Rhetoric achieves a new status and a new kind of coherence at the hands of René Rapin. In his *Comparaisons des grands hommes de l'antiquité, qui ont le plus excellé dans les belles-lettres* and in the logical sequel to that work, his *Réflexions sur l'éloquence, la poétique, l'histoire et la philosophie, avec le jugement qu'on doit faire des auteurs qui se sont signalés dans ces quatre parties des belles lettres*, he is not merely translating and paraphrasing his sources. Those procedures would lead one to neglect the differences between the seventeenth century and the times of Aristotle and Cicero. Instead he is rethinking the whole subject in a way that reflects consciously the taste of his contemporaries, consciously though not slavishly, since he aims by his treatises to improve their taste. I believe that his distinctive contribution can be outlined as follows. (1) Whereas the tendency in his ancient sources is to attribute art to the orator alone, Rapin thinks of writer and reader as sharing the same set of qualifications. (2) To an extent and with a degree of rigor not found in his contemporaries, he gathers under a single discipline, based on eloquence, all works of belles-lettres, all modes of expression: eloquence, poetry, history, and philosophy. (3) He modifies the aims of writers and speakers; for him they seek
less to persuade us, in the strongly practical sense that the word had in the ancient rhetorics, than to please, instruct, and move us, that is, to affect us in a broader, freer way.

With these generalities in mind, let us look at the structure of Rapin's work. It is a series of eight volumes, divided into four volumes of comparisons (Demosthenes and Cicero, Homer and Virgil, Thucydides and Livy, Plato and Aristotle) and four volumes of reflections (on rhetoric, poetry, history, and philosophy). In spite of what he says at first, that the work is a "... recueil de huit volumes, sur toutes les matières principales qui regardent les belles lettres, tous composés les uns après les autres, sans aucun rapport particulier entre eux," there is an obvious parallelism in the two sets of four volumes. When Rapin begins, after the *coquetterie* of the opening sentence, really to discuss what he has done, he reveals the plan which has been his guide. He presents a number of testimonials to the value of cultivating belles-lettres and then continues:

Voilà quels étaient les sentiments de ces grands hommes sur le sujet de ces sciences, dont je fais ici l'abrége: voilà l'estime qu'ils en faisaient. Et j'espère qu'on me saura gré du recueil que j'en donne, pour apprendre à notre siècle une nouvelle manière d'enseigner ces sciences; par l'autorité, en lui proposant de grands exemples; et par la raison, en lui donnant les plus belles maximes qu'on puisse donner, pour un dessein si important. [Comparaisons, I, iv–v].

Now this new way of teaching the disciplines in question—by authority and by reason—is an instance of the theological mind at work (Rapin was a Jesuit father) moving into the realm of literature and relating the old distinction of *example/precept* to two ideas usually applied elsewhere, as when one appeals to authority as a certifying principle based on revelation or to reason as a similar principle based on evidence. But this transfer of terms is not the important thing.
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We must see what happens to the art of eloquence when one approaches it as an ensemble of examples and maxims. In a sense, it regresses. It loses its technicality and thus it becomes less of a *scientia*. For, strictly speaking, an art or science comes into being at the end of a process involving at least three steps: experiences, reflections on experiences, and the articulation of reflections into a body of knowledge. In other words, in words more appropriate to a productive discipline, knowledge progresses from example to precept to art or method. This last stage is being relaxed by Rapin—not completely abandoned, but made less rigorous. However, what appears to be a serious weakness from the formal point of view of method or inquiry shows itself in another light as a source of strength. One may even say that the vitality of rhetoric in the latter half of the seventeenth century depended on this formal regression. The ancient theories were designed as professional training for specialists who would eventually conceal rather than reveal their technique, in harmony with the principle of *ars celare artem*. Such discipline is obviously too elaborate for a situation in which the audience considers itself as “professional” as the artist, in which poets and those who judge their works share in knowledge of the basic modes of expression. If everyone who matters is interested in eloquence and has or wants to have taste in what concerns it, the technicalities of Aristotle or Quintilian or even of Cicero are out of the question. The same principle applies to the other fields of belles-lettres. They, too, are made more available and less academic by this “nouvelle manière d’enseigner ces sciences,” which moves back from their more highly conceptualized and coherent states to the particulars and maxims where they originate.\(^8\)

I have just mentioned Cicero. In the *Réflexions sur l’éloquence*,\(^4\) Rapin gives him far more space and praise than any
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other ancient authority. Evidently Cicero's way of treating the art corresponds closely to what Rapin intends.

Cicéron dans les traités qu'il nous a laissés de l'éloquence, n'est pas tout à fait si méthodique qu'Aristote: mais il est plus poli et plus élégant: qui est son caractère essentiel dont il ne se défait jamais. Mais tout solide qu'il est, il n'est pas toujours le plus régulier du monde: parce qu'il pense plus à plaire qu'à instruire.5

Cicero has an order, but it is concealed; perfect regularity is for the savants only. Cicero's tact in expounding the rules leads Rapin to conclude that "... il n'y a point d'auteur, d'où l'on puisse tirer tant de fruit, tant de politesse, tant d'éloquence, tant de solidité, et tant de bon sens que de Cicéron" (Réflexions, II, iii). Rapin admires very much the performance of Antonius in the De oratore, as he explains with a light touch the rhetors' precepts and as he speaks of questions at law. These are for Rapin the driest of subjects, but Antonius manages to treat them "agréablement et en homme de qualité" (Réflexions, II, v).

The praise of Cicero's elegance and lack of pedantry points to something important in Rapin's theory. It leads us, within the broad framework furnished by the notions of "comparisons" and "reflections," to another, more specific tendency in his attempt to reformulate rhetoric. He will try nothing so extreme as replacing it by another discipline: that is the solution of the Port-Royalists, as we shall see. But he is definitely prepared to give more weight to the natural bases of art and to assert the priority of genius in belles-lettres.

