhē of the listener. As in Homer, speaking was active, hearing passive.

Despite the displacement of thumos and phrenes by psukhē and nous, the Greeks continued to understand thought as speech. Consciousness was still located in the chest around the chief organs of speech—as were memory and thought. Thinking was a monologue within the spaces of the psukhē (a description derived from earlier notions of holding words in the phrenes). Personal decision-making (boule) was modelled on public decision-making in the city assembly (Boule).

The influence of rhetoric in Classical Greece in fourth century BC

In the fourth century BC, communication-as-transmission interacted with rhetoric, marking both. This interaction is visible in the two main divisions of rhetoric.

The first was Aristotle’s division of the sources of persuasion:

1. the speaker’s character (ethos)
2. the listener’s emotional response (pathos), and
3. the speech itself (logos).

About the same time, communication-as-transmission expanded from two parts — speaker and listener — to include speech as an independent part. This may reflect the Greeks’ growing familiarity with writing. Writing gave speech a permanence it did not have when spoken: associated with breath and wind, speech was proverbially impermanent and changeable.

The second division of rhetoric followed the order in which a speaker composed their speech:

1. working out what to say
2. arranging arguments and evidence
3. selecting language to present the arguments and evidence
4. memorising the speech
5. presenting the speech.
This grew from an organisational plan into a description of speaking, starting with the speaker’s intentions and ending with words.

Communication-as-transmission in turn influenced the parts of rhetoric. Just as transference began in the psukhē and nous within the chest then passed out as words, so the first two parts of rhetoric were grouped with dianoia (knowledge in the nous), whereas the third and fifth were classed with rhēton (words).

Roman versions: second century BC to second century AD

The Roman version of communication-as-transmission was worked out within physiological assumptions largely identical to the Greeks’. Experience and consciousness were located in the chest (pectoris), either in the heart (cordis) or around it—although not specifically in the lungs. The Roman counterpart of psukhē was genius, located in the head and associated with procreation. The life-force thumos has its counterpart in the Latin animus, which animated the body, and in the airy anima, the substance of the animus. However, despite parallels between Greek and Roman physiology, by the time of the earliest Latin texts (second century BC), the connection between speech and physiology had been lost and physiological descriptions of communication were conventional, not literal.

Roman communication-as-transmission began in the chest, around the heart. There, the animus thought on or felt about some ‘thing’ (res) before expressing it as speech. In speaking, words were ‘ejected’ from the body, to ‘flow’ or be ‘carried’ to others. In transit, speech might have a fleeting existence independent of either speaker or listener. In listening, words entered the listener, to become known to their animus. Romans understood listening in two ways: if the hearer was active, they ‘grasped’ or ‘took in’ what was said; if they were passive, the speaker ‘poured’ their words into the listener’s animus.

The Romans occasionally referred to words being ‘full’ or ‘crammed’ or else ‘empty’ or ‘hollow’. This suggests that, just as the animus contained ‘things’ (rei), words could likewise be containers (although the Romans never referred to ‘contents’).
Most Roman terms for thinking were either close to physiology or derived from speech. The Romans believed that what the *animus* thought had substance, *anima*, an airy material: a belief originating in speech as breath. There is an obvious relationship between *ratio* (thought) and *oratio* (oratory, speech). The origins of the words *intellectum* and *intellegens* in *inter* + *lectio* (‘I speak within’) and *inter* + *lego* (‘I hear within’) suggest that the experience of thinking developed from the experience of speaking with others. This is supported in the structure of the many words based on the roots *co+gno* and *con+scio* (joint + know) which imply that knowledge was regarded as public, not interior and private.

The Middle Ages

By the High Middle Ages, communication-as-transmission had split into two traditions: physical and symbolic.

Physical transmission was based on physiology and saw communication as physical transference from one person to another. Even in the sixteenth century, speech was still breath, and the bulk of thought, experience and emotion took place in the chest and heart.

Symbolic transference was a product of Scholasticism and always remained the province of philosophers. Christian thinkers insisted that the mind was not physical. This implied that concepts in the mind could not pass through the physical space between people. The Scholastics drew on Aristotle and Augustine’s claim that “spoken words are the symbols of mental experience” to understand words not as mental objects, but physical signs of mental states. Symbolic transmission involved the speaker framing a concept in their mind, then creating a physical symbol—a word—to stand for it. Being physical, it could pass through physical space. When it reached the listener, it affected their physical senses, which in turn affected the intellect, calling to mind the speaker’s original concept. Medieval symbolic transference assumed that the listener’s concept would be identical to the speaker’s.
The Christian thinkers firmly separated body from mind and spirit, and with it, thought from speech. Unlike speech, the mind had no physical properties at all. Nonetheless, the Middle Ages continued to describe thought as ‘inner speech’, identical in form to the ‘external speech’ perceptible by the ears, but composed of an intellectual substance.

Symbolic transference in the early Modern Age

The final development of symbolic transference followed the philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century. Philosophers transferred knowledge and experience to the mind and cut it free from the body—the body was reduced to a mere machine. Early modern philosophers intensified the separation of minds from one another: sentient islands in an ocean of brute matter.

They also divorced language from knowledge. Cartesian introspection transformed logic from a public activity (right argumentation) into a private activity (right thinking). The Aristotelian–Scholastic rules of dialectic—with their roots in debate and discussion—were replaced by mathematical reasoning. Locke’s psychology made ‘ideas’ the unit of knowledge, and sensory experience their ultimate source. Words became no more than symbols of mental activity, and hence dependant on the mind.

These developments implied no major change to medieval symbolic transmission, although the relationship between mind and body became more problematic. Modern philosophers recognised that if each person was cut off from others, symbolic transference was radically uncertain. There was no reason for a listener to necessarily understand a word in the way a speaker intended. Certainty in the use of language required two things. First, successful communication demanded both regularity in use, so that each word always stood for the same idea, and specificity, so that one word always stood for one clearly defined idea and not several. Second, the meanings of words had to be grounded outside language itself, because defining one word in terms of another simply led to circularity.
By 1700, symbolic transmission had most features of the Shannon and Weaver model:

[1] a speaker or ‘information source’ creates a ‘message’
[2] this message is encoded in ‘signal’ suitable for transmission through space
[3] the transmitter sends the signal
[4] the receiver decodes the received signal, to reconstruct the sender’s message.

The mechanisation of physical transference in the early Modern Age

The mechanical philosophy of the seventeenth century understood the body as a machine, and with this, physical communication-as-transmission became a mechanical process. Communication would be freed of the human body: taking place between ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’ that might not be human. The main new foundations for metaphors about communication were machines associated with transport and travel.

Transport provided the model for the last two developments of physical transmission. First, just as goods were loaded inside vessels for transport, so ‘mental contents’ were placed inside ‘vessels’ or containers (words) for transference; by analogy, listening became ‘unpackaging’. Second, just as goods were fully real in transit, so words and their ‘contents’ continued to exist even when separated from a speaker or listener. This meant that ideas could be ‘stored up’ in books and libraries (The explosive growth in printed documents from the seventeenth century contributed to this belief in an independent existence of words.)
By 1700, physical communication-as-transmission was almost identical with the modern Conduit Metaphor:

[1] language functions as a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another
[2] in writing or speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings into words
[3] words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts and feelings and transferring them to others
[4] in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings from the words.

COMMUNICATION-AS-ORDER

The second tradition sees communication as participation in order. Its most important sources were beliefs about the way people should live in communities. This tradition intersects with ideas about society, law, justice, government, virtue, morality, God, sovereignty and individuality.

Classical Greek views of social order

Classical Greek ideas about society synthesised elements from two radically different views of community. The first ‘Olympian’ group of ideas was fully formed in Homer.

Homer characters were always understood as members of some social group (primarily family and home), and were defined by their relations with others: husbands and wives; parents and children; masters and servants; commanders and soldiers; kings and people. These relationships gave society an implicit hierarchy (a feature of all later Greek social thought). The order of society, themis, was divine, and the community’s laws were one aspect of the larger law of nature, dikē. Dikē and themis specified the position and roles that a person had within society and the behaviour appropriate to those roles. A person that conformed to the requirements of dikē and themis was agathos (good); if they did not, they were kakos (bad). A person that disobeyed themis insulted the order of the gods, and the gods would punish them for it. To disobey flagrantly was to break from the order of home and family, and go outside the laws of nature.

People with the skill to perform their role in society possessed aretē (a term that later evolved a moral sense akin to ‘virtue’). Society was ruled by those with aretē to a high degree, the aristoi. Communication-as-order in this world was simply obedience to dikē and themis, doing what was required in the social roles that fate and the gods cast characters, and giving others what they were due in their roles.
The second opposing view of community appeared in the mid-fifth century BC. Its appearance depended upon four developments which took Greek society well beyond the scope of the ‘Olympian’ social order:

1. The gods became distant from everyday human life, and human self-reliance increased.
2. People increasingly acknowledged desires of their own, independent of their social roles.
3. The polis developed, a social body of unprecedented size and complexity, requiring novel forms of social organisation.
4. Human law (nomos) appeared alongside the divine law (dike), which in turn created the problem of justice, dikaiosunē—the process of adjusting limited human laws to universal divine laws.

The extreme point of this trajectory was reached by the Sophists. Agnostic about the gods, they denied any certainty in the existence of dike or of fate which allocated people their roles in society. The Sophists asserted that all people were intrinsically self-interested, with desires and wants, and taught that happiness consisted in fulfilling these desires. Society only existed because individuals found that working together was more effective than a solitary life for satisfying their wants. Because some people were stronger than others, they were more effective at getting what they desired (or forcing others to get it for them). This established a hierarchy in society: from strongest to weakest. Such laws as existed in society were those permitted by the strong in order to secure the services of the weak. All laws (nomoi) and virtues (aretai) were simply human conventions that might be changed if people chose to do so. In this tradition, which denied any divine order, arete was simply a person’s capacity to achieve what they wanted, while dikaiosunē was whatever was in the interests of the strong.

These two constellations of ideas about community—the ‘Olympian’ and the ‘conventional’—provided the starting point for all subsequent Greek descriptions of community. Later variants would not be so starkly opposed as in the fifth century BC: philosophers blended ideas from both traditions with varying degrees of success. But the conflict between them—usually summarised in the opposition of nature and convention: physis and nomos—never ceased in Antiquity, primarily because neither tradition managed to suppress or integrate the other.

Plato provided the first synthesis, making three enduring contributions.

First was the claim that society was formed when individuals came together for mutual benefit—a ‘social contract’. Since the polis has no origins in nature, its only characteristics are those of its citizens. Hence, the constitution of society is the same as the human soul (psukhē).
Second was the description of society in his *Republic*. Drawing on the correspondence between *psukhē* and *polis*, he says that both have three parts:

1. parts that satisfy physical needs—appetites in the *psukhē*; traders, farmers and artisans in the *polis*

2. parts responsible for bravery, courage, fortitude and loyalty—emotions (*thumos*) in the *psukhē*; warriors in the *polis* (with *thumoeidēs*).

3. rational parts possessing foresight, calculating interests, making decisions—the *nous* (mind) in the *psukhē*; the philosopher rulers in the *polis*.

The *polis* is at peace and perfected when each part knows its place and role, and keeps to it. This harmony amongst parts is *diakiosune* (‘righteousness’ or ‘respectful of order’). Plato’s society is perfected when it conforms to an ideal unchanging *structure*. Communication—the way that social order is established and maintained—is identical to the principle ‘each thing in its right place’: *dikaiosune*.

Third was his Theory of Forms. Plato said that reality was established on permanent and unchanging principles: Ideas or Forms or Archetypes. Everything in the physical world was an image of the Forms, and they also provided the basis for all ethical judgements. They were purely intellectual, and could only be perceived by the philosophically-trained mind. But although intellectual, they were not products of the human mind: they are fully real, independent of any expression in the physical world.

Plato’s theory sharply divided the world into two realms: intellectual and physical; immutable and changing; timeless and temporal. The Platonists gave priority to the Forms, as they were the true ground of reality, free from corruption or imperfection. Although the Theory of Forms had no connection with communication in Plato’s philosophy, it would be incorporated into Christianity from the third century AD.

Aristotle influenced beliefs about communication in broadly two ways. First was in his ‘correction’ of Plato’s Theory of Forms. He argued that there was no independent realm of Forms, but rather, form was fully present in the material world. Each thing was matter in some form. However, Aristotle’s forms were dynamic and drove the development of things from their potential state to full actualisation. Everything moved towards its goal, *telos*, in which it was perfected. The material world achieved its *telos* at several levels: the material world was perfected in vegetable life; plants were perfected in animal life; and animal life found its perfection in humanity. This metaphysics of progress and hierarchy would become fundamental to Scholastic philosophy and medieval concepts of nature and law.

Aristotle’s second contribution was in his *Ethics* and *Politics*. Like everything else, human beings move toward their *telos*. The *telos* of human life is the good (*agathos*). The highest good is happiness which, Aristotle says, is an activity of the *psukhē* in accordance with the virtues, *aretai*. He divides the *aretai* into intellectual and the practical. The highest
practical areté is political life; the highest intellectual areté is contemplation. Aristotle was however dubious of people’s capacity to behave virtuously if left to themselves: they needed to be taught the intellectual aretai and habituated into the practical. Learning areté, says Aristotle, requires order and justice: dikê and dikaiosunê. These are only found within the polis. Since the polis is necessary for the development of areté and achievement of human happiness, it is a natural institution, and human beings are naturally social creatures. Citizenship within the polis is an education in areté—those more advanced in areté train the less advanced. Because people differ in areté and happiness, society has a natural hierarchy, from most advanced to least. Those suited to rule the polis are those most advanced in areté, the aristoi, forming an ‘aristocracy’ of virtue. The bond between people in Aristotle’s polis was dikaisônê, justice, the judging of areté. Communication is an education in areté: participating in political life, living virtuously with others, training the psukhê to act in accordance with areté, and leading others to happiness through the perfection of body and soul.

The chief philosophical influence on Hellenistic and Roman beliefs about society was Stoic. Society was an aspect of nature, and nature had an order (kosmou), making it the kosmos. The source of this all-pervasive order the Stoics called God, Logos, Nous or Nature. All people possessed a part of the divine Logos, so were fundamentally equal in their humanity, and due respect for the divine they embodied. Because all people were ‘Sons of God’ and brothers to one another, they were all citizens of the ‘world-city’, the kosmopolis. It was unnatural and immoral for a person to cut themselves off from their fellow citizens—the Stoics called on all people to contribute to the welfare of others and fulfil the duties placed on them by nature.

The order of nature was reason (logos). It was universal, and therefore there were natural rules of morality, justice and reason binding on all people. Human happiness lay in complying with the requirements of reason. In complying, people perfected their own natures, becoming virtuous (agathon) and just (dikaiosunê). Rejecting reason was to engage in a futile struggle with nature, which resulted only in disorder and unhappiness. The Stoics recognised that, because people could act against nature, their community’s laws could diverge from the universal law (although this made them less than perfectly just). People were obliged to uphold the laws of both God and their community. This meant Stoics effectively inhabited two worlds: the local community with its local customs, and the kosmopolis with its laws of reason. Stoics therefore lived two corresponding lives:

[1] withdrawing from society to contemplate the Logos and decide what reason or God required (in this, the Stoics were the first in Antiquity to advance a concept of the individual, entirely distinct from their community)

[2] living actively within the community, serving others.
To communicate—to participate in the community—was to discover what reason required; obey the dictates of nature and God; fulfil one’s duties; and behave morally to others and work for their good.

The last philosophical movement of Antiquity was Neoplatonism: a massive synthesis of ancient thought. It most enduring influence was in its metaphysics, which combined Plato’s Forms, the Stoic Logos and Aristotle’s teleological metaphysics. Neoplatonists claimed that all creation came from the One, the transcendent First Principle, outside change, time, or comparison. As it contemplated itself, it brought forth in turn:

[1] the Mind (Nous), which held the Platonic Ideas
[2] the Soul (Psuhkē), which knew change and development
[3] the Body (Phusis) of the kosmos, the material world.

The Neoplatonists understood this procession as an outwards, downwards flow from unity to multiplicity; from timelessness to mutability. A second impulse saw creation return inwards and upwards. Plato had said that images strove to ‘grasp’ their Idea and so perfect themselves—an action he called ‘love’ (eros). In Neoplatonism, each level of creation loves the one above, impelling their upward movement to perfection. Thus the One was simultaneously the source and goal of all creation.

Neoplatonic metaphysics offered escape from a troubled world. Since the material world was the furthest from the Good, salvation could be achieved by returning to the One. Through contemplation, the philosopher turned inwards and upwards, grasping first the Platonic Ideas, then the Mind they existed in, and finally rising to reunification with the One.

Neoplatonism completely estranged the soul from society. The Neoplatonists taught that the soul had become encased in flesh, cutting it off from the light and knowledge of perfection. Philosophy’s task was to free the soul from its prison in the body and the physical world (including society). Entirely absent from Neoplatonism was the Stoic demand for participation in the community: society was actively harmful, shackling a person to the senses, the body, illusion and a world deprived of goodness. The only participation that mattered in Neoplatonism was with the Ideas and the One, and so ideas about communication became based on the mystical participation of the individual in God.
Christianity and the Scholastics

Although Jesus’ ethical teachings would always exert an influence in Christian life, the most important ideas about Christian community were from Paul:

1. salvation consisted in reunion with God
2. reunion involved “dying in the flesh to become reborn in the spirit”—dividing the universe and human life into those parts with God and those separated from him
3. by having faith, Christians became parts of the mystical ‘body of Christ’
4. in this life, Christians were to follow the example of Christ on the Cross: subordinating their personal desires in compassion and suffering for others
5. God established authorities to rule society, and the faithful were obliged to obey.

Early Christianity quickly combined these ideas with Hellenistic habits of thought, categories and philosophies—particularly dualistic Neoplatonism. The result was a radical revision of the Evangelists’ ideas about God, salvation and community. Salvation changed from deliverance from suffering to assimilation with God. God became the ultimate source of both creation and redemption: the Christian One. Through his love God created Christ, the Logos (the collective expression of the Ideas in the Divine Mind). Creation was made in the image of Christ, just as Platonic philosophy said that the material world was an image of the Ideas. And, just as the Platonists taught that the material world sought perfection in the Ideas and return to the One, so Christians could find salvation through their participation—in its mystical Platonic sense—in Christ, in whose image they were made. Christ was both the agent of creation and the bridge to reconciliation with God. The Christian story of fall, punishment, redemption and reconciliation was recast in Neoplatonic terms as the out-going and return to the One.

Early Christian thinkers showed no interest in community for its own sake. Augustine argued that true happiness lay outside this world in reunion with God. The only true community was the Body of Christ, understood as the universal Church. Communication was communion: mystical participation in Christ. Augustine did however recognise the need for government in the temporal world: it helped establish the peace that Christians experienced in their reunion with God. To help establish God’s peace, Christians therefore had to obey their rulers and society’s laws.

In the mid-fifth century AD, the pseudo-Dionysius used the metaphysical architecture of Neoplatonism to describe the order of the Christian cosmos, making explicit what had long been implicit in Platonised Christianity, disposed to think in terms of symbols and archetypes: all parts of creation were mirrored their ultimate source, the Trinity. Creation
was a ‘Great Golden Chain’ of three basic parts: God, angels and humanity. There were three levels of angels, each containing three orders, reflecting the order of the Trinity. The angels were ordered hierarchically. A hierarchy, he said, was a state of understanding and activity that imitated the divine, and so became one with God.

The Church’s structure modelled the angels above: it was divided in three and ranked hierarchically—an order in which Christians sought assimilation with God. Although the pseudo-Dionysius did not write on secular society, he hinted that it reflected the divine order. Communication therefore consisted of participating in the divine order, the hierarchy, established by God.

The Dionysian hierarchy reconnected the divine and temporal in a single order. From the eleventh century, Christian thought became increasingly engaged with the natural world, culminating in Scholasticism. This movement was accelerated when the works of Aristotle and other Greek scientific texts, together with learned Muslim commentaries, reappeared in the twelfth century. Believing in the ultimate unity of faith and reason, the Scholastics gave themselves the task of synthesising their Aristotelian, Dionysian, Augustinian and Roman legal heritages within Christian belief—an effort crowned in the theology of Aquinas. Aquinas stressed God as the supreme ruling intellect. God’s reason was embodied within creation as the eternal law, from which all other order derived. Human beings possessed a measure of reason and, with this, had a limited but natural capacity to understand God and an inclination to do what is good. This established what Aquinas called ‘natural law’: it aspires to the eternal law but is circumscribed by humanity’s limitations. Drawing on Aristotle, Aquinas said that communities are natural institutions that embody the common good of its members. These communities have laws (both natural and human-made) which consist in the rational ordering of things that concern the common good. As all members of the community have a common share in the community and its goods, they should share in the selection of their rulers—by which Aquinas means that, as in Roman law, a ruler’s power was derived from the people and is to be employed for their good. The best form of government, said Aquinas, is one that embodies ‘unity’ between its members: monarchy. Aquinas expanded the Dionysian hierarchy into the natural world to argue that, just as there is a hierarchy amongst the angels and in the Church, so too a hierarchy is natural in all human societies.

Although Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that society exists for human good, he disagreed with Aristotle’s claim that human society contains all the goods of human life. Restating Augustine, Aquinas said that the greatest good is the enjoyment of God. This however is a good that secular rulers cannot provide: only the Church can. Therefore, he argued that all secular communities should be subject to the Church, and the practice of religion is
superior to the practice of politics. The highest form of government is the government of Christ, from whom the divine priesthood descended.

Communication in such a community has characteristics common to the pseudo-Dionysius and Neoplatonism implicit in Christianity but, with the influence of Aristotle, participation became active. It was the rational participation of individuals in the eternal law established by God.

In medieval thought, the social order was one part of the much greater order of nature. All of creation formed a mighty chain, the Great Chain of Being, which descended from God to the lowest part of creation. In the Ptolemaic-Christian cosmology, the earth and humanity lay at the bottommost point of the universe, at the point furthest from God. Above and around it rose the seven planetary spheres, the firmament, the Primum Mobile (which imparted motion to all things below) and the Empyreum: the realm of God. Each angel in the Dionysian hierarchy moved one of the heavenly spheres, mediating the relationship between God and humanity. On the earth, the natural world showed a hierarchy that reflected the cosmic order: material, vegetable, animal, human—an order that was surmounted in the heavens by the angels and God. The order in each part reflected the order of those parts above it: consequently, the human body, society and heavens all participated in a common order.

While the incorporation of the natural philosophy of Ptolemy and Aristotle satisfied the Scholastics’ determination to find a place for rational knowledge within Christian revelation, it also left Scholasticism dangerously exposed, for the failure of one part implied the failure of all the others. Within four hundred years of Aquinas’ synthesis, all of its main assumptions had been rejected: Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, the Dionysian hierarchy, Ptolemaic astronomy, and post-Apostolic Neoplatonic Christianity. With their loss, the metaphysical grounds for the medieval social hierarchy crumbled, paving the way for Modern individualism in religion and politics. Communication shifted from participation in divine cosmic order to a means for binding individuals into a coherent group.

Secular government and early Modern beliefs about social order

Alongside Christianity in the early Middle Ages appeared another group of ideas about society, established in the West by the migrating Germanic tribes:

[1] society was created and ordered by law
[2] God gave the people law, making them into a community
[3] law is embodied in the people’s customs
[4] all are subject to the law, and hence responsible for learning and teaching it
since all people possess the law in common, the people—or some competent representatives—have a right to be consulted on matters of law.

God vested government in the office of king. A person rules as king with the consent of the people, but if unjust may be removed by the people.

After the decline of central Roman government, security in the West disintegrated. To secure themselves, weaker individuals sought protection from local war chiefs (barons), and in return provided aid, land and labour. This system of vassalage established the feudal hierarchy: kings, barons and commons. In the early Middle Ages, this was seen as consistent with Christian government and the hierarchical order of nature.

Christian and secular government came into conflict from the thirteenth century, when kings tried to impose the system of absolute monarchy implied by Pauline Christianity. Defeated by the barons, kings were forced to submit to legal constitutions. Older principles of government with consent and freedom under the law were re-asserted. Councils became the normal institutions of law and government at all levels of European society. Communication increasingly involved representation and consultation, guided by tradition and law.

What halted the growth of constitutional society was the Church’s claims to sovereignty. Throughout the rise of constitutionalism, the Church maintained its ancient claim of the superiority of spiritual life over temporal. Applying this logic to politics, and combining it with Paul’s doctrine of obedience to appointed authority, the popes claimed absolute authority over Christianity. Although defeated twice by the forces of nationalism, when an internal reform movement failed to impose a general council on the Church (which would have made it a constitutional monarchy in line with other European governments) the popes secured their claims to sovereignty. The kings—notionally joint-rulers with the pope as representatives of God—responded by claiming supreme rule within their lands, suppressing representative institutions: parliaments, corporations, states general, juries. Law, social order and national identity were increasingly centralised in the person of the king. This type of community was established on divine appointment, royal will and military force—removing any function for communication.

Around the same time, the Humanists appeared rebelling against Scholasticism. They sought to overcome what they saw as a thousand years of moral and inventive decline by recovering and appreciating the lost texts of Greece and Rome. But emulation of Greek and Roman culture also committed the Renaissance Humanists to the values of old Rome—introducing social concepts that were often profoundly at odds with contemporary Christian virtues.
Initially their program was conducted within the medieval *vita contemplativa* of withdrawal, meditation and inward spiritual renewal—combining monasticism with Stoic aloofness. But around 1400, younger Humanists rejected the ‘selfishness’ of contemplation and praised instead the *vita activa*, which combined study with family life and public office. Saturated in the writings of Cicero, Demosthenes, Caesar, Thucydides, and Seneca, the Humanists began to extol personal ambition, public office, civic debate and military glory. The revived learning gave their claims legitimacy; their unparalleled oratory gave them force. They were also emphatic in the value of the natural world: in their hands, it and human society had gained worth entirely independent of Christian salvation.

By 1500, Scholasticism and Humanism had fully drawn human reality back into the material world. Yet human identity remained communal and the social structures were still modelled on the Great Chain of Being. The event that provoked the rise of individualism was the Protestant Reformation.

Initially protesting clerical abuses, the Reformers eventually broke from the Catholic Church and medieval Christianity. Salvation was henceforth to be based on ‘faith alone, grace alone and Scripture alone.’ God, said the Reformers, could forgive even those without any merit, so long as they had faith—and the only source of that faith was Scripture. Accordingly, the Protestants swept the Church of anything not sanctioned by the Bible: the priestly hierarchy, the cult of the saints, most Church ritual, all post-apostolic theology, and all Scholastic philosophy became irrelevant.

The Reformers also announced that salvation was attained in this life—not deferred to the next—and stressed the sacredness of worldly callings (including family, business and trade). Once saved, life in this world was as sacred as life in the next—completing the naturalisation of religion.

To secure their claims concerning Christian faith, both Catholics and Protestants looked to secular leaders for support (effectively transferring questions of faith to secular authority). Where the Protestants won royal support—Germany, England, Scandinavia—the result was national Protestant churches; where the reformers looked to the nobility, cities or provinces—as in France and Spain—they were overcome by royal power and the country remained Catholic. In both cases, the monarchy was strengthened. Religious conformity was tied to national loyalty, culminating in the ‘divine right of kings’.

Despite the rise of national churches with royal backing, most northern European countries contained sizeable dissenting religious minorities that could not be suppressed. These groups faced the question of whether or not they owed obedience to heretical monarchs. In reply, they revived the ancient Roman legal principle that secular power derived from the people, and therefore the people had the right to remove oppressive rulers. Since the only
power that could legitimately challenge a sovereign was another sovereign, it followed that all people must be sovereign in both religious and political matters. Since this theory was framed to reject claims of absolutism, it tended to become aligned with the idea of society that had opposed absolutism throughout the Middle Ages: constitutionalism. By 1600, a group of ideas had evolved which linked individualism, religious tolerance, right to resistance, consent of the governed, and rights to representation. In the following two hundred years, these principles were entrenched a series of revolutions that either placed royal power under a constitution (England, Scandinavia, Germany) or removed royalty entirely (France, America). Although Christianity held sway in private life, after 1700, it was formally severed from political life.

The century of religious conflict, 1550–1650, also saw immense intellectual upheaval. Along with works of history, politics, biography and rhetoric, the Humanists had recovered lost works of ancient science and mathematics. Although initially there were efforts to synthesise these recoveries within Scholasticism, the attempts failed, and Scholastic philosophy was rejected. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a new ‘natural philosophy’ emerged, based on mathematical reasoning and empirical observations of the natural world. It rejected the spiritual and teleological claims of speculative philosophy, replacing them with a mechanistic geometric causal universe. The Great Chain of Being and the medieval natural law were mortally wounded—and with them, the medieval concept of communication-as-order.

Community ceased to be a natural institution. Where Aristotle and Aquinas had said that the community formed people, Hobbes and Locke said that people formed communities. Community came to be understood as a contract established between individuals, established for their mutual protection and aid. People’s rights were based on either their emotions (Hobbes, Bentham) or reason (Locke). Communication was reduced to signalling between autonomous individuals: a function performed by communication-as-transmission. Communication’s chief functions were to secure the consent of people in establishing society, electing governments, creating laws, and enforcing obedience, as well as teaching the young. In this world, where the individual held a higher position than society, such order as society displayed had no significance beyond effectiveness. Communication-as-social-order faded in importance in Western beliefs about communication.

Contemporary versions of communication-as-order

Two main versions of communication-as-order survive today. The first and dominant version is reflected in the principles of liberal democratic individualism:

[1] all are individuals, with desires and goals (chief amongst which is happiness)
each individual is a person—aware of themselves and of the future, capable of envisioning different futures, possessing standards against which they judge these potential futures, planning to bring those futures about, then acting to achieve those goals

because all possess these capabilities, all are fundamentally equal as people, even though they may differ in their circumstances, nationality, strength, beauty, intelligence, or wealth

each person’s thoughts, feelings, desires and goals are known directly only to themselves

to achieve their goals, people need the help of others

to secure the help of others, individuals enter into a tacit contract with them, and in return surrender some of their native rights and freedoms, as well as agreeing to forebear the reasonable demands of others as they seek to satisfy their equally legitimate goals

participation in such a community is voluntary—an individual may withdraw at any time and cease both their contribution to the common good and their enjoyment the community’s benefits

since all people are equal, there are some obligations that apply equally to all members of this community, apart from any specific agreements between individuals: these are the basis for morality and law within society

in very large communities, people devolve the task of making and enforcing laws to a dedicated group, and provides that group with the training and resources needed to maintain the social contract—government. The powers of government are derived from the people

in large communities, the people have no direct part in the making of laws or the maintenance of order: they are only obliged to obey the laws of their government

the resulting society and its internal order is an entirely human creation.

Communication in such a community is limited. Apart from those that make laws, community participation means little more than selecting those that will govern, and obedience to legitimately constituted laws. (If government exceeds the powers granted to it by the people, or transgresses the social contract, then the people have the right to protest or displace the government.)

Because such a community is composed of individuals, and each person is an isolated world of experience that does not truly know the desires and experiences of others, the function of communication is reduced to signalling between individuals. In mechanised, Modern communities, symbolic communication-as-transmission has taken over the role of communication-as-order.

The second surviving version of communication-as-order is a variation on Platonic concepts, preserved in Christianity: its fullest contemporary representative is Structuralism. Its main claims are:
language and culture operate at two levels: one perfect and self-complete (*langue*), and an imperfect image of it used in the world (*parole*)

*langue* is a fully self-contained and formal system, with no dependence on what people actually speak, *parole*

*langue* is purely intellectual in nature and pre-exists any expression of it

all people that speak a particular language (or live in a particular culture) share the same *langue*—even though particular expressions of it, *parole*, may be unique.

all language (or culture) has ultimately a universal structure shared by all people. Just as all Christians participate in the one Christ, so all languages (or cultures) are images of this archetype.

Communication in this second sense is participation in *langue*. This is neither voluntary nor conscious participation. Indeed, just as Platonic philosophy insists that every material thing is the image of some Idea, so Structuralism and Post-Structuralism would say that every utterance people can make is in *langue*: language and culture are ‘inscribed’. People cannot get ‘outside’ the language or culture they live in because it is ultimately universal, and it is only by considerable intellectual effort that any can even perceive the true nature of language and culture.

**COMMUNICATION-AS-TECHNIQUE**

From the outset, communication-as-technique was divided into methods concerned with speaking and methods with interpreting writing. The first combined rhetoric with logic. The second was never a coherent tradition, but embraced grammar, etymology, legal interpretation and biblical exegesis.

**Ancient Greek rhetoric**

In Greece, rhetoric had three functions: persuading the Assembly on political issues, persuading juries in legal cases, and speaking on ceremonial occasions. The earliest rhetorical methods, created by the Sophists in the fifth century BC, were primarily concerned with:

1. organisation of topics within speeches
2. undermining an opponent’s arguments
3. being able to argue on both sides of a case
4. presenting speeches impressively through verbal display.

Training appears to have involved chiefly imitation of master speakers—possibly with criticism from a teacher.
The philosophers criticised Sophistic rhetoric for being unconcerned with the listeners' welfare and relying on opinion and belief, not true knowledge. They refashioned rhetoric in broadly three ways.

First, they expanded rhetoric’s scope to include analysis of the speaker’s subjects. Initially, this was done by referring speakers to ‘commonplaces’—topics they might address in various circumstances. Hellenistic rhetoric replaced this with *stasis* theory: an elaborate set of rules for discovering arguments to be mounted and defended.

Second, they provided methods for organising topics in speeches:

1. they drastically reduced the number of parts Sophists had included in speeches
2. they regarded a speech as a body, an integrated whole, within which all parts should be united organically
3. they organised arguments using logic—particularly as it was formalised by Aristotle.

Third, they analysed the types of audiences a speaker might address, the types of emotions that might sway them, and how speakers could adapt their speech for each.

At the same time, rules for presentation and style were formalised. The orators adopted lists of ‘figures’ from the grammarians and stylistic features such as rhythm from the poets. The orators also formalised voice and gesture, and specialists voice trainers emerged.

The philosophers separated working out what to say (*ennoia*) from expression (*lexeis*), and insisted that persuasion should be based on the former. This division and priority became permanent in ideas about speech.

In Antiquity, the rules formalised in handbooks were only ever part of the art: students also participated in practice drills and received criticism from their teachers. Textbooks and rules supplemented this training, they did not replace it.

**Roman rhetoric**

Under Rome, Hellenistic rhetoric took the form it would retain in the West until rhetoric’s decline in the eighteenth century. As in Greece, the Roman authors treated rhetoric as a branch of politics—although its main use was judicial—with the task of persuading listeners. The standard ‘Ciceronic’ rhetoric was divided into five parts, treating in turn the subjects a speaker had to deal with when preparing a speech.

First, *invention* showed the speaker how to work out what to say at each point of their speech. Most Roman textbooks focussed on judicial speeches, which had four basic parts:

1. an introduction which prepared the audience for what is to come
2. a statement of the facts about the case and the reasons for dispute
a proof of the speaker’s case and rejection of their opponent’s, and
a conclusion—usually an emotional appeal.

The proof was the core of the speech, and large parts of textbooks described how to construct defences, drawing on contemporary logic.

Second, arrangement of material was a small part of Roman rhetoric, because it was largely covered when inventing material. Typically, Roman orators relied on the rules of logic to structure their arguments.

The third part of rhetoric, style, was handled in three ways:
1. by typifying different styles into Grand, Middle and Plain
2. by enumerating the characteristics of good style and illustrating how to achieve them (for instance, with artistic composition and by using Latin correctly)
3. by using figures of speech and figures of thought.

The fourth part showed speakers how to memorise their speech.

The final part, delivery, showed the speaker how to speak and present their speech.

This five-part arrangement was probably influenced by beliefs about communication-as-transmission. The Greek sources that Roman rhetoric was based on allocated invention and arrangement to ennoia (the subject known to the speaker’s mind) while style and delivery were grouped under lexeis (expression). The Romans translated these as res (things) and verba (words), which became the fundamental division in Roman rhetoric. In interpretation, this division was used to distinguish the literal from intended meanings of texts; in style, figures of thought (schemata dianoias) were distinguished from figures of speech (schemata lexeis). However, the translation was unfortunate: both terms are more general than the Greek, and res had associations that the mental ennoia did not. In philosophy, res was the basic property of everything with existence, with the attributes of substance, matter, and essence. Although the Roman orators did not draw conclusions about the nature of verba, as the complement of res, in time, verba acquired all of its inverse properties—words became insubstantial, inessential and immaterial.

Rhetoric in late Antiquity

Under the Roman emperors, most political activity ceased and so rhetoric lost one of its primary functions. In law courts, increasing reliance on magistrates rather than juries also diminished opportunities for speech-making. Late Roman rhetoric increasingly became entertainment. As the range of topics addressed became more restricted, invention was increasingly limited to analysing stasis, while style became little more than lists of figures. Arrangement and delivery ossified, and the arts of memory largely forgotten. This limited state heightened the opposition between res and verba.
This was the rhetoric that Augustine employed as the starting point for Christian preaching. Preaching had only two parts: finding selections from the Bible and then presenting them. While the first task involved some interpretative methods, the second required little skill: Augustine said emulating the Bible would provide preachers with all the eloquence they needed. Style, which had dwindled in late Antiquity, effectively had no place in medieval preaching.

Ancient grammar and legal interpretation

The most widely practiced art of interpretation in Antiquity was grammar. It introduced students to their letters and parts of speech, and taught them how to read the canonical authors. By the first century BC, a complete formal description of Greek grammar had been developed, and later adapted to Latin grammar.

From the outset, grammar was caught in the arguments about whether language was natural or conventional—an aspect of the debate in philosophy between nomos and phusis. This had two somewhat opposed consequences. First, the use of language came to be discussed in the same terms as ethics: how people should and should not use language, (rather than how they do and do not). Second, descriptions of the grammatical structure of language quickly became formal, self-referential systems, independent of actual use.

Professional orators in both Greece and Rome had a second set of interpretative tools, used almost exclusively in legal cases to interrogate documents. They identified two main sources of contention:

1. the discrepancy between what authors intended (intentio, voluntas) and what their words actually say (scriptum)
2. the ambiguity in what words stand for (significatio).

Both were valuable tools to orators, for they allowed them to argue the meaning of a text. The orator could oppose a literal interpretation by suggesting what the writer meant, or else they could insist on the letter of the document in the face of an unwelcome interpretation. Questions about ambiguity could be resolved (or clouded) by appealing to the larger context in which a word or passage was used, or in which the author wrote.

In principle, these two interpretative methods were dealt with in different parts of rhetoric (invention and style), dealt with different objects (res and verba), and involved different definitions of meaning (as intention and as signification). In practice, lawyers often brought the two into collision to support their case and undermine their opponent’s. This illustrates one of the ways in which, while res and verba were treated as distinct or even opposed by
the development of ideas about communication in European thought

Medieval developments

Borrowing from Roman educational theory, the medieval curriculum was divided into the Seven Liberal Arts: the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music theory). Grammar was the first part of all education throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Modern Era. It differed little from its Greek and Latin origins. From the ninth century, Latin grammar was used as the model for grammars in other European languages.

Rhetoric disappeared almost entirely until the late Middle Ages. The main sources on classical rhetoric available were schoolboy cribs, not philosophical texts, and did not form part of the core curriculum of the medieval universities. Arts of poetry, letter-writing and preaching employed some rhetorical theory (although the main source of preaching remained Augustine). All three quickly evolved into arts independent of rhetoric, but they did not survive beyond the mid-fifteenth century.

The chief verbal art of the Middle Ages was dialectic, particularly in the Church where correctness in argument reached great sophistication in dealing with subtle doctrinal issues. Increased contact with Muslim Spain in the twelfth century delivered a vast body of Greek scientific texts, including the entire Aristotelian corpus on logic, which the Scholastics quickly assimilated.

Renaissance developments

From the mid-fourteenth century, the medieval priority of dialectic over rhetoric was challenged by the Humanists. Unlike the Scholastics, who sought to incorporate ancient learning within Christian faith, the Humanists sought to appreciate classical achievements on their own terms. The crowning achievement of Humanistic education was the recovery of Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, and with it the entire Roman educational program. Armed with Quintilian, and a growing body of ancient speeches and rhetorical textbooks, the Humanists sought to re-establish rhetoric at the summit of liberal studies.

