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Markku Peltonen 2013. *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-Revolutionary England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 278 pp. ISBN: 9781107028296.

The adversariality of Westminster politics is the defining characteristic of the British parliamentary culture. In contemporary political discourse, it is mainly described in pejorative terms and, for the general public in Britain, the Nordic model of consensus seems more appealing form of politics. It seems strange that in a country that would otherwise prize and be eager to conserve its historical heritage has not more extensively explored the roots of its signature political style and found a way to reappraise it. Markku Peltonen's recent volume *Rhetoric, Politics and Popularity in Pre-Revolutionary England* is an important contribution to the study of the English political culture and its connection to the humanist education of classical rhetoric. The book offers an interpretation of the intellectual, political and educational context of the causes of the English Civil War and Revolution. At the same time, it brings light to the discussion of the adversarial character of the British parliament.

Peltonen starts (and ends) his narrative with a reference to Hobbes and his argument that schoolmasters and rhetoricians were largely to blame for the start of the civil war and revolution. He contributes to Quentin Skinner's work by directing the attention to the political and historical context of Hobbes's anti-rhetorical arguments. But he more decisively sets out to contradict some of the prevalent accounts of pre-revolutionary political culture. Peltonen also criticises Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy for its simplistic way of understanding politics. He argues that in order to understand pre-revolutionary popular politics we cannot apply the current ideal of politics aiming at consensus but, instead, we should focus on what the prevailing intellectual ideas of the time were. In the book the notion of the omnipotency of eloquence is raised as a key element of the pre-revolutionary English political culture. The idea is so central that the author has even decided to emphasise it in the chapter titles of the book which all contain the word 'rhetoric'. This repetitiousness can be interpreted as an intention to strengthen the view of the omnipresence of eloquence in the pre-revolutionary context.

The book is divided in two parts. The first part deals with the education of *ars rhetorica* in early-Stuart England. It is shown that the basis of the pre-revolutionary rhetorical training was the speaking of *pro et contra* on a variety of topics. It is explained to whom the rhetorical training was directed, for what audiences eloquence was meant, what kind of topics the training involved and how the schoolmasters envisioned the political uses of the training. Peltonen describes how the English humanists used their classical authorities to advocate the centrality of political speech in active citizenship. He also points out that there were many aristocratic writers who were so convinced of the powers of eloquence that they warned of the disastrous effects if they were left to the hands of the masses. The idea was that active citizenship, including the education of rhetoric, would only enhance the *ethos* of a gentleman. However, there were a number of humanists who were eager to teach eloquence in grammar schools. The book discusses the extent to which the English school system was instrumental in providing humanist training. Schoolmasters who advocated the politics of active citizenship spread the humanist ideals to anyone irrespective of the accident of their birth. So, in fact, “everyone who received a grammar-school education received ... a training in political speech-making and hence in political action” (p. 32).

Peltonen is able to provide an impressive amount of historical evidence to argue that the most commonly held view that political debate was not aimed at conquering, but convincing in pre-revolutionary England, simply is not correct. He turns the attention to the rhetorical education provided by pre-revolutionary schoolmasters and how their teaching affected the political culture in more general terms. The training encouraged looking for the contrary side of an argument and ways to put forward counterarguments in any debate. The schoolboys were expected to speak and write about a variety of political topics, such as liberty, taxation and tyranny, and consider the people as an important audience. Furthermore, they were instructed to use words as weapons and seek victory of their opponent.

As Peltonen describes, the notion of popular politics was a key feature of the training, and its centrality derives directly from classical rhetorical manuals. Addressing the people, or the multitude, affected the way arguments were put together. Peltonen argues that there are two main ways to see how the English rhetoricians focused on a popular audience. The first one is to look for the ‘utility’ argument. Instead of following Cicero’s division of using arguments of *honestas* (honesty) and *utilitas* (utility) for aristocratic and plebeian audiences respectively, several English rhetoricians named *utilitas* as the most potent argument in deliberative rhetoric. The other way is to see how the rhetoricians instructed to speak in a language best suited to gain popular benevolence. The English manuals encouraged appeals to commonly held views and notions, and “if eloquence was above all about speaking to the people in a style which

sued them, it followed that it could be described as popular or populist” (p. 39). English rhetoricians also gave advice on what kind of topics an orator should cover which were based on classical predecessors. Peltonen argues that training of this kind was done through the practice of newsletter and theme writing. What is particularly striking in his account is the affirmation that early-Stuart rhetoric manuals were dominated by the setting of agenda for contemporary political debates.

In the second part of the book the attention turns to the political uses of the rhetorical training. This is an important section because it shows how the grammar school education affected the political culture more generally. With a detailed analysis of parliamentary debates Peltonen shows the extent to which *ars rhetorica* was used in contemporary popular politics. The analysis portrays frequent employment of rhetorical figures and tropes in parliamentary speeches, pamphlets and other writings. What is interesting is the way he argues the persuasiveness of the various uses of these weapons of *ars rhetorica*. A selection of political debates are presented and analysed from the point of view of *ars rhetorica* but it also becomes clear that the contemporaries did not use tropes and figures merely for the sake of following the classical authorities. The political debate on the role of eloquence played a part as well. It is here that Peltonen’s book provides a number of interesting historical findings. Although it has been known that the use of *ars rhetorica* was common in Elizabethan parliaments, Peltonen is able to show that it did not only continue in the early Stuart period but it became entangled in the political controversies. He shows, for example, that the members of the privy council of Elizabeth I advocated a policy to undermine the use of rhetoric in the House of Commons. They were able to make political use of the fact that most of the aristocratic rhetorical treatises emphasised that the duties of active citizenship, of which eloquence was a part, were reserved only for aristocracy and gentry. But the schoolmasters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century had a different agenda. They were largely responsible for the preservation and distribution of the civic humanism in England.

