William of Ockham's Rhetoric of Statism:Argumentation, Petrine Supremacy, and Secular Government in the Late Middle Ages

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Abstract

Studied primarily as an exemplar of medieval logic and epistemology, William of Ockham's treatises on politics have until recently been neglected by scholars. In addition to his philosophical works written at Oxford in the fourteenth century, William demonstrated increasing concern with what he saw as a drastic overreach of papal power into civil life under the auspices of the doctrine of Petrine Supremacy. William's political writings, especially "On the Rights of the Roman Empire" and *A Short Discourse on Tyranny* highlight his concern that papal legates loyal to the exiled papacy in Avignon were appropriating the means of legal dispute, or *disputatio*, by claiming that any interrogation into the legitimacy of ecclesial power was, in itself, insubordination. With a rhetoric that links the grammar of Priscian with his own nominalism and an Aristotelian conception of good governance, William shows that arguments for absolute papal power over temporal kingdoms have no legitimacy in the Christian tradition.

Keywords: William of Ockham, medieval rhetoric, legal rhetoric, medieval politics

Government in the Late Middle Ages

Studied primarily as an exemplar of medieval logic and epistemology, William of Ockham's treatises on politics have only recently been examined by rhetoricians. William's political tracts, which took shape against the backdrop of a dramatic debate on ecclesiastical poverty, demonstrate increased concern with what he saw as a drastic overreach of papal power into civil government under the pretext of the doctrine of Petrine supremacy, or the idea that the Pope has supreme, universal power. "On the Rights of the Roman Empire" and *A Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government* highlight William's methods of argumentation by publicizing his concern that papal legates loyal to Pope John XXII were appropriating the means of theologico-legal dispute. While the legates claimed

that any interrogation into the legitimacy of ecclesial power was, in itself, transgressive, William countered that church officials were actively discouraging legitimate debates about the limits of papal authority while appropriating ever more power from secular governments. Emphasizing the tropes from biblical exegesis, patristics, and canon law, William uses rhetoric as a defense against papal authoritarianism in order to demonstrate the ideal of free intellectual inquiry while supporting the autonomy of secular governments in Europe. In what follows, I will show how William uses elements of rhetoric and dialectic to reconstruct and analyze axiomatically the arguments of those in favor of absolute papal power. It is my contention that in critiquing his opponents methodically and publicly using both the tools of medieval logic and rhetoric, William safeguards the medieval rhetorical tradition of disputation (*disputatio*), applying it not only to theology, but showing how open disputation is essential for guaranteeing the public welfare.

William's engagement with medieval politics also showcases how much his argumentative method is influenced by his work as a logician. In *A Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government*, William restructures the arguments of proponents of papal primacy over the secular state by reiterating their often vague contentions into propositions. Subsequently, he disproves the premises of the propositions used by his interlocutors, showing them to be false. Often, he accomplishes this using the methods of terministic logic which held that "linguistic structures were ultimately human creations used to think and communicate ideas, and that the meaning of sentences or propositions depended on how terms were being used in those propositions" (Courtenay 6). Noting that William's *magnum opus*, *Summa logicae*, was written for students "who would ultimately be theologians and would need to apply logic to theological problems," William Courtenay reminds us that for medieval philosophers, logic has immediate and practical implications. William's political treatises demonstrates those practical implications, allowing him to resist his clerical adversaries in Avignon by using an admixture of medieval logic and rhetoric to explain the misuse of Petrine supremacy to a late medieval audience.

Theorizing William's Rhetoric

Investigating the rhetorical tradition in which William writes is crucial to understanding him as a rhetorician and as an author of political tracts that lean heavily upon theology and logic. Scholars of rhetoric have tended to suggest that its history moves from the vibrancy of the classical tradition to a rediscovery of lost classical texts in the European renaissance; but that characterisation rests more on the tendency to designate Europe's early history as "dark ages" than it does a nuanced approach to the history of rhetoric. Indeed, Boethius, commonly referred to as the "tutor of the Middle Ages" wrote *De topicis differentiis* squarely in Late

Antiquity, and his works are commonly cited throughout the Middle Ages. But a major difference between rhetorical theory of the medievals and that of classical rhetoricians like Quintilian is the former's reliance on Aristotle's *Topics* as the primary Aristotelian text on argumentation. Because of the prevalence of the *Topics* in the Middle Ages, rhetoric and logic coalesce in some fascinating ways in nearly every century that comprises the medieval period and in various disciplines such as law, medicine, and theology. So while William's arguments against Petrine supremacy tend to reference the gospels and early Christian theologians, his investigative methodology closely resembles mainstays in the medieval intellectual tradition, especially Aristotle's *Topics* and Boethius's commentaries on the logical tradition of Aristotle and the rhetorical tradition of Cicero.