Mais après tout, il faut avouer la vérité, quelque avantage qu'on ait en l'éloquence par les instructions de si grands maîtres, l'art y fait moins que le génie: et la plus grande partie des sujets que traite l'orateur sont de telle nature que l'opinion y a plus de part, et a beaucoup plus d'effet que la science... et il se
trouve des gens dans toutes les professions qui ont de l'éloquence et qui parlent bien, sans en avoir appris aucunes règles.\textsuperscript{4}

The usual statement follows to the effect that both art and nature must be there for the sake of perfection; still, the theorist is never to be allowed to forget that theory is not indispensable.

Rapin appeals in so many different places to "nature" and to the "natural" that it is not easy, in fact it would be wrong, to assign a fixed value to the term. Nature refers in general to any set of defining characteristics; it is always a given something that has consequences in fact or in reasoning; it is something to argue from, to work from. Each of the main factors in rhetoric—listeners or readers, subjects, and speakers or writers—has a nature in this sense. Taken together these natures form the prior conditions of speech (whether it takes the form of a poem, an oration, or a work of history or philosophy). Discourse is a variable depending on the limits laid down by the other three factors; what to say can never be known until the intelligible aspects of the rest of the situation have been grasped. Subjects may be grands and élevés or they may be petits and familiers, according to the natures of the things represented. Listeners are diverse in many ways: they vary as to age, sex, status, native ability, education. They have in common, however, minds, hearts, and feelings, that is, a general human nature, and no orator will really succeed without "une connaissance parfaite du coeur humain" (Réflexions, II, 23). And an elementary obligation of the speaker is to "know himself," to understand his own naturel or talent, so as to avoid forcing it by putting on manners or speech not suitable to it. Discourse results, therefore, from many particular acts of judgment, all of which go to assure its suitability, its "proportion" to what the subjects, speakers, listeners, and other circumstances are. In "Réflexion XII," Rapin shows
clearly how he thinks the orator must proceed and how in a typical instance mistakes occur:

Quand on s'applique à l'étude de l'éloquence, on a souvent coutume de s'y méprendre par les fausses mesures que l'on prend ou avec soi-même, ou avec son sujet, ou avec ceux à qui l'on parle. . . . L'orateur qui a de l'élévation d'esprit, pèche quelquefois par la trop grande complaisance qu'il a de se suivre lui-même: sans se donner le soin de se proportionner à sa matière, ni de se mesurer à la capacité de ceux à qui il parle.  

After all this insistence on nature it comes as no surprise that, when he shifts to the subject of expression, Rapin favors the tour naturel, the turn which renders things immediately to the mind with the least possible refraction due to human art. Are not things more striking than the images and figures of elocution? As a consequence the true orator makes no effort to display his art, since distortion would result. Nor, for that matter, does he try to conceal it: "La vraie éloquence n'affecte ni de paraître ni de ne paraître pas: elle a ses principes et ses règles, sans y chercher tant de façon: et l'art véritable ne s'amuse jamais à couvrir ni à découvrir trop d'art." (Réflexions, II, 17–18). Art neither shows itself nor hides itself; it simply is, almost in the same way that nature is.

In short, the role of art in eloquence is dwindling before our eyes. It makes no difference that all of the familiar terms having to do with the technique of expression appear in these pages: they are ghosts of what they had been. Of course we know that art, as Rapin understands it, has its rules and principles and processes. And we know that he thinks it to be, as it had traditionally been, a strengthening of natural powers by study, practice, and imitation. Nevertheless, a change has taken place. The knowledge involved has lost its technical status as a productive science or method. As for the strengthening of natural gifts, which seems an essential element of anything that calls itself an art, it is fair to say that the capacity
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to produce has been replaced by something rather different, by an informal sort of logic directed to the inner aspects of things, in other words, by a capacity to judge. I said earlier that, to Rapin’s mind, poets, orators, historians, and philosophers, on the one hand, and their readers or audiences, on the other, should come to share a common knowledge. It is now clear that their common possession should be, more than anything else, this power of discernment, this taste.

In the section entitled “Le Dessein de cet ouvrage” that precedes the Comparaisons and Réflexions, Rapin asserts: “Je commence ce premier tome par l’éloquence, la plus nécessaire des facultés comprises en ces deux volumes; parce qu’elle est propre à tout” (Comparaisons, I, p. [v]). If one puts with this principle, namely, that rhetoric underlies the whole field of disciplined expression in words, the fact that he constantly analyzes rhetorical problems in terms of nature and art, there arises the question of what place these two leading ideas have in poetry, history, and philosophy. What I wish to do now is to fill in briefly the shadings of these notions as they move in and out of the remaining sets of reflections. This is, I think, the best way to show how Rapin managed to achieve a unified and original discussion of belles-lettres.

In what he says of poetry one is immediately struck by the reappearance of words that gravitated about the “nature” and “art” in his rhetoric. He refers again and again to “mœurs,” “passions,” “bienveillance,” “agréments,” “nombre,” “harmonie,” “sujet,” “expression.” And this last term occurs with its usual cortège of adjectives: “congrue,” “claire,” “naturelle,” “éclatante,” “nombreuse,” and their opposites. There is, however, an obvious novelty: Aristotle’s Poetics moves into the foreground of the discussion. As result, Rapin adds some Aristotelian trimmings to his earlier vocabulary. For example, it is
impossible to follow Aristotle without using the concept of literary types or kinds, and here, in the *Réflexions sur la poétique*, epic, tragedy, comedy, and a string of minor genres furnish topics for Rapin and enable him to specify his observations. Sometimes he modifies—consciously or unconsciously—his basic language in an interesting way, as when he uses *sujet* interchangeably with *fable* (that is, plot) or when he applies *moeurs* not only to the dispositions and habits of the audience, as is usual in the theory of rhetoric, but also to those of the people whom poets represent in dramatic or epic poems.

