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978-0-521-19062-6 - Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric in Early Modern Europe

David L. Marshall

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Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric in Early Modern Europe

Considered the most original thinker in the Italian philosophical tradition, Giambattista Vico has been the object of much scholarly attention but little consensus. In this new interpretation, David L. Marshall examines the entirety of Vico's oeuvre and situates him in the political context of early modern Naples. He demonstrates Vico's significance as a theorist who adapted the discipline of rhetoric to modern conditions. Marshall presents Vico's work as an effort to resolve a contradiction. As a professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, Vico had a deep investment in the explanatory power of classical rhetorical thought, especially that of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Yet as a historian of the failure of Naples as a self-determining political community, he had no illusions about the ease with which democratic and republican systems of government could be established in the post-classical world. As Marshall demonstrates, by jettisoning the assumption that rhetoric only illuminates direct, face-to-face interactions between orator and auditor, Vico reinvented rhetoric for a modern world in which the Greek polis and the Roman *res publica* are no longer paradigmatic for political thought.

David L. Marshall is assistant professor of humanities at Kettering University. He has contributed to the *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani, Napoli Nobilissima*, *New Vico Studies*, and *Intellectual History Review*.

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