Boethius's work on topics occupies a central place in our understanding of medieval natural philosophy and logic—two elements that have enormous significance for a consideration of William's politics. Much of Boethius's work, especially *De Topicis differentiis*, consists of reflections on Aristotle's *Topics*. Highlighting the importance of a coherent system of investigation and argumentation in the sciences, Aristotle argues that "*dialectic* is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries" (168, emphasis mine). Aristotle further identifies a dialectical problem as "a subject of inquiry that contributes either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge, and does that either by itself, or as a help to the solution of some other such problem," and he goes on to showcase the *genera*, accidents, definitions, and properties of dialectic. A key elucidation of ancient and medieval dialectics comes from Eleonore Stump's analysis of Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*. She claims: "a dialectical argument differs from a demonstrative one because a demonstrative argument depends on true and indemonstrable premises, but a dialectical argument depends only on premises that are readily believable, that is, believed by everyone or the many or the wise" (18). But, as Niels J. Green-Pedersen suggests, Boethius's notion of the dialectic is less complicated than Aristotle's—an important consideration given how frequently Aristotle is refracted through Boethius in the Middle Ages (60). For Boethius, as for Cicero, dialectics is useful because it helps us to discover arguments, which is central to the art of discourse (Stump 25). Boethius's conception of dialectics avoids commenting on circumstances, which he suggests is rather the domain of rhetoric. *De topicis differentiis* limits dialectics to "question and answer," the support or negation of a thesis irrespective of circumstances. Boethian dialectics are primarily concerned with the discovery of arguments or theses rather than an exploration of theses in a variety of conditions.

The *Topics*, as construed through the lens of Boethius, becomes not only a guide for discovering arguments for medieval intellectuals, but also a method for evaluating their efficacy. Stump asserts that after Boethius "there is a growing

tendency to absorb the techniques of the art of finding into the art of judging"
(25). While the shift from finding to evaluating is certainly a palpable one in the
history of medieval argumentation, Stump fails to acknowledge the degree to
which this evolution characterizes the *De topicis differentiis* itself. Moving from an
account of the *Topics*, to dialectics, to the interplay between rhetoric and dialectics,
Boethius's work characterizes the very shift that Stump identifies as crucial to
Topics' reception in the Middle Ages. In Book IV of *De topicis differentiis*, the book
that deals most specifically with the confluence of rhetoric and dialectics, Boethius
notes the following distinction between the two:

> The dialectical discipline examines the thesis only; a thesis is a
> question not involved in circumstances. The rhetorical [discipline],
> on the other hand, investigates and discusses hypotheses, that is,
> questions hedged in by a multitude of circumstances.
> Circumstances are who, what, where, when, why, how, by what
> means … Dialectic is restricted to question and answer. Rhetoric,
> on the other hand, goes through the subject proposed in
> unbroken discourse. Similarly, dialectic uses complete syllogisms.
> Rhetoric is content with the brevity of enthymemes. (qtd. in Stump
> 80)

In her commentary, Stump summarizes these points by suggesting that "rhetoric
deals with questions about particular things done by particular people at particular
times, while dialectic deals with abstract or general questions not tied to
individuals" (142). The use of enthymemes portends a persuasive discourse, since
the persuasive writer or orator would, unlike the dialectician, abstain from
highlighting obvious propositions. But as we will see when looking specifically at
the mode and content of William's works on politics (and even many of his works
on theology), medieval argumentation does not always neatly fall in either the
realm of rhetoric or dialectics. Indeed, William of Ockham demonstrates that the
combination of dialectics and rhetoric in a single discourse can be a particularly
effective method of argumentation, especially when one's very right to disputation
is called into question by interlocutors. William's approach to argumentation
highlights his use of dialectics and rhetoric in two primary ways: his use of both
syllogisms and enthymemes and his reliance on the genre of the *disputatio*.[1]

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[1] My account of William's theory of consequences serves simply as a bridge between his work as a
logician and the interventions he makes as a political commentator. For more in-depth analysis on
William's theory of consequences as it pertains to formal logic, see Otto Bird's "Topic and Consequence
in Ockham's Logic." For a fuller account of William's place in the history of logic, see Ernest Moody's
The Logic of William of Ockham.