The Humanists’ model was Ciceronic five-part rhetoric. Although there were some innovations, particularly after Greek works re-appeared after the mid-fifteenth century, Renaissance rhetoric remained essentially Ciceronic.

The main difference between Roman and Renaissance rhetoric was that Humanistic rhetoric was far more literary. Roman rhetoric was intended for the forum and the
lawcourts: Renaissance Europe did not present orators with the same opportunities. The greater focus on text was also because the rhetoric’s chief sponsors were not lawyers and politicians, but chancery officials and scholars intent on recovering ancient texts.

The rise of the Humanists and their attempt to reverse the medieval priority of dialectic over rhetoric was fiercely contested by the late Scholastics. Humanistic educational programs did not enter French and English universities until the mid-sixteenth century. The most enduring legacy of the quarrel between Scholastics and Humanists, dialectic and rhetoric, were Ramus’ educational reforms in the early sixteenth century. Ramus insisted each ‘art’ should address only one subject, and different arts should not overlap. Since the first two parts of rhetoric—invention and arrangement—were duplicated in dialectic, Ramus transferred them to the latter. Rhetoric was left with style and delivery (memory being a separate art). When Ramus was murdered in a Huguenot massacre, he was hailed as a Protestant martyr, and his reformed logic widely adopted in the Protestant North.

The fate of rhetoric and logic in the Early Modern Age

When the Catholic Church launched the Counter-Reformation, it suppressed much intellectual activity that it had previously sponsored: the trial of Galileo in particular sent shockwaves through Europe’s intelligentsia. The balance of Europe’s intellectual life shifted from Renaissance Italy to the plain-speaking Protestant north. Early scientists in particular adopted Puritan plainness in their writing. The ascendancy of science assured the decline of rhetoric amongst intellectuals.

Also crucial to the fate of rhetoric were changes in contemporary logic. Medieval dialectic was a verbal art, taking Aristotle’s logic as its primary model. Rhetorical handbooks of the Renaissance contrasted the ‘loose open’ argumentation of rhetoric with the ‘tight closed’ argumentation of dialectic. In the early Modern Age, three changes radically changed the relationship between speech and logic. First, Scholastic philosophy, which had employed dialectical reasoning profusely, came under intense criticism by the early scientists, particularly for its reliance on verbal distinctions that might have no necessary counterpart in reality. Second, in place of verbal disputation, the scientists and ‘new philosophers’ adopted Euclidean mathematics as the model of reason. Third, the Cartesian method in philosophy coupled strict mathematical reasoning with rational introspection. This transformed logic from a public activity (right argumentation) into a private activity (right thinking). The new knowledge was to be established on reason and intellect alone: speech had no role—and from the seventeenth century was regarded with open suspicion.

Rejected by the Protestants, and with no place in the new sciences, rhetoric had little function in the Age of Reason. From the late seventeenth century, educational reformers
began to remove it from the curriculum. Even once the cult of reason itself came under attack, the situation did not improve for rhetoric. Rousseau argued against all ‘art’, praising ‘nature’ in its place. The conventions of classical rhetoric had no more place in his new world than reason. The forms of expression that Romantics prized were passionate (not rational), inspired (rather than trained) and spontaneous (rather than crafted)—poetry above all other else. So, as a formal art, rhetoric died in Europe from the early eighteenth century.

In rhetoric’s failing years, its rules—particularly those concerning style—were grafted onto the belles lettres: late rhetoric became a literary form. From there, some were adopted by early journalism. So while the ancient system was largely lost by the nineteenth century, many individual precepts became the rules-of-thumb of journalism.

Contemporary beliefs about communication-as-technique

Today, although there have been numerous attempts to impose order on the many rules offered for ‘good communication’, there is no coherent art of writing or speaking comparable with ancient rhetoric. Individual professions have their ‘trade rules’, but these are hardly universal. Contemporary books give sometimes hundreds of rules and variations. The following list summarises major themes—all prominent in rhetoric.

[1] The writing process is divided into ‘think about what to write’ and ‘choosing the words’—substance and style.

[2] If readers have trouble understanding a document it is because (a) the writer choose the wrong words (b) the writer arranged the words in the wrong way, or (c) because of some defect in the document.

[3] What makes a document intelligible is a property of the document itself—including words, arrangement, structure, logic, and layout.

[4] The chief virtues of good writing are simplicity, brevity, clarity and purity.

[5] Language is divided into four levels: words, sentences, paragraphs, and the overall story, argument or document.

[6] Words should be in common use, familiar, short, precise not vague, not fashionable, not ‘flabby’.

[7] Sentences should use the subject–verb–object structure; use active verbs not passive ones; keeps verbs and their subjects together; keep modifications with the things they modify; clearly link related items; avoid redundancy; avoid familiar or stale images; be brief.

[8] Paragraphs should be about one idea or fact, supported by any necessary detail.

[9] The overall structure should follow the ‘logic’ of the subject; begin with a summary or key points; start with important points and follow with increasingly less important items; clearly link related items; give ‘signposts’ to help readers find their way through the information (tables of contents, headings).
THE THREE TRADITIONS

Each of the traditions of communication has a very different character and reasons for existing. The core ideas of each belong to different categories—communication-as-transmission is made up mainly of factual claims; communication-as-order is comprised chiefly of value statements; and communication-as-technique is an amalgam of plans and rules. But the three traditions are far from separate: they overlap considerably. For instance transmission and technique both focus on the production of speech; technique and order are both concerned with how people and their behaviour can be changed; transmission and order both have views about human nature. Each tradition has influenced the development of the others.

The existence of three distinct but interacting traditions of communication is the source of the field’s most fundamental conflicts. In particular, the varying fortunes and conceptual demands of transmission and technique are at the root of debates about the ontology of communication and the subordination of communication to psychology.

The ontology of communication

One of the debates within the field of communication during the last twenty years has been whether there is an ontology of communication, or if instead its nature is dependent upon the foundations studied by other disciplines (such as psychology or sociology). The development of ideas about communication illuminates how the question came to be framed in the first place, as well as the concepts used to argue the derivative, inessential, foundationless nature of communication.

1 Maybe the most well-travelled idea about communication is ‘simplicity’: originating in Cynic asceticism it became a Stoic virtue, from where it was adopted as the ideal style in late Roman rhetoric—displacing the earlier Ciceronic division of style into Grand, Middle and Plain. Fourteen hundred years later, when the Protestants rejected the ‘pagan’ influences in the Catholic Church, they also rejected the grand Ciceronic rhetoric revived by the Renaissance Humanists, adopting in its place a strict simplicity and plainness of speech. It was primarily in the Protestant North where the sciences and early newspapers first became established, and they adopted the prevailing taste for simplicity—especially after education reformers began to remove rhetoric from Europe’s curriculum. Nineteenth century newspapers also favoured simplicity (which they equated with brevity) for economic reasons: the cost of telegraphing and typesetting favoured brevity, and the rise of commercial advertising, daily publication and diverse readerships increased demands on limited space. Simplicity became the dominant aesthetic of twentieth century journalism, where it influenced the new mathematical-mechanical theories of communication, which equated brevity with efficiency.
The argument against ontology has two broad sources. The first is Plato’s criticism of the Sophists and their rhetoric: arguments that would be replayed by philosophers and orators throughout Antiquity and again in the Renaissance. Rhetoric, says Plato, deals with opinion and belief, not truth or genuine knowledge. Rhetoric subsequently became associated with specious logic and deceptive language aimed at fooling the speaker’s audience. Plato contrasted it with philosophy, which was concerned for the listener’s soul and the importance of truth and genuine knowledge. After Plato, the debate would become transformed into an argument between knowledge based on reality and opinions based on words. Historically, the philosophers carried the argument, and so reality was understood to exclude words and their use.

The second argument against the ontology of communication originated in the division of rhetoric, and the associations that different parts of rhetoric came to have. Initially, Hellenistic orators divided rhetoric into stages to help the speaker compose and present a speech: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Even before the formalisation of this scheme, Aristotle had grouped the first two tasks in the realm of ennoia (the subject of the mind, nous), whereas he classed style and delivery with rhēton, words (memory was always a separate art).

The Romans translated dianoia and rhēton as res and verba. While verba was a fair translation of rhēton, res ‘thing’ had far broader associations than dianoia. Res was not limited to the mind or what it thought about. If the terminology had remained limited to rhetoric, the mistranslation would have been unimportant, but the philosophers took the division and attributed to the orators’ res all of the metaphysical properties that ‘things’ have: including substance, essence, and matter. As the complement of res, verba implicitly acquired all of the opposite properties: it became immaterial, insubstantial and inessential.

Under the influence of Neoplatonism, reality in late Antiquity came to be understood as either ‘outside’ or ‘above’ the physical world, consisting of the Platonic Ideas, or more generally in the intellect (nous). The physical world—and with it breath, speech, and physical signs—were all derivative: at best, a distorted image of what was real. This position was adopted by early Christianity, which gave priority to God and the soul over the body and the physical world. Res belonged to the transcendent God, verba to the valueless material world: implicitly downgrading the value and nature of communication. (Symptomatic of this priority was the vow of silence adopted by many monastic orders in order to contemplate God better.)

The opposition between res and verba was ambivalent in ancient rhetoric (where opposing verba to res was a crucial interpretative and oratorical technique), as well as in Scholastic philosophy (which had only small interest in language). The opposition between them hardened in the Renaissance—particularly after Ramus’ educational reforms, which stripped rhetoric of res and left it with only verba.
Ramism found support from the Protestants. They however favoured plain, bare words in their preaching, leaving little scope for Classical style. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ramus’ logic—which contained all that was ‘material’ to Protestant oratory—found support in England and North America. Rhetoric, reduced to dealing with ‘insubstantial’ words, began to decline.

The Ramist division of things and words was cemented by Descartes. Cartesian philosophy was established on interior reflection and mathematical logic, and a profound scepticism of all tradition, doctrine and even the physical senses. In the process, Descartes implicitly transformed logic from correct (public) argumentation to correct (private) thinking. Although Descartes said nothing on language, his philosophical method implied that certain knowledge could not be established on words.

The Cartesians’ chief philosophical rivals, the empiricists, arrived at a similar conclusion, although for different reasons. True knowledge was to be gained by observing things (reɪ), not from the Scholastics’ verbal distinctions (which might have no basis in reality). Locke’s theory of knowledge emphasised observation and mental operations as the only basis for knowledge—things known through words were liable to error: the ‘cheat of words’.

What remained of rhetoric after Protestant plainness, scientific empiricism, and the rise of individual mental experience in philosophy, was finally undermined by eighteenth-century educational reforms. Bacon and Locke deprecated the importance of rhetoric in education. Rousseau argued that human capacities should be allowed to develop naturally, unconstrained by inculcating ‘arts’ such as rhetoric.

Few of these developments had much to do with the nature of communication as such. Speech and words were usually treated as the complement of other things, and as these things evolved, communication was implicitly given their inverse attributes.

The development of the mind and its dependence upon speech

One of the most common Modern assumptions about communication, and one of the main reasons that communication is seen as dependant upon other disciplines, is that everything important regarding speech and writing is done by the mind: communication is merely signalling or transportation. But the history of ideas about communication suggests that the opposite may be true: the concept, experience and maybe even the existence of an ‘inner’ world developed, in part, as a consequence of beliefs about physiological communication-as-transmission. The location of consciousness, experience, thought and even sight around the organs of speech for most of Western history suggests the mind’s initial dependence on ideas about speech. Many other characteristics, both ancient and current, only heighten to the dependence of the mind on communication.
In Homer, there was no internal life of any kind. The only internal ‘space’ was with the *phrenes*, the lungs. What we would regard as reflective thought was treated in Homer as a person debating with either their *phrenes* or their *thumos*. There was no spontaneous thought: people attribute their impulses to either the gods or the *thumos* (poets for instance do not compose, but call on the Muses to sing through them).

By the fourth century BC, the Greeks began to experience an internal space, where the *psukhē* had taken over and expanded the functions of the *phrenes*, *thumos* and *noos* (sight). Consciousness remained centred in the chest, around the organs of speech. Thought was experienced in this inner space, but was still described as speech. While people also ‘saw’ in this space (they had ‘in-sight’) this appears to have been only one step removed from concrete experience. Not all functions we would describe as mental were ‘internal’: we do not find people having ‘internal debates’: decision-making (*boule*) appears to have arisen first in the public arena (*Boule*) then later been adopted ‘internally’.

The terminology and some legal practices from the first centuries BC and AD suggest that the Romans thought of knowledge as primarily public. The Romans however had a clear sense of a space within them in which they saw visions and within which they spoke and listened to themselves (*intellectus, intellegens*). Compared with the Greeks, their descriptions of thought were less grounded in physiology and speech. Still, the mind, *animus*, remained centred in the chest, and its substance, *anima*, is airy like breath —suggesting a traditional association with speech.

Classical models of memory take the form of a cage or chest or cabinet, within which visual images are stored and ordered. Descriptions of ancient memory suggest that the experience of interiority developed only gradually: there is nothing in early Antiquity that compares with sustained interiority of Augustine’s *Confessions*, over a third of which is devoted to an exploration of the inner ‘caverns’ and ‘mansions’ of his memory.

In the Renaissance, nine-tenths of emotional and intellectual activity was still located in the chest—and, interestingly, about nine-tenths of descriptions of communication are based firmly on speech and its physiology. However, thought had become an activity entirely independent of speech or sight, conducted privately and internally.

The connection between thought and communication was finally severed by Descartes and Locke. After them, mind was understood as a totally internal experience, utterly unlike the experience of the outside world. The mind was utterly dissimilar to the body, and thought prior to all action (including speech). With Locke, speech came to be reduced to signs of thoughts that existed first in the mind.
This trajectory suggests that the interior mind and silent thought, far from being a natural human experience, are learned experiences\(^2\). And furthermore, one of the main reasons they emerged was to explain the process of speaking. The experience of thought begins as speech that people learn to hear without speaking—just as insight starts as vision that people call up before their eyes. Even today, most people experience conscious thought as speech. The experience of an interior space simply has its origins in the belief that the lungs were an empty space where speech came from.

There is much in this suggestion that a history of ideas about communication cannot illuminate: the physical processes involved in ‘hearing’ thought and ‘seeing’ visions for instance. But, if it is true that the experience of mind arose as a by-product of the process of explaining communication, then our Modern habit of seeing communication as dependant upon psychology is entirely mistaken. This does not pose an enormous conceptual problem for communication: as I have illustrated in this thesis, historically there have been ways of understanding communication that do not require any theory of mind: the techniques of orators and writers, and the processes for maintaining and advancing communities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that history has knotted together three very different groups of ideas about communication. The conflicts between these traditions are the source of some of our field’s most fundamental problems and have prevented it from making genuine progress. Because our field has been largely unaware of its history, it has been prey to these internal conflicts, and the sources of our current malaise have been misdiagnosed.

This thesis has illustrated the key ideas from which our current notions of communication evolved. With this insight, we can now begin to account for some of the failures and conflicts our field has witnessed and learn from those experiences. By understanding our field’s evolution, and what it has committed ideas about communication to, we are better placed to make real progress—carrying forward ideas that seem right or useful; discarding others.

\(^2\) The process of learning to ‘speak’ internally appears to parallel the slow development of silent reading—and suggests that the capacity to take external experience ‘within’ developed only gradually. Ancient accounts show that reading out loud was the normal reading practice. The first account of silent reading is of the fourth century bishop Ambrose who, while moving his lips as he reads, nonetheless makes no sounds. In the High Middle Ages, monks appear to have read either by mumbling, whispering or subvocalising—although changes in library design in the late Middle Ages suggest that silent reading had become more common. But even as late as the late eighteenth century, silent reading still appears to have been unusual: with the rise of the novel, there was concern expressed about the effects on young women’s minds of sitting alone and readings silently.
that are mistaken or unproductive. Indeed, by clearing away the accretions of centuries, we will see that we already have before us ideas that could form the kernel of a unified account of communication. By recognising the historical associations of ideas about communication, we can assess what new ideas might commit us to, and refine our relationship with other disciplines.

Our field needs to keep its historical development before it for, without it, progress will be at best accidental. This thesis has provided at least some of the resources the field will need to decide what is useful and should be retained, detect errors and expel what is flawed, and begin building a unified account of communication.
EPILOGUE
EPILOGUE

TOWARDS A UNIFIED ACCOUNT OF COMMUNICATION

SUMMARY This Epilogue uses the findings of this thesis to suggest a way the field might deal with the problem posed in the Introduction: how can the field of communication overcome its fragmentation and make genuine progress? It considers what ideas about communication advanced historically might be accepted and rejected, what is at stake in doing so, and what ideas a unified theory of communication might contain.

The last chapter completed the tasks that I set out to achieve in the Introduction, and concluded the thesis proper. This thesis has demonstrated that there are three interacting but categorically different traditions concerning communication in Western thought. The main contemporary ideas about communication are simply recent variants on ancient traditions and had taken more or less their current form three hundred years ago. The current fragmentation of the field, and its subordination to other disciplines can be explained by the tensions between the traditions, and their connections with ideas about the human body, mind, society, nature and God.

I did not set out to critique ideas about communication in this thesis—although I have included some of the arguments mounted at important historical turning points. Yet, frankly, this thesis has been a history of superstitions. Held up against the standards of evidence and internal consistency, most of the models and theories do not survive long. Many of the claims about transference and community in particular rest on assertions that are hardly credible, and are certainly beyond our ability to verify.

In its current form, the field cannot and does not make progress. Moving forwards will require more than recycling ancient ideas, which is what much contemporary model-making appears to be. In the Introduction, I listed four characteristics of progress in intellectual fields. In the light of the historical
development of communication, we can now see why progress in the field has been elusive.

[1] A tradition that progresses builds on what has gone before, whether they are facts, theories, predictions, values, or plans. Older ideas may be discarded or modified, but there is always continuity. The field of communication has however tended to recycle old ideas, preserving some for hundreds and even thousands of years after they had been made irrelevant. The field does not, on the whole, build: it rearranges old ideas into new patterns.

[2] Where early stages of a tradition experience unresolvable disagreements, later stages can account for both why disagreement occurred and why the tradition was unable to resolve the dispute with the resources it possessed at that time. Progress implies an increasing ability to detect error and understand intellectual limitations. However, the contemporary field has been almost entirely ignorant of the evolution of communication, and development has consisted mostly of putting old ideas into new patterns—which resolves nothing. Ignorant of its history, the field lacks standards against which to assess error or change. This thesis has illustrated at least some of the key reasons for disagreements: the existence of three traditions; the different categories of their key ideas; the tensions between the traditions; and the attachments of key ideas to other fields. But because the field has not recognised these things, it has been unable to resolve the resulting conflicts in a coherent manner.

[3] In a tradition that progresses, later stages are conceptually richer, providing increasingly detailed descriptions and explanations, and allowing members of the tradition to better direct their research and practice. In the field of communication, because development has consisted largely in rearranging old ideas, or else inventing causes to explain communication (such as the mind), we have had no genuine increase in richness in the field—merely in volume. Richness will only come in overcoming the existing divisions between traditions, and drawing in new ideas about communication.

[4] As participants in progressing a tradition refine what their goal is, they will be able to conceive of what the tradition would look like when it is completed. This provides the tradition with its ultimate goal: its completed state. In this completed state, the field will be able to explain all of its findings and be able to act with complete certainty of the outcomes. The immediate goal for the field of communication needs to be the transformation of the three traditions into a singled unified tradition, which [a] accounts equally for the place of the individual, community and technique in communication, [b] synthesises ideas from each category, and [c] expels the characteristics attributed to speech that it acquired in its association with, or opposition to, other things: such as res, dialectic, and philosophy.
To finish, I want to suggest a direction for the future: towards a unified theory of communication. I do not mean to construct a coherent theory at this point: that is well beyond the scope of this book, and indeed, lies outside the scope of any historical survey. Rather I want to point to ideas advanced in the last three thousand years that could be profitably retained or rejected, which might be combined in a unified tradition that would overcome the errors and divisions of the past. I know some of the ideas listed below have already been advanced within the field, although I do not want to get into a detailed analysis of their provenance. I simply wish to make the point that the field already possesses the resources in its history to move forwards.

Rejecting communication-as-transmission and its consequences

Virtually everything to do with physical transmission has to be rejected. Although when one person speaks or writes to another, something passes between them—sound waves, documents, electrical impulses—these are purely physical objects. Emotions and thoughts do not pass between people.

Rejecting transmission also commits us to doubting traditional accounts of the mind and its role in communication—at least as the source and goal of words. As I discussed above, many of the mind’s characteristics—and possibly even its existence—appear to have evolved to explain communication-as-transmission. The idea of a ‘space’ inside us from where words start and return is simply a vast elaboration of the Greek idea that speech originates in the lungs. Conscious thought too simply appears to be nothing more than speech we have learnt to hold silently with ourselves: it belongs to the same category as spoken words—which means that it is not the source of spoken words.

Doubting the mind in turn commits us to rejecting most versions of symbolic transmission. In its Modern post-Locke form, spoken words are symbols of concepts in the mind. So, abandoning mind or thought or concepts means that we cannot assume that words are symbols of mental experience. We certainly cannot take it as an axiom in any new theory of communication.

We also need to be circumspect in understanding words as symbols, as that assumption arose in the philosophers’ treatment of logical propositions—a theory that was never intended as a complete description of language. This is not to say that at least some words are symbols—any theory that denies we use the word ‘dog’ to stand for a canine animal will be hard to defend. What we need is a non-mental theory that explains how some words operate as symbols, while others have other non-symbolic functions.
Problems with communication-as-order and the order of communities

Most ancient and medieval descriptions of community require some metaphysical agency to provide order: Plato’s Ideas, Aristotle’s *telos*, the Stoic’s *Logos*, the Church’s Body of Christ, the Dionysian Scale of Being, Locke’s Natural Law. As well as being beyond empirical validation, there are philosophical grounds for rejecting the existence of such agencies in communication. As thinkers from the Sophists onwards recognised, there was ample evidence to contradict the claim of a single source of social order, or the universal origins of law, or the universal operation of reason. The Christian assertion that creation was made in the image of Christ was rejected by Jews and Muslims as heresy. Later encounters by the West with Indian and Asian religions weakened the tenability of Christian claims to universality, as did the new cosmology of the early Modern Age. Finally, since modern astronomy, biology, and chemistry have now disproved major conclusions drawn from ancient Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic metaphysics, and advanced far more plausible accounts of physical reality without the ancient apparatus, we have good grounds for believing that the same ancient metaphysical agents do not provide the order of the social world. In short, we have to doubt that there is an innate order to nature in which society participates, or else, if there is order in the physical world, there is no necessary connection with social order.

Historically, the claim of a natural social order was countered with the claim that society is a pact between autonomous individuals for their mutual benefit. This too has serious problems, particularly in the inconsistent form advanced by Locke and adopted in most Western democratic societies. First, as philosophers since Augustine have pointed out, establishing a contract requires valid grounds for trust, which in turn depends on experience of living with others, which in turn implies life in human society. Thus, society cannot have its origins in consent—which, as Machiavelli and Hobbes recognised, meant that if society originated in individuals, then it had to be bankrolled by force, not communication. Second, like the origins of society, both the origins and nature of language cannot be explained away as a social convention. The belief that the meaning of words is what people agree they mean begs the question of how such an agreement was reached in the absence of language. Third, as Locke points out in his theory of knowledge, there is no way that language can operate between autonomous individuals without some common foundation. Locke’s solution is common knowledge based on identical physical experience, although this is not the only possible explanation.

The ‘Social Contract’ theory of society also focuses exclusively on the voluntary aspects of living in a community, and treats society as no more than a means to
people’s private ends. This ignores involuntary reasons that people come together and which keep them together. The most important of these advanced historically were friendship and love (whether erotic, Platonic, brotherly, paternal, Christian or patriotic). People seek out the company of their own for its own sake. They enjoy it and find happiness in it: it is not just as a means to some private goal. Human beings also have a range of involuntary emotions that only have a function in relations with other people: jealousy, pity and lust for example. That these are all biological implies that human beings did not evolve to function as autonomous individuals.

Consequently, any theory of communication has to reject both [1] a universal order in society and language, and the opposite claim [2] the complete independence of human beings and the deduction that communication relies on an entirely voluntary convention.

The plain fact is that, although people are biologically separate, human beings are fundamentally social creatures, not entirely autonomous individuals. There is no such thing as an asocial human being. Every person is born into society and is dependant upon it; a person takes many years before they could potentially survive independently of others. A baby born into this world cannot survive and reach maturity years without the support of other human beings—minimally for food, water, shelter and warmth. To survive, a child has to be able to express at least its needs to others and, later, learn to curb its demands on others. Even adults in large communities, where each person carries out a specialised task, depend on others to provide them with the necessities of life. In this much at least Aristotle saw clearly when he said that:

[1] human beings are fundamentally social creatures
[2] education and learning are fundamental part of the process of maintaining the group (and hence are integral to the nature of communication), and
[3] living in a community involves morality, law, justice and custom (and hence communication involves far more than just language).

Aristotle is also right when he points out the importance of training and habituation in communication. However, if we are forced to reject his teleological explanation of advancement in society, then we need another way to explain the development of people in society. One means that has no metaphysical commitments, which has been advanced in the last century, is dialogue: advancement of knowledge, experience and skill through on-going interaction with others.

Dialogue alone however cannot account for communication between individuals to habituate them into life within a community, for dialogue assumes that people
have some basis to understand the words and actions of others. Locke is correct in his assessment that signalling between individuals requires some common ground for communication to occur: people need some basis to know what others mean by words and gestures, which experience alone cannot provide.

Since, in rejecting a universal metaphysical source of order, and doubting the role of mind in communication, the only remaining basis for communication is our physical natures. This is not to say that language is necessarily biological in origin—if that were true then all people would speak the one language. Observing however that all people have the capacity to learn language—whether spoken or visual or in gesture—we must have some basis for knowing that this action means that, and this must ultimately be biological in origin, lacking any other cause.

Rethinking communication-as-technique

Communication-as-technique, particularly as rhetoric, experienced four problems in its historical development.

First, was the validity of individual rules. Originally they were guides to action put together by practicing speakers. They were based directly on what people found was and was not effective. As the application of rules became detached from their original context (as in rhetoric) or subordinated other purposes (such as legal and biblical interpretation), what became important in communication-as-technique was adherence to the rules, rather than the results of their use. This was exacerbated by the use of writing, which disconnected writers from whatever problems adherence to the rules caused. New rules for communicating need to be built on an empirical basis, as the original precepts were, rather than repeating old formulas.

The second problem was the transformation of specific techniques—particularly from rhetoric—into universal rules of communication. Rhetorical rules were originally designed for the context to which they were applied and the capacities of those addressed. Problems emerged when people began to employ the rules in different circumstances: such as applying speech-making techniques to writing. All speech-making is limited by the listener’s attention span and their memory of what has been said, and ancient rhetoric takes this into account. The circumstances are different in writing: people can read much faster than a speaker speaks; they may choose the order in which they read; they can review what they have read in a way that is impossible in speeches—greatly reducing the burden on the reader’s memory. This means that a document may present a greater volume and complexity than is practical in a speech. Writing does not
supersede speech-making however: it too has its limitations. For instance, writing is usually more limited in its emotional impact than a great speech because it lacks the speaker’s presence and passion. Consequently, any new theory of communication has to account for the opportunities and limitations that different media afford, and their relation to the capabilities of people as speakers, writers, audiences and readers.

The third problem of technique was the organisation of the rules, both in rhetoric and interpretation, and the way these became connected with larger metaphysical concerns: the opposition of res and verba for instance. If we are to avoid these problems, then we need to return to the original purpose of organisation: a way to [1] help authors and speakers prepare and present what they have to say, and [2] help audiences to judge what they hear and read. The basic purpose of the rules is to help people act: they should not be taken for a description of communication.

The fourth problem encountered by communication-as-technique was that rules alone were not enough to explain which techniques were to be used in what circumstances. They always needed to be supplemented with training. Communication is action; the rules are simply a way of organising those rules in ways that are productive. This suggests several links with what I said above about communication-as-order:

[1] communication requires training
[2] such training is only available within a community, and
[3] the standard for deciding which rules are effective is the degree to which the rules help people speak and write in order to live in their community well.

The kernel of a unified theory of communication

Drawing together these points, we have a collection of ideas that might form the kernel of a unified theory of communication—basic claims acceptable to all three traditions, upon which more complex accounts of communication could be built, and against which new theories could be checked for validity and consistency. None of the core ideas is new, although I have not seen some of the deductions. There is also some novelty in their arrangement and relation to one another. Importantly, many old ideas and connections have been purged. This group of ideas overcomes the fragmentation of the three traditions by giving a coherent account for the different categories of ideas in each: factual claims, value claims and technical claims. These ideas are:

[1] People are individuals biologically: they have no direct experience of the feelings, thoughts, desires or memories of others.
People are necessarily social. They are born into a social world upon which they are totally dependent for both their survival and the achievement of many of their desires.

People enjoy the company of others, and seek out and enjoy other people. Friendship and love all bring people together and keep them together, independently of any purpose or need.

Although people are ultimately dependent on others for their survival, people do not spend all of their time in survival activities. This means that people have time to choose many of the activities they do, and in which they interact with others.

The nature of communities is therefore a mixture of: [a] functional necessity, because people need the help of others to survive, [b] history, because people are born into and grow up in a community of one kind or another, [c] nature, because human biology includes emotions (and possibly other capacities) which only have a function within society, and [d] voluntary participation, because people can chose some of they ways they live and work with others in return for the benefits this mutual activity provides. The nature of communication—as the way that communities are maintained and developed—is thus partly functional, partly historical, partly natural and partly voluntary.

In order for society to function, its members must work together for at least some of the time (although not necessarily all the time—at some times, people are private and serve their own wishes, at others they are public and serve the needs of others).

To be able to work together implies that people have shared ways of doing things—particularly in the ways they interact with one another.

Since people are not born with all the skills they need to live and work together with others, they need to be trained in these skills. People need to be habituated into how to act, especially in very large communities where each person is highly dependent upon others.

This training tells people how to behave, and provides the community with the standards against which their behaviour can be judged and corrected.

One of the ways that people act together is by using language. Using language is a form of action in the community. Like other forms of action, it requires training to do well and it has standards of correctness and effectiveness. Using language is one way of communicating (but it is not all of communicating).

Training habituates members of the community into how they are to act. In the case of language, when one person uses a word or a gesture correctly, others in the community know how it is being used and the speaker’s
purposes. So language is neither purely conventional (for language is not a voluntary act but a trained one), nor is it natural (for it does not arise directly from nature, but exists to aid people’s activities within their community).

[12] Training takes the form of a dialogue, between those that have more experience and those that have less. (This is not as simple as the old teaching the young: the young may have experience that the old do not have. In dialogue, all people in the community advance in their experience.)

[13] Training requires that people have some capacity to learn. In particular, the use of language cannot arise from experience alone: before we can understand the use of particular words, we must grasp that particular sounds and gestures are significant and know what that significance is. The origins of the capacity for social knowledge cannot themselves be social, and must therefore be part of our physical natures. (Language itself need not be natural, but the capacity for language—or any other social interaction—must be part of each person’s nature.)

[14] Because people have no direct knowledge of one another’s experience, they must use some physical means to engage with each other: such as sounds, documents, electromagnetic waves. Because people have several senses they use when communicating with others (sight, sound, touch), various limits on their capacity (such as memory and attention), and varying expectations about how others should communicate with them on different topics, different media are better suited to some functions that others.

[15] Because living in a community involves people acting and communicating in similar ways, familiar methods of communicating can be reduced to generalisations and rules. These rules have to be worked out within the framework established by the activities of the community, the community’s conventions and standards, the capacity of individual people, and the capacity of the media. This framework also provides the standards against which the effectiveness of particular rules can be assessed.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX ONE

SOURCES AND METHODS

THE SOURCES

A history of ideas has to avoid two errors in its evidence. First, it cannot focus overmuch on individuals. A history of ideas and traditions is a history of what groups have believed in some way or other. Focussing solely on what one person said without reference to the community they live in is to reduce the history of ideas to the biography of thinkers. While there is virtue in understanding what a great thinker has to say on an important topic, it is the melancholy truth that most authors are influential only in outline, not in detail. In the process of becoming influential, the complexity of their thought is quickly reduced to a caricature: Kant equates ethics with duty; Descartes says “I think therefore I am”; Leibniz equates God with nature, and so on. Even where the works of particular authors have survived and been studied intensively—as in the case of Plato, Aristotle, Paul, Augustine and Shakespeare—it would be a mistake to believe that what earlier generations have understood what we now read in these texts. Consequently, the history of ideas cannot be reduced to the biography of great thinkers. This is not to say that individuals have no place in a history of ideas—only that what they say has to meet one of two criteria: either they must exemplify beliefs of their time, or that what they say must have been influential in later times.

At the same time, the history of ideas cannot be the history of some school or ‘–ism’. What people believe is rarely kind enough to stay neatly within the boundaries of conventional labels. For instance, while there has been a distinctive Platonic strand in Western thought for over 2,300 years, there has not been a continuous Platonic school. Even Plato’s own Academy abandoned key Platonic doctrines within a few generations. From the third century AD, Platonic metaphysics was incorporated into Christian theology—even though the Academy was the Church’s most formidable intellectual opponent. Despite its opposition, the character of Christian thought until the Renaissance was thoroughly Platonic—but it would be wrong to call this a ‘school of thought’.

Given that no explicit theory of communication appears before the seventeenth century, a history of about communication has to be concerned with ideas that were widely held (at least, widely held amongst the groups whose beliefs were accepted or adapted by later generations). In principle, the ideas expressed by one author are as good as any other, if
they can be shown to reflect beliefs in the larger community. In practice, some authors are easier to access, better researched, and more influential than others. Consequently, most of the sources I have used in this thesis are the West's canonical authors and texts—Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Quintilian, Plotinus, the Old and New Testaments, Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Dante, Chaucer, Petrarch, Luther, Shakespeare, Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. In most cases, my interest is not in what they say that is unique to them, but in what they tell us about the beliefs of the communities they lived in. For this, poets and playwrights are more useful than philosophers, and consequently, I have given Homer and Shakespeare more attention than Plato and Aristotle.

There are however several people and documents that I have discussed in detail because they are the starting points of great traditions of thought. They include Homer, the Bible, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Locke. Even when later generations have rejected their claims, they still often preserved them in a negative form. As it is, in much of Western history, people have been careful to go back to return to these founders, even when they interpreted them in very different ways. Genuine denial is unusual; reinterpretation and re-emphasis is the rule. Only where the original documents have been lost (as were most of Plato’s dialogues between the fifth and fifteenth centuries, and Aristotle’s books between the second and eleventh) was there a significant movement away from the original arguments.

**METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

Because each tradition concerning communication focuses on quite different activities and is made up of categorically different ideas, each requires different methods of analysis.

**Communication-as-transmission**

Beliefs about communication-as-transmission are the most difficult of the three traditions to analyse. As I show in Chapters 3–6, long before communication-as-transmission appeared as an explicit theory, a fully formed understanding of communicating as transmitting was implicit in the idioms of everyday language. When later philosophers and scientists came to describe communication, not surprisingly they constructed models from the linguistic materials that were readily available—their communities’ normal ways of talking about communication. Consequently, in seeking to understand how communication-as-transmission developed, we need not only to look at what influential thinkers have had to say, but also at the beliefs of the communities they lived in or that preceded them—even if these expressions are usually taken for granted or regarded as
insignificant. Of the everyday expressions that collectively make up communication-as-transmission, the most illuminating are metaphors.

Traditionally, metaphors are regarded as figures of speech: poetic flourishes or stylistic ornaments added for colour, but readily distinct from ordinary, literal language. This view of metaphor assumes that literal language stands directly for things in the world—the word ‘dog’ stands for the object dog. Metaphors twist this ‘natural’ relationship between words and the objects they normally stand for. (Traditionally, metaphors belong to a class of ‘non-literal’ expressions which are collectively referred to as ‘tropes’, from the Greek tropein, ‘to twist’). Metaphors are therefore parasitic on literal language. In this view it is theoretically possible to have metaphor-free language; metaphors are effectively a corruption of the ‘proper’ meanings of words.

In the last thirty years, a rather different way of understanding metaphor and language generally has developed, and I will be using these assumptions in my analysis of communication-as-transmission. This approach was first developed in detail by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1979) and many of the papers in Ortony’s *Metaphor and Thought* (1980). It rests though on a larger view of language which was first elaborated by the philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).

Instead of regarding language as a reflection of things in the world, we can regard language as a tool that people use in order to act in the world. Since a great deal of the action that people need or want to take in the world involves other people, they therefore need words and rules for the use of words, so they can act collectively. People use different types of words to do different things: they use nouns to refer to objects; verbs to refer to actions or to command; they use adjectives and adverbs to qualify nouns and verbs; prepositions are used to indicate the relationships between things, and so on. People use the rules of language in order to combine words for different functions: to describe, to command, to greet, to help, to sympathise, to explain, and so on.

A consequence of seeing language as different kinds of tools for getting things done is that there is no inherent relationship between language and the world—words are not like ‘luggage labels’ attached to objects. Consequently, the logic of language does not somehow mirror the order of nature. Rather, people create words and follow rules in order to act in the world. The language that people use imposes, to an extent, a structure on the world, dividing it up into useful units. However, because the actions we can take in the world are partly constrained by the physical nature of the world, people’s language (which needs to correspond to their actions in the world) will be structured, in part, to correspond with the physical nature of the world.
Words may appear to be ‘luggage labels’ or ‘the mirror of reality’ to people within a community because everyone group uses particular words in fairly similar ways. But it is the pattern of use that establishes the meaning of a word or a rule of language.

Because we habitually use particular words and expressions to do particular things, we build up fairly detailed associations and structures. Sometimes, we may wish to use our knowledge of one domain to help us act in another. We make a familiar thing stand for an unfamiliar, and use our experience of the former help us understand the latter. This act of making one thing stand for another is the act of making a metaphor.

Depending on how familiar a speaker thinks their listeners are with the domains they are building a metaphor on, they make more or less effort to explain themselves or flag when they are making on thing stand for another. The varying levels of effort are reflected in the traditional figures of speech used to make one thing stand for another: metaphor, simile, analogy, metonymy and synecdoche. When the speaker expects those they speak with to recognise what they do immediately, they construct a metaphor, “love is a red rose”. Then they want to signal that they are making one thing stand for another, they create a simile, “love is like a red rose”. When they spell out how they want their hearers to understand one thing in terms of the other, they construct an analogy, “love is like a red rose in that it is sweet and beautiful yet contains thorns and withers after a season”. Speakers may use an object to refer to another that is logically related to it: metonymy—for example, to use “the Crown” or “the Minister” to stand for “the government”. They may also use the part of a thing to refer to the whole object: synecdoche—for example, “the general won the battle”, where ‘the general’ refers to ‘the army lead by the general’. These terms reflect are the traditional divisions: but in the types of analysis that I will be conducting, they are now collectively referred to as ‘metaphors’ because they all use the same process, and so I will call them throughout this thesis.

For analysing beliefs about communication, individual metaphoric expressions are rarely of particular use. By themselves, they can be ambiguous when the stand-for relationship is not explained. Far more important are systematic metaphors, where large numbers of expressions all use aspects of one domain to explain aspects of another. The following two groups of expressions are all common ways we have of talking about political elections.

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1 Defining metaphors as a process rather than form also allows us to extend the definition beyond language to music and visual representations. Many road signs, for instance, use symbols to stand for the objects their direct us to: a cross stands for a hospital; a picture of a tap stands for drinking water; and an icon of a camera stands for scenic lookout. In music, composers have long used leitmotifs, melodies, tonal colours, and sound effects to stand for characters and ideas.
The election campaign has begun. An election is a battle for voter’s hearts. The leaders gathered at party headquarters. The Labor election strategy was launched today. The Opposition went onto the attack today. The party stared election defeat in the face. The sitting member has fought off the challenger. This is a safe seat. The sitting member stole a march over his rival. The party continues to lose ground in the south. The party president gave the victory speech.

All major parties are off and running in the election campaign. The parties are chasing the prize of government. The Coalition began the race with a clear lead over Labor. The Coalition is ahead in the polls. Labor is catching up.