The training and practice of rhetoric became widespread and the pre-revolutionary politics is difficult to understand without it: “It is surely significant for our understanding of the political culture of pre-revolutionary England that schoolboys seem to have been routinely told that their deliberative speeches treated such topics as law-making and foreign policy” (p. 59). One of the most significant reasons why it is so hard to understand the culture is because the contemporaries took it for granted that their audience would be well aware of the use of rhetorical strategies. Peltonen provides a sense of international background to his analysis of rhetorical manuals and treatises of the period. He points out that the humanist educational programme coincided with the invention of printing and a series of events that were connected with the po-

litical and religious turbulence of the sixteenth-century Europe. In a country that was ruled by a monarch with extensive authority a widespread education of active citizenship emphasising omnipotency of oratory was bound to cause trouble and second thoughts.

Peltonen's book highlights how deeply political the use of *ars rhetorica* was in pre-revolutionary England and the humanist writers were not just blindly following their classical authorities. In fact, they were very critical of the differences between the uses of rhetoric in republican and in monarchical forms of government. Rhetorical education was an important part of the power struggle between the monarch and the parliament. As it is shown, Elizabeth I and James I actually tried to take benefit from aristocratic writings against popular rhetoric. In this manner they both used *ars rhetorica* to their own political ends. By censoring popular rhetoric their intention was to draw the attention away from their own rhetorical undertakings. But it also shows how far even the monarchs believed in the powers of *ars rhetorica*. Although there were those who were not in favour of eloquence, its popular benefits were generally recognised.

For further research on the English political culture Peltonen's analysis opens up new possibilities. Given that the humanist rhetorical training was so widespread it provides interesting points of comparison with more modern British parliamentary practices. For example, a major difference with the nineteenth-century political culture is that the kind of systematic training of active citizenship did not exist anymore. However, the debates *pro et contra* remained relevant in politics. The grammar school teaching itself changed but its cultural effects could still be seen, for example, in the proceedings of Parliament and even in debating societies. The humanist rhetorical ideals continued to pass on through the practical knowledge of parliamentary work. In an essay dating from 1838, William Gladstone wrote that the most opportune way to self-educate oneself in public speaking was to follow the example of the British House of Commons. He wrote that not enough chances to practice rhetoric was available for those who aspired to a public career. In the light of Peltonen's book, Gladstone's solution to learning rhetoric by observing the actual practices of parliamentary oratory was not new at all. In 1622, Henry Peacham Jr. suggested that one should take note of parliamentary speeches in order to learn about rhetoric.

It is also interesting to compare the Elizabethan aristocratic interpretations of the dangers of popular rhetoric with the nineteenth-century Whig interpretation of parliamentary government. The role of the political press had changed radically, and greater contingency of politics due to outside demands of reform required adjustments. Although the times and methods are different, the argument that the aristocrats and gentry should educate the people remained similar. It was a Whig invention to incorporate the idea of popular sovereignty into

the parliamentary system in order to protect the aristocracy's traditional role as 'leaders of the people'. As the constitutional role of the House of Commons grew, the parliamentarians and especially the government ministers were given the high position of agenda-setters. Although the Crown still had the prerogative of naming the prime minister, the rest of the cabinet had to enjoy, first and foremost, the confidence of the majority of the House of Commons. The pre-revolutionary House of Commons debates had been between the opposition and the Crown, while the adversariality of the nineteenth-century Parliament was formed between the minority and the majority of the House. Whereas the humanist rhetorical training had provided themes and topics for political debate, the unpredictability and quicker pace of nineteenth-century parliamentary work changed the setting in which debates were conducted. Peltonen reminds us that the chief aim of humanist eloquence was the comparison of argumentative strength, not truth or efficiency, that is attested by the military metaphors used in training following the classical tradition. In the nineteenth-century political debate the idea of efficiency started to become a commonplace which put the aims of humanist training and ancient parliamentary procedure under strain. In other words, it was Parliament that now provided most of the training in political eloquence, not the school system.

Peltonen's volume is significant precisely because it deals with the formation of the English political culture by taking into account the wider influence of European political crises as well as the omnipresence of rhetoric in the pre-revolutionary context. Peltonen not only places the formed culture to a political setting but also discusses the extent to which the rhetoric manuals were used in grammar schools and what it entailed culturally. He presents Hobbes's anti-rhetorical arguments as a part and parcel of the humanist discourse of the time. In this light, Hobbes's account of the causes of the civil war becomes more commonplace since criticism of the rhetorical training was not unusual. Peltonen's book helps to better understand also the current debate about the adversariality so often associated with British politics. It makes us understand that the authority of the monarch has shaped (and it still does) the way the use of eloquence is perceived. It has created a certain reservation against adversarial politics that seems to continue running deep in the national discourse that idealises consensus and efficiency. It is important to take into account that the aversion is connected to the historical formation of the modern British parliament debating culture. But it also has to be understood as an argument in a debate, not as the absolute truth of the matter.