But these resemblances lie on the surface. A deeper analogy to eloquence emerges in the inevitable attempt to define the end of poetry:

Les uns veulent que la fin de la poésie soit de plaire: que c'est même pour cela qu'elle s'étudie à remuer les passions, dont tous les mouvements sont agréables. . . . Il est vrai que c'est le but que se propose la poésie, que de plaire: mais ce n'est pas le principal. . . . En effet, la poésie étant un art, doit être utile par la qualité de sa nature, et par la subordination essentielle que tout art doit avoir à la politique, dont la fin générale est le bien public. C'est le sentiment d'Aristote et d'Horace son premier interprète. [*Réflexions*, II, 100.]

This breathtaking promotion of Horace (and Rapin is not, of course, the first to suggest it in his century) leads to the conclusion that the principal aim of poetry is to serve, to *profiter*, and to do that in two ways. First, through relaxation, after which the mind may return with a new strength to its usual tasks. Second, through the instruction which it gives man, or, in the more cautious phrase of Rapin, "... qu'elle [la poésie] fait profession de donner à l'homme. . . ."

Car la vertu étant naturellement austère par la contrainte qu'elle impose au coeur en réprimant ses désirs; la morale qui entreprend de régler les mouvements du cœur, par les instructions, doit plaire pour être écouté: à quoi elle ne réussit mieux que par la poésie. [*Réflexions*, II, 101.]
What does this mean? It seems to me to mean that the nature—that is, the defining trait—of the audience is exactly the same for poetry as for eloquence. In both instances people are to be taught something or to be improved in an agreeable way. When Rapin treats of eloquence, it is self-evident that instruction is involved; and so he emphasizes pleasure, even to the point of saying that rhetoric is l’art de plaire. Similarly, it is obvious that the poet aims to please; that much is taken for granted; the emphasis falls, instead, on the need to instruct. In other words, both arts propose to serve the same two ends, but as different species of belles-lettres they have differing problems of balance in achieving them.

The discussion of utility brings us to a new sense and role of nature in poetry. The aim of instruction, although it orients the poet or critic in a general way, must be specified if it is to be of real use. Rapin does this by linking the lessons of poetry to what is represented in the poetic species; he thinks here of nature as subject matter rather than as the determining principle of the audience. Heroic poetry proposes the examples of great virtues and vices, exciting us (in theory at least) to love the one and to avoid the other. Tragic poetry defines and rectifies, again by outstanding examples, the use of the passions by showing us that vice does not go unpunished, and that good fortune may be more apparent than real. Comedy corrects private faults (and through them public lacks) by putting before us a critical image of ordinary life.

All of this is clearly a discussion of moeurs, and of those differences in moeurs that have consequences for poets. The universal rule to follow, says Rapin, becoming quite specific, is that one must “... représenter chaque personne dans son caractère” (Réflexions, II, 116), that is, with the appropriate marks of age, rank, desires, and so on. “... Horace dans l’endroit de sa poétique, où il distingue les âges pour en faire
des portraits, dit que ce n'est que par la représentation des moeurs qu'on se fait écouter au théâtre: car tout y languit, dès que les moeurs n'y sont pas gardées” (Réflexions, II, 118).

In short, what is here designated by “nature” has been transferred, so to speak, from the column of audience (in the treatment of eloquence) to the column of res or subject matter (in the treatment of poetry). As we saw, the orator had to understand his audience in order to adjust the presentation of his thesis to it, and he seeks this understanding in a grasp of human nature, especially as it reveals itself in passions and morals. The poet in turn must understand human nature—approached in the same way as patterns or forms of character and feeling—partly, of course, because he too is obliged to take account of the audience, whose approval he hopes to gain, but mainly because he finds in these dispositions and their consequences what he is called upon to portray. They function as his thesis.

“Nature” in its third application refers to the initial gift underlying everything the poet does. Rapin takes six of the first seven réflexions to stress its importance. He presupposes in the true poet “... un grand naturel,” “un esprit juste, fertile, pénétrant, solide, universel,” “un grand sens,” “une grande vivacité.” His best example is Homer “... qui eut un génie accompli pour la poésie, et aussi l’esprit le plus vaste, le plus sublime, le plus profond, le plus universel qui fut jamais” (Réflexions, II 97). This kind of genius is not to be confused with imagination, nor does it have any connection with poetic fureur. The orator may be able to make up for its lack by art; not so the poet. And finally, in the first reflection of the series on the various genres, Rapin advises the poet (as he had advised the orator) to consult his strengths,
so as not to attempt less or more than he should according to his gift.

Where eloquence is concerned, Rapin tends, as we have seen, to reduce its complications to something simple like good sense or taste. He continues and carries even further this line of thought in speaking of poetry. Again and again he refers to the role of judgment, to the choices that precede immediately the act of writing. The poet must know how to distinguish, as he works with a serious or elevated subject, between what is beautiful and agreeable in nature and what is ugly and unpleasant.

Car la poésie est un art où tout doit plaire. Et ce n’est pas assez de s’attacher à la nature, qui est rude et désagréable en certains endroits: il faut choisir ce qu'elle a de beau d’avec ce qui ne l’est pas: elle a des grâces cachées en des sujets qu’il faut découvrir. Quel discernement doit avoir le poète, pour faire ce choix et pour rebuter, sans s'y méprendre, l’objet qui ne plaira pas, et retenir celui qui doit plaire. [Réflexions, II, 128.]

"Distinguer," "choisir," "découvrir," "discernement"—every one of these indicates the change in emphasis from the art as a whole to the critical moment or act that Rapin takes as its most important and necessary part.

Another passage shows even more clearly the trend toward simplification—and incidentally, the confidence with which Rapin brings rhetoric into poetics.

Il y a une rhétorique particulière pour la poésie, que les poètes modernes ne connaissent presque point. Cet art consiste à savoir bien précisément ce qu’il faut dire figurément, et ce qu’il faut dire tout simplement; et à bien connaître où il faut de l’ornement et où il n’en faut pas. . . C’est un pur effet du génie, que ce discernement, et que cette rhétorique particulière, qui est propre à la poésie. [Réflexions, II, 128-29.]
Thus he goes beyond a reduction of art or method to cultivated judgment; he turns it into a natural gift! But he no doubt expresses what is for him a more typical view when in an earlier passage, commenting on the need for the poet to have a “grand sens,” he makes the traditional remark about the relationship between nature and art, substituting judgment, however, for art: “Mais comme le jugement sans génie est froid et languissant, le génie sans jugement est extravagant et aveugle” (Réflexions, II, 96).