The first of these groups is consistent with the metaphor AN ELECTION IS A WAR; the second group are consistent with AN ELECTION IS A RACE. (A note on terminology: throughout this thesis, I write the metaphor itself in small capital letters, and the words and phrases consistent with the metaphor in italics). These are normal everyday ways of thinking and talking about elections. When we say these things we are not being poetic or fanciful. Elections are actually won and lost; politicians do attack one another; political parties do mount campaigns. Indeed, we have few non-metaphorical ways of talking about elections: how else do we take about the outcomes except as victory or defeat?

Such metaphoric expressions may not be simply descriptive: they can suggest lines of reasoning and action. In an election, although there is no physical battle between candidates, there is a verbal one, and much of the way that political parties and commentators plan what they do on the understanding that an election is a war. If it is a war, then political parties need to devote resources where they are weakest and the contest is most evenly balanced. Directing action is the primary purpose of metaphors about communication; description is incidental. Successful metaphors suggest where to direct attention and effort in order to communicate well.

Stand-for relationships are never complete; they are always partial. That is, if I make A stand for B, there is always some sense in which A and B are different. Constructing a metaphor turns attention to some aspects of a thing, but in the process it distracts attention away from others. For instance, an election is not a war or a race; the outcome of an election depends on voters choosing between the candidates, whereas in a war, the outcome is decided by the efforts of the combatants. The more powerful and pervasive the metaphor is, and the fewer alternatives people have to it, the more powerfully it can hide or distract attention from alternative ways of looking or describing things. As I will show in Chapters 3–6 and 15, the metaphor of communication-as-transmission provides almost all of our everyday expressions for talking about communication. It contains literally hundreds of concrete, vivid expressions which forms a coherent, self-consistent description of communication, as well as providing a ‘logic’ for working out how to communicate.
Analysing the metaphoric expressions that collectively make up communication-as-transmission involves:

[1] looking at those moments when people explain ordinary acts of communication—speaking, writing, listening, reading—in terms drawn from other domains

[2] looking at how this other domain is used to structure explanations of communication, and suggest productive ways of acting

[3] looking at how people use conclusions drawn from this domain to reason about communication

[4] exploring what the metaphor hides from view or else suggests about communication that does not occur in reality.

Metaphors, like other idiosyncratic expressions, are often specific to particular cultures and do not translate easily. They rely on a great deal of previous knowledge of how language is used in a particular community. (Consider the difficulties in explaining the English expression, “Can I give you a hand?” to a native Chinese speaker.) Consequently, I have had to analyse texts for metaphors in their original languages, not translations. Normally—and rightly—translators replace inexpressible foreign phrases with familiar and intelligible ones, but in the process can lose the sense of the underlying structure provided by the metaphor.

**Communication-as-order**

As I will show in Chapters 7–9 and 13, communication-as-order grows out of beliefs about how communities are to be ordered: communication in this sense is the process by which communities are formed and maintained.

At the core of beliefs about communication-as-order are values. This tradition is concerned not with how things are but how they ought to be. People usually make value claims in to suggest ways to improve circumstances from the way they actually are; ethical principles exist to suggest how people may improve their actual behaviour; utopias exist to suggest how society may be made anew. Understanding traditions of this kind involves analysing:

[1] claims about how things ought to be (norms)

[2] observations about how things actually are (these are often very selective observations)

[3] processes that people use to judge how well the real compares with the norms

[4] claims about the relationship between reality and norms—in particular, claims about the way that the world as it is can be transformed into the world as it ought to be.

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2 My thanks to Sally White for this wonderfully problematic example.
The types of value claims that are particularly important to the development of community and communication as broadly ethical, legal, religious, and constitutional. Different traditions approach the problems of values and norms in different ways. The ancient Greeks and the Romans typically stated their expectations in conflicts—our surviving records are chiefly legal, political and dramatic. They regarded the relationship between the laws and actual behaviour as the role of justice (although, they meant several different things by the term). The arguments that survive the classical world are chiefly about justice; the norms themselves are usually implied. By contrast, the problem for the Modern Age is different. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, early Modern thinkers set out to establish a new social order on clear, distinct and rational principles. So, while Antiquity was concerned primarily with the relationship between norms and actual behaviour, the problem for the Modern Age is the validity of the norms themselves.

**Communication-as-technique**

The third tradition, communication-as-technique, is not ‘theory’ in the sense of an explanation of how reality is. It consists of the rules drawn from repeated experience that practitioners have used to plan their work. For most of its history in the West, it has been either atheoretical or explicitly anti-theoretical.

It is the easiest of the three traditions to analyse because almost as soon as the ancient Greeks developed techniques for speaking, writing and reading, they recorded them. Later generations drew quite explicitly on earlier ones—even when they rejected them—so we have a fairly continuous record of technical developments. But, just as individual metaphors are of little interest in analysing communication-as-transmission, so individual rules are of little interest here. It is the way that authors have organised these rules—explained when they are to be used, and in what order—that is more interesting. What a writer see as a logical and consistent way of organising these rules reveals much about what they think communication is.

**HISTORY**

A history of ideas cannot be too fussy with dates; ideas that endure are the property of the community that remembers them, not the individual that might first have given them voice. Some authors may pre-figure ideas long before they become commonplace; others may argue ideas long after their community has abandoned them. Consequently, the only firm dates that I have given in this book are the births and deaths of specific people, as well as major dates in western history (such as Alexander’s defeat of the Greeks, the advent of the Black Death, or the beginning of the Reformation). Otherwise I have use the
conventional periods of Western history—Ancient, Medieval and Modern—along with their usual subdivisions.

The Classical Age (or Antiquity) can be divided into Greek and Roman hemispheres. The Greek half is usually subdivided into:

1. Archaic—twelfth to seventh centuries BC
2. Classical or Hellenic—sixth to fourth centuries BC), and
3. Hellenistic—the period between Alexander the Great’s defeat of the Greek states in 332 BC and Constantine’s conversion to Christianity in 312 AD.

The Roman period is conveniently divided into:

1. the Republic—before 44 BC and the rise of Augustus, and
2. the Empire.

In the fourth century AD, the Roman Empire was divided into two; the Western half declined in the fifth century AD, but in the Eastern or Byzantine Empire survived until the fifteenth century.

The Middle Ages—the period between the decline of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century AD and the rise of the Modern Age in the seventeenth—are far more complicated to divide. I have used only the broadest definitions:

1. the Early Middle Ages cover the period from fifth to the mid-eleventh century AD
2. the High Middle Ages covers the mid-eleventh to mid-fourteenth centuries.
3. the Late Middle Ages last from then until the end of the sixteenth century.

The Middle Ages also contain the Renaissance, which has two broad phases: the Humanistic revival of the mid-fourteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries, and the scientific rebirth from the sixteenth century. The other major event of the Late Middle Ages is the Reformation of the Church, beginning with Luther’s schism of 1517, coming to an effective end with the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), in which the Catholic and Protestant powers fought themselves to a standstill.

The Thirty Years War is a fair marker for the beginning of the Modern Age, which then runs to the mid-twentieth century, ending with the World Wars, 1914–1945. With the exception of the Enlightenment (seventeenth century) I have usually referred to periods in the Modern Age by century rather than period.

REFERENCES AND TRANSLATIONS

A story as wide-ranging as this one risks being buried in its own references. To manage the volume I have followed the principle of supplying references only to facts, quotations and
arguments that cannot be found in a standard encyclopaedia. All references are given are in footnotes—along with asides, summaries and further reading not part of the main discussion.

I have tried to refer only to works that will normally be available in a good library. I have a particular dislike for authors who refer to exotic or unobtainable books, and I have tried to avoid inconveniencing you, my readers. In any case, my story follows the broad road of Western thought, not esoteric side tracks, and the chief authors will be available with the normal scholarly apparatus. I have tried to avoid commentators and secondary sources throughout, and instead have referred directly to the original authors. The bibliography at the end lists all secondary literature, along with important internet resources.

In Chapters 3–6 and Appendices 5–6, I have analysed the communication-as-transmission in Greek and Latin. Where I have quoted an extended passage, I have included both the original text and the translation. Most translations are from standard editions, which I have outlined at the beginning of the relevant chapters. Where I have used individual Greek words or fragments in the text, I have transliterated them into roman script so they are easier to read and, for the Greekless, to highlight similarities between words. I have not indicated the pitch accents in Greek transliterations.

I have used modernised spellings in quotations in early Modern English.

Appendix 4 includes a few examples from texts in Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Chinese. Because I have only made minor use of these languages, I have only included English translations without the original text. Individual words are transliterated into roman script.

**STYLE**

Finally, a comment on style. There is perhaps an expectation that a doctoral thesis will deal in dark and obscure matters, and consequently its language will be correspondingly technical and arcane, as the author stands on tiptoe to express ideas new and unfamiliar. This is certainly the impression I had when I first took myself to the university library to see how doctoral theses were written. I take a different view. An author that attempts to write on the new and unfamiliar has twice the responsibility to make their subject as clear as possible—triply so when the topic is communication. Obscurity is no virtue.

As I have written this book, I have constantly had before me the words of three great but very different writers who have influenced Western beliefs about communication. The first is Martin Luther, who in defending of his translation of the Bible, writes of the labours invested in producing a work easily accessible to the entire German people.
I have continually tried translating in a pure and accurate German. It has happened that sometimes I have sought a single word for three or four weeks and sometimes have not found it even then. In translating the Book of Job, Meister Philip and I could barely translate three lines in four days. Now that it has been translated and completed, anyone can read and criticise it. Anyone can now read three or four pages without stumbling once—without realising just what rocks and stumps had once been where now he travels as if over a smoothly-cut plank. ... The ploughing goes nicely when the field is cleared, but rooting out the woods and the stumps and getting the field ready, that is work no one wants.3

The second author is the philosopher John Locke, and his stinging criticism of those that block the way to genuine understanding through their use of “uncouth, affected, or unintelligible terms”—a charge as valid today as it was three hundred years ago.

The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master-builders, whose mighty designs, in advancing the sciences, will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity: but every one must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham; and in an age that produces such masters as the great Hygenius and the incomparable Mr. Newton, with some others of that strain, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge; which certainly had been very much more advanced in the world, if the endeavours of ingenious and industrious men had not been much cumbered with the learned but frivolous use of uncouth, affected, or unintelligible terms, introduced into the sciences, and there made an art of, to that degree that Philosophy, which is nothing but the true knowledge of things, was thought unfit or incapable to be brought into well-bred company and polite conversation. Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language, have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard and misapplied words, with little or no meaning, have, by prescription, such as right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance, and hindrance of true knowledge.4

Third have been the unparalleled essays of George Orwell: often quoted to communication students, and too often unheeded by their teachers.

If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark, its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself.5

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3 Luther An Open Letter on Translating
4 Locke (1690/1979), Epistle to the Reader, from the Essay concerning human understanding p10
5 Orwell 1977, p157
I have specifically written this book in a way that I hope will be accessible to readers unfamiliar with the awful verbiage of communication theory. I have striven to avoid jargon, in-jokes, convoluted sentences, passive verbs, pretentious language and all the other muck that passes for academic writing and defeats clear thinking. The very least we should expect from a book on communication is that it should be well written.
APPENDIX TWO

ORAL CULTURES

ABSTRACT  Most of the ideas about communication I discuss in this thesis are from cultures that use writing, and that implicitly take writing as the model for communication generally. But in cultures that do not use writing—oral cultures—recording and remembering important information has to be performed by speech. This influences the ways that speech is used, and how speech and memory are understood. Remembering is ‘re-telling’ or ‘re-calling’. Communication in oral cultures becomes saturated with verbal memory techniques—particularly rhythm, rhyme, and verbal formulas. Composing speech is understood as ‘weaving’ or ‘stitching together’ pieces of lore.

ORAL MEMORY

To survive for any length of time, a community has to remember. It has to remember skills and techniques, such as how to make tools, hunt, farm, mine and work metals, process foods, cook, and prepare medicines. It has to remember lore and wisdom, such as the changes of seasons, the signs of weather, and the shifting patterns of plants and animals. It has to remember the laws, customs and ceremonies that order community life, and the status and position of individuals within the community. And this has to be collective remembering. A stable community depends on its members agreeing, more or less, on what they remember. If there is too much disagreement or confusion, vital skills can easily be lost, and the relationships between people and the laws that regulate them can break down. Communal remembering also has to extend over years and generations, otherwise each new generation has to laboriously relearn what its predecessors had discovered or decided: techniques, customs, laws, legal precedents, social orders, and so on. In most cultures, it is important to remember family genealogies extending over many generations in order to establish social status and precedence, status in law, and rights to property.

In literate societies such as our own, writing, diagrams and pictures are important ways in which this common memory is maintained; sometimes they are the primary way. In the modern West, science, mathematics and philosophy would be impossible without texts to remind us of the thousands of technical terms and distinctions of meaning required;
complex engineering and architecture makes diagrams almost obligatory; our voluminous laws are consigned to the lawbooks. In law, we often give text precedence over speech: for instance, some types of oral evidence (such as hearsay) are not admissible in court; contracts are frequently not binding unless they are ‘in writing’; and for a long time oaths were only valid if sworn on a text—the Bible.

But in purely oral cultures—cultures which use no visual analogue of spoken language—entirely different approaches have to be taken. For instance, suppose an individual forgot the meaning of a word: that is, they remembered the conjunction of sounds, but could not recall what they meant. What could they do? In our literate culture, a normal solution would be to look the word up in a dictionary. But in an oral culture, people cannot literally ‘look the word up’ because there is nowhere to look it up. Indeed, ‘looking up’ a word can mean nothing in a community where words are never visual. Their only option is to ask someone else in the hope that they know. If they do not remember—if no one does—the word will normally drop out of use. Without repeated use, even the conjunction of sounds ceases to be of any use to anyone. The meaning of a word or phrase depends on context and constant use. It is forgotten when the community no longer uses it. Without writing to remind people of words and their meanings, oral cultures can usually only support lexicons of a few thousand words; only with the aid of writing can much larger lexicons develop.

The difference between oral and literate cultures was first popularised by Marshall McLuhan in The Gutenburg Galaxy (1963), although he was extrapolating heavily from the pioneering work of Parry (1971) and Lord (1960). In the first flush of enthusiasm, many extreme and incautious claims were made about oral cultures—by, amongst others Havelock (1963), Goody & Watt (1968) and Ong (1982). With the exception of Goody, most were ‘armchair experts’ rather than practising anthropologists with direct experience of the cultures they described, and their claims have been heavily challenged since then. Finnegan says of McLuhan “...not only are his interpretations elusive and emotive in the extreme, but he takes little account of the complexity of the actual facts” (1976, p143). Other critics include Opland (1976), Eisenstein (1982), and Bowman & Wolff (1994). While the later generation would accept there are differences between oral and literate cultures, they reject any idea of a dualism between them, but rather argue for an array of different cultures making use of a range of tools and skills to communicate in different ways leading to different forms of community life.

Most living oral cultures studied by linguists have relatively small vocabularies: usually no more than six thousand words—although most also have highly complex grammars, which give them great flexibility. Modern English, at least as it is recorded in dictionaries, is no longer a spoken language but a ‘grapholect’—a language preserved and maintained primarily through the use of writing. There would be very few people for instance who know how to use all 450,000 words listed in the full Oxford English Dictionary. Even Shakespeare, who had one of the largest vocabularies of any writer, only employed 30,000
Similarly, the ability to create and then remember complex technical and theoretical arguments may be limited in oral cultures.

Suppose a person in an oral culture would undertake to think through a particular complex problem and would finally manage to articulate a solution which is relatively complex, consisting, let us say, of a few hundred words. How does he or she retain for later recall the verbalization so painfully elaborated? In the total absence of any writing, there is nothing outside the thinker, no text, to enable him or her to produce the same line of thought again or even to verify whether he or she has done so or not. Aides mémoire such as notched sticks or a series of carefully arranged objects will not of themselves retrieve a complicated series of assertions. How in fact could a lengthy, analytic solution ever be assembled in the first place? An interlocutor is virtually essential. It is hard to talk to yourself for hours on end. Sustained thought in an oral culture is tied to communication. But even with a listener to stimulate and ground your thoughts, the bits and pieces of your thought cannot be preserved in jotted notes. How could you ever call back to mind what you had so laboriously worked out? The only answer is: Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence.3

If people want to remember something in an oral culture, they need to use ways of speaking that will help them remember—memory is tied to communication. So, we should expect that the way people think about communication intersects with the ways they conceive of remembering.

HOMER

Historically, the understanding of how oral cultures remembered extended or complex information began with the ‘Homeric Question’. By the eighteenth century, European scholars were aware that the Iliad and the Odyssey were quite unlike other poems that had survived from Antiquity. For instance, unlike most other Greek poetry, which had historical authors, their origins were obscure. Even the ancients knew nothing about ‘Homer’4. And

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3 Ong 1982, p34. Havelock (1963) notes the coincidence in ancient Greece of the flowering of classical philosophy and natural science with the widespread use of writing—although he overstates the case and has been heavily criticised for it.

4 The name ‘Homer’ simply means ‘slave’, an embarrassment to later educated Greeks, who tried to explain it away etymologically, suggesting ‘Homer’ was a corruption of ὄψις ἐπόκριτος ‘blind man’, which in turn gave rise to the myth that Homer was blind.
the poems’ date of composition was unknown, although it was known that they were far older than almost all other surviving works. Archaeological and textual evidence suggested that they must have been composed well before the widespread use of writing in Greece. This led to the question: How were twenty seven thousand lines of verse composed then preserved for several hundred years until, according to Greek tradition, they were written down around 600 BCE?

Some scholars suggested that both epics were originally several smaller songs by a single poet, ‘Homer’, but only connected together in the form of epic poems when they were written down. Others suggested that there was no single ‘Homer’, but that the poems were created as additions and modifications were made by successive generations of poets and editors. A very few scholars suggested that Homer was a bard quite unlike the type that modern Europeans were familiar with—although they could not explain how a bard, working without writing, could compose and preserve twenty-seven thousand lines of hexameter verse, beyond making vague statements about extraordinary powers of memory.

The nineteenth century ‘Analysts’ assumed that, if Homer lived in an age that was without writing, then such feats as the Iliad and the Odyssey were technically impossible, and so they set out to show that both poems were assembled from several smaller, more easily remembered works. The Analysts searched for discrepancies of plot, of historical and archaeological references, of language, and of style. Although several ways of dividing up the epics into smaller poems were proposed, none solved the problem satisfactorily. The detailed analysis also showed up several problems with the assumption that there were several authors. For one thing, the text was strikingly uniform and showed little stylistic variation, suggesting a single poet, not several. Also, the Analysts found that the poems were made up of different Greek dialects—a mix of early and late Aeolic and Ionic word forms—used in a way that could not be explained if both poems were made up by combining several smaller pieces. The following generation of classicists rejected the Analysts’ hypothesis, on the grounds that “the Homeric poems are works of art too great, their dramatic structure is too perfect, their characterisation too consistent to have been the more or less random conglomeration of a series of poets and editors”\(^5\).

The solution most widely accepted today was first proposed in the 1930s by Milman Parry. Parry’s insight was to imagine a type of poet quite different from modern poets—an oral poet. For Parry, an oral poet would not simply repeat a poem learned by rote. Rather they would retell the story, recomposing it, ‘re-calling’ it as they went along. The aoidos—knowing the general outline of the story, and having a sense of how his audience would like the tale told—would assemble the story out of a pre-learned stock of phrases and themes, set to music. The rhythm and melody provided them with a structure within which to assemble the story.

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Parry began by analysing the epithets applied to various common objects—such as people’s names, wine, ships and battle gear—and how they could be integrated into a line of hexameter verse. Because most words will not fit neatly into hexameter, Parry suggested that the *aoidoi* would ‘pad out’ most terms with epithets and adjectives to insert them into the verse. He surmised that the choice of words and phrases depended on the structure of the hexameter. “Odysseus is *polýmētis* (clever) not just because he is this kind of character but also because without the epithet *polýmētis* he could not be readily worked into the meter”\(^6\). Parry found that for all important nouns, there was a stock epithet for every metrical variation. More importantly, Homer was ‘thrifty’—for important nouns, there was precisely one epithet for each metrical possibility. This, presumably, helped cut down the amount of choice the poet had to exercise as he improvised the story at speed.

Parry argued that the choice of the epithet was determined by metrical needs rather than meaning. “Words and even phrases ... were chosen for their metrical convenience rather than their appropriateness to the particular context in which they appear”\(^8\). Parry’s theory also explained how older Aeolic words were retained in the poem—because they were needed to fill out the hexameter in the absence of any suitable Ionian words.

Parry later extended his analysis to larger structures within both poems. He showed that the poet had used many lines of hexameter with strikingly similar structures. Like the use of stock epithets, the poet probably used a limited repertoire of stock phrases or ‘formulas’ to reduce the number of choices they had to make as they wove their tale at speed. “Wherever [a Homeric poet] could obtain a new formula by altering one which was already in use, they did so, and this they did up to the point where the complexity of the ideas which must be expressed in their poetry put a stop to this making of systems”\(^9\). As in the case of the epithets, Homer used as many stock phrases as he needed and no more.

Parry also argued that commonly repeated scenes such as meetings, assemblies, challenges, and descriptions of warriors arming were frequently organised in similar ways—a ‘thematic formula’. More and more analysis only served to reveal more and more types of formulas, more patterns, more themes, to the point where, “it became evident that only a tiny

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\(^6\) Ong 1982, p58–59

\(^7\) In this, Parry was prefigured by Düntzer, who noted of the epithets of wine: “All of these forms are metricaly distinct ... and it is never sense that determines the choice of one or another of them.” (In Parry 1977, pxx)

\(^8\) Parry 1977, pxxv

\(^9\) Parry 1977, p323. Parry’s heavily utilitarian definition “has since been expanded, revised and rejected at various times.” (Stolz & Shannon 1976, pix–x) However, despite the revisions since then, no one seriously doubts that both poems are heavily formulaic—the disagreement lies over exactly what is a formula and what is not.
A fraction of the words in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not parts of formulas, and to a degree devastatingly predictable formulas. The scale of formulation in the two poems can be appreciated when we observe that “in twenty-seven thousand hexameters, we can find twenty-nine thousand repetitions of phrases with two or more words.”

Parry’s proposal also helped explain other problems with Homer. For instance, while today we have only one full version of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, quotations from classical authors and scattered papyri show there were a number of variations, although in ancient times all were regarded as authentic. If we understand that the epics were re-called with each telling, and may be adjusted to suit the tastes and attention span of the audience, and that different *aoidoi* may use different words in their telling, then it would be perfectly natural for variations to appear.

**LEARNING EPIC POETRY**

Parry’s proposal remained a hypothesis until he travelled to then Serbo-Croatia in the late 1920s to record the songs of non-literate oral poets of the Balkans, the *guslari*. Like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Parry and his assistant Albert Lord found that Serbo-Croatian epic poetry could also be constructed on a vast scale. Songs could take all night to sing and, in the case of master *guslari*, would sometimes stretch over ten thousand decasyllable stanzas. Parry and Lord found that no poet-singer ever sang a song the same way twice (a feature since confirmed in studies of other epic poetry singers), which led Parry to surmise that the songs were never memorised verbatim, but composed as they were sung—as he had conjectured was done by the Homeric *aoidoi*. Although Parry died young in 1935, his work was continued by Lord, who was able to confirm the use of stock epithets, formula lines, ‘thrift’ and other features described by Parry. Lord also gave a detailed description of how the

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10 Ong 1982, p23

11 Illich & Sanders 1988, p18

12 There are several important differences between Greek and Balkans epic poetry, which has led some researchers to question the relevance of Serbo-Croatian epic to the study of Homeric Greek epic. One difference is that Homeric verse is almost exclusively dactylic hexameter; the *guslari* used a much shorter decasyllable structure. Also the scale of the Yugoslav poems was smaller—the longest that Parry recorded amounted to twelve thousand decasyllables, slightly less than half the number of hexameters in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However supporters of the Parry-Lord method argue that the limitations of memory and consequently the techniques used to overcome these limitations are common to both cultures.

13 Parry’s methods and their application in Serbo-Croatia is described in Lord 1960.
guslari learned to sing epic poetry. Lord quotes one singer who summarised how he learnt his art.

When I was a shepherd boy, they [the guslari] used to come for an evening to my house, or sometimes we would go to someone else’s for the evening, somewhere in the village. Then a singer would pick up the gusle, and I would listen to the song. The next day when I was with the flock, I would put the song together, word for word, without the gusle, but I would sing it from memory, word for word, just as the singer had sung it … Then I learned gradually to finger the instrument, and to fit the fingering to the words, and my fingers obeyed better and better … I didn’t sing among the men until I had perfected the song, but only among the young fellows in my circle not in front of my elders and betters.14

This, along with evidence from other singers, led Lord to suggest a three-stage learning process15. The first stage began when the novice sat and listened to experienced singers16. He slowly learned the stories, the heroes and their names, place names, geography, and habits of long ago. “At the same time he is imbibing the rhythm of the singing and to an extent also the rhythm of the thoughts as they are expressed in song. Even at this early stage the oft-repeated phrases which we call formulas are being absorbed.”17

In the second stage, the singer began to fashion a song. First he established the rhythm and melody—the framework within which the story is expressed. The singer learned to fit the expression to the rhythm and how to use the formulas in order to compose at speed. The poet did not learn formulas explicitly. Rather, by drawing on the traditions of singers before him, the novice drew upon the phrases that had been developed by other singers before him to fit the metrical requirements of singing.

… over many generations there have been developed many phrases which express in the several rhythmic patterns the ideas most common in the poetry. These are the formulas of which Parry wrote.18

What Parry calls ‘formulas’ are the repeated devices used by poets as they sang. The poet did not learn them explicitly as rules, nor did any of the singers interviewed by Parry or Lord

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14 Lord 1960, p21
15 One important difference between the ancient Greek aoidoi and the Serbo-Croatian guslari is that we have no record of the former describing their learning process. Also both Homer and Hesiod talk of being ‘possessed’ by the Muse—their skill is the result of an external agency, not a learned skill. For instance, Iliad 1:1, 2:283, 11:218, 14:508, 16:112.
16 As in ancient Greece, singing epic-poetry was a strictly male-only art in Serbo-Croatia.
17 Lord 1960, p21
18 Lord 1960, p22
talk about the way they sing in such a way. They use them, partly because they were traditional and part of the art, but also because it was not possible to compose at speed without them.\textsuperscript{19}

The young singer had to learn enough of these phrases in order to be able to sing—to recall—a song. He did this through repeated use in singing, and by repeatedly facing the need to express an idea in song and satisfying that need by using a particular phrase. Through imitation and assimilation he slowly learnt how to use the phrases, rhythms, epithets, and other devices that eventually became the background of his art.

It is important to emphasise that the young singer was not memorising a particular song. “It may truthfully be said that the [young] singer imitates the techniques of composition of his master or masters rather than particular songs.”\textsuperscript{20} The same techniques were used for all songs. (One upshot is that there is great uniformity within the tradition. The same themes, devices and even characters appear over and over again, regardless of the specific tale.) The second learning stage ended when the singer was competent to sing one song all the way through for a critical audience.\textsuperscript{21}

In the third stage the singer developed and broadened his repertoire, adding ornamentation to his song, developing new phrases to fit the meter of the rhythm, developing new epithets, and so on. In the third stage the poet also learnt to meet the needs of his audience—expanding or contracting the song depending on the listeners’ patience; adjusting the heroes or the outcomes depending on their expectations. In the Serbo-Croatian tradition, a singer’s ‘training’ ended when he had sufficient repertoire to entertain an audience over several nights.

When he has sufficient command of the formula technique to sing any song that he hears, and enough thematic material at hand to lengthen or shorten a song according to his own desires and to create a new song if he sees fit, then he is an accomplished singer and worthy of his art.\textsuperscript{22}

Essential to the success of this process was the initial inculcation of patterns and compositional formulas. Once these were established to the extent that the singer was

\textsuperscript{19} “If we are fully aware that the singer is composing as he sings, the most striking element in the performance is the speed at which he proceeds. It is not unusual for a Yugoslav bard to sing at the rate of from ten to twenty ten-syllable lines a minute”. (Lord 1960, p17) This is about the speed of slow English speech. A performance may go for hours, or even all night, without interruption.

\textsuperscript{20} Lord 1960, p24

\textsuperscript{21} Lord 1960, p24

\textsuperscript{22} Lord 1960, p26
unaware of them, he could begin to sing more rapidly and on a larger scale. By drawing on epithets and phrases used by other singers, and modifying them within the rhythmic limitations of his art, the guslar was forced into a tradition that stabilised the tales. He was not entirely limited in his invention however. The guslar had a great deal of freedom to invent and select within the confines of the pattern. Because different poets drew upon different personal formulas to compose their own poems, and singers adjusted their tales for the audiences they sang for, no two songs were identical. Also, the singers could develop new phrases, patterns and formulas, all of which served to advance the tradition.

The use of rhythm, melody, inculcation, formulas, and tradition in order to compose at speed resulted in a technique in which the story could remain stable over extended periods of time. In 1937 Lord recorded a song composed by a Balkan singer. “It was my good fortune to record this song from him seventeen years later, and it was remarkably close to the earlier version, though hardly word for word”.

**OTHER EPIC POEMS**

Since Parry and Lord’s work, similar analysis has been done with a large number of other ancient and medieval poems from Europe, India and the Middle East—including *Beowulf* (Anglo-Saxon, eighth century), *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Irish, ninth century), *Nibelungenleid* (German pre-thirteenth century), the *Song of Roland* and other *chanson de geste* (Old French, sixth to ninth centuries), *El Cid* (Spanish, twelfth century) and the Indian Vedas. The results suggest that the same or similar techniques were used in preliterate cultures in Europe to retell epic and heroic poems.

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23 Lord 1960, p28

24 Lord 1960, p28. The concept of ‘word for word’ does exist in oral cultures, as Lord 1960, Ong 1982, and Illich & Sanders 1988 all note. The concept of ‘a word’ as the basic unit of language only appeared with the use of writing. “What prehistory perceives as units can have only audible contours. The sequences of sounds between pauses that characterise speech are not words but syllables, phrases, strophes” (Illich & Sanders 1988, p7). “Man without writing thinks in terms of sound groups and not in words, and the two do not necessarily coincide” (Lord 1960, p25). “...[illiterate] singers do not know what words and lines are. ... ’word for word and line for line’ are simply an emphatic way of saying ‘like’” (Lord 1960, p28).

25 *Beowulf* see Foley 1976; *Táin Bó Cúailnge* see Melia 1975; *Nibelungenleid* see Bäuml and Spielmann 1975; *The Song of Roland* and *chanson de geste* see Rychner 1955, Aspland 1970 and Duggan 1973; Vedas see Kiparsky 1976. Lord 1960 also reports on Icelandic sagas. Kiparsky notes that, while the Vedas originated as oral poems, they are no longer ‘retold’ by a bard retelling the story as he goes, but are repeated verbatim. “[The Vedic literature] is remarkable in several respects: the extent of the compositions, the great length of time (well over two
Much of the study of oral cultures—particularly the now vanished oral cultures of Europe—has focussed on the analysis of epic and heroic poetry, and mostly on European works. There are several reasons that the focus has been on these works. First, epic poetry was where, historically, research began. Second, the techniques developed by Parry were most easily applied to similar works. Third, epic and heroic poems are large enough and usually consistent enough to support statistical formulaic analysis. Fourth, European oral cultures now exist only in the historical record, and virtually all that has been recorded verbatim were epics and other large scale poems.

**EVERYDAY REMEMBERING**

Epic poetry is an exceptional creation of an oral culture—it must be. It requires enormous resources and highly developed skills to maintain. Lord reports: “It was Parry’s experience that Moslem singers, when asked how many songs they knew, frequently replied that they knew thirty, one for each night of [Ramadan].” Furthermore, it took many years for a thousand years] during which it has been continuously transmitted in oral form, and the absolute fidelity with which the text has been preserved, down to the smallest phonetic details.” (Kiparsky 1976, p99)

A distinction has to be drawn between poems that use formulas, and poems composed orally. Oral formulas appear to be a necessary strategy adopted by oral poets in order to be able to compose at speed. While later poets wrote and did not need the techniques of the oral poets, they did not immediately develop new poetic forms and they continued to use the models of the oral poets—just as when much later new communication media appeared (film, radio, television) all initially retained the traditions of the media they eventually supplanted. The main guide that scholars have used to distinguish oral and literate poets is the frequency and consistency of formulas. For instance, in the 13th century text of the *Nibelungenleid*, “the density of formulaic constructions varies from 25% to 80% per stanza. It therefore seems logical to conclude that the oral tradition ... served as the basis of the written composition of the transmitted text by a literate poet for a literate audience. ... an orally transmitted heroic epic was transformed by a learned poet into a courtly epic” (Bäuml & Spielmann 1975, p63). This example shows the problems associated with establishing the authenticity of an ‘oral poem’—is a written record a verbatim record of a poem composed orally, or a poem composed in the style of an oral poet?

An important exception is the work done on oral prose and other forms in Africa, particularly by Finnegan (1970 & 1976).

In the case of Greece, apart from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, only four other major works appear to have been composed in an oral culture, without the aid of writing, and accurately recorded without subsequent editing are Homer’s *Achilles*, some of the *Homer Hymns* and Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

Lord 1960, p15
To attain skill sufficient to support a repertoire. The demands of such a tradition are too great for the day-to-day memory requirements of an oral community.

Treating the techniques of oral poets as representative of memory techniques used for more everyday ends in oral communities needs to be done cautiously. “Formulaic diction has been extensively studied, but for the most part as a phenomenon sui generis. No-one has attempted to compare systematically the phrase patterns of oral poetry to those of ordinary language”\(^\text{30}\). Nevertheless, it is probable that some techniques using the acoustic properties of sound and speech were used—particularly in cultures like ancient Greece which did not have professional ‘rememberers’ like the Celtic bards or African ‘memory men’\(^\text{31}\). A culture that developed the techniques for recalling vast poems is not likely to have ignored similar techniques for maintaining other knowledge. There are many hints that this may well have been the case in ancient Greece, which I will focus on because of its importance in the Western tradition. Much of what survives of pre-Classical Greek thinkers is in verse form. For instance, according to Plutarch, the sixth century bc law-reformer Solon:

> ... introduced philosophical aphorisms and wove a great deal of political matter into his poems ... Some writers say that he tried to express his laws in the form of epic verse before he published them \(^\text{32}\).

Hesiod (fl.700 bc) and Heraclitus (fl.500 bc) both cast their philosophy in verse. Even when writing became established as a tool for philosophical thought amongst the Greeks, poetry persisted. Plato still has Socrates occasionally speak in verse for longer compositions. For instance, while he is ‘warming up’ to making a speech in Phaedrus, Socrates says, “the spot seems really to be a divine one, so that if perhaps I become possessed by nymphs as my speech proceeds, do not be surprised; as it is I’m already close to uttering in dithyrambs”\(^\text{33}\).

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\(^{30}\) Kiparsky 1976, p73

\(^{31}\) On Greece, see Thomas 1989, p9 8ff; on Africa, see Finnegan 1970 & 1976.

\(^{32}\) Plutarch, Solon 3. By the time that Plutarch wrote his biographies in the second century AD, poetry had become an artform and its mnemonic function was forgotten. Plutarch believed that initially Solon wrote poetry “without any serious end in view and simply for his own amusement.” By implication, he expects that Solon wrote his serious work in prose, as Roman and Hellenistic writers like Plutarch did. However, every authentic fragment that survives from Solon is in verse—no prose at all. A more plausible explanation for Solon’s poetry is that he was using the oral techniques he was familiar with as he wrote, rather than abandoning familiar habits to write unversed prose. In doing this, Solon would be doing what most people do when confronted with a new technology that can perform the same tasks as an existing one—for a while, they retain the old techniques and only after a period of familiarisation do they begin to develop new techniques specific to the new technology.

\(^{33}\) Plato Phaedrus 238d. Possession by some deity, usually the Muses, was how the Greeks traditionally explained inspiration.
Once he has finished, he says, “Haven’t you noticed ... that I’m already uttering epic verse, and not dithyrambs now?”  

The lapse into regular rhythm and verse is far more common in oral cultures, particularly in cultures which did not have professional ‘memory men’. Parry gives an example, as one guslar spontaneously applied the techniques of his art to the story of his own life:

In the summer of 1933, I met in Gatsko, in Hertsegovina, Mitcho Savitch, a man then eighty two years old. He had never learned to write. He dictated to me a number of poems which told of the uprising against the Turks in 1876, in which he took part, and he also dictated to me the story of his life. It began: “I was twenty-two years old when I took part in my first battle at Ravno above Gatsko...” The account goes on in a prose which keeps falling into verse... 

**LANGUAGE AND THE LONGEVITY OF MEMORY**

Rhythm, cadence, rhyme will all help preserve poems, possibly for centuries, even beyond the time when their original meanings are lost. I have already noted how the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* contain Aeolic words, retained because there were no suitable replacements in Ionic Greek, even though their meaning may have been obscure for Ionic speakers. Ong reports “African talking drums ... speak in elaborate formulas that preserve certain archaic words which the ... drummers can vocalise but whose meaning they no longer know”.

Normally though, the language of such poems is the language of common use—just as the remembering is collective remembering, so the language used to remember is also in common use. This is particularly true in cultures without professional ‘memory men’. Only highly trained singers, like the guslari, aoidoi and the African drummers, will preserve otherwise meaningless sounds and patterns. Normally people will simply substitute familiar words for unfamiliar ones. Widespread inculcation requires the use of language that is ‘common’—that is, it is used by all people in the community. Unusual, technical or arcane terms are unlikely to survive endless repetition uncorrupted.

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34 Plato *Phaedrus*, 241e. Plato may be being ironic here. *Phaedrus* attacks the rhetorical techniques of the Sophists, and it may be that the conservative Plato is harking back to the pre-Sophistic forms of speech-making which depended more heavily on rhythm and cadence for their spontaneous composition.

35 Parry 1971, p389–90

36 Ong 1982, p47
The very simplest poems used to recall technical lore are what we now know as ‘nursery rhymes’, although their origins were far from the nursery. They have preserved a great deal of folk wisdom, in some cases for centuries\(^\text{37}\).

\begin{verbatim}
Ring-a-ring of rosies,
A pocketful of posies,
A-tishoo A-tishoo,
We all fall down.
\end{verbatim}

The rhyme and driving rhythm preserve the symptoms of the Plague from seventeenth-century England: \textit{Ring-a-ring of rosies} refers to the red welts that plague victims developed; \textit{A pocketful of posies} refers to the sweet smelling flowers that people carried in order to drive away the miasmas and ‘foul airs’ that were presumed to carry the plague; \textit{A-tishoo A-tishoo} refers to the cold-like symptoms that accompanied the final stages of the disease; the outcome of the plague was \textit{We all fall down}—dead!

\begin{verbatim}
Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.
Up Jack got and off he trot as fast as he could caper,
To old Dame Dob, who plastered his nob with vinegar and brown paper.
\end{verbatim}

Jack and Jill recalls the phases of the moon. Seen from the northern hemisphere, the dark seas vaguely appear to be two figures—Jack and Jill. \textit{Jack and Jill went up the hill} refers to the rising of the full moon, when both ‘figures’ are visible. When \textit{Jack fell down}, the Jack ‘figure’ goes into darkness, and \textit{Jill came tumbling after} as the second ‘figure’ darkens and the moon is new. \textit{Up Jack got}, refers to the third quarter, as the Jack ‘figure’ becomes illuminated again and the moon waxes to full\(^\text{38}\). Both poems show how the aural structure of the poems helps maintain their form, even though their meanings were forgotten\(^\text{39}\).

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\(^{37}\) There are obviously serious problems in tracing the origins of such small works, especially trying to establish their origins in an oral culture. However, as Opie & Opie (1963) argue, nursery rhymes were perpetuated by word of mouth alone. It was only very recently that books of rhymes were printed for use in the nursery, and nurses had the education to read them.

\(^{38}\) The last line is an unrelated piece of lore. Opie & Opie (1963) suggest that brown paper, heated, dipped in vinegar, and sprinkled with pepper was a rustic remedy for headache. This line was presumably added to \textit{Jack and Jill}, to round out the rhyme once the original meanings of the lines had been forgotten.

\(^{39}\) There are limits to what and how much can be remembered with such techniques. There is an upper limit on the number of poems anyone can remember, even when they are in general use in a community. And there is some information that defies versification. For instance, in the Middle Ages, the indexes in several medieval libraries were maintained in verse form.

