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**LEADERSHIP
PERFORMANCE
AND RHETORIC**

**Adam B. Masters
John Uhr**



Palgrave Studies in Political Leadership

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PREFACE

This book arose from a research grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC), originally won by John Uhr and Ryan Walter, both academics in the School of Politics and International Relations in the College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University. This ARC ‘Discovery Program’ grant made possible a number of earlier studies by Walter and Uhr of political rhetoric in Australia. Ryan Walter moved from the Australian National University to the University of Queensland, with the original ARC grant being separated into two independent smaller grants. Uhr and Masters have completed related studies of political leadership, in both cases originally encouraged by former ANU colleague Paul ‘t Hart. This book arose from later studies by Adam Masters and John Uhr, using these research funds to bring together sketches of contemporary Australian political rhetoric with an intellectual history of neglected foundations of leadership studies associated with English statesman and philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon. Many are the links between leadership and political rhetoric but none so direct as those originally formulated by Bacon, whose neglect in contemporary leadership studies we hope this modest recovery of Bacon’s reflections on leadership and rhetoric can help repair.

We have many colleagues to thank for encouraging us to stay the distance with this unusual blend of Australian political science and international leadership studies. Dr. Andrew Banfield is Head of the School of Politics and International Relations at the ANU, and his role has been important to Uhr’s slow but steady application of ARC resources.

Professor Thomas Pangle and Prof. Timothy Burns are series editors of Palgrave's series 'Recovering Political Philosophy' which published Uhr's *Prudential Political Leadership* in 2015 which includes sections on leadership and rhetoric which helped frame the approaches used in this later Palgrave book. Uhr would also like to thank former colleague Ryan Walter for his sustained support for the study of political rhetoric, and Haig Patapan and John Kane, both of Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, for their pioneering studies of theories and practices of political leadership. Masters would like to thank Prof. Paul 't Hart now at Utrecht University in the Netherlands for his passion and mentorship in the field of political leadership and Prof. Adam Graycar of Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, for his mentorship also.

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Any academic exercise is, by its very nature, somewhat remote from the real world. The term *ivory tower* connotes the perceived (and far too often real) disconnect between academia and the rest of society. In writing Chap. 6 on Kevin Rudd's performance in the *Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program* (2013–14), we realise the best source from a purely academic sense would be to interview the families of the young men who died while implementing the Rudd government's Home Insulation Program. These families could provide—from an academic perspective—invaluable insight into their immediate reaction to the evidence presented by the former prime minister. However, we made a deliberate decision not to intrude on these families who have already been through a number of inquiries described within Chap. 6 regarding the deaths of Marcus, Rueben, Mitchell and Matthew. The reality for these families overrides our academic curiosity. Our interpretation for the chapter is thus based on the Royal Commission documents, media reports and television imagery from the time. The loss these families suffered underscores the importance of a prudent approach to policy.

The table *Summary of Royal Commission Findings* in Chap. 6 is reproduced from the final report of the Royal Commission in accordance with Creative Commons Licence CC by 3.0 (Australia).

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Leadership and Rhetoric

Abstract Studies of political leadership increasingly include examinations of leadership rhetoric. Yet much of this focus on rhetorical performance is case-specific, typically dealing with heads of government. This chapter introduces a new analytical framework suitable for studies of a larger class of political and public leaders. We derive this framework from British statesman and philosopher Francis Bacon who we see as a neglected pioneer for contemporary leadership studies.

Keywords Political leadership · Leadership rhetoric · Francis Bacon

The study of leadership often involves the study of speeches by leaders, especially political leaders who draw their public authority from whatever public support they can establish. Studies of leaders' speeches can then become studies of the leaders' rhetorical performance in winning public support for their own cause or in decreasing public support for their competitors' causes. The links between leadership and speeches are easy to identify, especially in the case of political leaders whose public rhetoric shapes much of modern democratic politics.