As is clear from the last three quotations, Rapin’s notion of judgment fluctuates between the habit of judging and the act of judging. I think that the latter is especially characteristic of his analysis. In an important passage he sees particular judgments according to rules of time, place, action, and so on as capable of being summed up in a single comprehensive judgment, made in the light of a single comprehensive value: bienséance. This is the supreme value that every artistic judgment is designed to affirm or deny of poems or parts of poems. “Sans elle, les autres règles de la poésie sont fausses. . . . Enfin tout ce qui est contre les règles du temps, des moeurs, des sentiments, de l’expression, est contraire à la bienséance, qui est la plus universelle de toutes les règles” (Réflexions, II, 135–36).

As he reflects on poetry, Rapin uses often and without any sense of crossing boundaries many terms and principles that have served him already in the reflections on eloquence. Sometimes he changes the emphases, as in the treatment of entertainment and instruction; sometimes he adds new elements, as in the case of generic and poetic vocabulary borrowed from Aristotle. But the bases remain the same. This is especially noticeable in Rapin’s way of transposing the fundamental themes of nature and art. The “nature” of the reader or spectator is the same in poetry as in rhetoric (since both poems and speeches are addressed to someone who is a judge);
however, the term is broadened into human nature as the object which the poet will imitate or represent in his work. The “naturel” of the poet becomes even more decisive than it was before in the case of the orator: here it tends to outweigh all other factors. The movement of art away from elaborate doctrine toward refined judgment, something already clear in Rapin’s rhetoric, continues in the discussion of poetry and the introduction of *bienséance* simplifies matters even further. Particular rules are inescapable, since poetry is a form of expression distinct from prose and since it is written in different genres, each of which has its own assumptions and way of coming into being. Nevertheless the many rules that guide the poet’s judgment turn out to be based on a single decisive value, appropriateness. To state a rule, to decide a particular point, that is, to make one choice among the indefinitely large number that have to be made in composing a poem, to estimate the worth of a poem as a whole, or even to distinguish from among ancient and modern works those really fit to be admired—any of these acts involves ultimately a reference to *bienséance*.

Rapin takes some pains to distinguish—though with mixed success, as we shall see—his historian from his poet, his orator, and his novelist. One of the first of his reflections on history begins:

Le roman ne pense qu’à plaire; et l’histoire ne pense qu’à instruire. Voilà proprement leur différence essentielle; celle-ci n’ayant d’autre but à se proposer, que l’instruction du public. Car comme elle ne travaille pas seulement pour le présent, sa vue ne doit pas se borner au temps qui est passager; mais à la postérité, qui dure toujours. [Réflexions, II, 220.]

*Plaire* and *instruire* again: as the aims of literary expression they are never far from the surface of Rapin’s mind. In elo-
quence and in poetry, he believes in a combination of the two. Here he apparently intends to eliminate pleasure as a proper aim for the historian and to assign it to the art of the novelist. But the deeper exigencies of his position soon show themselves. Near the end of this reflection he quotes Thucydides: “J’aime mieux, disait-il, plaire en disant la vérité, que de réjouir en contant des fables” (Réflexions, II, 221). And in the marginal heading for the next reflection we read: “Que la vérité est le seul moyen par où l’histoire plaît et va à sa fin.” Fiction may please, but so also may the truth; and so, once more, Rapin can suggest that the writer seek two aims simultaneously.

As a matter of fact the image of the austere reader delighting in truth changes soon after. Rapin calls him distrait and volage when he takes up the essential procedure of history, which is narration. He does not dismiss such a reader; far from it: it becomes the business of the historian to keep him reading. One of the great beauties of narration, he continues, resides in skilful transitions, thanks to which the reader moves from subject to subject “sans se lasser” (Réflexions, II, 232). And so, although in his initial distinction of the tasks of the novelist and the historian he discards the rule of pleasure for the latter, he later finds himself unable to proceed without it. The story is repeated when Rapin tries to distinguish history from poetry and oratory according to the presence or absence of figurative language. The historians will use figures sparingly to enliven their accounts and to avoid froideur, while orators and poets speak mainly and appropriately in such language, poets being especially free to try unusual turns of thought and expression. The closer one looks, the more this difference dwindles to one of degrees. In fact, at one place it reaches the vanishing point, as Rapin quotes from Cicero, “Magnum quid historiam recte scribere et summi oratoris proprium” (Réflexions, II, 268).
In the reflections on history we see once more the concern with nature and art, or, more specifically, with audience, work, and author as distinct but interrelated factors. I have already suggested in connection with the aims of the historian how his audience resembles the audience of poetry and eloquence. There are some nuances worth noting, however. Taking his cue, I think, from the beautiful phrase of Thucydides, who intended his history to be a "thing for all time," Rapin endows the readers of historical eloquence with a special dignity.

Il faut donc penser à écrire noblement, quand on se mêle d'écrire l'histoire. Car dès qu'on parle à toute la terre et à tous les siècles, on est revêtu d'un caractère, qui donne de l'autorité pour élever la voix, parce que c'est aux Rois, aux Princes et aux grands de tous les pays et de tous les âges qu'on parle, et qu'on devient en quelque façon le maître et l'instructeur du genre humain. [Réflexions, II, 206.]

In interpreting these lines, one wants to complete the picture by recalling those passages in which the reader appears easily distracted, easily bored. Even so, Rapin obviously seeks here to establish an obligation bearing on the historian because of the nature of his readers, who are high in rank and who include both present and future generations.

The discussion becomes more subtle when Rapin speaks of another "nature," that of the subject matter entering into the historical work.