\textit{...continued on next page.}
Similar problems doubtless affected the recalling of other items in other oral cultures. Many of the techniques used for recalling communal information will be similar to those used by the poet-singers I have discussed above, though less elaborate and subtle. ‘Professional’ memorisers invest a great deal of effort in learning recall techniques, but most members of the community do not have the time to learn techniques to the same level of sophistication. Surviving lore, such as the nursery rhymes I have cited above may be more representative of the general level of sophistication.40

HOW ANCIENT ORAL CULTURES TALKED ABOUT COMMUNICATION

The Homeric aoidoi, the Serbo-Croatian guslari and the bards of other oral cultures are not ‘original’ poets in the modern sense—artists creating striking and novel expressions. They assembled traditional tales out of a stock of pre-existing phrases and words. And while they were probably not aware of the technical detail of their art, they certainly did see themselves as assemblers not aesthetes. The term for their technique is rhapsodising. The Greek term rhapsōdein comes from ῥάπτειν, ‘to stitch’, and ὁἶδε, ‘song’. Sewing and stitching and weaving are how the ancient oral poets normally described their art. The great Indian epics, the Sutras, take their name from the Indian word for ‘sewing’, (which is etymologically related to the Latin suture, ‘stitch’). The poet of the Rgveda sings, “Let not the thread of my song be cut short”.41

There are numerous examples in Homer of sewing and weaving being used to describe speaking.42 Nestor, Menelaos and Odysseus ‘spin’ speech and counsel; kings ‘spin entangling treachery’;44 Penelope’s suitors ‘weave counsels’; gods ‘weave deceptions’;45

40 ‘Nursery’ rhymes may also represent the lower end of sophistication as well. Nursery rhymes were preserved up until relatively recently by voice alone, but in a culture that was increasingly losing and discarding its oral memory techniques. In this environment, it is possible that only the more robust verse would survive, while the more elaborate disappeared or were corrupted as the skills required to maintain them were forgotten.

41 Rgveda 11:28

42 Snyder (1980–81) gives a detailed summary of the metaphors of weaving for Homer, Sappho, Pindar and Baccylides. This section summarises some of her findings. She also draws a parallel between the Greek loom and the lyre, the instrument used to accompany lyric poetry.

43 Iliad 7:324–25, 3:211–213

44 Iliad 6:187–198
and Athena helps Odysseus ‘weave schemes’. Clever women in Homer—Circe and Calypso—all sing while at their looms.

Poets from the sixth and fifth centuries BC, who composed when writing was beginning to become more common in Greece, continued to use the metaphor of weaving. In the seventh century, Sappho gives Athena the epithet, doloploke, ‘weaver of wiles’, and she calls Eros a ‘weaver of stories’ (muthoplokos). Writing in the early fifth century, Pindar explicitly links stitching and singing, and he describes himself as a weaver:

weaving a many-coloured song for men who wield the spear.

Weave out, sweet phorminx, weave out at once [this lovely melody].

I weave for the sons of Amythaon a many coloured crown [of poetry].

Many other examples suggest that this is how the aoidoi talked about their art. In modern English, we have a few similar expressions, possibly descendants of this ancient metaphor:

spinning a tale (or a yarn), the thread of an argument, stringing ideas together, pull the threads of a story together.

These expressions are rare however, illustrating how little use we have for them as they have been crowded out by later metaphors—an illustration of how far our ideas about communication have changed since the times of oral cultures.

There is another concept that survives from oral cultures. As I noted earlier, re-calling a tale does not produce what we, from a literate society, would call a ‘word-for-word’ reproduction. Each re-calling is a new creation, and not surprisingly, oral cultures normally do not expect word-for-word reproductions. (How indeed could they tell if one telling of the Iliad or some other enormous poem was identical to a second without reference to some external record?) Usually what is important to people in oral cultures is the gist of what is said, not its exact reproduction. Gist is etymologically related to the words jest and jester. Originally, the jester of medieval Europe was a professional teller of tales and memoriser of

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45 Odyssey 4.677–680
46 Odyssey 5.356–57
49 See Snyder for more examples than I have given here.
50 ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων ... ἀοιδοί (Pindar Nemean 2:2)
51 Pindar Olympian 6.86–87
52 Pindar Nemean 4.44
53 Fragment 179 (Snell)
socially important information\textsuperscript{54}—which is why jesters were frequently found at court where they were advisers. It was only when their role as memoriser was displaced by the scribe and the use of writing that the jester become transformed into an entertainer and the term ‘jest’ come to mean a joke. This process was paralleled by the decline of rhyme from memory technique to entertainment\textsuperscript{55}.

\textbf{A POSTSCRIPT}

The distinction between oral and literate cultures is an artificial one. No human society has ever abandoned speech. Even the modern West—by far history’s greatest producer and consumer of text—relies predominantly on word-of-mouth for everyday communication. Furthermore, many of the same pressures to produce remain too. Journalists, politicians and bureaucrats all need to generate large numbers of words, often at speed. We should not be surprised to find then that these modern professionals employ various formulas to help them compose at speed, just as the \textit{aoidoi} did—although usually they are described as clichés, and ‘formula’ is usually meant in the perjorative sense. (Literate cultures, with vast vocabularies to draw on, avoid repetition; in oral cultures, it is inevitable and necessary.) Television news reports and tabloid journalism are crafted in quite specific patterns: partly traditional, partly to speed up production.

In \textit{Politics and the English Language}, George Orwell points (disapprovingly) at the unthinking use of precisely the techniques that I have discussed in this Appendix:

\begin{quote}
...modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug. The attraction of this way of writing is that it is easy. It is easier—even quicker, once you have the habit—to say \textit{in my opinion it is not a not unjustifiable assumption that} than to say \textit{I think}. If you use ready-made phrases, you not only don’t have to hunt about for words; you also don’t have to bother with the rhythms of your sentences, since the phrases are generally so arranged as to be more or less euphonious.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} Celtic cultures at the time of the Roman invasion treated their bards as sacred—partly because of their divine inspiration, but also because of the importance of their remembering in Celtic community life.

\textsuperscript{55} Many of the courtly tales of late medieval Europe appear to have begun as oral epics, and later preserved using texts. Examples include the French \textit{chansons de geste} and the German \textit{Nibelungenlied}.

\textsuperscript{56} In Orwell 1977, pp150–151
APPENDIX THREE

THE ART OF MEMORY

ABSTRACT the fourth part of Ciceronic rhetoric preserved an art of mnemonics that influenced later ideas about memory and communication-as-transmission. There were two variations on ancient models of memory: first, memory was a tablet upon which images were stamped—and idea taken from writing—and, second, memory was a treasure chest into which sensory impressions were placed and could be retrieved later for inspection. The second in particular provided a model of mind consistent with the belief of communication beginning and ending in an empty space within a person.

In the Middle Ages, parallels were drawn between books and memory, implying that books, like memory, contained an empty space inside them, within which ideas and images could be stored—a belief consistent with the Conduit Metaphor.

Memory is an essential part of communication. People cannot hold a conversation if they cannot remember what their partner has said. They cannot speak coherently at length if we do not remember their topic. They cannot speak or write if they do not remember the language or how it is used. In Appendix 2, I discussed how the need to remember in oral cultures led to a distinctive view of communication—as spinning, weaving and stitching. People have always realised the importance of memory in communication, so not surprisingly, beliefs about memory have inevitably overlapped with those about communication. And historically, there has always been pressure to make the two consistent.

Amongst the arts of rhetoric was preserved an art of memory that would prove important to modern beliefs about communication. The Greeks developed techniques for remembering long speeches by the fifth century BC. Like the other part of rhetoric, the Romans adopted and preserved these techniques. Today, many authors dismiss the classical memory techniques as a quirk of classical rhetoric, now rendered obsolete because, they say, writing and print have removed the necessity of memorising speeches. But just as the memory techniques of oral cultures influence how they viewed their art, so the classical memory
systems would influence the development of medieval and modern theories of meaning, mind, knowledge and, indirectly, communication.

While the arts of memory appear to have been commonplace in Antiquity, with the decline of oratory and classical culture generally in the fourth century AD, classical mnemonics disappeared from Western Europe until the twelfth century, when it was revived by the Scholastics, drawing on a handful of Roman texts. The artificial memory became a basic part of the Scholastic education, and would have been familiar to Europe’s educated classes until the end of the Renaissance. There were some novelties in the late Middle Ages, unconnected with rhetoric, but their influence was limited and rendered largely irrelevant by the increasing use of paper for writing from the twelfth century, and by the spread of mass printing from the fifteenth—book production in particular rendering the necessity of an encyclopaedic memory less and less important in both scholarly and everyday life. As rhetoric increasingly became a written art form, the ancient memory techniques were slowly forgotten for a second time. Bacon mentions them in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), only to dismiss them as ‘barren’. They occupy one page in Vico’s *Institutiones Oratoriae* (1711–41) and none at all in Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1785).

**THE CLASSICAL TECHNIQUES**

The influence of the artificial memory on modern ideas about communication derives largely from the version created by the Scholastics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their starting point though was the set the techniques described in three of the canonical texts of Roman rhetoric: the anonymous *Ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *De Oratore*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio*. All three books explain memorising a speech using a two-stage

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1. The seminal texts on ancient memory and mnemotechnical systems are Yates’ *The art of memory* (1966) and Rossi’s *Clavis universalis* (1960). Both have been criticised for details concerning memory systems in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, although critics accept their descriptions of the Greek and Roman systems. Sorabji (1972) discusses Greek mnemonics techniques as part of his translation of Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia* (On memory and reminiscence). Carruthers (1990) describes medieval systems in *The Book of Memory* (1990).

2. Yates 1966. Aristotle’s little *On memory and reminiscence* was influential in the Middle Ages on beliefs about memory, but provided no directions on techniques to be used to memorise. There were also a host of derivative sources available to the Middle Ages which presented potted summaries or passing references, although they gave no more than hints on practicalities. They include Augustine’s *Confessions* and Martianus Capella’s *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. There are so few directions on how to learn the ancient techniques presumably because, for the classical authors, they were commonplace and relatively simple, and so seemed too unremarkable to commit to paper. Even Cicero and the author of the ad

...continued on next page
process based on an architectural metaphor. In the first stage, the orator memorised a building, preferably a large one. This had to be done in great detail so that the memory was particularly lasting. This was the most laborious part of the art of memory, but the orator however only had to do this infrequently: maybe a few times in their career. Once memorised, the building could be used over and over to recall many speeches.

In the second stage, when the orator wanted to memorise a specific speech, they walked through their building and placed striking images (*imagines agentes*) at intervals to remind them of what was to be said at each point. Quintilian describes the process, using a Roman villa built around a courtyard as the background for his images:

> [each subject] ... is noted by a sign to remind of it. ... Let us suppose that the sign is drawn from navigation, as, for instance, an anchor; or from warfare, as, for example, a weapon. These signs are arranged as follows. The first notion is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the atrium; the remainder are placed in order all around the impluvium, and committed not only to bedrooms and parlours, but even to statues and the like.

The ancient texts describe in detail the lighting for *imagines*, the distance from which the person was to view the *imagines*, the space between the *imagines* in their imaginary building, and other technical requirements. They also place great emphasis on making the images particularly beautiful or ugly, or somehow visually striking, so that they would stay clear and fresh in the orator’s memory.

To recall the speech, the speaker retraced their steps through the building, and ‘looked’ at the images at each point. Each image reminded them of the subject to be discussed in that part of the speech. (The same building could be used to recall many speeches; the speaker simply ‘erased’ the images of one speech and replaced them with a new series.)

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3 Quintilian *Institutio* 11:2:18

4 The two-step process might appear laborious—and was apparently a frequent complaint of Roman and Greek students (Yates 1966, p25). However, Bartlett’s classic experiments on memory explain the importance of the first stage of memorising a building against which images are placed. “It is ... interesting to find that, even with [a] short series [of images]..., and with only brief intervals elapsing [between memorising and recall], order of sequence is a factor extremely liable to disturbance.” (Bartlett 1932, p49). By placing images against well-memorised background, which has a structure the orator is familiar with, the images become ‘fixed’ in a particular position and do not ‘shift’. The order of images is imposed by the path taken through the building, which in turn secures the correct order of the things to be said and prevents an item being forgotten or misplaced.
Using techniques like this, ancient orators and poets were able to perform extraordinary feats of memory. Plato has Hippias boast that he could repeat fifty names after a single hearing. Seneca the Elder boasted that he was once able to repeat—in either forward or reverse order—two thousand names after a single hearing, or two hundred disconnected lines of verse shouted to him by members of his audience. Pliny the Elder brings together a list of Roman memory feats: Cyrus knew the names of all the men in his army; Lucius Scipio, the names of all the Roman people; Cineas repeated the names of all the senators.

The technique of placing images upon a memorised background explains how Seneca was able to recall lines of poetry in reverse order as easily as forward—the process is simply a matter of walking through the building in reverse order. Elaborate search strategies were also developed so that speakers did not have to run through all of the images they memorised to locate a particular item.

Just as the Greeks and Romans distinguished between res and verba in rhetoric, they also distinguished between ‘memory for things’ and ‘memory for words’—although they used essentially the same technique for both. The system I described above allowed speakers to remember the topics of their speeches. To remember a phrase or speech verbatim, the orator used the images to remind them of the words to be spoken. The very oldest surviving memory treatise—the Greek Dialexis—makes precisely this distinction between memory-for-things and memory-for-words.

...what you hear, place on what you know. For example χρυσιππος (Chrysippus) is to be remembered; we place it on χρυσος (gold) and ιππος (horse). Another example: we place πυριλαμπης (pyrilampes) (glow-worm) on πυρ (fire) and λαμπειν (shine). So much for names. For things (do) thus: for courage (place it) on Mars and Achilles; for metal-working, on Vulcan; for cowardice, on Epeus.

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5 Plato Hippias Major 285e
6 In Sorabji 1972, p22
7 Pliny, Natural History, in Yates 1966, p41
8 See in particular Sorabji’s (1972) interpretation of a technique recommended by Aristotle (452a17–27). All three Roman texts recommend marking every fifth and tenth position for reference.
9 Our word topic derives from the Greek topoi meaning ‘places’. Aristotle uses this term in Topics, where he alludes to memory systems, and the value of committing to memory arguments that are frequently used: “For just as in a person with a trained memory, a memory of things themselves is immediately caused by the mere mention of their places [topoi], so these habits too will make a man readier in reasoning, because he has his premises classified before his mind’s eye...” (Topics 163b24–30)
10 Quoted in Yates 1966, p30
The memory-for-words system obviously demanded much greater effort because many more images were required to memorise a speech—one image for every word rather than just every subject. Even the demanding Cicero was prepared to admit that memory-for-things was adequate for most purposes.¹¹

A MODERN CASE STUDY

By the eighteenth century, the classical arts of memory were forgotten to all but a few scholars. But people have spontaneously ‘rediscovered’ the techniques since then, and their experiences provide some insight into how the ancient arts might have worked in practice. The most important case study is by the Soviet psychologist, Luria, of the Russian mnemonist Shereshevski.¹² Luria first met Shereshevski in the late 1920s and they remained in contact for some thirty years. Shereshevski had originally been sent to him because of his extraordinary memory. Luria began his examination with the then standard tests of memory—mostly of recall and capacity. After the initial interviews, Luria and his colleagues quickly gave up trying to measure Shereshevski’s capacity:

...it appeared that there was no limit to either the capacity of Shereshevski’s memory or to the durability of the traces he retained. Experiments indicated that he had no difficulty reproducing any lengthy series of words whatever, even though these had originally been presented to him a week, a month, a year or many years earlier. In fact, some of these experiments designed to test his retention were performed (without his being given any warning) fifteen or sixteen years after the session in which he had originally recalled the words. Yet inevitably they were successful.¹³

Throughout his life, Shereshevski’s basic technique remained the same. “The only mechanisms he employed were one of the following: either he continued to see series of words or numbers which had been presented to him or he converted these elements into visual images.”¹⁴ When Shereshevski first met Luria, his extraordinary memory was innate and untrained. But in the 1930s, he became a professional mnemonist and developed techniques strikingly similar to the ancient architectural methods—apparently without any knowledge of them.

When Shereshevski read through a long series of words, each word would elicit a graphic image. And since the list was fairly long, he had to find some way of

¹¹ Yates 1966, p9
¹² Luria 1969
¹³ Luria 1969, pp18–19
¹⁴ Luria 1969, p20
distributing these images of his in a mental row or sequence. Most often (and this habit persisted throughout his life) he would ‘distribute’ them along some roadway he visualised in his mind. Sometimes it was a street in his home town ... On the other hand, he might also select a street in Moscow. Frequently he would take a mental walk along that street—Gorky Street in Moscow—beginning at Mayakovsky Square and slowly make his way down, ‘distributing’ his images at houses, gates and store windows.\footnote{Luria 1969, pp30–31}

Luria also outlines some of the conditions that Shereshevski required of his images and the conditions under which he had to memorise—many of the them in perfect accordance with the rules for image-making and memorising speed recommended by the Roman authors.

If [Shereshevskij] had placed a particular image in a spot where it would be difficult for him to ‘discern’—if he for example, had placed it in an area that it was poorly lit or in a spot where he would have trouble distinguishing the object from the background against which it had been set—he would omit this image when he ‘read off’ the series he had distributed along his mental route. He would simply walk on ‘without noticing’ the particular item, as he explained.\footnote{Luria 1969, p32}

Shereshevski was able to perform many of the same feats as the ancient orators, for instance repeating a list of items in both forward and reverse order with equal ease.\footnote{Luria 1969, p31}

We need to be careful about drawing too many parallels. Despite the similarities between Shereshevski and the ancient practitioners, there are also important differences. For one thing, even Shereshevski’s untrained memory dwarfed the greatest of the ancients. He was also strongly synaesthetic—“for [Shereshevski] there was no distinct line as there is for most of us, separating vision from hearing or hearing from a sense of taste or touch.”\footnote{Luria 1969, p27} In one of Luria’s experiments, “he saw [a sound] as a dense orange colour which made him feel as though a needle had been thrust into his spine.”\footnote{Luria 1969, p25} Hearing a word, even an unintelligible one, would immediately summon up an intense visual image. He could recall Italian, a language he did not speak, by recalling the splotches, lines and splashes that the words summoned up for him, even though he did not know their meaning. But while his intense visual images helped him to recall words, images and sounds easily, they prevented him from generalising—he could not remember the subjects of discussions he memorised, even though he could easily recall all of the words. In ancient terms, he had ‘memory-for-words’
but no ‘memory-for-things’. Shereshevski’s synaesthesia crippled him in several other ways: he was easily confused when reading because his images would lead him to conclusions that did not match what the text said. He also proved quite inept at logical organisation. Finally, he had trouble doing what most people do all too easily—he could not forget, and it took him years to develop a method to rid himself of images he memorised.

Ancient Beliefs about Memory

Ancient explanations of how the *ars memoritiva* worked were closely bound up with Greek speculation on human memory. (The Romans took over the Greek explanations wholesale and made no significant innovations.) While the Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries BC produced a number of distinct theories of memory, as the mnemotechniques gained wider use, theories of memory that explained—and were explained by—the techniques used by the orators became the most common. Two basic metaphors dominated descriptions of memory throughout Antiquity and were revived in the High Middle Ages.

Memory as a wax tablet

The first model treats memory as a wax tablet, with individual memories likened to impressions pressed into the wax. Plato suggests this in *Theatetus*.

Let me ask you to suppose ... that there’s an imprint-receiving piece of wax in our minds ... and if there’s anything we want to remember, among the things we see, hear, or ourselves conceive, we hold it under the perceptions and conceptions and imprint them on it, as if we were taking the impression of signet rings. Whatever is imprinted, we remember and know, as long as its image is present; but whatever is smudged out or proves unable to be imprinted we’ve forgotten or don’t know.

Slightly later in the same dialogue he extends the metaphor to explain how the qualities of a person’s ‘mental wax’ may affect their ability to remember.

When the wax in someone’s mind is thick, copious, smooth, and worked to a proper consistency, then, when the things which come through the senses are imprinted on

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20 Carruthers 1990 presents a most detailed survey of the relationship between memory and mnemonics.

21 Plato’s use is not novel, as he later appears to acknowledge.

22 Plato *Theatetus* 191c–191e
the tablet of the heart... the imprints which come into being in those people and under those conditions are clean, and adequately deep, and they last a long time.

... But what about when someone's heart is shaggy ... or when it's dirty and made of wax that isn't pure, or excessively fluid or hard? Well, those in whom it's fluid prove good learners, but forgetful, and those in whom it's hard, the opposite. Those who have one that's shaggy and rough, a stony thing, ... have their imprints unclear. And they're unclear in those who have hard one's, too; because there's no depth in [the imprints]. They're unclear in those who have fluid ones, too; because, as a result of running together, they soon become blurred. And if ... the imprints have fallen on top of one another because of a lack of space—if someone has a tiny mind—then they're still more unclear than in those others.24

The primary source on memory during the Middle Ages was not Plato but Aristotle, chiefly his treatise On memory and reminiscence. In it, Aristotle follows Plato in using the metaphor of a wax model, but where Plato speculates and offers alternatives, Aristotle is explicit, and explains people's differing abilities in terms of scientific principles. Like Plato, he says that memory is like a picture or an impression made in wax.

Some men in the presence of considerable stimulus have no memory owing to disease or age, just as if a stimulus or a seal were impressed on flowing water. With them the design makes no impression because they are worn down like old walls in buildings, or because of the hardness of that which is to receive the impression. For this reason the very young and the very old have poor memories; they are in a state of flux, the young because of their growth, the old because of their decay. For a similar reason neither the very quick nor the very slow appear to have good memories; the former are moister than they should be, and the latter harder; with the former the picture has no permanence, with the latter it makes no impression.25

Aristotle's description of memory is thoroughly integrated into his treatment of the psukhē set out in On the soul26. He says that, while memory belongs incidentally to the faculty of

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23 Plato locates memory in the heart, reflecting a common belief amongst the Greeks that the heart was the seat of the perceptions and the organ of memory. As I noted in Chapter 4, this location is almost certainly through the heart's proximity to the phrenes or praecordia, the seat of consciousness and wisdom amongst earlier Greeks and Romans. We still talk about learning material 'by heart' not 'by brain'. The etymological root of our word record is cor: Latin for 'heart'.

24 Plato Theatetus 194d–195b

25 Aristotle On memory and reminiscence 450b1–10

26 Aristotle On memory and reminiscence 450a–450b, 453a14
intelligence, it belongs essentially to the faculty of sense perception. And, as the senses take on the form of what they sense—just as a wax tablet takes on the form of a signet ring pressed into it—so too does the memory take on the form of things perceived by the senses or conceived by the mind. Images stored in the memory are therefore accessible to the mind for analysis, just as are images from the imagination and the senses. Aristotle’s use of the wax tablet metaphor is entirely consistent with his use of the same metaphor for the mind and the operation of the senses that I discussed in Chapter 4.

Aristotle’s treatise also mentions mnemonics to illustrate some points, but it is not a treatise on the artificial memory of the orators. Both Plato and Aristotle, and the Romans that followed them, all based the metaphor of the wax tablet upon the example of writing. The most common writing surface used in both Greece and Rome was a tablet of wood coated with a layer of wax. To write, the surface was smoothed over and marked with a stylus. These wax tablets could be used many times over, simply by smoothing the wax, thus erasing the previous text. Such wax tablets were the most common writing surface in Europe until well after Thomas Aquinas’s death, only being replaced with the introduction of large-scale paper production in the fifteenth century.

Many ancient writers made little distinction between memory as writing on a wax tablet and memory as writing on the mind. Cicero says that:

> Memory ... is in a manner the twin sister of written script, and very similar to it [although] in a dissimilar medium. For just as script consists of marks indicating letters and of the material on which these marks are imprinted, so the structure of memory, like a wax tablet, employs topics [places], and in these stores images which correspond to the letters written in script.

Cicero explains the relationship between this ‘wax-tablet’ memory and the architectural mnemonic technique, saying “We shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters written upon it.” The building image was likened to the wax tablet, upon which specific ‘texts’ were to be recalled. Like a wax tablet, this background building could be used over and over.

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27 Diogenes Laertes says Aristotle wrote a text on mnemonics, but if he did it has not survived.
29 Cicero Partitiones oratoriae, 26
30 Cicero De Oratore 2:86:354
Memory as a birdcage or a treasure chest

The second major metaphor used in Antiquity to describe memory takes a number of forms, although all treat the memory as a space and memories as items which may be placed within it for safekeeping and drawn out for inspection. In *Theatetus*, Plato likens memory to an aviary, into which birds, ‘captured by the senses’ are shut up and later brought out for admiration.

...just as previously, we constructed a sort of moulded lump of wax in our minds, let’s now make, in every mind, a sort of aviary for birds of every kind:... We must say when we’re children this receptacle is empty, and in place of birds, we must think of pieces of knowledge. Whatever piece of knowledge someone comes to possess and shut up in his enclosure, we must say he has come to know or discovered the thing of which that’s knowledge; and that’s what knowing is.31

...we say that there are two types of catching: one before one has come to possess a thing, in order to get possession of it, and the other when one possesses it, in order to get hold of what one has possessed for some time and have it in one’s hands.32

The other important variation in Antiquity was a metaphor on a strongbox or treasury, *thesaurus*, with memories being likened to coins or valuable items kept inside it. The author of *Ad Herennium* introduces his discussion on the artificial memory saying “Now let us turn to the treasure-house of inventions, the custodian of all parts of rhetoric, memory”33, a phrase that would be much repeated through the Middle Ages. Like coins in a money belt, or treasures in a strongbox, memories could be sorted and organised, so that they were easier to locate when required.

Of the two metaphors, this second variation would dominate medieval thinking, although the metaphor on birds in an aviary was used occasionally34.

Parallels with ancient theories of mind

The ancient models of memory make several assumptions about the mind which would be important in later beliefs about words. The metaphors of an aviary or a treasure chest

31 Plato *Theatetus*, 197d–197e
32 Plato *Theatetus*, 198d. In using this metaphor, Plato may be inspired here by the ribs as a cage. The idea of birds may hark back to the traditional epithet of speech, ‘winged words’, especially as memory was still linked to oral recitation. Plato locates memory in its traditional Homeric position, the chest (for instance *Iliad* 17:260).
33 [Cicero] *Ad Herennium* 3:16
34 See Carruthers 1990
involve people experiencing the mind as an interior space. Our most detailed description of memory from ancient times, Augustine’s *Confessions*, confirms this. He speaks of “the fields and roomy chambers of memory”, “the vast chamber of my memory”, “inner chamber large and boundless”, and “the numberless fields, and caves, and caverns of my memory.”

The philosophers and, later, the Church emphasised the difference between external and internal worlds. The external was experienced through the senses; the interior through contemplation and reflection. The external world was material, the interior was spiritual or intellectual (the two were often not sharply distinguished in Antiquity). Although a fundamental distinction in classical thought, there are potential problems because some objects exist in both realms. Amongst the most important examples are words: the Greeks used the word *logos* to refer to both words and thought; the Latin terms *ratio* (thought) and *oratio* (oratory, declamation) are clearly related. Most ancient philosophers treated internal thought and external speech as virtually identical. Plato says that “thought and speech are the same, with this exception, that what is called thought is the unuttered conversation of the soul with itself... [and] the stream which flows through the lips and is audible is called speech.”

To resolve the problem of how words can exist in both realms, the Hellenistic grammarians tacitly divided words into two parts. One half was air, a word’s material part which issued from the body. The other half was sense, word’s intellectual part, ‘stamped’ on the breath by the mind.

Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolise, are the same for all, as also are those things of which experiences and the images.

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35 Just how people began to experience an internal space—in which they thought and remembered—is an unsolved problem (although see Jaynes 1976). As I noted in Chapter 3, in the *Iliad*, there is no concept of an interior ‘mental’ space, and thinking involves discussing it with the *phrenes*. Plato describes thinking as “the conversation the soul holds with herself... in silence, not aloud or to another” (*Theatetus* 190e). So the experience of conversation remains the core of thinking, but people have learnt to hold the conversation silently ‘inside’. There is a parallel in the history of reading. In Antiquity, people almost invariably read aloud; it would take two thousand years after writing became common in Greece for people to learn to read silently, sounding the words ‘inside’.

36 Augustine *Confessions* 10:8:12, 10:8:14, 10:8:15 and 10:17:26

37 Plato *Sophist* 263e

38 Ref Donatus & Priscan

39 Aristotle *On Interpretation* 16a6f
I have heard the sound of the words by which these things are signified when they are discussed; but the sounds are one thing, the things another. For the sounds are one thing in Greek, another in Latin; but the things themselves are neither Greek, nor Latin, nor any other language.

**DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

We have little information on the development of the wax-tablet and strongbox models of memory between the end of Antiquity in the fifth century AD and the High Middle Ages in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although there are obvious similarities between the surviving descriptions from each period. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, Augustine devotes a great deal of his *Confessions* to memory, using the metaphor of an inner strongroom or *thesaurus*.

... [memory] ... which is like a great field or spacious palace, a storehouse *[thesaurus]* for countless memories *[imaginum]* of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses. In it are stored away all kinds of thoughts by which we enlarge upon or diminish or modify in any way the perceptions at which we arrive through the senses, and it also contains anything else that has been entrusted to it for safe keeping, until such things are as these are swallowed up and buried in forgetfulness. When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out of some inner hiding place; some others come spilling out from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different ... Some memories present themselves easily and in the correct order just as I require them. They come and give place in their turn to others that follow upon them, and as their place is taken they return to their place of storage, ready to emerge again when I want them. This is what happens when I recite something by heart.

Seven centuries later, at the beginning of the High Middle Ages, we find Hugh of St. Victor using the same metaphor of a storeroom in a text to introduce young students to the memory techniques. He uses terms strikingly similar to those of the *Ad Herennium*.

Children, knowledge is a treasury *[thesaurus]* and your heart is its strongbox *[archa]*. As you study all of knowledge, store up for yourselves good treasures, immortal treasures, incorruptible treasures, which never decay or lose their look of brightness.

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40 Augustine *Confessions* 10:12:19

41 Augustine *Confessions* 10:8. See also 10:9–22 for other examples of the same metaphor. Although Augustine does not discuss the classical system of images-in-places, in this passage he still plainly expects memories (which he refers to as *imaginum*) to be set in a order.
In the treasure house of wisdom are various sorts of wealth, and many filing places in
the storehouse of your heart. ... Their orderly arrangement is clarity of knowledge.
Dispose and separate each single thing into its own place ... as you learn this or where
that should be gathered. Confusion is the mother of ignorance and forgetfulness, but
orderly arrangement illuminates the intelligence and firms up memory.42

[To find a memory] You see how a money changer who has unsorted coins, divides his
one pouch into several compartments, just as a cloister embraces many separate cells.
... Additionally, you observe in his display of money changing, how his ready hand
without delay follows wherever the commanding nod of a customer has caused it to
extend, and quickly, without delay, it brings out each thing which he either may have
wanted to receive or promised to give out... 43

In the seven centuries between Augustine and Hugh though, we have little evidence that
the classical memory techniques were still in use, although there are a few tantalising hints.
For instance, the Canon Tables of medieval Bibles were almost invariably illuminated as a
colonnade, with the verse numbers listed in the spaces between: possibly a corrupt version of
the architectural technique (Quintilian and the author of the Ad Herennium both instruct
students to place their images in the spaces between the columns of their memorised
building). As a mnemonic, the colonnades are of no use to remember the Canons—there
are numerous verses listed in each space, not one per space as the classical
mnemotechnique requires. Furthermore, the use of colonnades does not prove that the
architectural mnemonic was in use continuously from the sixth to eleventh century—the
decoration may well have become simply the conventional way of illuminating Canon
Tables. But the use of colonnades almost certainly has its roots in the architectural
model44. A second feature of the Tables is more important. The Canon Tables list biblical
verses by number, but the verses themselves were not numbered during the Middle Ages
nor were they until the Geneva Bible of 1561. As an index system, the lists were
useless—unless the reader had already assigned numbers to the verses in memory. And
there is some evidence that by the fifth century AD a grid, with numbered cells, had
replaced architecture as the background against which images were placed45. Each verse of
the Bible then would have been assigned to a numbered cell in the grid; the order of the

42 In Carruthers 1990, p261
43 In Carruthers 1990, p261. Medieval English also used the expression of a money belt to
explain the storing and ordering of memories. The word male—a leather sack with
compartments often used by money changers—was used by Chaucer as a metaphor for
memory in the Canterbury Tales: “But sires, oo would forgat I in my tale: I have relike and
pardon in my male.” (631–632)
44 See Carruthers 1990, pp???, for further discussion.
45 Carruthers 1990
numbers serving the same function as the layout of the building, keeping the verses in their proper order. This grid system would certainly allow for a much larger number of images to be recalled than a building. Unlike a specific building which had only a finite number of spaces to it, a numbered sequence could potentially be used to memorise an infinite series of images.

Evidence of developments in memory techniques before the twelfth century is scant, but by the thirteenth century there are clear indications that the classical techniques were back in use. Initially they derived primarily from Ad Herennium, although they were later influenced by Aristotle once his texts were translated into Latin.\footnote{Yates 1966, pp63–92}

There are several differences between classical and medieval uses. The most important is that the medieval use appears to have been predominantly scholarly. (If there was a significant non-scholarly use, it had little effect on modern ideas about communication.\footnote{The only non-scholarly parallels with classical memory models from the early Middle Ages that I am aware of are a few lines from Beowulf, where the bard uses the expression \textit{wordhord onleac} (259), literally “unlocked [his] word-hoard”, where he means ‘begin to say’; and \textit{wordes ord breosthord thurhbrae}, meaning “words from his breast-hoard broke” (2792, cf 1719). These odd expressions make sense if they refer to memory as a strongbox (hoard, unlock) located in the chest, as consciousness and thought is for most ancient Europeans. Both expressions are strikingly similar to a line from Homer “but what man could tell forth from his \textit{phrenes...}” (\textit{Iliad} 17:260), in which memory is speaking out of the chest.}

In the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, a training in memory was part of training in oratory. In the High Middle Ages, memory training was only available with an academic and religious training.

The influence of writing on beliefs about memory

During the High Middle Ages, books and memory were described in increasingly similar terms. Like the ancients, the Scholastics agreed that writing and memory were closely related and they continued to describe memory in terms of tabella, wax-covered writing tablets. But during the Middle Ages, there was a crucial development: not only was memory described in terms of writing, but books were increasingly described in terms of memory. For instance, the term \textit{thesaurus}, ‘strongbox’ or ‘treasure chest’, which was used to describe memory also came to be applied to books. Indeed, today, \textit{thesaurus} has lost all connection with both its original meaning, as well as its metaphorical connection with memory, and refers exclusively to a type of book. In medieval Latin, the term \textit{scrina} meant ‘bookcase’ or ‘letter case’, and was used metaphorically to describe the memory with its
niches for storing images. But by the ninth century, Alcuin and Isidore had reversed the direction of the metaphor, using scina-memory as a metaphor for books. The term arca, ‘chest’, was originally used like thesaurus, but later came to mean the places where written materials, rather than memories, were kept. Arca is the root of our word ‘archive’, which still reflects its ambivalent medieval reference to both what is being stored and where it is stored.

As books and memory were increasingly understood in similar terms, not surprisingly, the attributes of human memory came to be applied to books. This in turn influenced beliefs about communication. For instance, where the philosophers said that the soul was an inner space (chest, cloister or cell) within which imaginates could be placed, so in time books and writing came to ‘contain’ ideas ‘within’ them.

The prevailing empiricism of the Middle Ages may have prompted a second way of seeing books as ‘containers’ of knowledge. The objects of medieval study were texts—the Bible and the Church doctors, and to a lesser extent, Classical philosophers. If a person acquired knowledge as a result of reading a book, then the source of knowledge must have been the book, if we assume a naive empiricism which sees all knowledge ‘entering’ by the senses. Consequently books could be seen as repositories or storage boxes of wisdom.

[the conduit expression] “You’ll find better ideas in the library” is derived from the conduit metaphor by a chain of metonymies. This is, we think of the ideas as existing in the words, which are clearly there on the pages. So the ideas are ‘there on the pages’ by metonymy. Now the pages are in the books—and again, by metonymy, so are the ideas. But the books are in libraries, with the final result that the ideas, too, are ‘in the libraries’. The effect [of the conduit metaphor] ... is to suggest that the libraries, with the books, and tapes, and films, and photographs, are the real repositories of our culture.  

There is another set of metaphors on memory that would also have suggested books as containers. A much-repeated metaphor for the scholar studying in his library was of a bee at work in the ‘fields’ (books, libraries) ‘collecting’ (reading) ‘honey’ (knowledge, wisdom) and ‘storing’ it away in ‘hives’ and ‘cells’ (memory, books or libraries). Scholars repeatedly describe knowledge and study as ‘sweet’. Their collections of copied texts are referred to as florilegia, collections of flowers—just the sort of thing that bees might collect honey from. Even in the late Middle Ages, Bacon uses the metaphor of bees in the first

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48 Reddy 1979
49 Carruthers 1990. The metaphor may be derived indirectly from Plato’s metaphor of the aviary in Theatetus: birds and bees were closely related in medieval zoology. Theatetus was one of the few Platonic dialogues available in the medieval West.
50 Our word anthology comes from the Greek, meaning ‘collecting flowers’.
chapter of the *Novum Organum*. This metaphor of bees ‘gathering knowledge’ also dovetails very neatly with the Latin term for reading, *lege*, which means literally ‘collect’ or ‘gather’.

The Scholastics also used the term *cella*—‘storeroom’ or ‘cellar’, from which we derive our word ‘cells’ in a beehive or a bird coup—to describe the mind with its memory niches. Earlier I quoted Hugh of St Victor comparing memory to a money pouch: “a money changer who has unsorted coins, divides his one pouch into several compartments, just as a cloister embraces many separate cells”. In this one sentence, he draws together the metaphors of treasure chest, *cella*, and architecture for memory.

**Medieval theories of perception**

The Middle Ages produced more than variations on the ancient metaphors. The Scholastics’ aim of integrating all human knowledge into a single Aristotelian framework would see memory, perception and communication woven together. The principle Scholastic source for memory was Aristotle’s *On memory and reminiscence*, an appendix to the important treatise *On the Soul*. Memory is worked out within Aristotle’s system of perception, which is in turn one function of the soul.

For the Scholastics, the soul had three distinct levels. At the bottom were the five Aristotelian senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell). The second level was the ‘sensitive’ part of the soul, which contained the imagination, memory, and common sense. The highest level was the ‘rational’ part of the soul, made up of reason and intelligence, capable of deductive and inductive thought.

When sensing, a person viewed the world through their physical senses. The senses created images (*imaginæ, phantasmata*) of the objects they perceive (Aristotle used the term *eidos*, which meant a ‘copy’ or ‘impression’). The imagination, located in the sensitive part of the soul, worked on these images, joining them, contrasting them, to create larger images—assembling ‘red’ and ‘round’ and ‘juicy’ to create the ‘idea’ of an apple. Like Aristotle, the Scholastics agreed that, while the senses could not be in error, the imagination

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51 In the Latin translations available to the West, Aristotle’s *eidos* had been rendered as either *imaginæ* or *phantasmata*. *Eidos*, like the equivalent idea, originally meant ‘image’, but Plato and Aristotle used them with an abstraction that the Scholastics did not give to *imaginæ* and *phantasmata*. The Scholastics followed Aristotle in asserting that human beings cannot understand without images. The belief that thinking depended upon images—that ideas corresponded in some way to images—persisted in philosophy until the twentieth century. Wittgenstein for instance still felt obliged to argue against the belief in the *Philosophical Investigations* (part 2:9, p.196)
and higher reaches of the soul could be. A person could mistakenly believe that they observed an apple—but they could not be mistaken in seeing an object that was red and round before them. The images created in the sensitive part of the soul could be further acted upon by the rational intellect to create genuine knowledge or understanding, or else it may be stored in the memory.

When a person perceived an object, the senses created an idea or image of it. The Scholastics presumed that there was a one-to-one correspondence between the image and the object—unless the ‘wax’ in which the image was formed is deficient in some way or the soul is too small to contain many images\textsuperscript{52}. Thus same images could be found in the minds of different people perceiving the same object.