William is hardly the first medieval thinker to borrow from the *topoi* (or *loci* for Cicero and Boethius), nor is the combination limited particularly to political or theological writings. Hanns Hohmann, in an analysis of the arguments of 13th-century jurists, suggests that "while the formal treatment of arguments in these medieval works does indeed owe much to dialectic, this does not remove the substance and function of the argumentative modes discussed from the realm of rhetoric" (41). Hohmann's analysis demonstrates that distinguishing between dialectic and rhetoric is historically untenable, and he also points to Boethius and Cicero as figures who blur the line between rhetoric and dialectics. Discussing the medieval jurist Rainerius de Forlivio (d. 1358), Hohmann notes that many legal commentators thought of a logical or dialectical approach (represented by the syllogism) as a method of argumentation rather than as an end to itself, contra Aristotle. Thus, according to Hohmann, Rainerius "recommends to mix different modes of arguing, since that is 'very beautiful, philosophical, syllogistic, and scientific'" (qtd. in Hohmann 50). Though versed in canon law, William was not a professional jurist like Rainerius; still, his political treatises put him at odds with the papal court at Avignon, and his primary goal seems to have been to convince an audience of prelates and laypeople that the doctrine of Petrine supremacy was both illogical and a violation of canon law. As a result, his mode of argumentation makes use of dialectics, but the end is always rhetorical—that is, William examines what Boethius calls "a question not involved in circumstances" (dialectic) to investigate "hypotheses … hedged in by a multitude of circumstances" (79).

William's use of practical logic in his tracts on politics frequently gives rise to a defense of the medieval concept of the *disputatio*. Exploring uses of the *disputatio*, Olga Weijers argues that it was "one of the principal methods of argumentation in medieval Europe … both a method of teaching and research in addition to polemic" (141). Two elements of the *disputatio* especially pertinent to William's mode of argumentation, dialectical reasoning and the *expositio terminorum*, suggest that he wields the genre both for pedagogical and polemical purposes. The use of dialectics in concert with political rhetoric imparts a Boethian model of argumentation in which, according to Aquinas a "teacher must use arguments investigating the root of the truth … if he only uses authoritative texts, the pupil will not acquire any real knowledge or comprehension" (qtd. in Weijers 143). Equally crucial to William's concept of the *disputatio* is what Weijers calls the *exposition terminorum*, a detailed exposition of terms and concepts used in the formulation of specific problems. William uses these elements both to shore up a critique against the prelates calling for absolute papal authority and to illustrate the use of the *disputatio* as a mechanism of late medieval argumentation, even in ecclesiastical and doctrinal affairs.

In what follows, I explore William's use of dialectics as a tool employed for the purposes of his rhetoric especially in the form of syllogisms, which frequently function as important modes of critique. First, I highlight his use of premises and propositions to "find" arguments in a method reminiscent of Boethius and Aristotle. His search for the premises and propositions that contribute to his opponents' advocacy of Petrine supremacy use *loci* for rhetorical ends, and constitutes what van Eemeren and Grootendorst have called an analytical reconstruction. Next, I show how William defends the *disputatio* as a pedagogical tool that allows him to question the limits of papal power without, theoretically anyway, causing the papal office any harm. Finally, I propose that William's treatises use syllogisms to advance a rhetorical argument—particularly as he reconstructs his opponents' positions and underscores the most extreme logical conclusions of those positions to argue for secular governance.

William of Ockham on Papal Power

William opens *A Short Discourse* with a broad appeal underscoring the urgency and necessity of his resistance to papal imperialism, or Petrine supremacy, loosely defined as the pope's absolute authority over all institutions of government in Christendom. William describes not only his grief over the "iniquities and injustices" committed by the papacy, but also his belief that those who fail to "inquire with careful attention" into the tyranny wrought over them dishonour God and that the failure of inquiry is "opposed to the rights and liberties given … by God and nature" (William 3). Imagining the difficulty some of his readers might have with interrogating papal power, William addresses his right to question points of theology and canon law in the first chapter. Arthur Stephen McGrade points out that William believes, following Aristotle, that virtuous action alone is virtuous, but that virtuous action initiated by "right reason" leads to "operating at a higher level of virtue" (202). At stake for William in the controversy, then, is not only understanding and communicating the limits of papal authority in canon law, but the exercise of virtue that depends upon the application of right reason.