C'est un champ bien vaste que la matière propre à exercer l'art d'un historien, puisqu'elle s'étend à toutes les actions des hommes, sur la paix, sur la guerre, les conseils, les négociations, les ambassades, les intrigues, et toutes les différentes aventures qui peuvent arriver dans la vie. Cicéron demande deux qualités dans la matière d'une histoire, que ce soient de grandes choses, et qu'elles soient dignes d'être racontées au public. [Réflexions, II, 215.]

The movement of thought is characteristic: first expansive,
underlining the size and variety of the field of human action; then selective, as the historian's judgment separates by Ciceronian criteria the truly memorable and truly instructive actions from all the rest.

Still, something quite complex remains for him to study and recount: since men are involved, the historian must be a connaisseur of motives and characters. Otherwise he is merely a "gazetier" who is satisfied to relate events and results without bothering to inquire into their causes. The point made here sounds very like the obligation of the poet—mentioned above—to represent each person "dans son caractère." Rapin contrasts Livy, the most accomplished of them all, he says, and one of the greatest masters of eloquence who ever lived, with Tacitus, much to the advantage of the former, because he respects the natures of people and of ages.

C'est ainsi qu'il donne aux derniers rois de Rome tout l'orgueil que leur inspirait l'indépendance; qu'il varie l'esprit de la république . . . qu'il distingue chaque âge et chaque siècle, par le génie qui a le plus régné, sans confondre les mouvements différents de ce génie dans les différentes circonstances des temps, lesquels ne se ressemblent point. [Réflexions, II, 218.]

Tacitus fails in this sympathetic variation; it is his character that explains what he narrates; too shut up in himself, he makes everything resemble everything else.

The same idea—and the same examples—recur in the discussion of portraits, which are a great ornament when they are done a propos.

Mais c'est un coup de maître, que d'attraper cette ressemblance, laquelle ne consiste que dans les traits singuliers et imperceptibles, qui seuls expriment la nature, et qu'on ne trouve point, à moins de fouiller dans les coeurs, et d'en développer tous les replis, pour faire bien connaître ce qui est caché. [Réflexions, II, 251.]

Nature emerges thus at the springs of the actions to be told
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in history. But it presides likewise over the discussion of the historian's genius.

Rapin began, as we saw, by making him the maître et instructeur du genre humain, the chief justice, so to speak, in the court of humanity.

. . . L'historien est de tous les auteurs celui qui se fait un plan plus vaste, et qui s'érigé un plus grand tribunal. Car c'est à juger souverainement de tout ce qui se passe dans le monde, à faire la destinée des grands de la terre, pour leur réputation dans la postérité, et à donner des leçons à tous les peuples pour leur instruction. . . . Car que peut-on imaginer de plus beau que l'historie, qui sait rendre justice au mérite, et à la vertu, en éternisant les actions vertueuses. [Réflexions, II, 205.]

Such evaluative judgment is, I think, a species of something broader and more fundamental: judgment as discrimination. The initial act of the historian as he chooses his subject, the criticism of sources and documents, the conduct of the narration, the drawing of portraits, the analysis of motives, the selection of evocative details—in short, the whole sequence of wide-ranging and innumerable acts through which the historian passes—is a sequence of judgments in this generic sense.

Quel jugement ne faut-il pas pour prendre en tout le bon parti; tourner les choses dans leur bon sens, aller toujours à ce qui est le plus solide; interposer son sentiment sur les matières dont on parle, sans forcer le lecteur par des préjugés: ne toucher aux endroits délicats, qu'avec cette délicatesse d'esprit qui ne peut être l'effet que d'un sens exquis; ne point charger son discours de trop de matière, qui en étouffe l'esprit, sans y donner place à quelque réflexion qu'on fasse soi-même, ou qu'on donne lieu de faire à son lecteur; savoir trouver le véritable noeud qu'il y a dans chaque affaire sans s'y méprendre, pour l'éclaircir, et en faire le dénouement, ne point débiter de grands événements sur des motifs frivoles; ne point cacher des pensées fausses sous une expression éclatante; éviter ce qui sent l'étude et tout ce qui a l'air contraint, et suivre en toutes choses ce rayon de lumière
et d'intelligence qui donne idée du discernement de l'historien, en donnant bonne opinion de sa capacité et de sa suffisance? De sorte que la partie la plus nécessaire à l'histoire est le jugement. [Réflexions, II, 269-70.]

As Rapin discusses in this impressive way the nature of historical judgment, is he not at the same time defining the sense of art (or what is left of it) in history? At every moment of the process, to a degree not required of the orator or the poet, the power of judgment must be aimed at a grasp of the truth and of the true-seeming. Hence the general warnings in other passages against figures and other stylistic ornaments and the recommendation that one limit oneself to writing noblement, sensément, purement, simplement. As with poetry and eloquence, a multitude of particular "rules" and bits of advice is indeed offered concerning narrations, transitions, portraits, passions, descriptions, harangues, reflections, and so on, but the complexities of art are frequently telescoped and all arguments referred to the single principle of judgment, to something that is more a matter of psychology or nature than of technique.

Normally the forms of oratory, poetry, and history are immediately accessible to the public, at least to the cultivated part of it. Philosophy usually requires some rewriting for the general reader. Rapin is very conscious of this problem as he undertakes his reflections on philosophy. Luckily he has an ancient model, Cicero (incidentally, a distinguished rhetorician).

