

PHILOSOPHY AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE

Which language should philosophers use: technical or common language? In a book as important for intellectual historians as it is for philosophers, Lodi Nauta addresses a vital question which still has resonance today: is the discipline of philosophy assisted or disadvantaged by employing a special vocabulary? By the Middle Ages, philosophy had become a highly technical discipline, with its own lexicon and methods. The Renaissance humanist critique of this specialized language has been dismissed as philosophically superficial, but the author demonstrates that it makes a crucial though controversial point: it is through the misuse of language that philosophical problems arise. He charts the influence of this critique on early modern philosophers, including Hobbes and Locke, and shows how it led to the downfall of medieval Aristotelianism and the gradual democratization of language and knowledge. This book will be essential reading for anyone interested in the transition from medieval to modern philosophy.

Lodi Nauta is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Groningen. He is author and editor of several monographs and essay collections, including the award-winning *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (2009), and has written numerous journal articles and book chapters on medieval and early modern philosophy. He was a recipient of the Spinoza Award in 2016.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE
LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE

The Claims of Common Speech from Petrarch to Locke

LODI NAUTA

University of Groningen



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108845960
 DOI: 10.1017/9781108991476

© Lodi Nauta 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Nauta, Lodi, author.

TITLE: Philosophy and the language of the people : the claims of common speech from Petrarch to Locke / Lodi Nauta, University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2020052325 (print) | LCCN 2020052326 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108845960 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108994118 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108991476 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Philosophy – Terminology. | Philosophy – Language. | Philosophy, Medieval. | Philosophy, Modern. | Language and languages – Philosophy.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC B49 .N38 2021 (print) | LCC B49 (ebook) | DDC 101/.4–DC23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020052325>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020052326>

ISBN 978-1-108-84596-0 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction	i
1 Early Humanist Critics of Scholastic Language: Francesco Petrarch and Leonardo Bruni	20
2 From a Linguistic Point of View: Lorenzo Valla's Critique of Aristotelian-Scholastic Philosophy	44
3 Giovanni Pontano on Language, Meaning, and Grammar	71
4 Juan Luis Vives on Language, Knowledge, and the Topics	95
5 Anti-Essentialism and the Rhetoricization of Knowledge: Mario Nizolio's Humanist Attack on Universals	127
6 Skepticism and the Critique of Language in Francisco Sanches	154
7 Thomas Hobbes and the Rhetoric of Common Language	180
8 Between Private Signification and Common Use: Locke on Ideas, Words, and the Social Dimension of Language	215
Conclusion	245
<i>Bibliography</i>	252
<i>Index</i>	271

Acknowledgments

This book was written, for the most part, during my two terms as dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Groningen. To combine deaning, teaching, and research (not to mention birdwatching) remains a challenge, but I have been helped immensely by the fact that this faculty is not only a center of philosophical excellence but also a community where intellectual freedom and professional efficiency are matched only by a wonderfully collegial spirit, which even a nasty virus was not able to dispel. I am grateful to all my colleagues for making this place such an intellectually and socially inspiring environment.

For comments, suggestions, advice, and support of various kinds I am grateful to many of my colleagues and friends. In particular I should mention Han Thomas Adriaenssen, Michael Allen, Robert Black, Christopher Celenza, Alexandra Chadwick, Brian Copenhaver, Unn Falkeid, James Hankins, Jill Krave, Martin Lenz, David Lines, Christoph Lüthy, Peter Mack, John Monfasani, Carla Rita Palmerino, Jan Papy, Matthias Roick, Andrea Robiglio, and Arthur Weststeijn. I thank Simone and our children Julia and Roeland for their love and delightful companionship.

The Dutch Research Council (NWO) did me an immense honor when it awarded me the Spinoza Prize in 2016. I would also like to thank the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome (KNIR) for its hospitality on my usually brief visits, and its former director, Harald Hendrix, for inviting me to visit as a KNIR Fellow in the first three months of 2017.

Three chapters have been published before as articles, but they have been revised and in some cases expanded: Chapter 3 on Pontano in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 72:4 (2011), 481–502; Chapter 4 on Vives in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 76:3 (2015), 325–345; and Chapter 5 on Nizolio in *Renaissance Quarterly* 65:1 (2012), 31–66. Some sections of Chapter 2 on Valla are based on my article in *Renaissance Quarterly* 71:1 (2018), 1–32. I thank my publishers and editors for allowing me to reuse this material here.