William expects that those who question the right to examine papal power will do so with the understanding that "no one is permitted to inquire about the pope's power through disputation," a claim that William suggests is advanced by legates and scholars seeking favor with the papacy. He restructures that enthymeme into a syllogism, which he strengthens by supplying it with the canon law with which it has been (erroneously) justified. The proposition William formulates is as follows: "according to the canon and civil laws no one is permitted 'to dispute the ruler's jurisdiction'; therefore, *a fortiori*, it is not permissible to dispute about the power of the supreme pontiff, lest one commit the crime of sacrilege" (3). In the ten chapters that follow in Book 1, William uses a syllogistic

structure to show the fallaciousness of the premises of this proposition, thereby using a dialectic structure to advance a rhetorical argument with a general audience.

The syllogistic structure William employs is an analytical tool that allows him to explore the logic of what should otherwise be considered an enthymeme. Taking vague and ill-supported contentions from advocates of Petrine supremacy, William uses *loci* to "find arguments" and problematize their logic. In their important work on argumentative theory, van Eemeren and Grootendorst explore the necessary components of an "analytical reconstruction" that has as its aim the reconstruction of "the process of resolving a difference of opinion occurring in an argumentative discourse or text" (95). In their ideal of a pragma-dialectical approach to discourse, van Eemeren and Grootendorst suggest that the analytical reconstruction "is a way of analyzing those parts of a discourse or text whose argumentative status *is not clear*, taking the distribution of speech acts in the ideal model of a critical discussion as the theoretical starting point" (118). Like the jurist Rainerius, William uses logic as a particular tool in the service of rhetoric; because William also happens to be engaging in a battle for public perception (which is to say, he wants the Christian world to agree with his assessment of late-medieval politics), he stages his dissent in terms of its pedagogical value. Consequently, when he "reconstructs" his opponents' propositions, William supplies their arguments with textual support from the gospels and patristic commentators, only to show how supporters of Petrine supremacy ultimately read those texts erroneously. That the syllogistic logic William uses is staged in terms of a wider debate on secular government addressed to Christians broadly demonstrates William's commitment to political pedagogy. He makes it clear that the reason he investigates the claims of Pope John's prelates in such a structured, nuanced manner is for the benefit of "right reason," which he suggests is a validating factor in his dispute with Avignon.

As a result of his emphasis on the right to argue with the pope, William begins by showing that those who think it impermissible to interrogate papal supremacy misuse the word "dispute" in order to make it seem as if opponents of Petrine supremacy have no right to disagree with the pope and his court. William turns to an etymological analysis of the term "*disputatio,*" arguing that it need not take on the meaning of contradiction, and he suggests that it entails discussing or questioning for the sake of elucidating a point. In *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Classical Text*, Suzanne Reynolds explains that etymology generally functions in two distinct ways in medieval texts: the epistemological and the argumentative, or rhetorical (83). William argues that "to dispute and inquire, publicly or in private, with the intention of taking away or reducing papal power, or mentally calling into doubt things that should be believed about (not only

implicitly) about papal power" is not permitted (*A Short Discourse* 6). However, he writes that "to dispute about the pope's power for exercise and teaching, to refute those who are mistaken about it (who take it away, or reduce it, or enlarge it more than is right), to bring unknown aspects of it to public notice, must be regarded as praiseworthy" (*A Short Discourse* 6). Consequently, the validity of William's line of inquiry is related to pedagogy, but not to the attenuation of the pope's rightful exercise of power.

To fortify his use of the term "dispute," William notes that far more pressing doctrinal matters of the church, such as form of the deity, are routinely disputed both for the sake of learning and refuting heretics. "Truth," he argues in *A Short Discourse*, "is better found in questioning, opposing, disputing, and resolving the arguments of the other side" (William 7). By calling into question the use of the term "dispute" in his opponents' proposition, William demonstrates that the normative function of the word is educational and crucial to defeating heresy. Removing the injunction against the possibility of disputing the nature of Petrine supremacy, William clarifies the legitimacy of his inquiry and highlights its importance. His method of argumentation also suggests that *disputatio* is exempt from the language of "transgression" insofar as disputation is an exercise in searching for right reason or virtuous action. The ire he openly directs toward John and the Avignon court suggests that William is, in any event, unconcerned with transgressing what he argues are illegitimate intellectual boundaries proclaimed by a heretical pontiff.