The fact that every person had the same experience, and these were the basis for all knowledge, provided a certain basis for understanding between people. It also made possible genuine communication (understood as a matching of the ideas in different minds). The Scholastics agreed with Aristotle that “spoken words are images of mental experience”\textsuperscript{53}. So a word signified the same object within the minds of different people. The word ‘red’ meant the same thing to all people because everyone has the same impression of red derived from sensory experience. Since the ideas within different people’s minds—or at least the uncompounded sense experiences from which ideas were formed—were common to all, then people could be sure when they spoke to one another that they referred to the same objects. If there were problems in communication, it was because people had incorrectly combined ideas within the sensitive or rational part of the soul.

**POPULAR MODERN MODELS OF MEMORY**

Although the ancient mnemotechniques were forgotten with the spread of paper and printing from the sixteenth century, the medieval descriptions of memory that corroborated them still provide the main everyday ways of describing memory—although the specifics of the metaphors have changed. For instance, although we no longer describe memory in terms of wax tablets and signet rings, we do talk of ‘photographic memory’, retaining the idea of memories as visual images. And we still talk about our ‘impressions’, that is, those experiences that are ‘imprinted’ on our minds. In an echo of Greek and Scholastic

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\textsuperscript{52} The Scholastic description of perception is confused at this point, partly because they tried to reconcile Aristotle’s four causes with the wax-metaphor of perception. And Aristotle himself is not clear on exactly what happens when the senses perceive. It is not clear for instance whether, when the eye looks upon an object, the structure of the eye changes only \textit{formally}, or \textit{materially} as well, and in either case how this change comes about.

\textsuperscript{53} Aristotle \textit{On Interpretation} 16a4
philosophy, we say that some minds are ‘impressionable’ (particularly those belong to people with ‘soft hearts’ or ‘soft heads’); some things ‘leave no impression’ and do not ‘impress us’ (particularly if we have ‘hard heads’ or ‘hard hearts’). Strong memories are ‘engraved on our hearts forever’. We even still talk of learning things ‘by heart’—the organ of memory for both ancients and Scholastics.

Like the Conduit Metaphor, most people are not aware of the metaphors they use to explain memory. They are simply drawing on their usual stock of linguistic resources. But descendants of the medieval models have been the basis for models of memory in psychology until recently.

I have a little self-help book written in 1985 called *Fending off forgetfulness*, a practical guide to improving memory, intended for a general audience. The topics covered are typical of many other self-help memory books, although it is more detailed than most such books published over the last twenty years—it draws on psychological research and includes references to Cicero, Yates, and Luria. It is more useful to us here than most books because it was written after its author had given several courses and knew what made sense to people and what did not. It balances everyday beliefs about memory with psychological research and terminology. Here is how it summarises the functions of the human memory.

For you and me it’s probably most useful to think of memory as a series of information processing systems, so closely interconnected that it may be misleading to try to separate them at all. The terms ‘sensory memory’, ‘short-term memory’ and ‘long-term memory’ are really just metaphors for rather arbitrary divisions representing different functions. Their chief advantage is that they make it easier to grasp what would otherwise be quite bewildering complexities, but it is certainly more realistic to think of memory in terms of what it does rather than what it ‘contains’. And what it does can be summarised as consisting of input, storage and output, which are equally important parts of the remembering process.

Input, storage and output themselves can be described as involving three steps, partly conscious, partly subconscious.

The first step is noticing—paying attention. Our chances of remembering something are remote if we don’t pay attention to it in the first place.

The second step is consolidating for storage, and this is more complicated. If storage is to become more than temporary, it involves organising the material in several ways: classifying its components and arranging them in some sort of order; placing the material in its proper context; associating it with what’s already known; visualising it as a mental picture; repeating it verbally and/or by re-visualising; self-testing; allowing time for consolidation, which often takes up to six hours. Technically all this is known as encoding, and ordinarily we are conscious of it just as ‘thinking over’ the information to be stored.
The third step is searching for and finding the information that we want. Technically it’s known as retrieval, leading to the output of memory—recognition and recall. To recognise something we have to match a memory with a given object; to recall it we have to patch together memories consistent with a given clue.54

Memory here is being described using metaphors based on computers: an almost ubiquitous in psychology. Here is another description of memory from a university psychology textbook written in 1981:

The basic processes that affect memory performance are acquisition, retention and retrieval. Failures of recall often result from failures in initial acquisition due to inattention or misunderstanding of the original experience. Retention refers to our ability to store information for a period of time after it has been coded. Forgetting, as the term is ordinarily used, refers to the loss of stored information due primarily to the acquisition of new, competing material. Retrieval can be described as a search process amenable to any one of a number of recall strategies. Recall is usually best when the cues used in retrieval most closely match those used in initial encoding.55

In both these examples, human memory is being described using the language of computing—‘information processing systems’, ‘input/output’, ‘acquisition’, ‘retention’, ‘retrieval’, ‘storage’. These examples—and particularly the use of the terms ‘information processing systems’ and ‘coding’—illustrate the enormous influence that Claude Shannon and Norbert Weiner had amongst electrical and computer engineers of the 1950s and 1960s. Shannon provided them with not only a mathematical, mechanical model of signal transmission (described as ‘communication’) but also a language to talk about it, drawn chiefly from the Conduit Metaphor. The terms used to describe computer memory very quickly became almost identical to the terms used to describe transmitted signals—from an electrical point of view, the two processes are almost identical. With the dramatic growth in personal computers from the late 1970s, psychologists quickly adopted the language and conceptual framework of the engineers—which derived from Shannon, Neisser and ultimately the misapplication of the Conduit Metaphor. Just as engineers understood ‘communication’ as the ‘encoding’ and ‘transmission’ of ‘information’, so psychologists and computer users came to describe memory as ‘encoding’ the ‘incoming information’ then ‘storing’ it.56

54 Job 1985, pp4–5
55 Wingfield and Byrnes, 1981
56 To be fair—if only for a moment—to the psychologists, the computer model of memory has seen a slow decline under the combined impact of cognitive psychology launched by Neisser in the 1960s and advances in neuroscience since the 1980s. But it would be a gross overstatement to say that the model has been banished. Just as most writers of communication texts routinely reject the transmission model but seem incapable of... continued on next page
But if we look beyond the surface metaphor of computing, the way each author explains how memory works is basically a variation on the *thesaurus* metaphor. Like the ancient metaphor of a treasure chest, memories are placed ‘in’ the strongbox of memory and ‘stored’ there until they are ‘retrieved’ or ‘taken out’ for inspection. Memory is still metaphorically a space that things are contained ‘in’, however much each talks in terms of processes—we still talk about a person’s ‘capacity’ for instance. My little self-help book also mentions processes for ordering and categorising memories which are almost identical to those discussed by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian.\(^57\)

**CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNICATION**

Memory is crucial to communication. Not surprisingly, the way people think about memory has implications for how they think about communication.

The assumptions of the ancient and medieval memory metaphors—particularly in the *thesaurus* model—complement the contemporary beliefs of communication-as-transmission that I discussed in Chapters 3–5. Communication-as-transmission sees words or knowledge transferred from one person to another. The *thesaurus* model sees knowledge enter the memory via the senses where it is sorted and ordered. Both beliefs are consistent with the empiricism of medieval philosophy. The quotes I gave from Augustine, Hugh of St Victor and the modern textbooks suggests that people saw them almost as different parts of one continuous process.

The empiricism of the Scholastics provided the philosophical basis of later transmission models. Philosophers from Plato to the late Scholastics agreed that, when perceiving or memorising, the senses created images that were either ‘placed in’ the memory or acted on by the intellectual parts of the soul. The Scholastic scheme of perception occurs, almost identically, in Weaver’s version of the transmission model, seven hundred years later.

abandoning either its language or the ways of acting it implies, so too many psychologists seem incapable of rejecting the language or model of computers. To judge by a random selection of student texts in my local university bookshop, the metaphor is still widely used.

\(^57\) Classifying and arranging memories is of course one pillar of the memory arts. Associating new memories with what is already known: see Aristotle (On memory and reminiscence 452a13–17) and Quintilian (*Institutio* 3:3:17). Visualising what is to be remembered as a mental picture is again the whole basis of the ancient arts of memory as well as, indirectly, the etymology of our word *idea*. Repeating or revisualising images was recommended by the author of the *Ad Herennium* (3:221). The need to allow time for consolidation was known to the oral bards: see Lord 1960. Job’s distinction between recognition and recall differs only slightly from Aristotle’s distinction between *memoria* and *reminiscentia*. 
sense perception  transmission model
an object a signal
is sensed by the senses is received
which create an image and is decoded as a message
which can be acted on which is understood
by the active intelligence by the receiver.

Many transmission models—including the Shannon & Weaver model—distinguish between a signal and a message, and between the machine that transmits or receives and a person that understands. This dichotomy comes from the ancient distinction made between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds—an implicit assumption of all the ancient models of memory. Objects in the outer world are experienced quite different to those in the inner. Words, which exist in both worlds, became divided into material ‘outer’ parts (sound) and intellectual ‘inner’ parts (sense)—a dichotomy that would evolve into the modern distinction between words (as sounds) and the meanings. It is also reflected in many modern transmission models which distinguish between signals (which are physical objects known to the senses) and messages (which have a meaning understood by the mind).

The transference of the characteristics of memory to books and writing helped make consistent beliefs about memory and communication. The cost of consistency though was to make writing, not speech, the paradigmatic form of communication—which paralleled the process in ancient interpretation and grammar that I discuss in Chapter 12. The ancient grammarians dissolved writing into smaller and smaller units—sentences, phrases and words. By making writing emblematic of communication, speech and thought also came to be treated as though made out of atomic units. In particular, the metaphor of the thesaurus or treasure chest—with its corollary that memories and ideas are coins—accelerated the atomisation of knowledge: like coins, knowledge could be sorted, ordered and stored up in the mind, as well as passed between people. Today, computer engineers still talk about ‘bits of information’ when referring to the smallest signals transmitted, and the expression has passed into modern communication theory.

Whether the ancient orator’s images and places techniques influenced beliefs about ideas as images we cannot know: we have no detailed memory texts from the time of Plato and Aristotle, when people first began to treat ideas as pictures. The word ‘idea’ comes from eidon meaning ‘image’ and the connection between the two was never forgotten by the medieval philosophers. As I discuss in Chapter 15, this belief became fundamental to empiricist theories of knowledge in the seventeenth century.

None of the theories and techniques I have discussed in this Appendix was created with the aim of explaining human communication. Yet, by the end of the fourteenth century, the Scholastics had incorporated into them almost of the elements necessary for the modern view of communication-as-transmission. All that needed to be done was name the elements, show how each applied to communication, and integrate them into a system.
APPENDIX FOUR

ANCIENT METAPHORS ON SPEECH FROM THE
HEBREWS, INDIA AND CHINA

This Appendix complements Chapter 3 by sketching out the basic architecture of beliefs concerning ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ for three non-European cultures—the Biblical Hebrews, the Sanskrit-speaking Indians and the ancient Chinese—at about the time when the Greek aoidoi were composing the Homeric epics.

THE BIBLICAL HEBREWS

Linguists who have analysed portions of the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible, agree that much of it was originally composed and preserved using the techniques of oral cultures. Only later were the verses and epics written down and edited: beginning in the ninth century BC with the Book of Amos and ending in the third century BC with Ecclesiastes. Over this six hundred years Hebrew thought develops greatly. Nonetheless, there are some obvious patterns that run throughout the entire corpus.

Like the Greeks, many of the terms in the Tanakh which are today translated as ‘mind’, ‘intelligence’, ‘spirit’, ‘will’ and ‘soul’ all have their origins in metaphors on breath and organs of the body. The two most important are nefesh and ruah.

Nefesh is usually translated as ‘life’ or ‘soul’, or occasionally ‘mind’. But its root is something like ‘breath’ or ‘exhalation’.

But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of nefesh [life].

His nefesh [breath] kindleth hot coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth.

Nefesh is located in the chest, and there are many passages that relate it with the heart and with blood:

1 Onians 1960, p481
2 Job 11:20
3 Job 41:21
Only be sure not to eat the blood [nefesh]: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.\(^5\)

‘Blood’, ‘breath’, ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’—these are all senses that the Greeks attributed to thumos. But nefesh and thumos are not identical: nefesh survives death, it cannot leave the body temporarily in the way that thumos can and, more importantly for our purposes, people do not consult their nefesh for counsel or advice.

There are however, parallels with the thumos and the ruah. In its root, literal sense, ruah denotes ‘air’, ‘wind’ or ‘breath’. Metaphorically, it can denote ‘spirit’, in the Jewish sense of “that which remains of man after his death, and is not subject to destruction.” In later Jewish theology, ruah seems to have been conflated with nefesh. (Much the same happened in Greece, where the ‘soul’ senses of thumos and psukhē became associated, and slowly the intellectual senses of thumos were transferred to psukhē in the head, leaving ‘emotion’ and ‘life’ located in the chest—and specifically with the heart. This is why, today, we locate mind, intelligence and consciousness in the head, not the chest as did most ancient European cultures.)

Also interesting, in relation to communication, are the senses of ruah linked with ‘intelligence’, ‘will’ and ‘prophecy’.

The meaning of ‘intention’, ‘will’ is likewise contained in the word ruah. [For instance] “A fool uttereth all his spirit” (ruah),\(^6\) ie his intention and will; “And the spirit (ruah) of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof, and I will destroy the counsel thereof”\(^7\) ie. “her intentions will be frustrated, and her plans obscured.”\(^8\)

These expressions suggest the ancient Hebrews understood ruah and breath as a kind of ‘speech–intelligence’ as the archaic Greeks did.

Who has comprehended the ruah of the Lord, or is familiar with his counsel that he may tell us?\(^9\)

There are other parallels between the Biblical ruah and Homeric thumos. In Homer, a god may put thumos into someone’s phrenes, and so make them utter prophecy, or the Muses may speak through poets by pouring thumos into them. The Hebrew God seems to do the

\(^{4}\) For instance, Joshua 22:5 and 23:14
\(^{5}\) Deuteronomy 12:23. See also Genesis 9:4, and Leviticus 17:11 and 17:14.
\(^{6}\) Proverbs 29:11
\(^{7}\) Isaiah 19:3
\(^{8}\) Maimonides Guide to the Perplexed, Chapter 40
\(^{9}\) Isaiah 40:13
same: ruah is used very frequently to mean “the divine inspiration of the prophets whereby they prophesy.” For instance, King David’s last words are:

The spirit [ruah] of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.

Similarly, when God sends prophecy to the Israelites who followed Moses into the wilderness, he places his ruah upon them:

And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto them, and took of the spirit [ruah] that was upon him [Moses], and gave it unto the seventy elders; and it came to pass, that when the spirit [ruah] was upon them, they prophesied …

The Bible Hebrews do not seem to have an organ comparable to the phrenes—lungs. But they did have organs associated with speaking and thinking: leb—heart for instance. But the way that the Hebrews write about how the leb creates speech are strikingly similar to the roles played by thumos and phrenes in Greece. To illustrate the point, below are three passages from the Psalms, with passages from Homer immediately after:

**Psalm:** I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my leb.

**Iliad:** I know this thing well in my phrenes and my thumos knows it.

**Psalm:** I have not hidden thy righteousness within my leb: I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

**Iliad:** I detest the man, who hides one thing in [his deep] phrenes, and speaks forth another.

**Psalm:** I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my leb.

**Iliad:** But the chest [stethos] of Hera could not contain her anger, and she spoke forth…

Other senses that leb has include ‘understanding’, or ‘will be wise’, as in the expression “Consider it in thy heart.” Such expressions only appear in later books of the Tanakh.

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10 Maimonides *Guide to the Perplexed*
11 2 Samuel, 23:2
12 Numbers 11:24–25
13 Psalms 40:9
14 Iliad 4:163
15 Psalms 40:10
16 Iliad 9:312–313
17 Psalms 38:8
18 Iliad 4:24 and 8:461
19 Deuteronomy 4:39 and similarly in Isaiah 44:19
early works, such as the Book of Amos, written about 800 BC, “there are no words for mind or think or feel or understand or anything similar whatever; Amos never ponders anything in his heart; he can’t; he would not know what it meant.”

This corresponds roughly to the state of the Homeric *aoidoi*, where no one ‘thinks in their *phrenes*’ and only on very rare occasions do they ask their *thumos* or *phrenes* for advice. Only in later books of the Tanakh however, such as Isaiah and Ecclesiastes, do people think in the ‘depths of their hearts’.

The Biblical Hebrews do not appear to have distinguished much between the internal organs, all of which can be covered by the term *beten*. There are formulas where the words *beten* and *leb* are interchanged.

In phrases like “my bowels are troubled for him”\(^{21}\); “the sounding of thy bowels”\(^{22}\), the term ‘bowels’ [*beten*] is used in the sense of heart [*leb*]; for the term ‘bowels’ is used both in a general and a specific meaning; it denotes specifically ‘bowels’, but more generally it can be used as the name of any inner organ, including ‘heart’. The correctness of this argument can be proved by the phrase “And the law is within my bowels”\(^{23}\), which is identical with "And the law is within my heart".\(^{24}\)

**Betten** is associated with both speaking and thinking.

> Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir–haresh.\(^{25}\)

> The way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reaches unto thine heart. My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at the very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because those hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.\(^{26}\)

**Ruah** is also associated with the *beten*. For instance, in an argument between Elihu and Job, Elihu says he must speak:

> For I am full of words. The spirit [*ruah*] of my belly [*beten*] constraineth me. Behold, my belly [*beten*] is as a wine which hath no vent. Like new wine-skins it is ready to burst. I will speak that I may be refreshed [lit ‘breathe’]. I will open my lips and answer.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{20}\) Jaynes 1976, p296

\(^{21}\) Jeremiah 31:20

\(^{22}\) Isaiah 43:15

\(^{23}\) Psalms 40:9

\(^{24}\) Maimonides *Guide to the Perplexed*, Chapter 46

\(^{25}\) Isaiah 16:11

\(^{26}\) Jeremiah 4:18–19

\(^{27}\) Job 32:18–20
The association between ruah—breath—speaking and beten suggests that the lungs might be included in beten’s senses of ‘internal organs’. It would also locate the Hebrew ‘mind’ in the chest and abdomen, and so explain a puzzling passage. The Prophet Ezekiel is confronted by an angel, who tells him to eat a book roll:

...he said unto me, “Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat the roll. And he said unto me, “Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill they bowels [beten] with this roll that I give thee.” Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, “Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.”

An extraordinary passage that makes more sense if we understand beten as ‘mind’. In this case the process of reading is ‘putting words into the belly [beten]’. And since speech comes from the beten, it makes sense that words to be repeated—in this case, God’s words for the Israelites—should be ‘placed in’ it in the first place.

To summarise then: in the oldest books of the Tanakh, we see the ‘mind’ being metaphored out of the internal organs, leb (heart) and beten (internal organs). Nefesh (breath) is also rendered as ‘mind’. Ruah (breath) is associated with speaking, and both are associated with the internal organs that are the site of wisdom and prophesy, leb and beten. Ruah can also be put into a person, and be translated as our ‘thought’. This establishes that all of the metaphors that formed the basis of the thumos–phrenes model were used by the Biblical Hebrews, although the precise organs were somewhat different from the Greeks’.

**INDIA**

About the same time as the Greeks transcribed the Homeric epics and the Hebrews began to commit the Tanakh to paper, the Indians began to record the greatest of their oral classics, the Vedas, Sutras and the Mahabharata. Like the Greeks, Romans and Hebrews, the mind of the Vedas is conceived in terms of bodily organs.

...when, in early Indian literature, an attempt is met with, to distinguish man from mind, we find it citing, as an aid, the bodily parts and functions, as a parallel. But it is done by way of a simile, drawn from the better-known: the seen, the tangible in popular knowledge, to illustrate the unknown, the unseen, the intangible.

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28 Ezekiel 3:1ff. There is a near identical episode in the New Testament, Revelation 10:9–11
29 Traditionally, the Rgveda is dated to around 1400 BC, although it was written down much later.
30 Davids 1936, p12
From about 400 BC, the Indian scribes began to write the first of the *Upanisads*. Although they began as commentaries on the *Vedas* and *Sutras*, they were also extensive metaphysical works in their own right. Later *Upanisads* were composed on many subjects up until the arrival of Islam around 900 AD. There are 108 in total, although in what follows I have drawn only on the oldest thirteen, ‘primary’ *Upanisads*.

Like the *Iliad* of the Greeks and the Tanakh of the Jews, the *Upanisads* are central to much later Indian thought. In these, the Vedic location of mental, psychical or emotional attributes within internal organs continues. According to the *Naradaparivrajokopanisad*: “wakefulness is located in the eye, the dream state in the throat, sleep in the heart, and ‘the fourth state in the head of men’”\textsuperscript{31}. The *Parabrahmopanisad* “locates the first three states of consciousness in the navel, heart and throat respectively”. Almost all of the early *Upanisads* speak of the ‘heart of the soul’ (*manas*)\textsuperscript{32}.

One of the most important terms in the *Upanisads* is *prana*. Literally, it means ‘breath’ or ‘wind’, but it has metaphorical aspects similar to *thumos*, *animus*, *ruah* and *nefesh*: “in *prana*, we have a word meaning at once breath-and-spirit (literally, breath) and life (or vitality)”\textsuperscript{33}.

Then he [Indra] said: “I am the breathing spirit (*prana*), the intelligent self (*prajnatman*). As such, reverence me as life (*ayus*), as immortality. Life is the breathing spirit, indeed it is immortality. For as long as the breathing spirit remains in this body, so long is there life. For indeed, with the breathing spirit in this world one obtains immortality, with intelligence, true conception.\textsuperscript{34}

In the *Upanisads, prana* is central to consciousness. According to various *Upanisads*, speech, sight, hearing, and mind are all *prana*.

Verily, they do not call them ‘speeches’ nor ‘eyes’ nor ‘minds’. They call them breaths, for the vital breath is all these.\textsuperscript{35}

The vital breaths verily go into a unity, for [otherwise] no one would be able at once to cause to know a name with speech, a form with the eye, a sound with the ear, a thought with the mind. As a unity, verily, the vital breaths, every single one, cause to

\textsuperscript{31} Atreya 1985, p126
\textsuperscript{32} Atreya, 1985, p126. It was only later that the Yogis and Tantrics came to the view that the cerebro-spinal system was the organ of the soul— with obvious parallels to the development of the Homeric *psukhê*.
\textsuperscript{33} Davids 1936, p82
\textsuperscript{34} Doctrine of *prana*, *Kaushitaki Upanisad* 3:2
\textsuperscript{35} *Chandogya Upanisad*, 5:1
know all things here. All the vital breaths speak along with speech when it speaks, all the vital breaths see along with the eye when it sees.\(^{36}\)

Prajapati created the active functions (\textit{karma}). They, when they had been created, strove with one another. “I am going to speak,” the voice began. “I am going to see,” said the eye. “I am going to hear,” said the ear. So spake the other functions, each according to his functions. Death, appearing as weariness, laid hold and took possession of them; and, taking possession of them, Death checked them. Therefore the voice become weary, the eye becomes weary, the ear becomes weary. But Death did not take possession of him who was the middle breath. They [the other active functions] sought to know him. They said, “Verily, he is the best of us, since whether moving or not moving, he is not perturbed, nor perishes. Come, let us all become a form of him.” Of him, indeed, they all became a form. Therefore they are named ‘vital breaths’ after him.\(^{37}\)

Yoga, which developed around the fifth century BC, emphasises the control of \textit{prana} (\textit{pranayama}) which is the fourth of eight stages to \textit{samadhi} (‘perfect concentration’). Yoga, in both its intellectual and practical aspects, became an important school in Hindu philosophy, influencing many other schools of Indian thought, including Buddhism.

A word commonly used for ‘breath’ in the early \textit{Rgveda} is \textit{atman}, a term that the early \textit{Upanisads} also use. But in them, \textit{atman} is transformed to mean ‘the innermost of the man’, ‘the soul’, ‘the self’.

In the \textit{Upanisads}, speech is closely bound up with the soul and the mind. One author says that “verily, the self (\textit{atman}) consists of speech, mind, and breath”\(^{38}\) and then goes on to say that the three are distinct but integrated, and encompass all of Being:

These same [speech, mind, and breath] are the three worlds. This [terrestrial] world is Speech. The middle [atmospheric] world is Mind. That [celestial] world is Breath.

These same are the three Vedas. The Rig-Veda is Speech. The Yajur-Veda is Mind. The Sama-Veda is Breath.

The same are the gods, Manes, and men. The gods are Speech. The Manes are Mind. Men are Breath.

The same are father, mother, and offspring. The father is Mind. The mother is Speech. The offspring is Breath.\(^{39}\)

\(^{36}\) Kaushitaki \textit{Upanisad} 3:2. See also Kaushitaki \textit{Upanisad} 3:4 for a continuation.

\(^{37}\) Brihad-Aranyaka \textit{Upanisad}, 1:5:21

\(^{38}\) Brihad-Aranyaka \textit{Upanisad}, 1:5:3

\(^{39}\) Brihad-Aranyaka \textit{Upanisad} 1:5:4–7, and continues to 1:5:13
While the breath is central to Indian thought, the lungs play a far less significant role in either mind or intelligence—there is no parallel with the Greek *phrenes*. However, the throat plays an important role it does not have for the Greeks: partly as the source of speech and counsel, partly as the site of thinking and dreams. It also has an important role in consciousness. Despite these differences however, clearly the same basic processes are at work as in ancient Greece: speech provides a fundamental starting point for theories about intelligence, and so by association is breath, the throat and the chest—and these become conflated with ideas about the breath as a life—substance.

**CHINA**

There are examples of similar metaphors on the human body from ancient China. Detailed knowledge of what the early Chinese believed has to be tentative: partly because there are still very few English translations of any but the most important Chinese works; and partly because we know that virtually every scientific treatise written before 30 AD has perished. The distance between European and Chinese thought also makes interpretations tentative.

Like the ancient Greeks, the ancient Chinese distinguished between two basic life substances or ‘souls’. Both appear to originate as metaphors on the same physiology as *thumos* and *psukhē*—. In 535 BC, the politician and philosopher, Tzu-ch’ān wrote:

> Man has two souls, the one the material *p’o* issued from the sperm exists first; the other, the aerial *hun*, is only produced after the birth, little by little, by internal condensation of a part of the inhaled air. This explains why animal life is prior, why intelligence develops only with the passing of the years.  

Some fifty years later, Confucius says that:

> Man is composed of two parts; one which the substance is aerial, the other of which the substance is spermatic.

The Taoists also give a similar account. This division between ‘spermatic’ and ‘aerial’ souls was maintained throughout early Chinese philosophy. There are rituals traditionally dated

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40 We have the catalogue of the Imperial Library of the Sung Dynasty, composed in 30 AD, and also a huge thesaurus of quotations, the *T’oí Píng Yü Lan*, from about the same period. At least sixty per cent of the texts recorded in them have been lost, including virtually every scientific treatise. Even by the time of the Sung Dynasty, we know there had been huge losses of texts: the First Emperor Ch’in Shih Huang Ti, burnt tremendous numbers of books (221 BC), and the widespread use of paper in China from very early times meant texts were more liable to damage than in the West, where use of parchment meant texts were more durable.

41 Wiegner 1927, p120

42 Wiegner 1927, p150
to around 1039 BC which are consistent with the division.\textsuperscript{43} (There are major differences between the ‘souls’ in Greece and China though: for instance, the Chinese believed that at death, the ‘spermatic’ \textit{p'o} decomposed with the body, whereas the ‘aerial’ \textit{hun} floated free and survived—the Greeks believed at death, the \textit{thumos}—breath was destroyed but spermatic \textit{psukhē} survived and went down into Hades.)

The character used to denote the substance of the aerial soul is \textit{ch'i}, also the character does ‘breath’ or sometimes ‘wind’. As in India, some Chinese schools of philosophy stressed the dependence of thought on breath. Writing in the fifth century BC, Kwangtse says:

> The knowledge of all creatures depends upon their breathing, but if their breathing be not abundant, it is not the fault of Heaven which tries to penetrate them with it day and night without ceasing, but men, notwithstanding, shut their pores against it.\textsuperscript{44}

Like the Greeks, the Chinese locate thought as going on in the middle of the body, usually the heart but sometimes also more generally in the chest or belly.\textsuperscript{45} The only way that this association could happen is if thought or intelligence is associated with speech, from which it would follow (as it did for the Greeks, Hebrews and Indians) that the organs of thought would be located in the chest or around the lungs.

Waley, in his now-classic translation of Confucius’ \textit{Analects}, notes that the ancient Chinese conceived of thinking in terms of sensations, although “the physical sensations connected by the Chinese with ‘thinking’ were evidently very different from our own.”\textsuperscript{46} Although the character of Chinese ancient thought was very different from that of the contemporary Greeks, the Chinese did think in strikingly physical ways. In its original sense, \textit{ssu}, the word used most frequently translated as ‘think’, means something like ‘to observe an outside thing’:

> ...I want to emphasise ... that in each case [in the \textit{Analects} where \textit{ssu} is used] we are dealing with a process that is \textit{only a short remove from concrete observation}. Never is there a suggestion of a long interior process of cogitation or ratiocination, in which a whole series of thoughts are evolved one out of the other, producing on the physical level a headache and on the intellectual, an abstract theory. We must think of \textit{ssu} as a fixing of the attention (\textit{located in the middle of the belly}) on an impression recently imbibed from without and destined to be immediately re-exteriorised in action.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Weigner 1927 p101, Onians 1960, pp520–524  
\textsuperscript{44} Translated by Legge, cited by Onians 1960, p76  
\textsuperscript{45} Waley 1938, p45  
\textsuperscript{46} Waley 1938, p44  
\textsuperscript{47} Waley 1938, p45, my italics
While *su*-thinking is not obviously related to breath, it is certainly grounded in the world of immediate sensation, and has a distinct physical location in the abdomen.

While we are a long way from the *thumos–phrenes* model, the ancient Chinese appear to have drawn upon a basic framework organised around a firmly physiological understanding, and in particular, in terms of breath and chest.
APPENDIX FIVE

FRAGMENTS FROM PRE-CLASSICAL GREEK POETS

Tracing the development of the ‘Homeric model’ of communication between the seventh and fourth centuries BC has to be largely conjectural. Apart from Homer, we have very few texts from the pre-Classical Greeks: Hesiod, Pindar a few fragments of epic poetry, hymns, some lyric and elegiac poetry, but nothing substantial enough to map out the development of life and thought. Our vision of ancient Greece is clearest during the fourth century BC, but the world we see is very different from the one that the Homeric aoidoi describe.

Apart from Hesiod, the surviving texts are not long enough or sufficiently well-preserved for the type of metaphor analysis of Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Also, unlike Homer, we have no assurance that the words of any of these poets are at all representative of the community they lived in: their language may reflect the poet’s personal idiosyncrasies. This Appendix presents a few suggestive illustrations from three important pre-Classical Greek poets: Sappho, Pindar and Simonides.

The earliest writer from whom we have more than dislocated fragments is the poet Sappho (born c.650 BC). She uses both thumos and the phrenes as the basis for metaphors of feelings and soul in ways consistent with the Homeric aoidoi. As in Homer, Sappho says strong feelings ‘shake’ or ‘disturb’ the phrenes:

\[\text{ἔµιοι δ’ ὁς ἄνεµος κατάρχης δρόναν ἐµπέτων ἑτίναξεν ἐρός φρένας}\]

As for me, love has shaken my phrenes as a down-rushing whirlwind that falls upon the oaks.

As in Homer, she still treats the phrenes or, by association, the chest, stethos, as the source of words:

\[\text{σκιδναµένας ἐν στῆθεσιν ὅργας γλῶσσαν μαστιγάκας περφύλαξε.}\]

When anger rises in the [chest], restrain the idly-barking tongue.

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1 For instance, Edmonds Sappho Fragment 1, 74, 93

2 Edmonds Fragment 54. This metaphor on trees may be a second reference to the phrenes. Onians (1954, p28–30) says that the Greeks described the lungs in terms of vegetation, just as we talk of the ‘bronchial tree’ after its branching shape.
Speech remains a type of breath: she describes talk as ‘airy words’⁴. Finally, the poet-critic Longinus notes that she treats different organs of the body “all as quite separate things”⁵, which I suggested was characteristic of Homer and necessary for explaining reflective thought.

Pindar (c.522–440 BC) uses aspects of the same metaphoric framework to describe speech. In the Pythian Odes, the oracle Medeia “breathed forth speech from her immortal lips”⁶, and speech still originates in the phrenes.

\[
\text{ὅ, τι κε σὺν Χαρίτων τίχα γλῶσσα φρενὸς εξέλοι βαθείας.}
\]

Such speech as with the blessing of the Graces the tongue may take from the deep places of the phrēn...⁷

Of the two hundred references and fragments we have from Pindar’s older contemporary, Simonides of Ceos (556–468 BC), many of those dealing with speaking are loosely consistent with the model. Speech is air or breath, as in the following example:

\[
\text{oὐδὲ γὰρ ἐννοσίφυλλος ἀήτα τότ’ ὤρτ’ ἀνέμοιν ἀτὶς κατεχόλυε καϊνυμενα μελιαδέα γάριν ἄφαρεὶν ἀκοαῖσι βροτῶν.}
\]

For then there was wind not so much as the breath that makes leaves quiver, to stay the honeysweet voice from its goal in the ears of men.⁸

And although words enter by the ears, as with Homer the ultimate goal of speech is located in the chest (sternon). Commenting on a wise saying in Homer, he remarks that:

\[
\text{παύροι μὴν θητηῶν οἶκαυ δεξάμενοι στέρνοις ἐγκατέθεντο.}
\]

few that receive [Homer’s words] with their ear lay it away in the sternon.⁹

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3 Edmonds Sappho Fragment 137
4 Onians 1954, p67
5 In Edmonds Sappho Fragment 2
6 Pindar Pythian Odes 4:11
7 Pindar Nemean Odes 4:6–8
8 Edmonds Simonides Fragment 52
9 Edmonds Simonides Fragment 97:3–4
As in this example, the *sternon* is also where memory resides, just as in the *Iliad*\(^\text{10}\). In Simonides though, we begin to see changes from Homer. Amongst his preserved writings, he almost never uses *thumos* to mean ‘soul’ or ‘life-stuff’: he uses *psukhē*\(^\text{11}\). Nor does he use *phrenes* for ‘mind’; instead he uses *noos*, in its sense of ‘seeing’ or ‘understanding’. He does however continue to locate the *noos* in the chest\(^\text{12}\). Feelings, memory and ‘soul’ are increasingly separated from their specific physiological associations with the *phrenes* and are located more generally in the chest.

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\(\text{10} \) *Iliad* 17:260

\(\text{11} \) In Fragment 143 (Edmonds *Simonides*) Simonides does say that a person ‘breathes out’, (*epneen*) their life (*psukhē*), as in Homer.

\(\text{12} \) Edmonds *Simonides* Fragment 199
THE BALANCE OF ROMAN METAPHORS ABOUT SPEECH

ABSTRACT
Chapter 5 described metaphoric expressions consistent with communication-as-transmission in Latin. This Appendix describes expressions consistent with two other metaphors—on dress and on spinning—and the frequency that the Romans used of each of the three metaphors.

DRESS AND ADORNMENT

In modern English, we have a few phrases in which we describe speaking, particularly rhetorical speaking, as “dressing our thoughts in fancy clothes”, or “arranging our words in finery”. Such expressions are unusual, often deliberate, and hardly normal ways of speaking in modern English. The Roman orators however used similar expressions quite commonly when discussing oratory. For instance, Cicero uses it when he outlines his early training in oratory, and its traditional division into five parts:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ut deberet reperire primum, quid dicerat; deinde inventa non solum ordine, sed etiam momento quodam atque judicio dispensane atque componere; tum ea denique vestire atque ornane oratione; post memoria saepine; ad extremum agere cum dignitale ac venustate} ...
\end{quote}

I learned … that the whole activity and faculty of the orator falls under five heads:—that he must think of what he is to say; secondly … marshal and arrange them in order … thirdly clothe them in artistic language … fourthly fix them firmly in his memory; fifthly … deliver them with grace and dignity.\(^1\)

The key term here is \textit{vestio}, which usually means ‘to clothe’ or ‘to dress’, although clearly what Cicero is dressing is the speaker’s argument.

\(^1\) Cicero, \textit{De Oratore} 1:31:142, translated by Blakiston p215.
The metaphor is used to refer to the style of a speech or a speaker:

...ita reconditas exquisitasque sententias mollis et perlucens *vestiebat oratio*.

[Marcus Calidius’ speeches were] marked by a flexible and translucent style which fitted his original and penetrating thought *like a garment*.  

...*concinnitas illa crebritasque sententiarum pristina manebat, sed ea vestitu illo orationis quo consuerat ornata non erat.*

[As Hortensius grew older] ... though his habit of neatly balanced phrase and thought remained, it was now no longer *dressed out* with the same richness of language as formerly.

The idea of styling an argument as ‘dressing’ leads to a number of metaphors on different types of clothing. For instance:

*Elaborant alii in lenitate et aequabilitate et *puro* quasi quodam et *candido* genere dicendi; ecce aliqui duritatem et severitatem quandam in verbis et orationis quasi maestitiam secuntur.*

Some [orators] spend their labour on smoothness and uniformity, and on what we may call a *pure and clear style*; others affect a harshness and severity of language and an almost gloomy style.

The expression *puro et candida* (pure and clean) is a metaphor based on ‘clean and white clothing’ (*vestis*)—both ‘clean’ and ‘white’ being traditional epithets for clothing.

The metaphor of clothing is related to another common way that Roman orators talked about style—in terms of ornamentation:

...*nam ut mulieres pulchriori esse dicuntur nonnullae inornatae quas id ipsum deceat, sic haec subtilis oratio etiam inornamenta delectat; fit enim quiddam in utroque, quo sit venustius sed non ut appareat. Tum removebitur omnis insignis ornatus quasi margaritarum, ne calamistri quidem adhibebuntur. Fucati vero medicamenta candoris et ruboris omnia repellentur: elegantia modo et munditia remanebit. Sermo purus erit et Latinus, cilucide planeque dicentur...*

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2 Cicero, *Brutus* 274.
3 Cicero, *Brutus* 327.
4 Cicero, *Orator* 53.
5 Sandys 1885. See also Cicero, *De Oratore* 3:7:29.
Just as some women are said to be handsomer when unadorned—this very lack of ornament becomes them—so this plain style gives pleasure even when unembellished: there is something in both cases which lends greater charm, but without showing itself. Also all noticeable adornment, pearls as it were, will be excluded; not even curling irons will be used; all cosmetics, artificial white and red, will be rejected; only elegance and neatness will remain. The language will be pure Latin, plain and clear.  

\[\text{6}\]

\textit{quoniam dicendi facultas non debeat esse ieiuna atque nuda, sed aspersa atque distincta multarum rerum iucunda quadam varietate...}

\[\text{7}\]

\[\text{[the] ability to speak ought not to be starved and go naked, but to be besprinkled and adorned with a kind of charming variety in many details...}\]

There is almost no point of contact between this metaphor and the belief in communication -as-transmission. The only point of agreement is that, whether a speech ‘ornaments’ or ‘dresses’ thought, the matter of the speech, res, precedes the decoration with words, \textit{verba}.

**SPINNING AND WEAVING**

The classical orators use another metaphor on cloth, weaving and spinning which may be related to the metaphor on dress. Some aspects of it though may to hark back to the techniques of oral composition described in Appendix Two: expressions like ‘spinning out a story’ and ‘the thread of an argument’.  

\[\text{8}\]

In this second aspect, the metaphor usually refers to the order of items (res) in a speech, and the need to ‘string them together’: the metaphor of the thread represents the unbroken continuity of the speech.  

\[\text{9}\]

\[\text{dein si tenues causae, tum etiam argumentandi tenue filum et in docendo et in refellendo idque ita tenebitur...}\]

Thereafter if the case is slight, the thread of the argument will be slight, both in proof and refutation.  

\[\text{10}\]

\[\text{Cicero, Orator, 78–79.}\]

\[\text{Cicero, Letters to Atticus, 21.}\]

\[\text{There are no written records native to Rome from the oral period, so we cannot know directly how the early Romans talked about communication in its oral phase.}\]

\[\text{Sandys 1885, p128.}\]

\[\text{Cicero, Orator, 124.}\]
Usually, the reference to a *filum*, a thread, is a metaphor on weaving and fineness of cloth—and it is used like the metaphor of dress exclusively to do with the style of a speech: *verba* not *res*.

> onnnes etiam tum retinebant illum Periclis sucum; sed erant paulo uberiore filo.