Je ne suis entré dans aucune discussion des préceptes, qui se débitent dans l'école, pour ne pas languir: je ne m'arrête qu'aux maximes générales, sans rien approfondir. En quoi j'ai tâché d'imiter Cîcérôn, qui dans ses livres de philosophie ne s'engage presqu'à aucun détail des opinions dont il parle, qu'autant qu'il le peut faire sans rien perdre de sa politesse ordinaire. [Réflexions, II, 292-93.]
Cicero explains only the general principles and maxims of each school, adding a few reflections of his own. That is what I have done, says Rapin: “C’est ce que j’ai fait pour m’accorder au goût du siècle, où l’on est moins touché de la grande érudition que du bon sens” (Réflexions, II, 293). What this means is obvious: the usual domination of the scene by public tastes and lights. As I have shown, in this theory the reader’s judgment in grading a speech or a poem or a history is at bottom equal to that of the one who created the work. What happens when such a reader turns to philosophy as taught by Rapin? “Et comme on trouvera dans le fond de ces réflexions une satire de la fausse philosophie et un éloge de la vraie: je suis sûr par là de plaire à la plus considérable secte des philosophes, qui est celle des honnêtes gens” (Réflexions, II, 293). So the answer to the question is that Rapin promotes his reader to the rank of philosopher, and, in fact, gives him an advantage, since the company of honnêtes gens is larger than that of the original thinkers. The principles that these thinkers made convincing by putting them into systematic arguments are extracted and made relevant to savoir vivre, the really serious philosophical business. We recognize once more the dual aim of instructing and pleasing. But, as I indicated above, there is a significant variation. Rapin had not, after all, felt obliged to restate what Demosthenes and Homer and Thucydides had said. The works of philosophers, however, cannot be absorbed as they are; they have to be cut and rephrased lest they repel and in order that philosophical principles or maxims may have some bearing on particular lives. It is clear that in some unspecified balance, Rapin sees such application as more important than pedantic respect for original contexts and intentions.

The love of wisdom, the study of virtue—these are the fundamental qualities of the philosopher, according to Rapin,
and the one who possesses them becomes an authority, an example, or even an oracle. Socrates is the philosopher par excellence. He had "facilité du génie," "agréments d'esprit," "profondeur," "solidité," "sublimité de lumière et d'intelligence," "simplicité." At other moments, when Rapin has in mind especially the would-be philosopher rather than his ideal, he stresses balance and moderation as characteristics of the philosopher's mind. But I do not think that these traits, however real they may be to him, are as truly basic as something indicated by the term secte, used above, and its correlative, sectateurs, used elsewhere. By implication these words define the philosopher as the holder of an opinion who has attracted to himself a group of partisans, of people who share his opinion. In other words, Rapin is led by his principles to think of philosophizing, viewed historically, as a kind of rhetorical activity.

Let me be more specific. A Greek philosopher, in his time and setting—so to speak—expounded his views to his friends or to associates in his school; eventually this group came to include thinkers of other ages, and formed "... la secte de Socrate, de Platon, des Pyrrhoniens et des Sceptiques, qui est originairement la même" or "... celle d'Aristote et des Péricratéticiens" (Réflexions, II, 292). As a matter of fact, there were many more schools than these. Rapin confesses that his greatest problem in composing his reflections on philosophy was bringing some order out of this abundance. In his opinion, Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius failed to make any proper distinctions among the sects; Varro counted two hundred and eighty of them; Themistius went as far as three hundred. Rapin contents himself with treatments of the seven "principal" ones and their leaders.

What he goes on to do here, it seems to me, is to bring these chefs de secte to a point at which they can communicate with the seventeenth-century audience of "honnêtes
 gens," that is, with people who belong, after all, to the most considerable group of philosophers. In other words, the scheme is the same, whether he writes the history of philosophy or whether he summarizes it for the use of his readers: a philosopher is a lover of truth and virtue who addresses himself to hearers or readers who have the privilege of agreeing or disagreeing and of determining thus the value of the man, of his speculation, and of his school.

Given such a man, what is the nature of his discourse, or, since in philosophy language and style are less important than content (once obscurities have been removed by clever exposition), what is the subject matter that he studies? Rapin answers in a completely traditional way. The philosopher studies thought itself and its laws in logic; man’s desires and the regulation of them in morality or ethics; the world (that is, the entire order of natural and observable things) in physics; and finally, in metaphysics, purely intellectual objects, abstract and spiritual beings. After reflections on philosophy in general—essentially a series of paragraphs commenting on the opinions and historical fortunes of the “sectes”—he offers chapters on each of the four subject matters I have just mentioned.

Now philosophy is not studied for itself alone, but as a way to savoir vivre, to a habit of adapting oneself to circumstances and of doing so without loss of one’s independence.

A la vérité la plus belle de toutes les philosophies est de savoir vivre: c’est à dire de s’accommoder aux temps, aux personnes, aux affaires, quand la raison le demande: mais cela même doit se faire librement et sans contrainte; pour ne pas imiter ces âmes faibles, qui n’ont que des sentiments empruntés sur chaque chose, et qui s’abaissent à avoir de la condescendance pour des opinions auxquelles ils ont peine à se soumettre: parce qu’ils n’ont pas la force de garder leur liberté entière. [Réflexions, II, 343-44.]
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Since the aim of "la plus belle des philosophies" is unmistakably practical, the study or reading of philosophy is naturally drawn into the status of means to that end. The savoir in question comes from reason in its role as judge, as maker of distinctions according to circumstances. One thinks at once of the quality of bienséance that Rapin developed so fully in his first two groups of réflexions. Eloquence and poetry sought, ultimately, bienséance in expression: now philosophy becomes the art of attaining it in action.

The lines quoted show, of course, where the objectives of the "professional" philosopher lie, but they also serve to define the attitude and posture, that is, the nature, of his audience. They point to a definite expectation on the part of honnêtes gens who read philosophy or reflections on it. Furthermore, although the present passage makes no mention of religion, there are many others that leave no room for doubt: savoir vivre means knowing how to live as a Christian. This one for example:

Ainsi, pour ne pas nous méprendre, commençons à étudier ce qu'il faut croire, avant que de penser à raisonner. Réglons l'usage de notre foi, pour régler l'usage de notre raison; soyons Chrétiens avant que d'être philosophes; que notre première sagesse et notre principale philosophie soit notre religion. [Réflexions, II, 423.]