Having established his right to question doctrine for the sake of education, William turns to the pope himself in order to isolate the characteristics of a good ruler as they relate to that ruler's willingness to have the scope of his power explored. Here William's concern is not so much syllogistic efficiency as it is the analysis of what constitutes a good ruler. The good ruler who seeks to govern "with leniency and justice" consequently "should rejoice if experts try to search out what power he has" (*A Short Discourse* 10). If the ruler does not appreciate the inquiry, William reasons, then he is "deservedly suspect of not intending to be content with the legitimate bounds of his own power" (10). William's notion that the pope should be open to an investigation of the authority of his power heralds William's conceptualization of the papacy as a form of government that, while ruled by an individual, consists of a juridical code to which the pope is ultimately responsible. That code—comprised of the gospels, patristic commentaries, and well-informed canonists—should theoretically suffice to keep the papal government from descending into tyranny, if only the papal court complies with it.

For obvious reasons, the idea that Petrine supremacy derives temporally and spiritually from Christ is the most important concept William opposes in his *Short Discourse on Tyrannical Government*. Not only is the claim of Christological

derivation at the center of his opponents' support of Petrine supremacy, the wedding of temporal papal power to religious dogma means that William cannot support secular institutions without demonstrating that the Christian religion does not require papal involvement in secular governments. In order to counter the claim that the pope has jurisdiction over civil law, William begins by noting that proponents of absolute papal authority defend their claims "chiefly by Christ's words to Peter in Matthew 16:19: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven'" (20). Using this quotation as the starting point for analyzing the premises of the proposition that the pope's absolute power derives from Christ, William argues that interpreting this singular quotation to mean that the pope has absolute power over spiritual and temporal (as well as natural) matters "plainly conflicts with divine Scripture," suggesting that the general language of a single sentence cannot be interpreted to invalidate the specific language of much of the gospels.

William initially illustrates the weakness of this premise by invoking James 1:25 and stating that "compared with the law of Moses the gospel law involves, not more servitude, but less, and hence it is called by blessed James a law of perfect freedom" (22). Moving from the biblical text to patristic exegesis, William refers to Augustine, saying "Augustine regards as blameworthy those who wish to weigh down Christians, contrary to gospel freedom, with burdens greater than those of the Old Law" (22). So his initial response to the claim of boundless papal authority is to point out that the general framework of the gospels suggests a liberation from burdensome legalism, the implication being that papal absolutism clearly contradicts a liberatory tradition found both in the biblical text and in the writings of the early church fathers.

Having established the illogicality of reading a single general sentence in the gospel against a specific set of proscriptions from the same text, William further opposes the idea that the Christian bible affords absolute power to the papacy by demonstrating the absurdity of its logical conclusion. If, he reasons, the pope has unmitigated temporal power he could "by right deprive the king of France and every other king of his kingdom without fault or reason," the result of which is ultimate servitude to the pope-- a servitude, William points out, that is far greater than the servitude of the so-called Old Law (24). In addition to establishing the contradiction between the servitude resulting from papal supremacy and the liberatory import of the New Testament writings, William underscores the idea that papal authority exists not for the benefit of the clerics, but for the "common advantage of the faithful" (26). By moving the trajectory of the argument from the rights of the papacy to exercise power to the maintenance of the Christian

community, William suggests that advocates of Petrine supremacy have misread the text central to their premise.

The implication that papal absolutism is based on a textual misunderstanding (or, at worst, a textual manipulation) allows William to argue for a definition of papal authority that is more in line, he suggests, with the moral invocation of the gospel. Taking the "common advantage of the faithful" as the reason for the existence of the papacy, William surmises that the concept of papal absolutism would be disadvantageous to the faithful and would effectively render the project of the gospel texts—represented by William as a liberation from the legalism of the Hebrew bible—moot. Thus, he concludes that advocates of Petrine supremacy (including the pope himself) willfully endorse heresy. But more interestingly for an exploration of William's mode of argumentation, he is not content only to condemn others for heresy; rather, he suggests that it is outside the purview of the church to hold temporal power for the simple reason that Christ never in practice or in teaching held such power. Constructing a binary opposition between sacred and temporal governance, William argues that in addition to misreading Christian tradition intentionally to support an imperial papacy, prelates have used canon law to transgress what should be the autonomous sphere of secular law.