...[these speeches] all still retained the peculiar vigour of Pericles, but their texture [thread] was a little more luxuriant.\(^{11}\)

> et contra tenues acuti, omnia docentes et dilucidiora, non ampliora facientes, *subtili* quadam et pressa oratione et limita...

At the other extreme were the orators who were plain, to the point, explaining everything, and using a *refined*, concise style stripped of ornament.\(^{12}\)

The word used in the second passage, *subtili*, which is being used here to mean ‘graceful’ or ‘refined’, originally meant ‘finely woven’\(^{13}\). Cicero refers to one of his own speeches which he was not proud of as being “of loose texture and coarse thread” (*volui levidense crasso filo*)\(^{14}\).

The last word to mention in relation to spinning and weaving is *texo*, the etymological root of our words *text* and *context*. Originally the verb meant ‘to weave’, but later came to mean ‘to construct’ something complex (like a ship) or a mental object (like writing). There are examples where the Romans talk of words being ‘woven’.

> epistulas cotidianis verbis *texere*\(^{15}\)

But my letters I generally compose [weave] in the language of everyday life.

> sermo ... in novem et dies et libros distributus ... de optimo cive (sane *texebatur* opus luce lente ...)**\(^{16}\)

However, *textilis*, the object that is made by weaving (or plaiting) was not used by the Romans to describe written materials—what we would now call ‘texts’.

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\(^{12}\) Cicero, *Orator* 20.

\(^{13}\) Cicero, from whom the passage comes, never uses *subtili* in its literal sense of ‘finely woven’: only as a metaphor on the ‘fineness’ of an orator’s style (Sandys 1885).

\(^{14}\) Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 9:12.


Chapter Four and this Appendix to this point have only discussed the terms available to the Romans to talk about communication. But this tells us little about which expressions the Romans used most frequently or where they directed their attention. To understand this, we have to look at the frequency with which each metaphorical expression was used in normal speech and the uses it was put to in various contexts. Unlike the classical Greeks—from whom we have no texts that are written in unambiguously ‘everyday’ language—we do have several Romans texts we know were intended only for private use, and were not crafted, refined and edited for publication. While all these texts were written by a small, educated group at the peak of Roman society, they probably do approximate the way ordinary people talked about communication.

The best source for this purpose is the correspondence of Cicero. Unlike most collections of letters by Roman authors, which were written with publication in mind, most of Cicero’s letters are private correspondence. Surveying Cicero’s entire output—over nine hundred letters in all—is a huge task, and one I have not attempted. I have however analysed the first two books of letters to his friend, Atticus: forty-five letters, containing nineteen thousand words.

I had five reasons for selecting this group of letters. First, Atticus was his Cicero’s friend, the person he was least likely to ‘put on a show for’, and someone with whom he would be prepared to use ordinary, unaffected language. Second, Cicero clearly did not intend to make his correspondence with Atticus public, so he does not hide what he has to say. Normally his language is straightforward and to the point; only when there is a risk of something sensitive being captured does he become veiled. Third, in these letters he repeatedly demands news and letters from his friend; reports what he has heard; discusses speeches, plots and rumours; and talks about books and politics. In the process, he uses many phrases—probably ordinary phrases—to talk about ways of communicating with others. Fourth, Cicero wrote almost all of these letters himself, rather than dictating them to a secretary. We can assume that all or most of the letters to Atticus are representative of Cicero’s personal choice of words, phrases and metaphors. Fifth, he wrote many of the texts.

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17 He says to another friend, “Don’t I seem to talk in the language of commonfolk? … My letters I generally compose in the language of everyday life.” (Letters to his friends, 9:21)

18 Towards the end of the selection, he writes “I don’t think you ever before read a letter of mine which I had not written myself … [but] as I haven’t a moment to spare … I am dictating this as I walk.” (Cicero, Letters to Atticus 2:23)
letters at speed, while a messenger waited. In this context, Cicero would have had little
time to artfully compose what he said, but would have used expressions that came
naturally to him—some of which would inevitably have included expressions used by
ordinary Romans.

In the forty-five letters, I can find only six places in five letters where Cicero uses the
metaphor of dressing or ornamentation\(^19\). In each case, he is using it to discuss rhetoric and
its techniques.

Far more frequent are expressions consistent with transmission. I can find at least fifty-five
places where he uses expressions—forty-five if we exclude the use of *legere*, ‘to collect’,
which was the word the Romans used for ‘to read’, having no specific non-metaphoric term
for the activity. I am ignoring ambiguous expressions like *ex tuis litteris*, ‘from your letter’,
of which there are five examples\(^20\). The most frequent terms Cicero uses are words based on
*ferre* (16 examples), *legere* (10 examples), *mittere* (8 examples) and *gerere* (4 examples).
The other metaphors he uses in these letters are based on *jactere, jacere, accipere, elicere,
ponere, commovere, promere*, and *deprehendere*\(^21\). There is also one, metaphor, probably
deliberate, where he asks Atticus to ‘fish information’ out of a contact\(^22\).

\(^19\) …quae fuerunt omnes, ut rhetorum pueri loquuntur, cum humanitatis sparsae sale tum
insignes amoris notis (1:13); …totum hunc locum, quem ego varie meis orationibus, quorum tu
Aristarchus es, soleo pingere, de flamma, de ferro (nosti illas ἀργυροθείας), valde graviter
pertexuit. (1:14); Quamquam tua illa horridula mihi atque incompta visa sunt, sed tamen erant
ornata hoc ipso, quod ornamenta neglexerant, et ut mulieres idea bene olere, quia nihil
olebant, videbantur. Meus autem liber totum isocratis myrothecium atque omnes eius
discipulorum arculas ac non nihil etiam Aristotelia pigmenta consumsit. (2:1); volgo qui
instabant, ut clarem sibi, quod ornament, iam exhibere mihi molestam destiterunt. (2:1); nec
tam possunt ἀνθηρογραφεῖθαι quam videbantur… (2:6); sic ego hunc omnibus a me pictum et
politum artis coloribus subito deformatum non sine magno dolore vidi. (2:21)

\(^20\) 1:8, 1:14, 1:17, 2:12, 2:20

\(^21\) **FERRE** Haec habebam fere, quae te scire vellum (1:6); quod te moleste ferre certo scio (1:12); ut
quaeque res ad consilium primis postulationibus referebatur (1:16); referebatur ad consilium
(1:16); defertur ad senatum (1:16) quousque hunc regem feremus? (1:16); mirandas
ἐπισηµανίας sine uila pastoricia fistula auferebamus (1:16); ut legem de ambitu ferret (1:16); cum
erimus congressi, tum, si quid res feret, coram inter nos conferemus (1:20) cetera si
reprehenderis, non feres tacitum (2:3) si enim defertur (2:6); quae si statim a me ferre non
potuueris, primus habebis tamen et aliquamdiu solus (2:12); sed conferemus tranquillo animo
(2:17); ad me ab eo quasi ἐπισηµανίας adferes (2:17); cum hoc Pompeius egit et, ut ad me ipse
referebat… vehementer egit (2:22); iedeo sum brevior quod, ut spero, coram brevi tempore
conferre quae volumus licebit (2:25). **LEGERE** nam si ego tuum ante legissem (2:1); legi enim
libenter (2:1); mihi credes lege doceo mirabilis vir est (2:2); Ἡρωδης… eum potius legeret… (2:2)
...continued on next page
Fifty-five expressions implying communication is transference compared with five of the metaphor of adornment, and none at all on spinning and weaving. The ‘Roman transference model’ is used in thirty-one of the forty-five letters; the metaphor on adornment appears in only five and only in connection with oratory. Alongside metaphors on adornment Cicero also uses technical Greek terms used in the rhetorical schools, which suggests that he was not using everyday language at that point. Several of the phrases are also very like those he used in his later textbooks, which suggests that metaphors on dress may be personal pet phrases rather than ordinary Latin. Taken all together, this suggests that expressions consistent with the Latin model are vastly more likely to be the normal, everyday metaphors used by the Romans to describe how people communicate.
APPENDIX SEVEN

THREE MEDIEVAL TECHNIQUES

ABSTRACT In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, three new communication techniques appeared, drawing on classical rhetoric: the ars dictaminis (the art of letter-writing), the ars praedicandi (the art of preaching) and the ars poetica (the art of poetry). All three evolved arts independent of rhetoric, and none survived the rise of the Humanists and the printing press. However, they illustrate how the classical speech-making techniques were adapted to writing.

THE ARS DICTAMINIS: THE ART OF LETTER-Writing

The earliest of the three new arts, the ars dictaminis, appeared in the eleventh century. Although letter-writing had existed long before, and scribes had long used formulaic letters as models for their correspondence, the importance and complexity of letter-writing expanded enormously in the eleventh century. As I discussed in Chapter 9, with better security in the tenth and eleventh centuries, baronial and church lands became larger and more stable in the Early Middle Ages. Consequently, estate management became more complex. Landlords responded by employing cathedral-trained clerks who brought with them their document-based methods for record-keeping, accounting and correspondence. The Church’s normal pastoral work also generated a large volume of letters, particularly as the Popes increasingly imposed direct control on its far-flung parishes. In the eleventh century, the fifty-year controversy begun between Pope Gregory VII and the Emperor Henry IV over the investiture of bishops probably produced more works on political philosophy than had been written since Antiquity—almost all in the form of letters. In law, the decline of trial by ordeal and the rise of rational methods of proof increased reliance

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1 In From memory to the written record (1979) Clanchy traces the increased use of written documents and administrative procedures that employ them in the three hundred years after invasion of England by William the Conqueror. He finds that the volume of records increased enormously from the mid-twelfth century.

2 Sabine 1964, p224

3 Lanham 2001, p114
The use of text in law grew sharply after a copy of the Roman law was discovered in the mid-eleventh century. So, for a variety of reasons, there was a flood of letter-writing from the mid-eleventh century and, consequently, a rising demand for trained letter writers (dictamen).

The first manuals on the ars dictaminis appeared in Italy (probably in the service of the papal court), before appearing throughout France, then later in England and Germany. Initially, the manuals drew on the conventions of existing formula letters and combined them with the precepts of Ciceronic rhetoric: particularly the organisation of material (arrangement) and the ornamentation (style). By the twelfth century, the letters had stabilised in a five-part structure:

1. a greeting (salutatio)
2. a statement to secure the reader's good will (captatio benevolentiae)
3. a statement of facts relevant to the circumstances (narratio)
4. the request or command or announcement that is the purpose of letter, (petitio) and
5. a short conclusion (conclusio).

The only part specific to the ars dictaminis was the salutation which became enormously elaborate and ornate, drawing on rhetorical style for their ornamentation. The ars dictaminis drew a parallel between the letter's salutatio and the exordium of classical rhetoric—the opening of the speech intended to secure the reader's goodwill and attention.

The other parts of letters followed the parts of a speech described by Cicero—statement of relevant facts, then a request for action derived logically from the facts, and a conclusion. Stylistically, the manuals drew in the rules of Ciceronic rhetoric. Apart from the salutatio, the ars dictaminis usually recommended brevity (early medieval correspondence had been brief and the style persisted). The manuals usually also contained numerous model letters, and illustrations of salutations appropriate for people of different social degrees.

Initially the dictamen stayed close to their ancient sources, and quoted them in their books. However, once the art was established in the mid-eleventh century, this reliance disappeared. Later manuals began to cite the dictamen themselves, rather than rhetorical figures such as Cicero. By the twelfth century, the ars dictaminis had broken away from

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4 Southern 1967, pp94–96
5 Murphy 1974, pp225–226
7 Murphy 1974, p329
its roots in rhetoric to become a fully independent art. Hundreds of *ars dictaminis* survive in over three thousand manuscripts and, in a sense, the art has never disappeared: there has been a constant stream of manuals on letter-writing with examples ever since.

## THE ARS POETICA

The first art of poetry appeared in the early twelfth century, following several centuries of innovation in methods and subject matter. The most important of these works was the *Ars Poetica* by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, written around 1200, and a standard text for over three hundred years. Like the *ars dictaminis*, it and similar works were heavily influenced by a classical source, Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, and they combined it with the rules on style from Ciceronic rhetoric (particularly the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*). Although the medieval *ars* look mechanical to modern eyes, the writers were discussing only one half of the medieval poet’s skill: discipline. Skill (*natura*) was also essential, although unanalysed.

Geoffrey’s scheme of poetry is divided into five parts: inventing the material, ordering it, expression and ornamentation, memory and finally presentation—a system that he explicitly adopts from Ciceronic rhetoric. He gives invention little attention, either because it was in the realm of *natura* not *ars*, or else because it was a subject shared with all other types of writing and did not require specific treatment in the *ars poetica*. Geoffrey’s advice on invention amounts to: “let the poet’s hand not be swift to take up the pen, nor his tongue be impatient to speak; trust neither hand nor tongue to the guidance of fortune … construct the whole fabric within the mind’s citadel; let it exist in the mind before it is on the lips.” More important in his *Ars Poetica* is the order of material. Drawing on Horace, Geoffrey says that poem has basically three parts: an introduction to draw in the listener, the *narratio* which tells the story, and the conclusion. As in rhetoric, each of these parts may be divided for more detailed treatment. The poet can either organise their material by ‘nature’ ordering affairs as they occur, or else they can use ‘method by art’, introducing

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8 The appearance guidelines on writing poetry, based on Roman models, coincides with the sharp decline in oral composition methods (described in Appendix 2), and the appearance of new subject matter and new poetic forms. This may explain why the *ars poetica* was often described as the *poetrica nova*.

9 Geoffrey’s *Ars Poetica* is translated in Nims 1967

10 Geoffrey emphasises the importance of invention in poetry in his *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi*: “Substance [*sententia*] must be the writer’s first concern, before he turns his attention to the harmonious arrangement of words; for words are dead unless sustained by the sound vitality of substance, which is the life and soul of verbal expression” (2:3:2). In Nims 1967.

11 Horace *Art of Poetry* 152
later events earlier and suspending earlier topics until later in order to heighten suspense and interest. This method of division became standard in later *ars*, and they typically explained how to combine each organisational principle. They also drew on rhetorical theory to explain how to amplify or abbreviate their themes (a part of rhetoric known as *copia*). The most important part of poetry was the third: style. It drew heavily on the third part of rhetoric in the use of figures such as metaphor and allegory. Some *ars*, such as Geoffery’s *Ars Poetica*, ended with a discussion of poetic performance, although this was sometimes omitted. Again, this drew on the final part of rhetoric. Geoffery says that the poet’s “final concern is to ensure that a well-modulated voice enters the ears and feeds the hearing, a voice seasoned with the two spices of facial expression and gesture”—exactly as Quintilian had divided the subject.

Artes of poetic composition came to influence views about the interpretation of poetry. Until the late Middle Ages, literary criticism was heavily influenced by Augustine *De doctrina Christiana*, both in its analysis of figures and particularly in its view that study should lead the soul to God. This second claim found a strong endorsement in Horace’s *Art of Poetry*, which said that the best poetry combined pleasure with profit. This principle was reflected in the common introductory defence to many poems that they had a purpose beyond entertainment. The poets’ compositional methods could also be used to interpret poems, particularly to unlock their metaphors, allegories and moral purposes. The most detailed example of these methods are those Dante provided to unlock the Christian allegory of his *Divine Comedy*. While these interpretative methods were congenial to the medieval world, which understood the world as fundamentally symbolic, they underwent a major transformation with the rise of Humanism from the mid-fourteenth century, and ceased to play an important role in ideas about communication after the Renaissance.

**THE ARS PRAEDICANDI: THE ART OF PREACHING**

The arts of poetry and letter writing are both concerned with writing—unlike the ancient art of rhetoric, which was understood as an oral art. The chief arts of speech-making in the Middle Ages was the art of preaching (*ars praedicandi*). Of the three medieval arts, it was the last to develop, but within fifty years it had evolved into a stable tradition. One

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12 Horace *Art of Poetry* 333

13 For example, in the mid-fourteenth century, Boccaccio said in the Proem to the *Decameron*, that it provided his readers not only with pleasure but “also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue.”

14 See Murphy (1974), Chapter 6, pp269–356 for the development of the *ars praedicandi*.

15 “For a variety of reasons … the Church did not produce during its first twelve centuries any coherent body of precepts that might be called a rhetoric of preaching. Augustine made the

...continued on next page
the reason for the sudden explosion in works on preaching in the thirteenth century may have been the rapid development of the universities around the same time. Students studying theology in particular had to demonstrate their ability to preach before they could graduate. Around the same time, there were also two new preaching orders established: the Dominicans and Franciscans.

Before 1200, the primary medieval sources on preaching were Augustine’s *de doctrina Christiana* and Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis*, along with collections of model sermons. Although these illustrated what subjects a priest should address, they provided little or no advice on how to organise the material or make a sermon attractive. To provide this missing direction, the *ars praedicandi* borrowed heavily from Roman rhetorical manuals, particularly the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Indeed, some early writers pointed out that preaching shares with rhetoric the goal of persuading listeners, so rhetorical methods are entirely appropriate to the preacher.

The art of preaching was far more limited than the other two *artes* in its borrowings from rhetoric. For example, in the first part of judicial rhetoric (the only ancient form available when the first preaching manuals were written), the speaker worked out what case they wanted to make and what resources were available to defend their argument—a task given to *stasis* theory. In the case of preaching, everything that is to be argued is provided by the Bible, so theology and Biblical interpretation replaced *stasis* theory. Methods for interpreting scripture were of course already provided in *de doctrina Christiana*. Most medieval books followed Augustine’s four-fold system of interpretation: the *historical* or *literal* meaning of a text referred to the actual events as they occurred; the *allegorical* meaning was where one thing stood for something else; the *tropological* meaning was the moral instruction of a passage; and the *anagogical* reading led listeners to the higher life and spiritual enlightenment.

The *ars praedicandi* also altered the parts and rationale of classical legal speeches. The parts of a judicial speech were an introduction, a statement of facts, a division of the speech

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16 By the time the first *ars praedicandi* appeared from around 1230, Ciceronic precepts had been employed in the *ars dictaminis* for over a century and a half, and numerous copies of *De Inventione* and the *ad Herennium* were available, as were Boethius’ positive comments on rhetoric.

17 Murphy 1974, p311. There are several reasons that the universities may not have been the source of the *ars praedicandi*. For example, the universities were home to dialectic, which was always understood as a dispute between two parties, whereas a sermon is a sustained speech by one person and not usually controversial.
into parts, a proof of each part and refutation of the opponent’s parts, and a conclusion to
move the audience to action. To this scheme, the preachers normally added an introductory
prayer or request for divine aid. This was followed by an introduction or protheme—which
had the same goal as the Ciceronic introduction: to make the listeners ‘attentive, docile and
well-disposed’. But the real difference between preaching and judicial oratory sermon was
not a combative statement of facts, but an exposition of scripture. The preacher began with
a Biblical quotation or theme then, like the statement of facts in a legal case, then divided
it for discussion in the body of their sermon (the revival of Aristotle’s categories in the
twelfth century provided preachers with numerous ways of subdividing their theme). The
lawyer’s proof, the fourth part of rhetoric, was replaced by a development of each part of the
theme, using a variety of methods18. The sermon ended with a conclusion19.

Even the earliest versions of ars praedicendi were a major advance on Augustine’s de
doctrina, which provided little direction on organising and presenting of scripture. Like the
ars dictaminis, the ars praedicendi soon broke away from its roots in rhetoric to become a
self-contained art. Versions of the ars praedicandi survived until the Protestant Reformation
in the sixteenth century, when they were swept away by Ciceronian models of speaking20.

None of the three arts—letter-writing, poetry and preaching—represented new ways of
presenting written and spoken material: they started with concepts of rhetoric, grammar,
dialectic and Christian exegesis then adapted them to specific circumstances. Unlike the
ancient art of rhetoric, which claimed to be both the highest verbal art and a citizen’s
greatest achievement, the three medieval arts were humble: the province of clerks and
clerics, not kings and consuls. Their scope was also far more limited: they dealt with estate
management or pastoral directions, and rarely with cases of law or affairs of state. They
were however a major advance on the guidance left by Augustine and Gregory, and played
an important role in adapting the verbal arts of rhetoric to the written page.

18 Methods for developing and expanding the theme became quite advanced and, by the mid-
thirteenth century, eight ‘modes of amplification’ had become standard. Some were drawn
from rhetoric, others from logic and grammar, others again from Augustine: [1] replacing a
word or name with a phrase—for instance, providing a definition, or description, or some
other exposition, [2] dividing the theme into its parts and then treating each, [3] reasoning
—using syllogisms, enthymemes, or induction, [4] quoting authorities that support the point
being discussed, [5] explaining the roots of the point being explained, [6] creating metaphors,
then demonstrating their aptness, [7] exposing the theme using the four modes of
interpretation—literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical, and [8] assigning causes
and effects. (Adapted from Richard of Thetford’s octo modis in Murphy 1974, p327).

19 Murphy (1974, pp300–344) discusses the development of medieval ‘thematic’ preaching in.

20 Murphy 1974, p344
ABSTRACT  Everyday Elizabethan ideas about human physiology provide the basis for a variant on communication-as-transmission. As in Greece and Rome, is tightly woven into a much larger explanation of human mental, emotional and spiritual life, all of which are explained in terms of metaphors on organs and their bodily actions. Communication starts with thoughts and feelings in the heart and the head. They are breathed out of words to the listener, where they enter through the ears, and pass the heart again. Shakespeare also occasionally uses variations on transmission based on weaponry and transportation, rather than human physiology.

WRITING IN COMMUNICATION DURING THE LATE RENAISSANCE

Most explicit references to communication in Shakespeare’s plays and poems are to on speaking rather than writing. Not surprisingly therefore, his metaphors share many of the features of archaic and classical models based on breath and speech. But unlike the ancient models, Shakespeare does mention writing explicitly although, as I will show, his metaphors describing its operation are derived almost entirely from the physiological model.

Shakespeare lived when the shift from oral to literate communities was accelerating rapidly. Writing had, of course, been in use in Britain since it was a Roman province. Throughout the Middle Ages—a period when most European writing was sacred and in Latin—England had an active vernacular literature. Despite this literary heritage however, when the Normans invaded in 1066, the English relied very little on writing for the management of their society. For a century after the invasion, writing would be treated as a supplement to the spoken word, and only slowly did written documents come to replace vows, oaths and the spoken records. Even when the skill of writing became widespread, it

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1 For a history of this change, see Clanchy (1979) From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307.
was limited in its use by the lack of a cheap writing surface. Paper manufacture was only introduced into Europe in 1270 and England in 1494.

Large-scale paper production, coupled with Gutenberg’s invention of moveable type in the century before Shakespeare’s birth, vastly accelerated the production and use of written and printed texts. In the fifty years after Gutenberg printed his Bible, more books were printed in Europe than the total output of the ancient scribes and medieval scriptoria. At the same time as book production was increasing, the number of children being sent to grammar school also increased. By Shakespeare’s time, writing was a familiar, everyday medium for communication. Yet it was not so pervasive as it is in the Modern West, nor was it understood in the same way.

Shakespeare’s England still conceived of communication largely in verbal terms rather than visual ones. Shakespeare, like most playwrights of the time, repeatedly talks about people going to ‘hear’ a play, not to ‘see’ one. Inigo Jones’s idea of the theatre as a visual illusion was revolutionary to Jacobean audiences. Scenery, a visual support and setting for a play, only appeared in English theatres in the late seventeenth century—fifty years after Shakespeare’s death. Book design also provides us with evidence that books were often read aloud (that is verbally) rather than silently (that is, visually). For instance, printers frequently reproduced the first few words on the left hand page of a book below the last line of the previous page. This allowed someone reading the book aloud to turn the page without creating a pause in their reading. As a device it is only of value to speakers that want to maintain an even diction; it is irrelevant to silent readers. These ‘catchwords’ were still printed to 1800 (silent reading was clearly known to the Elizabethans, but did not become commonplace until the 1800s.) Even where Shakespeare specifically describes written communication, he clearly expects people to hear the words, not see them.

Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper’d with Love’s sighs;
O, then his lines would ravage savage ears.

Even though the poet writes, it is the ears that are savaged: Shakespeare clearly expects written poetry to be read aloud.

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2 McMurtrie 1943, p67
3 Cipolla 1969, p48
4 Taming of the Shrew introduction:93 & 96; Midsummer Night’s Dream 5.1.76, 77 & 81; Henry V prologue:34. See also Donawerth 1984, p13–14.
5 Love’s Labour’s Lost 4.3:347
The emphasis placed on speech over writing is clearly visible in the balance of the words *speak* and *write* (and their various inflections) in Shakespeare's works.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speak</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoke</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speech</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>writing (noun)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoken, spake</td>
<td>58 + 53</td>
<td>written, writ (verb)</td>
<td>31 + 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speaking</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>writing (verb)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In most cases, the speech terms outnumber writing terms ten to one. Another useful insight is the relative paucity of terms in Shakespeare for objects used specifically in writing. For instance, those used in the creation of writing are, in order of frequency:

- paper: 82
- pen: 29
- ink: 26
- parchment: 7
- inkhorn: 3
- pencil: 3

By comparison, some of the main organs and substances used in creating speech, in order of frequency are: tongue 465; breath 350; mouth 168 and throat 74. The products of writing also appear quite infrequently:

- book: 110
- volume: 14
- scroll: 13
- writ (noun): 11

The number of terms is quite small, compared with the rich variety of the spoken–physiological model. Furthermore, when referring to writing, virtually all of the words name their conventional objects. Few are used in structural metaphors that can tell us about how Shakespeare might have thought of writing operating in communication. (Indeed, Shakespeare more often uses metaphors on speech to explain the process of reading and writing.) There are some exceptions however:

- he hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink.6

Shakespeare occasionally has his characters drinking written words.

- I’ll drink the words you send
- Though the ink be made of gall.7

6 *Love's Labour's Lost* 4.2:27
Elizabethan ideas about the body’s organs were a variation of those current in the Middle Ages, which in turn were based heavily on Greek physiology and philosophy going back to Galen and Aristotle. Not surprisingly then, Renaissance ideas about communication-as-transmission based on physiology show many of the features of the ancient and Roman beliefs. However, Shakespeare and his contemporaries differ from the Greeks in some details. In particular, by the late Renaissance, ‘mind’ and ‘meaning’ do not have quasi-physical natures they do for the Greeks.

As with the earliest Greeks, the Elizabethans believed that thoughts and emotions originated within the body. They also located the centres of consciousness in a number of organs. In communication, thoughts and such are metaphorically transformed into written or spoken words, transferred through space to other people, who take the words in through either ears or eyes, to deposit them into their minds and the corresponding organs.8

This Appendix is organised around each step of this process and the associated metaphors9:

1. the sources of words and meaning in the organs of mind, emotion, soul, consciousness
2. speaking and the organs of speech
3. the passage of words through space
4. the entry of words into listeners.

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7 Cymbeline 1:1:101. Also Twelfth Night 3:2:53

8 One note on Shakespeare’s metaphors: there has long been a debate amongst Shakespearian scholars over whether Shakespeare meant literally what he says some particular expression, or whether he was being ironic. While understanding Shakespeare’s intentions may be important to understanding the plot of a play or a poem, it does not affect the analysis of physiological metaphors. Whether he is unwittingly drawing on a metaphor prevalent in his day, or using it intentionally is neither here nor there: both imply that the metaphors were in use in his time. If he intends irony, so much the better: to be ironic he has to clearly see the implications of the metaphors he is rejecting, with the expectation that at least some of the audience will do likewise. Other listeners will accept his statement at face value without recognising the irony, because what he is saying is commonplace.

9 I have only given a few examples of each metaphoric expression, with references to others. Literally hundreds of other examples can be quickly found by searching standard wordlists such as Bartlett’s Concordance to Shakespeare (1894) or Stevenson’s Home book of Shakespeare quotations (1965).
WHAT IS BEING TRANSFERRED

In Shakespeare, two types of things pass between people when they communicate. The first are spoken words or written documents. In the second group are thoughts, emotions, affections, ideas, hopes, and fears. The relationship between the two groups is ambiguous. Sometimes they are kept distinct, in much the way we usually distinguish between them today—internal and external, physical and immaterial, public and private. Speech and writing are public and can be perceived by others, whereas thoughts or feelings can experienced only privately, although they may have ‘outward signs’. But there are many times in Shakespeare when the distinction between these two is unclear. Partly this is because his characters have to verbalise what they are thinking so that the audience can be aware of it. But most of the ambiguities cannot be explained away like this. Thoughts, in particular, are treated as though they were words (a metaphor that I will explore in more detail later).

My lord ... made me think of this; Else [these things] Had, from the conversation of my thoughts, Haply been absent...¹⁰

This ambiguity—the separation of word and thought at some times, but their equivalent treatment at others—is a key feature of contemporary transmission models.

A parallel ambiguity is the role Shakespeare and his contemporaries assign to words in communicating. Sometimes it is words themselves that are communicated. But at other times they are only containers for meanings or thoughts or feelings, reflected in the metaphor, WORDS ARE CONTAINERS. For instance, in Much ado about nothing, Shakespeare describes Beatrice’s letter as “containing her affection unto Benedick”¹¹, and that love can be “cramm’d up in a sheet of paper”¹². Elsewhere he says that words may be filled¹³, or swelled with stuff¹⁴, or crammed with thoughts and feelings. Also consistent with the metaphor WORDS ARE CONTAINERS is the belief that words may be metaphorically empty of thought:

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects: heaven has my empty words,
Whilst my invention [mind/thought], hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel: heaven in my mouth,

¹⁰ All’s well that ends well 1:3:240, my italics.
¹¹ Much Ado About Nothing 5:4:90.
¹³ Twelfth Night 3:1:114; Cymbeline 3:2:59
¹⁴ Timon of Athens 5:1:87
As if I did but only chew his name,
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. 15

The metaphor, *words are containers*, is not common in Shakespeare. Much more common are metaphors that imply that the sources and end-points of transference are containers, which may be swollen with thoughts and feelings, or words—often those received from another person. The metaphor *words are containers* may simply be created to give coherence to the whole system of expressions.

**THE SOURCES OF TRANSMITTED MATERIAL**

Just as materials transferred from one person to another can be separated broadly into physical and non-physical, so too can the sources of speech. Amongst the non-physical sources are the mind, the emotions, the soul, the affections, and the wit. Each is located within the body, and all but the wits are associated with either specific organs or general regions of the body—primarily the heart and the head, but also the liver, spleen, and stomach. These organs are also the physical sources of words. While Shakespeare does not appear to look at intelligence or wits as physical, the soul and the emotions are closely linked with the natural functioning of the body. However, by the late Renaissance, the neat medieval assignment of reason, emotion and appetite to the head, heart and liver respectively had broken down. An organ might sometimes have taken over the roles that had traditionally been given to another.

Far the most important organs associated with communication are the *heart* and the *brain*. With the *heart* are associated the *breast* and the *bosom*, mostly because they are physically close to the heart (that is, they are used metonymically). Words with functions similar to *brain* are *head*, *skull*, *pate*, *sconce* and *brain pan*. (Shakespeare does not use *cranium* or *noggin* although other English writers of the time do.) Unlike *heart*, *breast* and *bosom*, the relationship between *head* and *brain* is more complex than simple physical proximity. The head in particular has functions apart from being the container of the brain: it also carries the face; it is the point where air enters and leaves the body; and it is where words emanate from. Also, as in Greek physiology and philosophy—some of which was preserved in

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<sup>15</sup> *Measure for Measure* 2:4:1. ‘Invention’ is a reference to the first part of rhetoric, and Shakespeare is using it here as a metaphor for thought or active intelligence.
Renaissance thought—Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers occasionally treat the head as sacred, distinct from its relationship with the brain\textsuperscript{16}.

The head is mentioned over 570 times in Shakespeare’s plays, compared with brain’s 122 appearances, and its functions are sometimes unrelated to the brain. But in terms of numerical frequency, both head and brain are vastly outweighed by the heart: it is used nearly 1200 times in Shakespeare’s works; bosom appears 136 times, and breast 95. For Shakespeare, the overwhelming part of intellectual, emotional and spiritual life still takes place in the chest, not the head. In this, he is still far closer to the Greek and medieval traditions than he is to us. In the remainder of this section, I will go through each of these organs and their functions in turn, and discuss briefly their roles in mental and emotional life in Shakespeare’s works. First the brain, the head and other associated organs.

The head and brain

Of the 122 times brain and brains are used in Shakespeare’s texts, one third are metaphors for thought or for where thought is located.

Has Page any brains? ... Hath he any thinking?\textsuperscript{17}

I have a young conception in my brain.\textsuperscript{18}

While Shakespeare uses the word head far more frequently than brain—about 570 times compared with 122—it is the subject of a much wider range of metaphors. Only ten per cent are concerned with intelligence or wits. They take the same form as metaphors on brain.

'Tis in my head to my master good.\textsuperscript{19}

Strange things I have in my head.\textsuperscript{20}

As in the Middle Ages, the types of thought attributed by metaphor to either head or brain are logical, abstract, and intellectual thinking. Shakespeare repeatedly describes reason


\textsuperscript{17} Merry Wives of Windsor 3:2:30

\textsuperscript{18} Troilus and Cressida 1:3:312. See also Othello 4:1:280; Hamlet 2:2:46; 2 Henry VI 3:1:339; Coriolanus 1:1:40; Macbeth 2:1:39; Lear 1:2:61.

\textsuperscript{19} The Taming of the Shrew 2:1:408

\textsuperscript{20} Macbeth 3:4:139
and thought as cold; a quality of the brain in Renaissance medicine. (Emotions of rage and anger by contrast are often described as hot, which is the characteristic of blood and, by association, the heart.)

The brain may devise laws for the blood but a hot temper leaps o’er a cold decree.

Shakespeare frequently inverts the metaphor; thus a lack of brains is a lack of thoughts. “What a lack-brain is this!” complains Hotspur; “…he has not so much brain as earwax,” or “Thou mad misleader of thy brain-sick son!”

The other main metaphor on the head and the brain is the metaphor, the brain is the site of the mind.

Our court, you know, is haunted
With a refined traveller of Spain;
A man in all the world’s new fashion planted,
That hath a mint of phrases in his brain.

Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour?

Of the non-intellectual metaphors, the brain is also occasionally associated with imagination, illusion and dreams, and the site of the memory (although the organ of memory is more usually the heart, and in a very few cases, both simultaneously). The brain is rarely associated with the emotions—when it is, it is usually only in conjunction with the heart. The brain is also associated metaphorically with life, and by extension,
killing: “Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club”, an expression that appears about twenty times in Shakespeare. Finally, there are expressions that link the brain with the soul (a metaphor consistent with Platonic and Augustinian notions of the soul’s location):

...his pure brain
Which some suppose the soul’s frail dwelling house.

Of the words associated with brain, brain pan is used only once to refer to the site of intelligence by association with the skull and brain. Skull is used 14 times, but usually as a metaphor for death; only 4 times is it linked with the brain, but never with thinking. Pate, an old English word for the top of the head, appears 32 times, although when used in association with intelligence, pate is used only derisively to imply stupidity and a lack of wits. Sconce appears 8 times, but only twice could it refer to intelligence being located inside the head, and only then in one act of one play.

The heart and chest

Unlike the Modern world, the Elizabethans did not treat the brain and the head as the main sites of mental activity. While consciousness and logical thought are located there, most activity takes place in the heart, breast, and bosom. They take many of the roles that we now ascribe solely to brain. (The division between heart and brain is not entirely clear though, and sometimes Elizabethan writers were not sure of the precise role of each; “Tell me where is fancy bred, ... in the heart or in the head?”

The heart is the basis for metaphors on a huge range of subjects—far more than any other organ. Primarily, the heart is the organ responsible for most strong emotions: love, hate, fear, joy, jealousy, rage, vengeance, rapture.

Young men’s love then lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.

32 As You Like It 4:1:98
33 King John 5:7:2
34 Comedy of Errors 2:2:34 & 37
35 Merchant of Venice 3:2:64. See also King Lear 1:2:63 and As You Like It 3:5:157
36 The following is only a very small sample of metaphors on the heart for various emotions.
   LOVE Antony and Cleopatra 4:14:16; Comedy of Errors 3:2:62; Love’s Labour’s Lost 3:1:42.
By your heart you love her, because your heart cannot come by her; in heart you love her, because your heart is in love with her; and out of heart you love her, being out of heart that you cannot enjoy her.38

The heart is also the primary seat of the soul—where ‘soul’ in the Renaissance could mean both the essence of life and also the immortal spirit. Most important personality traits are ascribed to the heart: honour, fidelity, mercy, justice, virtue, bravery, courage, weakness, strength.

...honour’s thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man.39

Finally, the heart is frequently an organ of the mind. It can have “thoughts and counsels”40; it can reason41; it can be “sick with thought”42; indeed it is possible to “think my heart out of thinking”43.

Far be it from my heart, the thought of it.44

...my heart
Throbs to know one thing...45

These hands are free from guiltless blood-letting,
This heart from harbouring foul deceitful thoughts.46

In Shakespeare, the heart is the primary source of words; it is far more so than the brain. Hamlet says he will “Unpack my heart with words, And fall a-cursing”47.

Juliet: Speakest thou from thy heart?
Nurse: And from my soul too;
Or else beshrew them both.48

37 Romeo and Juliet 2:3:68
38 Love’s Labour’s Lost 3:1:42
39 Henry V 2:prologue:3
40 Much Ado About Nothing 4:1:103, also Henry V 5:2:254
41 Love’s Labour’s Lost 2:1:152
42 Two Gentlemen of Verona 1:1:69
43 Much Ado About Nothing 3:4:85
44 Richard III 1:3:150
45 MacBeth 4:1:100
46 2 Henry VI 4:7:107
47 Hamlet 2:2:614
48 Romeo and Juliet 3:5:228

A84 THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
As a source of words, thoughts and emotions, the heart is a container, that may be variously empty49, full50, crammed51, swollen52 and overflowing53.

I draw the sword myself: take it, and hit
the innocent mansion of my love, my heart:
Fear not, 'tis empty of all things but grief54.

It is from this container that words, or the substances placed inside words, come from. “I did never know so full a voice issue from so empty a heart”55. Consistent with this metaphor the heart is a container is the idea that a person can ‘pour out their heart’ or ‘pour out words’ from the heart.

Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of the counsel sweet.56

Thinking in the spaces of the mind

Like the head, the head is also a container, full of thoughts and words.

Do not seek to stuff
My head with more ill news, for it is full57
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head.58

One feature of some of Shakespeare’s heart metaphors is that, unlike the brain, the heart and bosom sometimes seem to have an agency apart of the person themselves. In particular, the heart and bosom may speak, apparently with some independence. Shakespeare’s characters may find themselves struggling to contain what their hearts would speak.

49 Henry V 4:4:72; Midsummer Night’s Dream 1:1:16; King Lear 1:1:154
50 Winter’s Tale 4:4:357; overfull Midsummer Night’s Dream 1:1:113
51 Henry VIII 2:4:110
53 Much Ado About Nothing 1:1:26
54 Cymbeline 3:4:69
55 Henry V 4:4:72. See also Troilus and Cressida 5:3:108
56 Midsummer Night’s Dream 1:1:216. Also MacBeth 4:3:1
57 King John 4:2:134
58 Richard II 2:1:101
In my heart there was a kind of fighting that would not let me sleep.59
My proud heart sues and prompts my tongue to speak.60
My heart speaks they are welcome.61

I noted in Chapter 3 the independence of the mind’s organ (in Homer, the thumos and phrenes; in Shakespeare, the heart) from the person themselves created the possibility of metaphorically treating thinking as a discussion between the person and their heart or bosom. We see exactly the same belief in Shakespeare’s works, although only infrequently.

I and my bosom must debate awhile
And then I would no other company62
Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know.63

Alternatively the metaphor thinking is speaking may have developed as Shakespeare and other Elizabethans tried to reconcile the metaphors the heart is a site of thinking and the heart is a source of words by creating a new metaphor, thoughts are words, from which follows thinking is speaking. There are several expressions in Shakespeare consistent with this last metaphor:

The conversation of my thoughts...64
Thy head is full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat.65

Unfortunately there simply are not enough examples in Shakespeare to decide which explanation may be correct. In any case, the metaphor thinking is speaking is unusual in Shakespeare. Thinking for him is an intellectual activity, not a physical or linguistic one.