A good example is Grube's study of *Prime Ministers and Rhetorical Governance* (Grube 2013). This fine collection of fascinating case studies takes its cue from British politics but extends its analysis to other Westminster-derived parliamentary countries where high public officials exercise 'rhetorical governance' through their style and content

of public speaking. Prime ministers are good examples of the political class involved in such exercises, but they know only too well that many non-elective public officials—such as heads of many government agencies or regulatory or accountability bodies—also contribute to current forms of democratic governance through their power of public speech, not always delivered under close direction by the elected government or even an agency’s approved government minister. Thus, many public leaders in civil society exercise important responsibilities through their public speech, often building a case for more or less government action through their presentation of evidence-based policy advice (Kane et al. 2009; Kane and Patapan 2014).

IS THERE A THEORY?

Examples provide us with the first sample of evidence about the nature of leadership. This book examines a gallery of current and recent political leaders, using them as examples of what contemporary political leaders do when they perform in the public role they have asked their supporters (party colleagues, media commentators and, most importantly, voters) to secure for them. This book uses Australian examples, in part because of the recent rapid turnover within the two main Australian parties of government and opposition which lets us see greater variety in leadership types than is evident in more stable political systems.

We think that the study of ‘rhetoric’ is best explained by literary theorist Brian Vickers whose work *In Defence of Rhetoric* outlines the central place of rhetoric as a way of speech and as a disciplined way of analysing speech (Vickers 1988). Our approach to rhetoric in this book on leadership rhetoric in politics follows the approach of Vickers whose ‘defence’ of rhetoric includes an attack on those who distrust or dismiss rhetoric. The study of rhetoric can be justified if we accept that rhetoric can serve useful purposes in shaping public debate over politics and leadership, even though we know that Plato was not simply making up his critique of rhetoric as a *misleading* art of covert manipulation. Decent political leadership has to learn how best to cope with misleading rhetoric, and decent leadership analysis has also to cope with leadership rhetoric which falls far short of its highest potential by flattering entrenched prejudices. Vicker’s influential study defends the value of political rhetoric by turning away from Plato’s understandable critique to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, which is the classical defence in what is probably

the first comprehensive study of the arts of rhetoric (Vickers 1988, viii, 160–163; Aristotle 2007).

We have a second reason for taking Vickers seriously: he is also a close student of English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561–1626) to whom we will soon turn to help us frame our research methodology. Although Vickers has only a few things to say about Bacon in his defence of rhetoric text (see, e.g. Vickers 1988, 267, 276–277), he has written many other excellent studies of Bacon’s scientific and political thought—including writing four books on Bacon and editing two of Bacon’s works. It turns out that Bacon emerges as one of the very first *theorists* of political rhetoric, in part because he shared the preference for Aristotle’s classical defence of rhetoric against Plato’s critique, and in part because he served in the House of Commons and, briefly, in the House of Lords, holding many high public offices which allowed him to see and appreciate the values of rhetoric in the management of political affairs. As we explain below, Bacon is not simply an example of a gifted user of political rhetoric; he was in fact an exemplar of the study of rhetorical performance from whose long-forgotten works on rhetoric we will recover what we think is a renewed and promising theory or methodology about practices (both good and bad) of political rhetoric. He described his project as ‘not an opinion to be held, but a work to be done’, requiring many leaders ‘laboring to lay the foundation ... of human utility and power’ (Bacon 1960, 16; Gaukroger 2001, 37–57).

Leadership studies often receive their greatest contribution from internal sources when public leaders themselves reflect on the successes and failures of rhetorical performance. Here, we unearth a neglected internal source in Bacon who helped shape the way that modern politics thinks about leadership by acting it out in practice as a leading politician and an even more leading public intellectual. We think that internal sources can be very productive in revealing the norms of practice often invisible to external sources. One of the greatest students of modern leadership is the influential sociologist Max Weber who adopted a similar view in favour of internal sources. Uhr’s recent account of rhetorical performance was sparked in part by Weber’s praise for two of the great founders of modern mass democracy whose political oratory was intended to shape not simply parliamentary or political opinion but the more popular field of public opinion (Uhr 2015, 52–54, 150–152). Leadership studies can be deepened by a close rereading of the public stagecraft of founders of modern mass democracy like Lincoln and Gladstone, both of whom

devoted large parts of their professional lives to learning as much as they could about the arts and neglected crafts required by those working the political stage. Weber's skill as an external authority was to persuade his own audience to take a closer personal interest in the stagecraft and skillcraft of these two democratic pioneers. We think something equally productive can come from our recovery of Francis Bacon's articulation of a 'method' or science in political rhetoric.