William questions this intervention by pointing out that such an interference has no precedent or justification in Christian theology. Allying himself with patristic theologians and exegetes such as Saints Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome, Bernard of Clairvaux, and John Chrysostom, as well as three of the four gospel writers and a majority of Paul's epistles, William thoroughly and decisively shows that orthodox Christianity does not embrace the concept of Petrine supremacy, especially where it concerns the abrogation of secular power. Convinced by his dual challenge to the premise that Christ gave Peter and the papacy unmitigated power by virtue of a general statement, William assumes the proposition, that of the papal right to exercise temporal power over the contemporary world, has been shown false.

The Aristotelian perspective that William advocates in his more definitional writings on the state, especially his dialogue entitled "Rights of the Roman Empire," develops from Aristotle's analysis of justice and nation-states in the latter's *Politics*. Aristotle claims that the goal of political science "is justice, in other words, the common interest" (2035). Though Aristotle spends significant time in the *Politics* interrogating both justice and the common interest, the hope that justice is the result of a discussion on the rights and roles of government clearly influences William. Though Takashi Shogimen argues that "Ockham's interest in secular power is no more than an extension of his concern with ecclesiastical power" (233), William's "Rights on the Roman Empire" clearly attests to his interest in

autonomous secular governance in Europe. The prologue asks, "does it belong to the advantage and utility of the whole human race for the whole world to be under one emperor or secular ruler in temporal matters? In what excellences, virtues, and characteristics should an emperor of the world be outstanding [?]" (232). The list continues, and though William raises theological questions such as the spirituality of the emperor, the queries posed here demonstrate that his primary concern is not ecclesiology, but the wellbeing—even from a strictly utilitarian viewpoint—of "the whole human race" (232).

In addition to relating secular power structures to a more nuanced understanding of natural rule, William unabashedly defends the autonomy of papal authority and secular jurisprudence in what is perhaps his most detailed enunciation of the separate roles of the papacy and the government in society. At the beginning of "On the Freedom of the Roman Empire," William notes that the protection of secular power *for its own sake* was also defended by early popes. He includes this circumstantial information at a critical moment at the beginning of the dialogue to illustrate that secular power is not just a phenomenon outside the scope of the canonists; rather, it has a function implicitly recognized by the Christian tradition and exists as a necessity of its own right. Quoting Pope Nicholas, William maintains that "the man Christ Jesus distinguished the duties of both powers by their own distinct activities [...] so that Christian emperors would need the pontiffs for eternal life and the pontiffs would use the imperial laws only for the course of temporal affairs" (240). The result of this duality of powers is that clerics should not involve themselves in secular matters that laymen could accomplish, and individuals in secular government should not be seen to hold sway over spiritual jurisprudence. William goes so far as to claim this distinction between powers would be true even if "the whole world were converted to the faith" (240). From the defense of this separation in any eventuality, we can ascertain the centrality of public benefit to William's conception of government.

Conclusion

William of Ockham is an interesting case study in the history of rhetoric not only because he upholds the necessity of dispute for the general welfare, but also because his political discourses demonstrate the richly nuanced rhetorical tradition of the medieval Latin West. Applying a Boethian model of discourse that makes use of dialectic and rhetoric, William's arguments against the prelates of Avignon use various logical tools rhetorically to convince a general audience of the necessity of a secular state independent of papal power. William was excommunicated for his attacks against John XXII, and subsequently lived under the protection of Louis V of Bavaria. His exploration of autonomous secular government, however, has obvious descendants in the history of rhetoric—Cicero

and Quintilian among them—and anticipates important rhetoricians like Vico, Erasmus, and Ramus. William adroitly not only proves that papal power over secular governments has no legal basis, but he uses his knowledge of Christian tradition and Aristotle to claim that governments are responsible for the wellbeing of their citizens. Despite his excommunication and the exhaustive use he makes of primarily Christian texts when critiquing papal absolutism, William's defense of *disputatio* and his advocacy for secular autonomy demonstrates his importance to archetypal modes of medieval debate, and his treatises on government very clearly deserve the attention of historians of rhetoric.

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