Other organs

There are a number of other organs that have minor roles in emotional life which are occasionally the metaphorical source of words. In Renaissance medicine, the spleen was the

59 Hamlet 5:2:4
60 Richard III 1:2:171
61 Macbeth 3:4:8
62 Henry V 4:1:31
63 Measure for Measure 2:2:136. Also 2 Henry IV 4:1:183
64 All’s Well That Ends Well 1:3:240
65 Romeo and Juliet 3:1:24

THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT
source of bile (choler), the substance responsible for anger (choleric). Thus when someone is angry they may "vent spleen". The liver is more important, but was never the source of words. It was the seat of appetites and the insensible, vegetative part of the soul. "Liver, brain and heart/ These sovereign thrones"—an arrangement of the soul that goes back to Plato’s Timaeus. Stomach is used in familiar expressions like “no stomach to fight”, but it is occasionally also a source of words in its own right:

Losers will have leave
To ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues.

THE ACT OF SPEAKING

If the source of words is the heart and brain, then the substance of words is explained in Shakespeare by two metaphors: words are breath and speaking is breathing. “Vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is” 68; “their word are natural breath” 69; “Words of so sweet breath composed” 70. But unlike the thumos of archaic Greece, in the late Renaissance breath had lost its central position in metaphors of consciousness, thought and spirit; those roles had largely been taken by the head and the heart.

The words breathe, breathing and other grammatical variations appear 340 times in Shakespeare’s works. A little under half of these ground metaphors for words and speaking.

Thy word is but the vain breath of a common man.
As there comes light from heaven and words from breath...
Being held a foe, he may not have access
To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear.

There are numerous related metaphors. Breath is of course air and so, extending the metaphor, words are air. “What is that word ‘honour’? Air,” muses Falstaff. 74.

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66 Twelfth Night 1:1:37–38, also Cymbeline 5:5:14
67 Titus Andronicus 3:1:233. Also 2 Henry VI 5:1:89
68 Love’s Labour’s Lost 4:3:68
69 The Tempest 5:1:156
70 Hamlet 3:1:98, and see also Romeo and Juliet 1:4:76, 2:5:31–32, and 2:prologue:9; MacBeth 1:4:35
71 King John 3:3:8, All’s Well That Ends Well 2:1:151; Macbeth 5:6:9
72 Measure for Measure 5:1:225
73 Romeo and Juliet 2: prologue: 9–10
74 1 Henry IV 5:1:137
Three civic brawls, bred of an airy word... have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets.\textsuperscript{75}

The metaphor, \textit{words are air}, takes in a number of airy substances: \textit{air, wind, vapour, cloud}, and so on: “Words are but wind” \textsuperscript{76}.

Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome.\textsuperscript{77}

The notion of ideas and feelings being breathed out of the body finds an important parallel in medieval medical theory, which in turn derived largely from Galen. Emotions were believed to be caused by the build-up of excess humours in parts of the body, particularly the heart. This build-up was thought to be harmful, and Renaissance doctors devised methods to drain or drive out the humours—leaches, bloodletting and blistering being the most familiar. One of the ways it was believed that excess airy humours could be dispelled from the heart and the lungs was by breathing them out—for instance, in speaking.

...the tongue’s office should be prodigal
to breathe the abundant dolour of the heart.\textsuperscript{78}

In \textit{Richard III}, when the Duchess of York asks, “why should calamity be full of words?”, Queen Elizabeth tells her that the words, being breath, help expel the humours and thus ease the troubled heart—even though, as words, they may do little good as advice or wisdom:

\begin{quote}
Windy attorneys to their client’s woes,
Aery succeders to intestate joys,
Poor breathing orators of miseries,
Let them have scope! though what they will impart
Help nothing else, \textit{yet they do ease the heart}.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

If emotions are humours and humours can be breathed out, it is coherent to talk about breathing the emotions out. For instance, Montague says of Romeo’s low mood:

\begin{quote}
Romeo and Juliet 1:1:90 & 92
Comedy of Errors 3:1:75
Much Ado About Nothing 5:2:52
Richard II 1:3:256
Richard III 4:4:127–131, my italics
\end{quote}
Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning’s dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs...\textsuperscript{80}

Shakespeare’s other main metaphoric use of breath is another in constant use since the Greeks: \textit{breath is life}. As with the Greeks, this metaphor seems to be based upon the observation that all living creatures breathe (at least, all those that the Renaissance considered living creatures). “Take my breath from me,” says the distressed Glouster in \textit{King Lear} hoping for death\textsuperscript{81}.

\begin{quote}
I dreamed my lady came and found me dead...
And breathed such life with kisses in my lips
That I revived and was an emperor\textsuperscript{82}

I have seen a medicine
That’s able to breathe life into a stone\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Hamlet}, Gertrude weaves together these metaphors for life and word when, aghast at Hamlet’s murder of Polonius and shocked by him into recognising her adultery and Claudius’ murder of the king, she promises not to betray him:

\begin{quote}
Be thou assur’d, if words be made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

\section*{THE ORGANS OF BREATH AND SPEECH}

To make words, it is, of course, necessary to breathe outwards. The diaphragm forces air out of the \textit{lungs}, through the \textit{throat} where sound is formed, over the \textit{tongue} which shapes the sounds, and then out through the \textit{mouth, teeth} and \textit{lips}. Shakespeare uses each to ground metaphors for \textit{speaking} and \textit{meaning}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[80] \textit{Romeo and Juliet} 1:1:132–134
\item[81] \textit{King Lear} 4:6:222. Also 5:3:245 & 307.
\item[82] \textit{Romeo and Juliet} 5:1:6
\item[83] \textit{All’s Well That Ends Well} 2:1:76
\item[84] \textit{Hamlet} 3:4:197–199
\end{footnotes}
The source of breath, the *lungs*, are the most infrequently mentioned of these organs: only twenty times in all of Shakespeare's works. Four times, they are the lungs are source of laughter. Eight times they are the source of words: “so shall my lungs coin words,” says Coriolanus. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, when a messenger asks the inn-keeper to rouse Falstaff, the inn-keeper says:

Bully Sir John! Speak from thy lungs military; art thou there?

Moving upwards from the lungs, *throat* is used 74 times by Shakespeare: 23 times either to refer to the organ of speech or speech itself. Often the throat seems to be merely a passage from the heart to the outside, and does not create speech within itself.

But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
*Stuck in my throat.*

Whilst I can *vent clamour from my throat*, I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

The most common type of speaking associated with the *throat* is lying. Variations on “In thy foul throat thou liest” make up 10 of the 23 references to speech. Possibly this belief arises because the truth was traditionally located in the soul, and by association the heart, and hence falsehoods could not be generated there. “His words come from his mouth, ours come from our breast.” Consequently, lies, which are words that lack truth, must have some other source—and in Shakespeare these are most commonly the throat, mouth, tongue and teeth.

The physiological metaphor also suggests what people can do if someone lies to them: if words and thoughts emerge from the throat as breath, and lies are words someone rejects (re+ject, ‘throw back’) then they return the lie to where it came from—the speaker’s throat.

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85 Coriolanus 3:1:77
86 *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3:1:77
87 The other main use of throat is in murder—‘slitting throats’—which accounts for 31 expressions.
88 MacBeth 2:2:32
89 King Lear 1:1:168
90 Richard III 1:2:93
92 Richard II 5:3:102
With a foul traitor’s name stuff I thy throat. 93

Further up the air passage, the word *mouth* is used 168 times. Nearly two thirds of these uses refer to the point of the body from which words and speech come.

*Take from my mouth* the wish of happy years 94

The mouth does not create speech though; it is simply a cavity through which words pass on their way out of the body. Consistent with this metaphor of a cavity, is the idea that the mouth may be *full*: “[a] mouth full of news.” 95

I would thou couldst stammer, that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth, as wine comes out of a narrow-mouth’d bottle, either too much at once, or none at all. I prithee, take the cork out of my mouth that I may drink thy tidings. 96

Obviously enough, shutting up the mouth stops someone from speaking.

*Stop close their mouths, let them speak not a word.* 97

For the Elizabethans, the most important of the speech organs is the *tongue*: Shakespeare uses it 465 times in his works—more than all the other speech organs put together. Furthermore, he uses the word only rarely to refer to the organ *per se*. Shakespeare uses *tongue* almost exclusively as a metaphor for speech and speaking.

*What early tongue so sweet saluteth me?* 98

Ah, poor my lord,

What tongue shall smooth thy name

When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it? 99

Unlike the rest of the mouth and its parts, the tongue is clearly integral to the process of creating speech. Depriving someone of their tongue, or damaging it, will render them incapable of communicating. Hence, there are many expressions used to explain a person’s silence: ‘tongue-tied’, ‘lost your tongue?’ and ‘cat got your tongue?’ We still tell people to “hold your tongue” when we mean ‘don’t speak’. In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus laments that his daughter’s tongue has been cut out:

Richard II 1:1:46. See also Richard II 1:1:57, and Titus Andronicus 2:1:55

Richard II 1:3:94. See also Henry V 4:7:45, 1 Henry IV 3:2:53

As You Like It 1:2:98; see also King John 4:2:161 & 4:2:187; Henry V 4:3:52

As You Like It 3:2:208; also 3:2:239

Titus Andronicus 5:2:65. See also Titus Andronicus 5:1:51 & 5:2:168

Romeo and Juliet 2:3:33

Romeo and Juliet 3:2:98–99
O, that delightful engine of her thoughts,
That blabb’d them with such pleasing eloquence,
Is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage,
Where, like a sweet melodious bird, it sang
Sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear.\(^{100}\)

"Tongue means not only an individual’s speech, but their language. "You can speak the French tongue."\(^{101}\)

The teeth are mentioned 80 times, but only as part of the mouth through which words must pass. “Tis a secret must be locked within the teeth and lips.”\(^{102}\) Just as people may stuff lies down the speaker’s throat, insults are routinely ‘hurled back’ or ‘tossed’ into their teeth.

Throw your vile guesses in the devil’s teeth
From whence you heard them.\(^{103}\)

The lips are mentioned far more often than the teeth, 158 times, but only forty of these references have anything to do with speech: the bulk of uses involve kissing. As with the teeth, the lips are part of the mouth through which speech passes on its way from the lungs to the outside air—the last part as far as Shakespeare is concerned.

These words become your lips as they pass through them.\(^{104}\)
A gentle judgment vanished from his lips.\(^{105}\)

All these organs—lungs, throat, mouth, tongue, teeth and lips—are important in Shakespeare’s scheme only because they are associated with breath and thus speech. But with the exception of the tongue, they are almost never the sources of speech, nor do they have any of the functions of thought or spirit that thumos, phrenes and psukhé had in Homeric Greece. What a person thinks with their brain or feels with their heart, these organs transform into speech.

What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent.\(^{106}\)

\(^{100}\) Titus Andronicus 3:1:82

\(^{101}\) Henry VIII 1:4:57. Also Henry V 5:2:67; Cymbeline 1:4:150; All’s Well That Ends Well 4:1:82; The Merry Wives of Windsor 1:4:85; Hamlet 5:2:132

\(^{102}\) Measure for Measure 3:2:143. Also Richard II 1:3:167; 2 Henry VI 3:2:213


\(^{104}\) Timon of Athens 5:1:198. Also Merry Wives of Windsor 1:1:236; Richard III 1:3:286

\(^{105}\) Romeo and Juliet 3:3:10

\(^{106}\) Coriolanus 3:1:258
Shakespeare weaves all of these organs together in an absurdly comic tirade in *Henry V*. Pistol, imagining that he has been insulted by Nym by the word *solus*, rejects the word and, along with it, all of the organs by which Nym spoke it.

*Solus*, egregious dog? O viper vile!
The *solus* in thy most mervailous face;
The *solus* in thy teeth, and in the throat,
And in thy hateful lungs, yea in thy maw, perdy: And, which is worse, within thy nasty mouth!
I do retort the *solus* in thy bowels.\(^{107}\)

**THE PASSAGE OF SPOKEN WORDS THROUGH THE AIR**

Shakespeare does not provide many metaphorical expressions to explain what happens between one person ‘breathing out’ words and another ‘taking them in’. In part, this should not be surprising. As I noted at the beginning of this Appendix, Shakespeare lives in a world that thinks of communication largely in terms of face-to-face speech. In this situation, there is an immediacy and intimacy to communication that makes the idea of a ‘space’ between people which words must ‘traverse’ hard to sustain. It is much simpler to think of listening happening simultaneously with speaking.

The few metaphors Shakespeare uses to indicate spoken words moving between people are those relating to breath and air. Once words are breathed out as air, they are blown from the speaker’s mouth to the listener’s ear. For instance when Benvolio describes how Tybalt refused to stop fighting, he says, “he breathed defiance to my ears”\(^{108}\).

The hopeless word of ‘never to return’
Breathe I against thee.\(^{109}\)

The blessed gods, as angry with my fancy,
More bright with zeal than the devotion which
Cold lips blow to their deities, take thee from me.\(^{110}\)

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\(^{107}\) *Henry V*, 2:1:47–54  
\(^{108}\) *Romeo and Juliet*, 1:1:111  
\(^{109}\) *Richard II*, 1:3:153  
\(^{110}\) *Troilus and Cressida*, 4:4:27, my italics
THE ENTRY OF WORDS INTO THE LISTENER

Once spoken words have passed from one person to another, they enter the listener through the ears. Entry here is conceived as physical entry, like a person passing through a gateway. Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief...

...these words like daggers enter in mine ears.

You cram these words in mine ears against The stomach of my sense.

Although the Elizabethans used the metaphor, words are breath, this does not appear to have entailed that hearing was breathing in words as it did for early Greeks. Only a few times does Shakespeare use metaphors on breath in conjunction with the ears.

Open your ears; for which of you will stop The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?

Breathe it in my ear.

Once words have entered in by the ears, they pass to the head and the heart. "By our ears our heart oft tainted be".

Put this in your head

His words do take possession of my bosom

111 Timon of Athens 5:1:196
112 Love's Labour's Lost 5:2:763
113 Hamlet 3:4:95. Also Cymbeline 4:2:79; Julius Caesar 5:3:73
115 2 Henry IV Introduction:1–2
116 Two Gentlemen of Verona 3:1:239. Also Macbeth 1:4:26 and King John 5:7:65
117 Rape of Lucrece 38
118 Othello 4:2:15. This expression, “Put this in your head” as well as the equivalent “Stall this in your bosom” (All's Well That Ends Well 1:3:131), is almost identical to one that appears repeatedly in Homer, “Here is a thing to put in your phrenes”, and means the same in all cases: ‘know this’.
119 King John 4:1:32. Also Much Ado About Nothing 5:1:67; Henry V 1:2:30; King John 3:3:21
Thy groans
Did make wolves howl and *penetrate the breasts* Of ever angry bears.\(^{120}\)

It is usually words that enter the organs of consciousness, as in the examples above, but it may also be thoughts:

> Within this bosom never *enter’d* yet
> The dreadful motion of a murderous thought.\(^{121}\)
> Despite of brooded watchful day, I would into thy bosom *pour* my thoughts.\(^{122}\)

Earlier, I said that Shakespeare metaphorically treats the head and the heart as containers. He uses this metaphor most frequently to describe words entering and filling up these containers.

> Do not seek to *stuff*  
> *My head with more ill news*, for it is *full*.\(^{123}\)
> *Their understanding begins to swell*.\(^{124}\)

> France hath found out  
> A nest of *hollow* bosoms, which he *fills*  
> With treacherous crowns.\(^{125}\)

The process of listening is normally described in terms of words passing through the ears and entering the heart and head. But there is a variation on this process of words entering the body: the metaphor, *listening is eating*. People may *eat* their words, *drink* them in, *devour* them or *feast* on them.\(^{126, 127, 128}\)

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\(^{120}\) *The Tempest* 1:2:288. Also *Hamlet* 3:4:35

\(^{121}\) *King John* 4:2:254

\(^{122}\) *King John* 3:3:53. *Julius Caesar* 2:1:305

\(^{123}\) *King John* 4:2:134

\(^{124}\) *The Tempest* 5:1:80

\(^{125}\) *Henry V* 2:prologue:21


\(^{127}\) *Cymbeline* 1:1:100; *Henry V* 4:1:267

\(^{128}\) *Othello* 1:3:150

\(^{129}\) *Comedy of Errors* 5:1:405 & 407; *Love’s Labour’s Lost* 5:1:40; *Timon of Athens* 3:6:36; *Hamlet* 2:2:52. People may also ‘feast their eyes’ or ‘drink in a scene’; a parallel metaphor of taking sight into the body.
My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of thy tongue’s uttering.\textsuperscript{130}
I prithee, take the cork out of thy mouth that I may drink thy tidings.\textsuperscript{131}

Once the hearers have eaten speech, they may \textit{digest} the words and thoughts\textsuperscript{132}, and \textit{ruminate} upon them\textsuperscript{133}—indeed, the original digestive meaning of \textit{rumination} is quite absent from Shakespeare; it is only used in relation to thought.

If listening is eating, then by extension words are food.

Now he has turned orthography; his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes.\textsuperscript{134}

\textit{Moth:} They have been to a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps.
\textit{Costard:} O! they have lived long on the alms basket of words. I marvel that thy master hath not eaten thee for a word; for thou art not so long by the head as \textit{honorificabilitudinitatibus}: thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon.\textsuperscript{135}

There are a very few expressions where, instead of food, words may be \textit{poison} or \textit{medicine}, which may be then \textit{infused}\textsuperscript{136} into the body.

How much an ill word may empoison liking.\textsuperscript{137}

There are a few expressions where wisdom, honour and mercy are passed from one person to another as food. Because intelligence and the soul are located in the chest, they may pass from mother to baby as breast-milk:

\ldots were I not thine only nurse,
I would say thou hast suck’d wisdom from thy teat.\textsuperscript{138}

Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck’dst it from me…\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Romeo and Juliet} 2:1:58–59
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{As You Like It} 3:2:214
\textsuperscript{132} For instance, \textit{Merchant of Venice} 3:5:95; \textit{Henry VIII} 3:2:53; \textit{Julius Caesar} 1:2:305
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Much Ado About Nothing} 2:3:21
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Love’s Labour’s Lost} 5:1:40
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Titus Andronicus} 1:1:461, \textit{3 Henry VI} 5:4:41, \textit{Merchant of Venice} 4:1:132
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Much Ado About Nothing} 3:1:87. See also \textit{King John} 3:1:63, \textit{Hamlet} 4:7:104
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Romeo and Juliet} 1:3:68
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Coriolanus} 3:2:129
THE OVERALL PHYSIOLOGICAL MODEL

So far, I have dealt with expressions organised around individual speech and mental organs. But Shakespeare weaves a great number of the expressions together, clearly treating them as parts of a larger system. What follows are a few examples from the many available which illustrate the process of communication-as-transmission based on this model: from heart or head, through speech organs, to breath and speech, to ears, and back to heart or head.

Were his heart
Almost impregnable, his old ears deaf,
Yet should both ear and heart obey my tongue.\(^{140}\)

Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms
Such as will enter at a lady’s ear
And plead his love-suit to her gentle heart.\(^{141}\)

I am disgraced, impeach’d and baffled here,
Pierced to the soul with slander’s venom’d spear
The which no balm can cure but his heart-blood
Which breathed this poison.\(^{142}\)

The total system of communication-as-transmission can be described entirely in physiological terms, without reference to thoughts, ideas, feelings or any other mental or emotional processes.

Young Arthur’s death is common in their mouths
And when they talk of him, they shake their heads,
And whisper one another in the ear
And he that speaks doth gripe the hearer’s wrist,
Whilst he that hears makes frightful action
With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.\(^{143}\)

\(^{140}\) Titus Andronicus 4.4:98
\(^{141}\) Henry V 5.2:101
\(^{142}\) Richard II 1.1:170
\(^{143}\) King John 4.2:187–192
CONSEQUENCES OF METAPHORS ON OUT-BREATHE AIR

The physiological model has implications beyond the apparently physical nature of thought and emotion, and its physical transport in communication. The metaphor WORDS ARE AIR has important ramifications.

In Renaissance thought—and to an even greater extent, early Modern thought—one of the basic categorisations made of objects in the physical universe could be divided into those that had substance and those that were insubstantial; those that were material and those that were immaterial; those with weight and those that lacked weight. This was related to the fundamental opposition of words and things (res and verba) and the Christian and Scholastic distinction between body (matter, substance) and soul (spirit, intellect). Air was always placed into the category of things immaterial, insubstantial and without weight. These qualities were transferred to words, language and argument via the metaphors WORDS ARE BREATHE and BREATHE IS AIR.

This helpless smoke of words doth me no right

What craker is this same that deafs our ears
With this abundance of superfluous breath?

The same metaphors are also paralleled in the language used to describe dreams, spirits, and ghosts. “All this is but a dream/Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.” Words were lumped together with things that had no more influence on the world than dreams or fantasies.

I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
begot of nothing but vain fantasy;
Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant that the wind...

To be effective, communication requires matter, substance or weight.

144 Romeo and Juliet 5:3:103, King Lear 4:6
145 Rape of Lucrece 1027
146 King John 2:1:147–148
147 Other things with the same qualities in his plays are visions, spirits, shadows, and dreams. For instance The Tempest 4:1:146–158, Romeo and Juliet 1:4:98–104 and 2:2:139–141, Hamlet 2:2:269–270.
148 Romeo and Juliet 2:2:140
149 Romeo and Juliet 1:4:95
When priests are more in word than matter ...
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion.\textsuperscript{150}

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.\textsuperscript{151}

Shakespeare can even conceive of a type of communication that consists \textit{only} of matter, and includes nothing that is inessential—that is, which uses no words.

There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves:
You must translate: 'tis fit we understand them.\textsuperscript{152}

The reverse however was not possible: words without matter (or thought) were insincere and ineffective. When the Trojan Troilas is asked what a letter from Cressida—who he thought loved him but has now abandoned him for the enemy Greek camp—says, he responds:

Word, words, mere words, no matter from the heart;
the effect doth operate another way \textit{(Tearing the letter)}
Go, wind to wind, there turn and change together.
My love with words and errors she feeds,
But edifies another with her deeds.\textsuperscript{153}

His love was based on words, and words are wind, insubstantial, lacking matter; more effective in love are deeds and other ‘matter from the heart’.

\textbf{MECHANICAL TRANSFERENCE}

Human physiology provides Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers with the bulk of expressions to discuss communication in terms of transmission. There are a number of expressions that Shakespeare uses when he uses the metaphor of transference, but unconnected with any reference to the body. For instance, words and thoughts may be \textit{thrown} and \textit{cast}, or they may \textit{fly} and \textit{pierce}. 

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{150} From \textit{King Lear} 3:2:81–92
\item \textsuperscript{151} \textit{Hamlet} 3:3:97
\item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{King Lear} 4:1:1–2
\item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Troilus and Cressida} 5:3:109
\end{itemize}
As the idea of communication-as-transfer became separated from its grounding in the human body, new grounds were found for it. Two that Shakespeare uses repeatedly are projectile weapons and transportation. In the weapons group, the most common are cannons and arrows, which fire words and thoughts at people.

...so, haply, slander,
Whose whisper o’er the world’s diameter,
As level as the cannon to his blank,
Transports his poison’d shot, may miss our name,
And hit the woundless air.\textsuperscript{159}

...for his thoughts [of love],
Would they were blanks, rather than filled with me.\textsuperscript{160}

these haughty words of hers
Have batter’d me like roaring cannon shot\textsuperscript{161}

Behold, the French amaz’d vouchsafe a parle,
And now instead of bullets wrapp’d in fire,
To make a shaking fever in your walls,
They shoot but calm words folded up in smoke,
To make a faithless error in your ears.\textsuperscript{162}

Historically though, as I showed in Chapter 15, it is metaphors on transportation not weaponry that would become the dominant metaphor of communication-as-transmission in the Modern Age. While such metaphors did exist much earlier, in the century between 1600 and 1700, their use escalated significantly. Here are some examples from Shakespeare.

\begin{quote}
When I came hither to transport the tidings
Which I have heavily borne, there ran a rumour.\textsuperscript{163}

Might not you
Transport her purposes by word?\textsuperscript{164}

Love’s heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten time faster glide than the sun’s beams.\textsuperscript{165}

If seriously I may convey my thoughts.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

\textbf{PARALLELS WITH ANCIENT BELIEFS ABOUT TRANSMISSION}

There are clear parallels between the metaphors Shakespeare uses and the ancient model of communication-as-transference. Both are based firmly in human physiology. Both see communication beginning in the chest of one person (in Shakespeare the head is responsible for rational thought, but emotions and practical judgement are still located in the chest). Speech from the lungs passes up the throat, then from one person to another; in their ears, and back (by undisclosed paths) to the centres of consciousness in the chest and head. Like the Romans, in Shakespeare’s process, both thoughts and emotions may be transferred. Communication-as-transmission is divided into three parts: a speaker, a listener and a message that passes between them. But, as in Rome, the message usually only has an independent existence in the form of writing; when people speak, the words are believed to pass directly from one person to another immediately, so there is no real basis for thinking about an independent ‘message’. Unlike the Romans though, the metaphors that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{King John} 2:1:226  \\
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{MacBeth} 4:3:181  \\
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{King Lear} 4:5:20  \\
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Romeo and Juliet} 2:5:4  \\
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{All’s Well that Ends Well} 2:1:84
\end{flushright}
Shakespeare uses suggests that writing, like people, ‘contains’ a ‘space’ which may ‘hold’ meaning as it passes from one person to another.

Altogether, the collection of metaphors that Shakespeare and his contemporaries use to explain communication-as transmission is closer to its ancient sources than it is to the modern Conduit Metaphor. As I discuss in Chapter 15, in the century after Shakespeare’s death, that changed in several ways: the metaphor would be torn free from human physiology; writing would become the model of communication, not speech; the ‘message’ which was believed to pass from one person to another would become fully independent; and the message would become a container for meaning and feelings.
APPENDIX NINE

SHAKESPEARE: COMMUNICATION-AS-ORDER

ABSTRACT The principle social order in Shakespeare is provided by the Great Chain of being. Society is perfected when each person takes their appointed place in the hierarchy of nature. Order in human society mirrors the order in the other ‘planes’ of creation: the angels and demonic world, the heavens, the animals and the material elements. However, in Shakespeare’s time, the order was beginning to break down, and some of his characters voice doubts about its influence.

DEGREE

Social order in Shakespeare is clearly derived from the medieval cosmology. The largest single passage which deals directly with the cosmological hierarchy is Nestor’s speech on ‘degree’ in Troilus and Cressida. Based on an episode in the Trojan War, the play begins with the Greek army camped before Troy. Even though Hector, Troy’s greatest soldier, has been killed by Achilles, the Greeks have been unable to capture the city. At the same time, Achilles has quarreled with the Greek king, Agamemnon, and withdrawn his forces from the war. Agamemnon calls a council of his remaining generals to understand why the Greeks have been unable to take the city despite its weakness. Nestor proposes that the fault lies in the lack of order within the Greek army—which he discusses in terms of ‘degree’.

Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down,
And the great Hector’s sword had lack’d a master,
But for these instances.
The specialty of rule hath been neglected:
And, look, how many Grecian tents do stand
Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
When that the general is not like the hive
To whom the foragers shall all repair,
What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.

1 Troilus and Cressida 1:3:75–137
Nestor begins by describing the proper order in society using the Elizabethan commonplace that the planets in the heavens have their own order or ‘degree’ (“in all line of order”). From their influence is derived the order in society and the physical world (“Insisture course proportion season form office and custom”).

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre [the Earth]
Observe degree priority and place
Insisture course proportion season form
Office and custom, in all line of order;
And therefore is the great planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron’d and spher’d
Amidst the other, whose med’cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
And posts like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad.

But, just as a king may be disobeyed, the order imposed by the sun over the planets may be upset. When the planets become disordered, their influence leads to disorder on the earth.

But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
What ranging of the seas, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights changes horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
the unity and married calm of states
Quite from the fixture.

With the fundamental order of the universe undone—or the authority of a king neglected—order within society, education, professions, trades, families and governments is lost. Without degree in society (“the ladder to all high designs”) no plans can hope to be fulfilled.

Oh, when degree is shak’d,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns sceptres, laurels,
But by degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune the string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe.
Strength should be lord to imbecility,  
And the rude son should strike his father dead.  
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,  
Follows the choking.

Nestor concludes that it is the neglect of degree, the natural hierarchy in society, that is the reason that the Greeks have been unable to capture Troy. Specifically, Achilles’ quarrel with Agamemnon inspires each rank to rebel against those above, weakening the army’s unity and effectiveness. Closing Nestor’s speech, Shakespeare leaves the correspondence between society and the heavens (macrocosmos) and replaces it with another common metaphor, the human body (microcosmos)—in this case, one that suffers a fever.

And this neglection of degree it is  
That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose  
It hath to climb. The general’s disdain’d  
By him one step below, he by the next,  
That next by him beneath; so every step,  
Examplesd by the first pace that is sick  
Of his superior, grows to an envious fever  
Of pale and bloodless emulation:  
And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot,  
Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length,  
Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength.

In the speech, Shakespeare does not refer to the complete Chain of Being. The highest levels (God and the angels) and the lowest (the animals and elements) are not included, although he refers to them in other plays. This speech does however involve all of the basic concepts implied by the Chain:

1. the universe is constituted on a number planes or levels (Nestor’s ‘degrees’)
2. each plane touches those immediately above and below (like links in a chain)
3. within each of the planes there are also secondary hierarchies (for instance, the sun rules over the planets, and kings rule over other men)
4. there is a correspondence between the planes (for instance, society mirrors the heavens above and the human body)
5. events in one plane affect those in others below it—usually those immediately below, but occasionally at further remove.

Exactly what the various planes of creation were varied between Elizabethan authors. However, the overall scheme is clearly a variant on the medieval scheme described by

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2 Troilus and Cressida 1:3:142–210
Aquinas three hundred years before. At the very top of the Chain was God, and below him were, in order, the angels, the heavens, human beings and human society, animals, plants and, at the bottom, the physical elements. In Shakespeare's plays, the focus is mainly on the human world and consequently the exact nature of each of the planes is less important than the connections with and influences on the human world. Because those levels with the greatest influence on the human world are those closest to it—the heavens above and the animals below—the very highest and lowest levels of the Chain appear only rarely in Shakespeare's works.

**GOD AND THE ANGELS**

In Shakespeare's plays, like most non-religious literature of the Renaissance, God does not actively intervene in the world. Characters may call on God for mercy, justice, protection and occasionally revenge, but whatever response God makes goes unseen. He might perform occasional miracles, but generally his actions are invisible. Most of God's work is done through his intermediaries, the angels. Even these creatures have only occasional involvement in human affairs: their proper place is between God and the heavens, and it is the influence of the planets that directly influences affairs on the Earth.

> Look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed Cherubins.
> Such harmony is in immortal souls;
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

This passage also reflects the continuing dualism in medieval thought between heaven and earth, intellectual and physical, spiritual and material. Conventional Christian belief held that, after Adam had sinned in the Garden of Eden, God had punished not only him, but the earth as well. In the medieval cosmology, everything below the orbit of the moon was afflicted and subject to impurity, decay, change, pain, and death. A sharp line was drawn between the immortal heavens and the mortal world. Human nature contain aspects of both: an immortal intellectual soul like the angels, encased in a mortal body—the "muddy vesture of decay". While the soul is encased in the body, the intellectual parts of a person are unable to perceive the divine. Only at death are the two parts of the human being

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3 *The Merchant of Venice* 5:1:58–65. Music is presumably a reference to either the Music of the Spheres or else to musical harmony, which had been regarded as divine since Pythagoras.
separated, with each returning to its natural place in the scheme of creation: the soul ‘rises’ to heaven while the body ‘descends’ into the earth.

Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high,
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die.4

Alongsie the angels in the popular imagination were the spirits of folklore: elves, goblins, witches, and pixies. It is they, rather than the angels, that appear on stage in Renaissance theatre. Although they have no place in the ‘official’ hierarchy (at best, they are ranked with the fallen angels in hell), they nonetheless share many of the angels’ characteristics. They are spiritual or ‘airy’ or ‘insubstantial’ creatures5. They, like the angels, have their proper order6. They have influence over humans and their affairs, as the angels do—and humans, being lower in the cosmic order, (usually) have no influence on them. They, like God and the angels, influence the nature world. For instance, when Titania and Oberon, King and Queen of the fairies, quarrel in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the result is all of the confusion that follows the upsetting of the Great Chain.

But with thy brawls thou hast disturb’d our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck’d up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath thereforestretch’d his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain’d a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
The nine men’s morris is fill’d up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable:
The human mortals want their winter here;
No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:

4 Richard II 5:5:112–113
6 A Midsummer Night’s Dream 2:1:123
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original.7

Associated with spirits were witches. Belief in magic and witches was as pervasive during
the Renaissance as was belief in the angels: in Shakespeare’s lifetime, thousands of alleged
witches were burnt, drowned or tortured in England alone. Normally, human beings were
not believed to be magical in themselves—which is consistent with their place in the Chain.
To work magic they needed the aid of some ‘familiar’ spirit8. The witches in MacBeth call
upon Hecate, Prospero in The Tempest works through the spirit Ariel; Joan of Arc call up
fiends and when they fail her she knows her end has come9.

THE HEAVENS

In Shakespeare’s plays, the heaven loom far larger than God and the angels in their
immediate influence on human life. The heavens were the link in the chain immediately
above human beings, joining them with the angelic hierarchy. The heaven’s influence was
most often understood in astrological terms. The stars, and particularly the planets, affected
people in three ways: in their influence on society, on individual destinies, and in their
relationships with parts of the human body.

It was a commonplace in medieval thought that celestial events—particularly eclipses,
meteors and appearances of comets—signified great events for states. Storms, lightning and

8 Here the Renaissance imagination also had the support of the Bible. Ref.
9 1 Henry VI, 5:3:1–36. See also 2 Henry VI 2:3:171–176, and 1 Henry IV 3:1:53–62
thunder are also classed amongst the heavenly phenomena. Virtually all references to meteors in Shakespeare, and half of those to stars, are references to their influence on human affairs.

You look pale, and gaze
And put on fear, and cast yourself in wonder,
To see the strange impatience of the heavens;
But if you would consider the true cause
Why all these fires, why all these gliding ghosts,
Why birds and beasts, from quality and kind;
Why old men, fools and children calculate;
Why all these things change from their ordinance,
their natures, and pre-formed faculties,
To monstrous quality, why, you shall find
That heaven hath infus’d them with these spirits
To make them instruments of fear and warning
Unto some monstrous state.

Major celestial portents in particular were understood as signs of calamity for rulers—and in the hierarchical imagination of the later Middle Ages, this automatically implied calamity for all the lower ranks of society. Julius Caesar is warned before his death, “When beggars die there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.”

In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets:
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star
Upon whose influence Neptune’s empire stands
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:
And even the like precurse of fierce events,

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10 We preserve this ancient link between weather and heavens in the term ‘meteorology’.

11 *Julius Caesar* 1:3:59–71. Act 1 Scene 3 and Act 2 Scene 2 both deal at length with celestial and unnatural events that prophesy impending calamity.

12 *Julius Caesar* 2:2:30–31. In *Richard II* 2:4:817, meteors and eclipse are amongst the signs of Richard’s approaching death. Just why the heavens only announced events for rulers is unclear. Possibly because society is hierarchical, it was believed that only the topmost levels of society—its rulers—touched the lowest levels of the heavens. Against this however has to be set the belief that over every person God set a guardian angel, and each angel influenced the individual through its own particular star.
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.\textsuperscript{13}

In \textit{Richard II}, Shakespeare compares the fate of King Richard with a fallen star and the setting sun. The king, as ruler of society is like the sun which rules over the planets, and the king’s diminished authority is like its setting.

\begin{quote}
I see thy glory like a shooting star
Fall to the base earth from the firmament.
Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west,
Witnessing storms to come, woe and unrest:
Thy friends are fled to wait upon thy foes,
And crossly to thy good all fortune goes.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Far more frequent than references to the planet’s affects on society in Shakespeare’s plays are the influences of the heavens on individual’s lives.

\begin{quote}
Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of heaven!
Wind, rain, and thunder, remember, earthly man
Is but a substance that must yield to you;
And I, as fits my nature, do obey you\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

The influence of the stars in not necessarily baleful however. In \textit{The Tempest}, Prospero reads the heavens to find that the chance of ending his island exile and challenging those that exiled him approaches.

\begin{quote}
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

It was a commonplace in the Renaissance that the stars, planets or constellations that shone at the moment of a person’s birth decided their character.

\begin{itemize}
\item [13] \textit{Hamlet} 1:1:112–125
\item [14] \textit{Richard II} 2:4:19–24
\item [15] \textit{Pericles} 2:1:1–4
\item [16] \textit{The Tempest} 1:2:180–184
\end{itemize}
I was not born under a rhyming planet,
nor I cannot woo in festival terms.\textsuperscript{17}

Different planets were believed to have different characters, and these produced the variety of human characters. We still refer to ‘mercurial’, ‘martial’, ‘jovial’ and ‘saturnine’ temperaments.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Helena} Monsieur Parolles, you were born under a charitable star.
\textit{Parolles} Under Mars, I.
\textit{Helena} I especially think, under Mars.
\textit{Parolles} Why under Mars?
\textit{Helena} The wars have so kept you under that you must needs be born under Mars.
\textit{Parolles} When he was predominant.
\textit{Helena} When he was retrograde, I think, rather.
\textit{Parolles} Why think you so?
\textit{Helena} You go so much backward when you fight.
\textit{Parolles} That’s for advantage.
\textit{Helena} So is running away, when fear proposes the safety; but the composition that your valour and fear makes in you is a virtue of a good wing, and I like the wear well.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

References to the connection between the stars and the human body are uncommon in Shakespeare’s plays, but were commonplace in the Renaissance. Despite advances in Renaissance medicine, Ptolemy’s claim that studying the stars was useful in medicine was still familiar. Each part of the human body was associated with a part of the zodiac, and each of the humours that gave people their characters and moods was affected by a particular planet.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Sir Toby Belch} I did think, by the excellent constitution of thy leg, it was formed under the star of a galliard.
\textit{Sir Andrew} Ay, ’tis strong, and it does indifferent well in a flame-coloured stock. Shall we set about some revels?
\textit{Sir Toby Belch} What shall we do else? were we not born under Taurus?
\textit{Sir Andrew} Taurus! That’s sides and heart.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Much Ado About Nothing} 5.2.41–42
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{All’s Well That Ends Well} 1.1.208–223
Sir Toby Belch No, sir; it is legs and thighs. Let me see the
caper; ha! higher: ha, ha! excellent!\textsuperscript{19}

In their buffoonery, both knights get the association wrong—Taurus was associated with the neck and throat\textsuperscript{20}. But as a joke, it only makes sense if the audience understood what the proper relationship is.

\begin{quote}
Belief in the influence of the planets and heavens was not universal in the late Renaissance. Shakespeare has several of his characters reject belief in the heavenly influences—which implies that his audiences would have been familiar with dissenting opinion. In \textit{King Lear}, the Earl of Gloucester—hearing that the king's daughter and the Duke of Kent are banished, and his eldest son is apparently plotting against him—attributes the fault to the heavens in the conventional manner:

\begin{quote}
These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain [son] of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

On his exit however, his bastard son scorns the idea that the heavens are responsible for people's fates.

\begin{quote}
This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit of our own behavior,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Twelfth Night} 1:3:142–152
\textsuperscript{20} Tillyard 1960, p5
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{King Lear} 1:2:115–128
if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon’s tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. 22

That Shakespeare gives this speech to a bastard may be significant. Bastards, being born outside marriage, were therefore born outside the natural social order and believed to behave in unnatural ways. The Bastard admits to his own “rough and lecherous” ways; he plots to dispose of his natural brother and his father, to seduce the king’s daughters behind their husband’s backs. So, for Shakespeare’s audiences, this speech may be precisely the sort of anti-social, subversive thing that unnaturally begotten children were expected to say.

HUMAN BEINGS

Shakespeare places human beings in their conventional medieval position, halfway between God and the physical elements.

What a piece of work is a man: how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world, the paragon of the animals. 23

Humans were created in the image of God, and in the exercise of reason they are most like him. Humans have some of the attributes of the intellectual beings immediately above them in the hierarchy (the angels), and in possessing these they are the most excellent of all creatures with physical bodies, superior to the animate but irrational beings immediately below them (“the paragon of the animals”). 24

22 King Lear 1:2:132–149
23 Hamlet 2:2:320–331
24 Tillyard 1960, p1
As I discussed in Chapter 13, the Middle Ages married the cosmological hierarchy with the Christian revelation, and consequently the Bible provided a wealth of valid examples of the hierarchy in human society. These were, in turn, woven into the larger Great Chain of Being. For example, the Bible states that women are to be subject to men. In Shakespeare’s plays, this is regarded as part of the natural order, and so is observed not only in human society but also amongst the animals. And the fact that males take precedence over females amongst animals corroborates its naturalness in human society.