TIME FOR A NEW MODEL?

Given the powerful influence of British parliamentary government in contemporary politics, can we come up with another model of political leadership which can speak with the confidence of having played that game with relentless personal vigour? Perhaps surprisingly, we two distant Australian scholars think that there is much to be gained by retracing our steps back to the near beginning of British parliamentary politics to hear and reflect on the case for rhetorical performance formulated by Bacon as one of the most respected theorists of the modern enlightenment. Bacon was a leading politician, as well as a philosophic genius, who fashioned the methods of analysis by later theorists of modernity such as Thomas Hobbes (Jones 1982, 41–61; Strauss 1984, 85–94, 135–136; Kennington 2004, 1–77). In the early years of modern political development, Bacon attempted in practice—and to our lasting benefit, reflected theoretically on—the rhetorical arts of political leadership (Vickers 1988, 24, 267, 276; Faulkner 1993, 111–126; Kennedy 1999, 254–257).

Bacon has a reputation as a progressive philosopher of the Enlightenment: a defender of 'method' and an opponent of traditionalism (White 1987; Rahe 1994, 44–52). What is surprising in this cagey critic of traditional doctrines like classical Aristotelianism and Christian scholasticism is Bacon's relish for one of Aristotle's most neglected works—which is the *Rhetoric* (Aristotle 2007). Bacon was very prepared to relinquish the lingering and especially Christian respect for Aristotle's philosophy and science. But he was also fascinated by the forgotten wisdom of Aristotle's political psychology evident in the *Rhetoric*, which is one of the classical philosopher's most hard-headed and empirical accounts of political society—showing readers the practical arts necessary for rulers to move people away from vice and towards virtue (White 1968, 23–24). Bacon's realism meant that he accepted the important

elements of this ‘realistic’ yet classical theory of rhetoric even though he rejected many, perhaps most, of Aristotle’s ‘unrealistic’ metaphysics (Jones 1982, 43; Weinberger 1985, 108–110; Rahe 2008, 284, 293).

One explanation for this important early-modern interest in rhetoric comes from Bacon’s own political career (Vickers 1988, 437). Bacon was a member of the House of Commons for over 30 years and a member of the House of Lords for a few years before being sentenced for corruption by that House. His time in parliament was significant: he was Solicitor General, Attorney General, a Privy Counsellor, Lord Keeper, and then finally Lord Chancellor. All this time, Bacon persisted with his philosophical writings which became his primary duty in his later years. Bacon was an innovator yet he was not openly republican: he accepted the monarchy—but deliberately and conditionally, so long as the monarchy approved the kinds of scientific innovations, including elected representation, which could modernise the polity. Some of Bacon’s reflections on political leadership and rhetoric are found in two of his works originally published in English rather than Latin where so much of his grander theory was published: his *Essays* (originally 1597) and *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). The philosopher Bacon was a prominent public figure holding quite a few high public offices: he understood leadership because he performed many leadership roles. His practice as a political and public leader makes many of his essays core documents in the intellectual history of modern leadership where readers have the opportunity to think through with Bacon many aspects of the public performance carried out by political leaders.

There is one further reason for taking Bacon seriously: his choice of ‘hope’ as the motivating force to advance his goal that ‘human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers’ (Bacon 1960, 78). The suspicion is that those leaders who base their power on the classic alternative motivation of *fear* are, by definition as it were, misleading in their leadership performance. Certainly, Bacon acknowledged that ‘great men’ might indeed have to arouse and manage fear as part of their leadership campaign. Fear alone, however, is a form of misleading: it takes followers down the wrong path which is one of the dependencies on the leader. Fear should be regulated by hope, by which Bacon means hope for the blessings of innovation with new powers to promote human well-being. Leaders provide hope, even in times of insecurity and fear.

Bacon’s general theory as formulated in *The New Organon* includes a complex philosophy of hope, just as his more practical analysis in *The Essays*