Such are the practical and religious dispositions that characterize the audience in this epiphany of the familiar rhetorical triad—and this piece of the picture matches the other two. One sees the congruence of the parts in a scheme that makes of the philosopher an advocate, of philosophy a position reducible to maxims or opinions, and of the reader or hearer someone who distinguishes the true from the false and the useful from the harmful in view of natural and Christian ends.
In philosophy Rapin finds it easy, from one point of view, to identify the appropriate art: it is logic. But in his reflections on logic he tends regularly to generalize, to avoid a systematic presentation in favor of examples and anecdotes. Once more the controlling notion of judgment comes to the foreground, although it is true that he develops the theme according to some new values. In the first place, one must pay attention to the different degrees of certainty that are attained in judgments. “C'est une grande science de juger des choses selon les différents degrés de certitude qu'elles peuvent avoir, de démêler la vérité des apparences; de prendre pour opinion ce qui n'est qu'opinion, et de savoir bien distinguer ces jugements pour juger sainement de tout” (Réflexions, II, 331). This suggests an art of judging that is focussed on particular propositions and on the modes according to which predicates are said of subjects. In other places Rapin emphasizes the interrelationships of judgments: they may be balanced against each other as opposed extremes or one judgment may stand as a mean between extremes.

For example, he advises us to stay in the voies ordinaires (Réflexions, II, 332); as soon as one leaves these paths and rejects widely shared opinions or sentiments, one runs the risk of falling into absurdity. Or again, he notes a difference between “esprits” that are naturally free and masterful and those who are “naturellement esclaves” (Réflexions, II, 335); he thinks both are extremes. In another instance, he criticizes equally those who never have any doubts and those who are doubtful of everything; the proud man who will not approve of anything for fear of submitting to something and the “volage” who approves of everything in order to spare himself the effort required to do some thinking of his own. “S'accommoder de tout et ne s'accommoder de rien, ce sont d'autres extrémités à éviter à un sage” (Réflexions, II, 340).
AUDIENCE, WORDS, AND ART

And so the most accessible kind of regulation for judgment here would seem to come to these two pieces of advice: (1) in judging, distinguish, of course, the true from the false, but also note degrees of certainty within the category of truth; and (2) avoid extremes. Logic as the art of thinking in philosophy becomes some such technique of balanced discrimination.

In its ancient forms, as well as in its later derivations or counterparts, rhetoric is in essence a discipline that regulates transactions involving words in which what is said is part of an effort to secure the adherence of a listener or a reader to the views of a speaker or writer. One may, therefore, isolate in the rhetorical situation four aspects or dimensions—speaker, audience, speech, and aim—three of which I have just analyzed as they appear in the Réflexions of Rapin. The custom of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian is to specify the audience according to the kind of occasion for decision: deliberative (concerning what should be done); judicial (concerning what has been done); or epideictic (concerning the quality of a thing or a person). A particular set of circumstances leads to words addressed to people who then make up their minds, with consequences for that situation. In at least two of these cases (my reservation applies to the "judicial" category), the audience is heterogeneous and is characterized by a wide range of notions and feelings that enter directly into the orator's calculations. In Rapin's theory, the conception of the audience moves definitely in the direction of a homogeneous elite, les honnêtes gens, who have culture, standing, and, in some cases, money for patronage.

Having narrowed considerably the focus of rhetoric as regards the composition of the audience, Rapin goes on to broaden the traditional notion of rhetorical occasions or circumstances. Set pieces of public oratory belong to his subject
matter, of course, but so does any instance of disciplined
speech, no matter where it falls: in eloquence proper, in
poetry, in history, or in philosophy. This broadening does not
come as something invented suddenly and wholly by Rapin.
In many critical works of smaller compass, it had already left
its effect on the vocabulary used in discussing works other
than orations. The fundamental rhetorical processes of inven-
tion and expression, which are by nature hard to pin down,
lent themselves to such uses. The feat of Rapin is to gather
into a whole de grande envergure the principles and conse-
quences of this unsystematized tendency.

By thus extending rhetoric to new fields, Rapin complic-
tates the role of the audience as judge of expression. The
place of antilogism, the inevitability of shocks between op-
posed statements in matters of law or civic policy, had always
been recognized in rhetorical theory. But the judge, whether
thought of as one person or as an assembly of many persons,
was hardly in the wide-open situation of Rapin's reader, who
has before him, especially during the process of forming his
taste, an immense number of works in a variety of genres.

The change in the audience and in the scope of rhetorical
judgment involves a change in the orator: he becomes any-
one "... qui se mêle d'écrire et de parler." He had been
an expert in possession of a genuine science that made him
the master of the rhetorical situation. In Rapin's analysis this
productive virtue, with its content of clear and certain knowl-
edge, is redefined as a habit of judgment. It is based on experi-
ence that may in turn give rise to reflections or maxims (when
it bothers to make itself explicit) rather than to organized
theory. It is more immediate than discursive in its way of
working; and at times it seems less a habit than a natural
power.

In the most radical change of all, perhaps, the writer or
speaker now faces judges who equal him in understanding,
background, and taste. I say faces; this is actually the expression of an ideal; Rapin looks forward to a time when poets, orators, historians, and philosophers, on the one hand, and their audiences, on the other, will all recognize essentially the same rules and act according to essentially the same taste. If anything, Rapin wants to do more for audiences than for authors:

But this honnête homme, this enlightened consumer (to speak as Valéry might), is on the way to becoming, as he approaches his ideal, a producer as well. Rapin continues:

It would not be possible, I think, to say more clearly what Rapin has done to Quintilian: his teaching ideally forms, not the cultivated orator-statesman, but the courtier-connaisseur-patron who writes verse à ses heures.

In his Cicero and his Quintilian, Rapin read that the end of rhetoric is persuasion by means of discourse that pleases, instructs, and moves. It seems to be true that means tend naturally to substitute themselves for ends; in any case, that
happens here. For one thing, persuasion refers to something too specific for a scheme as broad as this one, which includes all the divisions and subdivisions of belles-lettres; for another, the term has essentially practical connotations: it suggests an agreement followed by action. Obviously Rapin needed a more flexible and speculative end. He found the answer in what had been the means to persuasion, in *delectare*, *docere*, and *movere*. Eloquence, he writes, is the “véritable art de plaire”—and at one stroke he has left behind all that limited him in persuasion. But note also the rest of the sentence: “L'éloquence, qui est le véritable art de plaire, n'y réussit jamais mieux qu'en imitant la nature.”

