EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC IN GALILEO'S DIALOGO

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This essay relates Galileo's Dialogue to the tradition of debate in Renaissance humanism, where individual personae representing separate philosophical systems argue their case in a polemical manner. Galileo's use of this form is shown to include an intensive and brilliant application of epideictic rhetoric, the linked techniques of praise and blame which, since the time of Aristotle's Rhetoric, were applied to evaluating ethical and philosophical issues.

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No discussion of Galileo's Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo can be complete that neglects its literary form. It is unique among the classic texts of the new science in that it does not work by the sequential enunciation of propositions, hypotheses, experiments. Where Kepler, Descartes, or Newton (and Galileo in his next and final book) communicate in the style of a scientific treatise, Galileo gives us a fictional conversation between invented characters. The dialogue form is sometimes said by Galileo scholars to have been chosen to make his work more widely accessible, but the form carries with it rather more significance than that. Galileo was educated in the humanist tradition, which had its great formative periods in Florence and Venice during the fifteenth century, and had transformed all levels of education and discourse. "To the humanists", as Charles Trinkaus has said, "the form of their discourse was an essential part of the content". They

1 CH. TRINKAUS, In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian
held this belief not out of some merely aesthetic or belle-lettrist concept of literary beauty, but because they realized that form is functional to argument. They knew that to set out a case effectively the argument needs to be shaped so as to arouse in the reader or hearer conviction of its rightness, or at least of its superiority to the alternatives. They were all schooled in rhetoric for many more years than any modern historian has been, and they could draw on a more-or-less continuous tradition (especially in Italy), since the Greek and Roman schools, of training in the arts of discourse.

"Form" is not quite enough, however, as an analytical concept. We must also distinguish "mode". The form or genre is obviously the dialogue, which we shall consider shortly, but within this form the mode is that of epideictic rhetoric, the techniques of praise and blame. While Galileo's rhetoric has recently begun to attract attention, scholars have approached it without a knowledge of the full rhetorical context. Maurice Finocchiaro has, in effect, discussed logical and argumentative techniques more than rhetorical procedures, while Jean Moss has drawn on the structures of epistolary rhetoric. But neither of them, nor

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3 M. Finocchiaro, Galileo and the Art of Reasoning: Rhetorical Foundations of Logic and Scientific Method (Dordrecht and Boston, 1980); Jean Dietz Moss, "Galileo's rhetorical strategies in defense of Copernicanism", in Novità celesti e crisi del sapere (Convegno Internazionale di Studi Galileiani), eds. P. Galluzzi and W. R. Shea (in the press). Of Finocchiaro's book the historian of rhetoric must at once record a certain surprise that, despite the subtitle and the frequent references to rhetoric, only one half-sentence refers to rhetoric as a historical discipline, and this merely names two modern studies (p. 70 and note 25). The author makes no reference to epideictic rhetoric, although he does see that the work as a whole tends to set Copernicanism in a favourable light, and Aristotelianism in an unfavourable one (pp. 22-3). This lack of interest in the concrete reality of rhetoric is disappointing, considering the care lavished on logic and philosophy. As for the personae and their functioning, there are a few brief comments (pp. 3, 8-11, 13-15, 19-20, 46-65 passim) but no investigation of how they work to shape judgment. The dialogue form is also ignored, and for most of the time topics are summarized outside the dialogic context which gives them their value. The