There’s nothing situate under heaven’s eye
But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls,
Are their males’ subjects and at their controls.
Men, more divine, the masters of all these,
Lords of the wide world, and wild wat’ry seas,
Imbu’d with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowl,
Are masters to their females and their lords…²⁵

**SOCIETY**

The Renaissance believed that the order of society matches the order of the universe at large. At its peak should be the intellectual and spiritual parts, in the middle the mortal and emotional, and at the bottom the animal appetites. This is the structure that Shakespeare uses in *The Tempest*. At the top is the magus Prospero who, through deep learning, understand the heavens and can command the spirits. At the bottom is the bestial Caliban, more animal than man.

However, the most common model for society in the Renaissance was the human body, a unified whole made up of discrete parts. The Christian doctrine that the Church was ‘the body of Christ’²⁶ was still influential. Then as now people referred to the *head* of state, *arms* of government, and the *bowels* of organisations²⁷.

Because most of Shakespeare’s plays deal with conflict of some kind, the state is sometimes described as a body wracked with illness. “The commonwealth is sick of their own choice”²⁸. War is one remedy to the ‘fever’ of insurrection.

²⁵ *Comedy or Errors* 2:1:16–24
²⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:27 and 12:12
²⁷ For instance, *1King Henry VI* 3:1:73. Also *Coriolanus* 4:5:136, 5:3:103
²⁸ 2 *Henry IV* 1:3:87 Also, a country affected by cancer: *Coriolanus* 4:5:97
O great corrector of enormous times,  
Shaker of o’er-rank states, thou grand decider  
Of dusty and old titles, that heal’st with blood  
the earth which it is sick, and cur’st the world  
O’ the plurality of people.\textsuperscript{29}

Worth noting in this example is the belief that war cures not just society, but “the world” and “the earth” of the “plurisy of the people”. The world is a place where all parts are interconnected; sickness in one part infects the rest: there is no sharp line between society and the natural world.

The metaphor between society and body may also run in the opposite direction. The activity of the mind in particular may be understood in terms of a state. For instance, having agreed to murder Caesar, Brutus describes the turmoil he experiences as an “insurrection”, when the physical body (“the mortal instruments”) tries to overwhelm its intellectual parts (“the genius”)—reversing their proper order.

\begin{verbatim}
Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{verbatim}

THE ANIMALS

Below humans in the Great Chain are the animals. Like the heavens and human society, they too have their proper order: the eagle is the king of the birds; the whale or dolphin is king of the fishes; the lion the king of the beasts. Shakespeare often uses the animals to describe the position of a person within society. (People are of course also compared to the animals for other reasons: “strong as an ox”, “timid as a rabbit” and so on). Referring to Antony’s pre-eminence amongst the Romans, Cleopatra compares him to a dolphin:

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Two Noble Kinsmen} 5:1:2697–2701  
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Julius Caesar} 2:1:63–69
... his delights
were dolphin-like; they show’d his back above
the element they lived in

In *Richard II*, the king’s status is compared with an eagle’s, the king of the birds.

> Yet he looks like a king: behold, his eye,
>  As bright as the eagle’s, lightens forth
>  Controlling majesty.

By contrast, the common people—credited with little intelligence and regarded as effective only en masse—are understood in terms of animals at the opposite end of the hierarchy: bees and ants.

> The commons, like an angry hive of bees
>  That want their leader, scatter up and down
>  And care not who they sting in his revenge.
>  ...we’ll follow where thou lead’st,
>  Like stinging bees in hottest summer’s day
>  Led by their master to the flowered fields,
>  And be avenged...

In the great hierarchy, the animals lie beneath the humans. To refer to someone as ‘a beast’ is to say that they have lost the faculties that separate people from animals—particularly the use of reason. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Armado describes the clown Costard as “a rational hind [hound]”—a petty slur. Armado admits that the clown is a rational animal (the formal definition of a human being), but belittles him saying he is less than a full person because he is fundamentally no more than a faithful dog—and therefore low on the social scale. To describe someone as being ‘lower than the beasts’ is a serious insult—it is to claim that a person has lost all of the better emotional attributes of the animals, such as loyalty, faithfulness, bravery and pity.

> Villain, thou know’st no law of God nor man:
>  No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.
THE ELEMENTS

Below the animals in the cosmic scheme are the plants. They have only a small place in Renaissance concerns about society. More important is the plane below, the physical elements. In the late Renaissance, these were still the traditional four elements of the Middle Ages: earth, air, fire and water. (Aristotle’s fifth element, aether, only appears in discussions about the heavens: it was found only above the orbit of the moon and played no part in human life.) The main role of the elements was in Renaissance medical theory, which was still influenced by Aristotle’s scheme of four humours. When the elements were mentioned—to describe a person as fiery, watery, airy or earthy—it is usually a reference to medicine rather than the Great Chain.

The elements, like everything else in creation, had their proper order: the earth (as the heaviest) at the bottom, and the above it were, in order, water, air and fire (as the lightest). In Shakespeare, there are occasional references to social order in terms of this rank—usually to do with the highest and lowest elements. Kings are occasionally described in terms of fire; Bolingbroke says of King Richard:

Be he the fire, I’ll be yielding water.37

He signals his station below the king, as water is lower in the hierarchy than fire.

The most common elemental reference in Shakespeare is to earth. The lowest level of the human social order are regularly referred to as “earth”, “dirt”, “mud”, “clods”, “clay”, or simple “gross” (the defining characteristic of solid matter). The physical aspects of human nature are described in similar terms.38 The reason that people cannot hear the angels singing, explains Lorenzo in the Merchant of Venice, is that their souls are encased in a “muddy vesture of decay”39.

NATURE AND SOCIETY

As in Aquinas and Scholastic philosophy three hundred years before, the word that Shakespeare and his contemporaries use to sum up the Great Chain and its consequences

37 Richard II 3:3:58
38 The correspondence between earth and the physical aspects of human nature may be the original reason why sex—the most physical and least intellectual type of human behaviour—came to be described as “dirty”.
39 The Merchant of Venice 5:1:64.
for humanity is ‘nature’\textsuperscript{40}. What gave nature its order were the ordinances of God, both as explicitly set out in the Bible and as implied in the creation (as interpreted by priests, theologians and philosophers). The chief ordering forces in society were the Christian virtues—particularly love and obedience.

For Shakespeare, the term ‘nature’ has no theological overtones. Nature is simply the order of the world, particularly as it was described in the Bible—and it was the Bible, not theology, that provided the immediate rules for ‘natural’ social order. For example, Genesis gives humans dominion over the animals and men over women\textsuperscript{41}. Children were likewise expected to respect and obey their parents, subjects their lawful kings. In \textit{King Lear}, the old king abdicates his rule in favour of his two daughters, requiring only that they house him in the manner of a king. After he is driven out by his first daughter Goneril, he turns to his second daughter Regan, begging her to remember the natural order:

\begin{quote}
...thou better know\'st
The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Lear calls upon all of the traditional forces that bind society together into order—an order which is summarised in the word ‘nature’. Amongst the most important of these forces is love, which in Renaissance thought had is natural conclusion in marriage (also sanctioned by God). Marriage without love is destructive as it is contrary to nature\textsuperscript{43}.

\begin{quote}
For what is wedlock forced but a hell,
An age of discord and continual strife?
Whereas the contrary bringeth bliss,
And is a pattern of celestial peace.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Good order is rather rare in Shakespeare’s plays however, so the word ‘unnatural’ appears rather more frequently than ‘nature’. The term ‘unnatural’ is used to cover civil war, murder, infanticide, rape, mayhem and strife generally. For instance, in the civil war of \textit{Henry VI}, sons kill fathers and fathers kill their sons.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] The term ‘Great Chain of Being’ was formally used to describe the system by Lovejoy in 1933 in a series of lectures which were later published as the \textit{Great Chain of Being} (1936). Lovejoy’s immediate source for the term was Alexander Pope, but the metaphor of a chain dates from the Neoplatonists. Shakespeare does not use the term.
\item[41] Genesis 1:27–30, 3:16
\item[42] \textit{King Lear} 2.4:180–182
\item[43] The necessity of love for a harmonious marriage is a major theme of \textit{The Taming of the Shrew}.
\item[44] \textit{1 Henry VI} 5.5:62–65
\end{footnotes}
Father O, pity, God, this miserable age!  
What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly, 
Erroneous, mutinous and unnatural, 
This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!45

Even more distraught is the Duke of Northumberland in Henry IV who, hearing of that his son has been killed during the rebellion, flies into a rage, and would see the entire natural order upset in his revenge:

Let heaven kiss earth! now let not Nature’s hand  
Keep the wild flood confined! let order die!46

At the beginning of Richard III, Queen Anne enters lamenting over her dead husband, the former king, killed by the villainous Richard. When Richard seeks her hand in marriage over the corpse, she curses him, calling on the furthest reaches of creation (God above and the earth below) to correct Richard’s ‘unnatural’ acts—murder, regicide, courting the widow—and so purge the world of this source of chaos (whom she describes as “the devil” and “the “dreadful minister of hell”47):

Thy deed, inhuman and unnatural,  
Provokes this deluge [of blood] most unnatural.  
O God, which this blood madest, revenge his death!  
O earth, which this blood drink’st revenge his death!  
Either heaven with lightning strike the murderer dead,  
Or earth, gape open wide and eat him quick,  
As thou dost swallow up this good king’s blood  
Which his hell-govern’d arm hath butchered!48

Nature appears frequently in Shakespeare’s plays to refer to the total cosmic order. What he does not use the term ‘nature’ for what we usually mean by the term today—the environment—distinct from human activity (this distinction is chiefly a creation of the nineteenth century Romantic poets). Shakespeare draws no contrast between society and nature: a society that observes God’s ordinances is natural; sinful behaviour is unnatural. The distinction between ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ belongs to a later age, after the cosmic order has broken down. There are a few occasions when Shakespeare refers to wild people in

45 3 Henry VI 2:5.88–91
46 2 King Kenry IV 1:1.153–154
47 Richard III 1:2.44–45
48 Richard III 1:2.60–67
their ‘natural’ state. By this, he appears to mean the state of Adam in the Garden of Eden—naked, knowing neither good nor evil, and having no government, kings or laws.\(^{49}\)

**THE CORPORATE NATURE OF SOCIETY**

Society in the Renaissance is an integrated, organic whole: it is the matrix within which human lives are worked out. Society gives people their roles, station and prerogatives. It is not the product of individual’s contributions; quite the reverse. This corporate nature of society, with its interacting ranks and stations, is made explicit in an extended speech at the beginning of *Henry V* where the King and his nobles decide on whether to pursue war simultaneously with France and Scotland. The Duke of Exeter notes that, although society is divided into different ranks (“high, low and lower”), they are all part of one harmonious whole (“congreeing ... like music”).

> ... government, though high and low and lower,  
> Put into parts, doth keep in one consent,  
> Congreeing in a full and natural close  
> Like music.

The Archbishop of Canterbury takes up the theme of unity in diversity, adding in vaguely Aristotelian terms that all parts of society, as well as being interrelated, move towards a common goal—in this case, the Christian virtue of obedience—which gives diverse activities a common purpose.

> Therefore doth heaven divide  
> The state of man in divers functions,  
> Setting endeavour in continual motion;  
> To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,  
> Obedience...

\(^{49}\) In Renaissance thought, law and government were instituted after the Fall, to control people’s otherwise sinning natures. The origins of this belief are in Plato. His Republic—intended as the ideal society—has no laws; people know their place and roles from their social position and the state’s educational system. However, at the end of his life, Plato came to understand the difficulties of construct such a society, and so explore a practical compromise: a state which was ordered by laws not by a knowledge of philosophy. When the Christians incorporated Platonism, they accepted Plato’s basic premises, but altered their application to fit within Christian mythology. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived without law, needing only their knowledge of God. After sinning however, the ideal was lost, and the world was flawed through their disobedience. Because of sin, people required law and government, because knowledge and fear of God was not sufficient to hold them in check.
He then compares human society with a colony of bees—another metaphor with its origins in Aristotle, and a favorite image in the Middle Ages. Each part of the insect commonwealth has its role and tasks, but all work towards the same good.

...for so work the honey-bees,
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach
The act of order to a peopled kingdom.
They have a king and officers of sorts;
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home,
Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad,
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
Make boot upon the summer’s velvet buds,
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent-royal of their emperor;
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
The singing masons building roofs of gold,
The civil citizens kneading up the honey,
The poor mechanic porters crowding in
Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate,
The sad-eyed justice, with his surly hum,
Delivering o’er to executors pale
The lazy yawning drone.

He concludes with a miscellany of examples to illustrate how a state, so long as it works obediently to one will, can precede on several activities at once and succeed in all of them—in short, a war with both Scotland and France is possible.

The other ‘natural’ unit for human beings is the family, which functions in many ways like a state in miniature. It is ruled over by the father, and has its ‘natural’ hierarchy: men over women, parents over children, and legitimate children over bastards. And like states, families may go to war. The fate of individuals is tied to their family, and the attempt to move outside that natural structure results in ruin. For parents to turn their children out was not only a source of hardship, but was to cut them off from the ‘natural’ order.

These themes provide basic architecture for Romeo and Juliet. Although the Modern habit is to focus on the young lovers, the chief concern of the Renaissance was—as the opening lines make explicit—the “two households ... [which] from ancient grudge break to new mutiny.” It is this conflict which propels the action. When Romeo’s friend Mercutio is
slain by Juliet’s cousin Tybalt, he does not blame the individuals, but calls down “a plague on both your houses”\(^\text{51}\). Romeo had tried to prevent the fight, not because of any feeling for his enemy Tybalt, but because “Tybalt ... an hour hath been my kinsman”\(^\text{52}\). Friar Lawrence was prepared to marry Romeo and Juliet, not because of their love (which he pokes fun at), but because he sees a chance to end the quarrel between their families\(^\text{53}\). At the end of the play, the Prince of Verona blames not individuals for the deaths of so many, but the heads of both houses.

As I discussed in Chapter 7, in the ancient world, the belief is society as a natural integrated whole was contrasted with the belief that society was the result of a contract between self-interested individuals. Sophocles, Thucydides and Plato all blamed self-interest for social catastrophe. The same theme appears in Shakespeare’s plays—although without any reference to the classical sources. In his plays, self interest usually results in social disorder, and is often contrasted with acts consistent with the good of the community or God’s laws. Self-interest is frequently the motivation of Shakespeare’s villains— Iago (\textit{Othello}), Shylock (\textit{Merchant of Venice}), Claudius (\textit{Hamlet}), Edmund (\textit{King Lear}), Saturnius (\textit{Titus Andronicus}), and MacBeth. (The model for the consequences of self-interested behaviour for the Renaissance was the fall of Lucifer and the other evil angels. The Church taught that the cause of their fall was the sin of pride: they had turned their minds away from God and his creation towards themselves. God would likewise punish those that took too much interest in themselves and ignored the order he laid down for nature and society.)

There is however one play where the characters attempt to establish a community on entirely ‘unnatural’ principles: \textit{Love’s Labours Lost}. The king decides to establish an academy of learning and persuades three friends to join him for three years of scholarship. The king tells them that, In this time, they will “war against our own affections and the huge army of the world’s desires”\(^\text{54}\). Their little state—which Shakespeare describes as a ‘commonwealth’\(^\text{55}\)—is to be governed not on the natural forces of love, degree or family, but by a contract requiring the rejection of “love, wealth and pomp”.

...not to see a woman...
and one day in a week to touch no food,

\(^{51}\) Romeo and Juliet 3:1:96–114
\(^{52}\) Romeo and Juliet 3:1:118
\(^{53}\) Romeo and Juliet 2:3:90–92
\(^{54}\) Love’s Labours Lost 1:1:9
\(^{55}\) Love’s Labours Lost 4:1:41 and 4:2:79
and but one meal on every day beside ...  
And ... to sleep but three hours in the night 
And not to be seen to wink of all the day ...  

Nature—and specifically love—proves to be stronger than the contract. On the day it is signed, a princess and her largely female retinue arrive, and each member of the male community is smitten and breaks his vows. The women however recognise that vows too are holy and it would be unnatural to break them, even for love. The men are left with neither community nor wives.

THE FATE OF THE GREAT CHAIN

The social order of Shakespeare’s theatrical world is clearly derived from the great medieval cosmology. But in his time, the system is beginning to break down. Some of Shakespeare’s characters do not believe in the influence of the planets; others forget their proper order; some even make jokes about it. Some characters act out individual self-interest, rather than behaving as is appropriate to their place in society; others try to rise above their God-ordained station; worse, some even attempt to establish a community on principles divorced from God, the natural order, and the forces that hold everything in place. These examples are not common in Shakespeare’s plays, but they are signs that decay has set in—especially as all of these traits would become marked in the century after his death. As I discuss in Chapter 13, the Great Chain would be brought down in pieces: first the failure was the Copernican attack on the Ptolemaic heavens, then the Protestant Reformation which discredited the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies, then the scepticism of modern political philosophy which combined with Humanism to announce the equality of all people, at the same time as modern science began to attack the metaphysics which held the whole system together. But the death of a social order is rarely swift thing; even hastened by war or insurrection, the decline of the Great Chain of being was a slow and majestic thing. In England, an attenuated form—the English class system, dividing society into upper, middle and lower classes—persisted until the twentieth century.

Although religious wars, Enlightenment philosophy and political revolution in the first two centuries of the Modern Age would finish the Great Chain of Being as a viable model for social order, it nevertheless continued to hold enormous attraction. Writing Les Misérables in 1862, Victor Hugo draws upon the assumption of a divinely ordered chain incessantly. The ex-convict, Valjean, looks out at society from its bottommost level to see:

56 Love’s Labours Lost 1:1:37–44
...the huge pyramid that we call civilisation. Here and there in the formless, swarming heap, near to him or at an inaccessible height, some detail would be thrown into sharp relief—the prison-warder with his truncheon, the gendarme with his sabre; above these the mitred bishop, and at the very top, like a sun, the Emperor radiantly crowned. ...Life came and went ...in the intricate and mysterious pattern God stamps on civilisation ...  

Seventy years after the French Revolution theoretically overturned the ancient order and proclaimed ‘freedom, equality and fraternity’ for all, Hugo can still have his characters reject:

...the kind of indulgence which consists in supporting a woman of the town against a respectable citizen, or a police officer against a mayor, or in any form the lower against the higher, this is a false indulgence which undermines society  

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57 Hugo 1982, p100 (1:2:7). For the principle of plenitude, see p764 (4:3:3); the place of humanity is the hierarchy, below the angels and above the animals p850 (4:3:2); the comparison between social order and order in the planets p1006 (5:1:5).

58 Hugo 1982, p200 (1:7:2). See also p1160 (5:8:2)
APPENDIX TEN

MODERN SPELLING AND LINGUISTIC REFORMS

ABSTRACT The late Renaissance and the Modern Age saw a large number of programs to ‘improve’ natural languages and reform spelling. Artificial language programs all shared the assumption that the meaning of words is the property of words, and hence problems in communicating could be overcome either by purging existing words of faults or else creating entirely new languages. An associated program was to simplify the spelling; reformers believed that by removing confusing irregularities they would make writing easier to learn and use correctly.

PROJECTS TO REFORM LANGUAGE

From the late-sixteenth century, great concern was expressed by philosophers and writers of all kinds about the ability of language to establish certain communication—a constant theme throughout the Modern Age. In response, a great number of reform programs were launched. Some were concerned to reform spelling, which had become set in medieval forms with the invention of the printing press. Others invented new alphabets, better suited to representing their native tongues than the scripts they had inherited from Rome. But the most extreme were those that proposed to abolish existing languages altogether, and in their place establish new ‘artificial’ languages based on rational principles¹. By 1903, there were

¹ Scholars had proposed rational languages since the Middle Ages, the process accelerated enormously from the mid-nineteenth century. A partial list of projects since the Middle Ages includes Ramón Llull, Ars Magna (13th century); Cave Beck, Universal Character (1657); Faiguet, Langue nouvelle (1765; printed in the 9th volume of the Encyclopédie); Simon Brodley, Cadmus Britannicus (1787); Delormel, Projet d’une langue universelle (1795); Thomas Northmore, A Triplet of Inventions (1796); Jean-François Sudre, Solresol, also called Langue Musicale Universelle (1817); Description (1835); Sotos Ochando, Universal Language (1852); Herr Schleyer, Volapük (1879); Charles Sprague, Handbook of Volapük (1887); Adolphe Nicolas, Spokil (1887); Volk and Fuche, Weltsprache (1883); Lazarz Ludwik Zamenhof, Esperanto (1887); Eugen A. Lauda, Kosmos (1888); George Henderson, Lingua: an international Language (1888); J. Bauer, Spelin: A Universal Language (English edition by Charles Strauss; 1889); P. Hoinix, Anglo-Franca (1889); (George?) Henderson, Latinse (1890); Julius Lott, Un lingua internazional (1890);...continued on next page
at least 38 separate artificial language projects in Europe\(^2\). Apart from demonstrating faith in the power of reason and mathematics, few met with any lasting success: at the end of the twentieth century, probably no more than ten million people spoke Esperanto, the most popular of all artificial languages.

Ironically, it was not the artificial languages that survived but the criticisms, which provided influential in defining Modern understandings of language, its role in communication, and what communicating well involved. Amongst the most ferocious and influential of early English critics was the satirist Jonathan Swift. In the third book of *Gulliver’s Travels* he mercilessly satirised various philosophical reforms. In 1716, he wrote his own *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, in which he complained:

> our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; and the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar.

> ... I doubt whether the Alterations ... introduced [since the Civil War], have added much to the Beauty or Strength of the English Tongue, though they have taken off a great deal from that Simplicity, which is one of the greatest Perfections in any Language.

He attributed the loss of simplicity to an “Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon [which has] prevailed in every Writing”, the “Succession of affected Phrases, and new, conceited Words”, and contractions such as *Drudg’d, Disturb’d Rebuk’t* and *Fledg’d*. He also notes that English grammar is “very defective”. His remedy was to set up an Academy to correct and improve English\(^3\). Its role would be to discard some newer ‘corrupt’ words, correct others, and if necessary restore antiquated words that had dropped out of use.

\(^2\) Eco 1997, p318

\(^3\) Although the English never followed Swift’s advice to set up an academy to regulate their language, many other European countries did, including France, Italy and Spain. An English Academy had already been proposed by the Royal Society in 1664, on the model of the Académie Française.
Swift’s Academy was never founded. But complaints and remedies similar to those of the seventeenth and eighteenth century have been made ever since. Even the terminology has remained largely unchanged: chiefly in calls for ‘simple’, ‘pure’, ‘natural’ and ‘everyday’ words, along with the appeal to the language of ‘the man in the street’. French and Latin have remained constant foes in English-speaking countries.

Over two hundred years after Swift, George Orwell pointed to some strikingly similar problems and solutions in his great essay, *Politics and the English Language*. Unlike Swift, whose concern was the decay of English language in its own right, the avowedly political Orwell’s concern was that the decay in language contributed to and was a symptom of political decay. Language and politics are joined together for Orwell in his maxim, “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought”.

…one ought to recognise that the present political chaos [of post-war Europe] is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end.

Orwell began with the old complaint—“Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way…”—and illustrated his point with a number of contemporary examples. These he criticised for “staleness of imagery”, “lack of precision”, “vagueness” and “sheer incompetence”. Unlike Swift, who was content with general denouncement, Orwell provided a detailed, richly illustrated critique of poor English. Common characteristics include the use of:

1. ‘dying metaphors’, like *stand shoulder to shoulder with*, *play into the hands of*, *grist to the mill*, *the order of the day*, which are “used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves”.

2. ‘verbal false limbs’, in which simple verbs are eliminated and replaced with a phrase, such as *render inoperative*, *make contact with*, *be subjected to*, *give rise to*, *have the effect of*, *play a leading role*. In these ‘false limbs’, “the passive voice is used wherever possible in preference to the active, and noun constructions are used instead of gerunds… the range of verbs is cut down by means of the -ize and de- formations, and the banal statements are given an appearance of profundity by means of the not-un formation.”

3. pretentious diction, like *phenomenon*, *element*, *objective*, *categorical*, *effective*, and *virtual*, which are “used to dress up simple statements and give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgements”. “Bad writers … are nearly always haunted by the notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones.”

4. meaningless words, which he illustrates with the following example:

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4 Orwell was a great admirer of Swift’s writing, even though he objected to the satirist’s politics. See his essay *Politics vs Literature* (1946)
Comfort’s catholicity of perception and image, strangely Whitmanesque in range, almost the exact opposite in aesthetic compulsion, continues to evoke that trembling atmospheric accumulative hinting at a cruel, and inexorably serene timelessness … Wrey Gardiner scores by aiming at simple bull’s-eyes with precision. Only they are not so simple, and through this contented sadness runs more than the surface bitter-sweet of resignation.

Despite the prevalence of bad usage and its numbing effects of political thought, Orwell remained optimistic: “the decadence of our language is probably curable”. Having identified characteristic problems, he set out what he believed was involved in “the defence of the English language”:

To begin with it has nothing to do with archaism, with the salvaging of obsolete words and turns of speech, or with the setting up of a ‘standard English’ which must never be departed from. On the contrary, it is especially concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom that has outlived its usefulness. It has nothing to do with correct grammar or syntax, which are of no importance so long as one makes one’s meaning clear, or with the avoidance of Americanisms, or with having what is called a ‘good prose style’. On the other hand, it is not concerned with fake simplicity and the attempt to make English colloquial. Nor does it even imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one’s meaning.

[1] never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
[2] never use a long word where a short one will do.
[3] if it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
[4] never use a passive where you can use the active.
[5] never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
[6] break any of these rules sooner than do anything outright barbarous.

Orwell’s whole program in “defence of the English language” can be summed up in two sentences:

If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of [political] orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself.

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5 These six elementary rules, taken from Politics and the English language, are amongst the most cited rules for good writing. But how sincerely they are applied, let alone whether they help achieve Orwell’s goal of freeing people’s minds from political orthodoxies, is another matter.
Although Orwell rejects some proposals that had been made by Swift—reviving old words, creating a ‘standard English’, correct grammar, use of everyday English—the fact that he mentions them implies they are still current and advocated in his time. Despite their differences though, Swift and Orwell both prescribe similar therapies: using simpler language, choosing better words, avoiding foreign words and jargon, avoiding ‘pretentious’ and ‘conceited’ words, cutting affected metaphors and phrases. Despite being separated by nearly 250 years, both essayists are fundamentally concerned with words.

**SPELLING REFORM**

Alongside efforts to reform languages in the last three hundred years have been proposals to either simplify or reform spelling. The movement has always been most active in the English-speaking world, inheritor of Europe’s most irregular spelling system.

Until the seventeenth century English spelling was fairly flexible, but after then English printers began to fix the spelling of words through mass printing. Unfortunately, the pronunciation of many common words followed one English dialect while the spelling followed another. So today *busy* and *bury* are pronounced as they were in Restoration London but take West Country spellings.

At about the same time as spelling was becoming standardised, English underwent a major change of pronunciation, so today *derk* rhymes with *bark* not *work*; and *night* is said as *nite* rather like *nicht* as it was in Caxton’s day. The now-silent letters in *folk, gnat,* and *would,* were all once pronounced. Poor scholarship changed *iland,* sissors, and *ancor* into *island,* sissors and anchor; made *tight* and *delight* consistent with *night* and *right* (although without any basis); and unhelpfully changed *dette* and *doute* into *debt* and *doubt* to make them consistent with their Latin origins. Spelling purists delight in the idiocies of English orthography. Most English words actually do follow regular spelling patterns; only a small number have really unpredictable spellings—including, unfortunately, some of the most common, such as *eight, write, bury, where, whose, bread, nation, enough, debt, through, of, once, thought.*

There were calls for the reform of English spelling early in the eighteenth century—which the reactionary Swift felt he had to oppose. His comments are just as valid now as they were three hundred years ago.

Another Cause which hath contributed not a little to the maiming of our Language, is a foolish Opinion, advanced of late Years, that we ought to spell exactly as we speak; which beside the obvious Inconvenience of utterly destroying our Etymology, would

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be a thing we should never see an End of. Not only the several Towns and Countries of England, have a different way of Pronouncing, but even here in London, they clip their Words after one Manner about the Court, another in the City, and a third in the Suburbs; and in a few Years, it is probable, will all differ from themselves, as Fancy or Fashion shall direct: All which reduced to Writing would entirely confound Orthography. Yet many People are so fond of this Conceit, that is sometimes a difficult matter to read modern Books and Pamphlets, where the Words are so curtailed, and varied from their original Spelling, that whoever hath been used to plain English, will hardly know them by sight.7

Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Charles Darwin, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Arthur Conan Doyle were all prominent supporters of spelling reform. In 1876, the American Philological Society and Spelling Reform Society were established in the U.S.; and a British version followed three years later.8 In 1906, Andrew Carnegie donated a quarter of a million dollars to establish the Simplified Spelling Board, which managed to get several American spellings—including catalog and program—adopted by the U.S. government. Its initial success lead the Board to attempt several more radical changes, which promptly met widespread resistance; the Board never achieved anything else. In England, George Bernard Shaw left the bulk of his estate to spelling reform, without any noticeable outcome.9

In 1908, the Simple Spelling Society was founded in Britain and has been active ever since. Its most recent program has been to introduce ‘cut spelling’ or CS, which involves removing redundant and silent letters, and reforming a few spellings—like writing the gh sound in enough as f. Here is an eye-jarring example of CS from the Society’s website, which suggests how unlikely change in this direction is.

Th foloing paragrafs sho CS in action. We first notice it is not hard to read, even without noing its rules, and with practis we read it as esily as traditionl spelng. Most words ar unchanjed (over 3/4 in th previus sentnce), and we hav th impression not of a totaly new riting systm, but of norml script with lettrs misng here and ther. Th basic shape of most words, by wich we recognize them, is not fundmently altrd, and nearly al those that ar mor substantialy chanjed ar quikly decoded; very few ar truly puzling. This means that, if al printd matr sudnly apeard in CS tomoro, peples readng abiliy wud not be seriusly afecdt. Foren lernrs in particulr ar helpd by th clearr indication of pronunciation, as wen pairs like lo/cow, danjer/angr, undrmine/determn cese to look like ryms. With groing

7 Swift 1712
8 Bryson 1990, p121
9 Shaw liked to demonstrate the absurdities of English orthography by pointing out that the word fish could legitimately be spelt GHOTI: GH as in rough, O as in women, and TI as in nation.
familiarity, users appreciate CS as a streamlined but more accurate representation of spoken English. Its novelty lies in the disappearance of much of the arbitrary clutter that makes written English so confusing and causes most of the mistakes people now make.10

Probably the greatest achievement in English spelling reform was not by any society but the American dictionary maker, Noah Webster. During the American War of Independence, he became a teacher at a time when schoolbooks (mostly produced in England) were scarce. In response he produced a speller, reader and grammar. Their influence was enormous: his speller sold eighty million copies in his lifetime alone—second in sales only to the Bible—and was used throughout the newly united States. Webster’s lasting achievement though was to produce the first American dictionary, editions of which are still used today throughout the United States. Webster the political revolutionary also proposed a revolution in spelling, foreseeing the separation of American English from its parent as “necessary and unavoidable”: “Our honour requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government”11. This in Webster’s mind necessitated a new, revolutionary spelling system. He set about ‘improving’ spelling, introducing words like theater, center, color, wagon, fiber and defense. He lobbied American printers intensively to adopt his new words. But even Webster’s indefatigable zeal had to be limited to a few hundred words. He did not rid American spelling of the gh, ig and ph combinations in rough, sign and phonetic. Nor did he remove redundant or silent letters as in island, scissors, knife, doubt or write. At the end of his life, he conceded that “The body of the language [in his dictionary] is the same as in England, an it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness”.

Webster had advantages that no English spelling reformer has today: he lived in a country fired with revolution, determined to assert its independence in all ways; America was desperately short of school textbooks; and he had no significant rivals, particularly no competing dictionary makers12. The only European government to achieve major spelling reform through legislation was the Bolshevik government after the 1917 Russian revolution.

10 Simple Spelling Society website
11 McCrum, Cran & MacNeil 1988, p241
12 Webster’s dictionary of American English, with his improved spellings, first appeared in 1828. While there had been many books called ‘dictionaries’ produced since the seventeenth century in England, but most were, as their name implies, guides on diction—how to pronounce difficult and unfamiliar words. They did not attempt to define every word in the English language: that first happened with Samuel Johnson’s dictionary of 40,000 words, first published in 1755, only thirty years before the American revolution.
They not only simplified some spellings but abolished four letters of the Russian alphabet. Like Webster, they were able to make these changes because the revolution had removed the conservative forces that normally stabilise spelling conventions. Large parts of the Russian people were also illiterate—probably more than half did not know the letters of the kyrillitsa.

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**THE INVENTION OF BASIC ENGLISH**

The nineteenth century inventors of artificial languages rejected all existing languages; the spelling reformers by contrast accepted the language as they found it and sought only to make its spelling more regular. The twentieth century saw a new trend, lying between total acceptance and total rejection: simplifying, by keeping the basics of the existing language, but reducing the lexicon and the grammatical complexities. The most ambitious version in the English-speaking world was Basic English, developed in the 1930s by the philosopher and orthographer C.K. Ogden. His starting point had been an intellectual exercise: what was the minimum number of words required to intelligibly define all the other words used in modern English? Although English is the largest of modern languages, with about half a

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13 Alphabetic reform has paralleled spelling reform throughout history, although that story lies outside this thesis. Russia is the only country I know of that has abolished letters. Most cultures are highly conservative: the French for instance retain the letter w even though no French word uses it. Nor is conservatism in spelling anything new. Graffiti from Pompeii, buried by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in 79 AD, shows that Latin pronunciation had drifted way from its spelling. The Emperor Claudius (41–54AD) introduced three new letters, although none survived (Suetonius *Claudius* 41). Although the French diacritical marks—accents, dieresis, cedilla and apostrophe—were developed around 1540, along with the new letters j and v, French spelling did not become standardised until the mid-eighteenth century. (Martin 1988, pp305–307).

From the Renaissance onwards there were numerous new alphabets devised, particularly for English. Amongst the innovators was Isaac Pitman, the inventor of Pitman shorthand. George Bernard Shaw left a large bequest for a new English alphabet (See Drucker 1995). English has always attracted proposals for new alphabets because the Latin alphabet is not well suited to the way English is spoken. Modern English has about 45 sounds, depending on the dialect, but only 26 letters to represent them. Every letter stands for at least two sounds and usually more. The letters c, q and x are redundant as their sounds can be formed using other letters. There are no symbols for several sounds, including the most common in English—the neutral vowel a, used in apart and sofa. Some sounds are represented several ways, the worst case being the sound sh which is spelled in 11 ways: na*tion, show, sugar, mas*ton, mis*ion, sus*picion, o*cean, con*scious, ch*aperone, sch*ist, fuch*ia—and 13 if we allow nauseous and psh*aw. (Mann 2000, p97)

14 Cipolla 1969, pp90–91
million words, Ogden and his colleagues at the Orthographical Institute at Cambridge University came to the surprising conclusion that about 850 words would suffice. From this list developed the idea of Basic English, which Ogden conceived as the international language for the future.

Basic English is a careful and systematic selection of 850 English words which will cover those needs of everyday life for which a vocabulary of 20,000 words is frequently employed. These words are not the words most commonly used, as determined by word-counts; but all of them are common, and more than 600 of them are constantly used by any English or American child of six.\(^\text{15}\)

Basic English is made up 600 nouns (200 names of picturable objects, and 400 other names of things); 150 adjectives, and 100 words which put these names and adjectives into operation so that the whole system works like normal English. Ogden though made a large innovation: he removed all verbs and instead made do with words that could act as both object and action.\(^\text{16}\) Verbs like advertise, invent and select were excluded from Basic English, but the nouns advertisement, invention and selection were retained, along with eighteen ‘operators’ to help people operate these nouns (be, have, make, do, come, go, give, take, get, put, keep, let, see, seem, send, say, may, will). So while it is not possible to say “I smile” it is possible to say “I made a smile” or “I gave a smile”. Ogden also permitted the addition of the suffixes -ing and -ed to about half of the nouns, creating words like work-ing, hammer-ed.

Cutting the number of words to 850 meant that the entire vocabulary could be memorised within a few days; cutting the verbs removed all of the difficulties with irregular formations.

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\(^{15}\) Ogden 1930. Ogden’s original lists did not include words for numbers, measures, money, days, or months, which would take his list to about 1100 words. Ogden also allowed that in some circumstances, international, scientific and special-purpose words might also be required.

\(^{16}\) Basic English was like most attempts to reform English grammar in the twentieth century in its efforts to rid English of its many irregular common verbs. However illogical it seems to people, learners just have to learn that ride inflects one way (ride, rides, riding, rode, ridden) but dive inflects another (dive, dives, diving, dived, not dove—although this one gives pause to many—and never diven). But for all the squealing, when compared with the inflected European languages, English inflections are fairly simple, albeit with many exceptions. No verb has more than five inflections—ride is the worst case—whereas in Latin, for instance, verbs may inflect in up to 120 ways. English nouns and adjectives have only a few, regular inflections. For instance, most nouns can be made plural by adding an -s or -es; and most verbs are transformed in the past perfect tense by adding -ed. Many English nouns, verbs and adjectives can be interchanged without altering spelling: uniquely amongst European languages, English allows its speakers to both plan a table and table a plan without inflecting the words.
The cost was the use of the eighteen highly abstract ‘operators’ and the loss of basic grammatical habits common to all European languages. It also involved using English in rather idiosyncratic ways—some of which involved knowing the full rules of English grammar if they were to make sense. While Basic English, rich in nouns, may be adequate for descriptive writing—and Ogden specifically refers to words formed “by the pictorial method”—it is nearly impossible to express instructions (“Write this down”, “Run!”), warnings (“Watch out!”,” Beware”) or greetings (“Hello”, “How do you do?”). It can also require considerable circumlocutions to refer to familiar objects:

The English word leopard (not one of the Basic words) is in the vocabulary of the majority of six-year-olds. In Basic it has to be expressed as great animal of the cat family with a yellow coat having round dark marks on it, and which lives on meat. These twenty-one words are all in the vocabulary of the six-year-old, but it would be a very strange six-year-old indeed who would think of expressing the concept of leopard in this way!

While it may be technically possible to define most or all English words using a much smaller subset, Ogden does not appear to have asked the question: why do ordinary speakers learn such a vast number of words if over ninety-five per cent are, by his assumption, redundant?

Basic English attracted considerable support during the 1930s and 1940s. During the Second World War, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt both found time to set up Ministerial committees to explore and promote its use. It also attracted much criticism. One initially enthusiastic supporter was George Orwell who later foresaw a danger in restricting the language people had to express themselves. In his bleak dystopia, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell created a bitter satire on Basic English: Newspeak, the official language of government and repression. So important is the language to his basic theme of political repression that he added an extended Appendix to the novel, explaining the principles used to construct Newspeak, many of which came from Basic English.

Summarising his creation, he says:

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak [Standard English] forgotten, a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependant on words.17

17 Orwell 1977, p241. Orwell is possibly inverting Ogden’s own words here: “The idea that because our thought is based on language, and because it is important for our thought to be clear, a great respect for form might be a help in the development of our minds. The use of Basic is an insurance that the words most necessary to the structure will be worked in...continued on next page
There were attempts to teach basic English: Ogden estimated it would take about a month to learn, rather than seven years needed learn polished English. But repeated efforts failed. Native English speakers found its lexicon and grammar too restrictive and unlike everyday, idiomatic English. Non-English speakers found its grammar hard, particularly the use of ‘operators’ (effectively indirect verbs and prepositions; always the most elusive part of English). But the chief reason Basic English failed was not its critics or inflexibility but lack of interest: there was not sufficiently widespread support for seeing it used, nor a pressing need for it, nor anyone capable of making the rules stick. Basic English was a solution in search of a problem. It began as a philosopher’s exercise and ended up a linguist’s curio.
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