This satisfies the instructive function, while subordinating it as a means to pleasure. (I interpret *nature* here as any object or person which furnishes, when imitated by an author and recognized by his public, the speculative value I have just mentioned.) Rapin does not forget *movere*:

L'éloquence qui ne touche que l'esprit, et ne va pas jusques au cœur, n'est pas une véritable éloquence. . . . Et s'insinuant par des voies imperceptibles dans l'âme de ceux à qui elle parle, elle fait sur eux de si puissantes impressions, qu'ils semblent agir moins par jugement et par conseil, que par l'émotion et par impétuosité. Ainsi toutes ces beautés qui vont à l'esprit sans aller au cœur, ne sont point de véritables beautés. . . . [Réflexions, II, 20.]

Above all the work must please, and the way to that end lies in appeals to thought and to feeling, in that order. In other words Rapin modifies and realigns the traditional principles: the over-riding aim of *persuadere* tends to disappear into *docere* and that plus *movere* become the means to *delectare*.

The Academy had agreed on its prospectus in 1635. In 1684, Rapin published the complete set of his *Comparaisons*
What had been a live problem for almost fifty years had at last found its solution. A synthesis of considerable power, backed by erudition tactfully used, it was far superior to anything his immediate predecessors had done. Vaugelas had stopped short of the main job, leaving it for Patru; Patru had lived and talked rhetoric but had not written it down; Bary and Le Gras had for the most part copied and rephrased Quintilian, since they understood the problem as a call to import ancient theory into the seventeenth century. Rapin saw that the old had to be thought through again, that it must be recast in an attractive form if it was to become truly available. He continues a conservative and backward-looking tradition but he shows signs of a genuinely independent talent: in the unusual structure of the work, in its steady effort to be discriminating, in its accessibility, in its style. Contrary to the expectations of the Academy, the composition of a French rhetoric did not precede the writing of great literary works. Practice and the development of theory went hand in hand, each explaining or illustrating the other; and when Rapin's synthesis appeared in its final form, French classicism was over. For us the special value of his work comes from this vital interrelation. I know of no better contemporary source to which one may turn for a summary of the literary culture to which the honnête homme aspired and of the common doctrine that writers knew even when they chose to interpret it freely.

1. These are the titles of the Paris edition of 1684 in two volumes. They are repeated in the Amsterdam edition of 1709, also in two volumes, to which my footnotes refer. Where quotations are drawn from Volume I, I have identified them by the abbreviation Comparaisons; where they are taken from Volume II, I have used Réflexions.

2. From "Le Dessein de cet ouvrage," Comparaisons, I, p. [ii].

3. Rapin recalls to his readers the story of Marcellus, who, according to Plutarch, gave Rome the "amour des belles choses" by pictures and
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statues that he brought back from Syracuse and showed to the public.
"C'est ce que je voudrais tâcher de faire, c'est-à-dire, d'affectionner notre
cœur aux belles-lettres en lui proposant les grands modèles. . . . C'est
mame une espèce de méthode de devenir savant pour les gens de
qualité, sans les obliger à descendre dans un détail trop mécanique de
préceptes, et sans tomber dans les minuties de la construction et de la
grammaire, qui est toujours désagréable aux gens d'un esprit déjà avancé"
(Comparaisons, I, p. [v]). From the point of view of rhetorical theory,
it has seemed to me more useful to study here the Réflexions rather than
the Comparaisons. But the latter have a definite place in Rapin's program,
as the lines just quoted show clearly.

4. A detailed analysis of these reflections would be out of place here.
For the wide scope of Rapin's exposé, note these lines: "Le premier volume
qui contient les réflexions sur l'éloquence a trois parties, les réflexions sur
l'éloquence en général selon l'usage qu'elle a dans les lieux où l'on
parle, sur l'éloquence du barreau, et sur l'éloquence de la chaire. Sur
quoi tout ce qui peut s'observer dans l'usage de ces trois sortes d'éloquence
est exactement observé: avec toutes les règles que chacun demande par
son caractère dans un assez grand détail" (Comparaisons, pp. [vii–viii]).


6. Ibid., p. [viii]. Cf. also: "L'éloquence qui est le véritable art de
plaire n'y réussit jamais mieux qu'en imitant la nature: ce n'est pas un
moyen fort sûr pour persuader que de donner trop à l'art. . . . Le
souvenir art de l'éloquence est de s'attacher scrupuleusement à la nature
comme à son premier original" (ibid., pp. 16–17).

7. Ibid., p. 13. Other mistakes easily interpretable according to the
basic schema are: "... De représenter les objets plus grands que le
naturel; de prendre un grand air en de petites affaires; d'afecter de grandes
expressions en de petits sujets; faire le bel esprit avec le peuple; vouloir
être ardent et pathétique dans des sujets qui ne le méritent pas; accabl-
ner les esprits faibles par des discours trop forts."—Ibid., p. 13. The expla-
nation is always the same. "... Dès qu'on sort de la nature, tout
devient faux dans l'éloquence" (ibid., p. 17).

8. Ibid., p. 13.

9. He had published them in separate volumes over the period from
1664 to 1681. Here are some salient facts. (1) Comparaisons: Homer and
Virgil (two French editions in 1664 and 1669; three in Latin in 1684,
1704, and 1707); Demosthenes and Cicero (two editions in 1676); (2)
Réflexions: on poetics (editions in 1674, 1675, and again in 1675); on
eloquence (editions in 1671, 1672, and 1679). The comparison of Plato
and Aristotle appeared in 1671, that of Thucydides and Livy in 1681.
The reflections on philosophy were published in 1676. I have found no
sign of separate publication of the reflections on history; they may be
combined in the Instructions pour l'histoire de 1677 and 1690, but I have
not been able to consult either of those editions. Rapin's Œuvres were
published in 1709 and 1725; they included the Comparaisons and Réflexions.
These dates and indications give some idea of the success and
continuing impact of Rapin's thought. See also note 1, above, for the
reference to the collected edition of the Comparaisons and Réflexions in
1684.