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THE RHETORIC OF PRUDENCE IN STANISŁAW HERAKLIUSZ LUBOMIRSKI'S *DE VANITATE CONSILIORUM**

ANDRZEJ PROBULSKI
Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków

Abstract

The article aims to present a new interpretation of Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski's *De vanitate consiliorum* by discussing the way the Latin notion of *prudentia* and the two-fold argument (*disputatio in utramque partem*) are employed in the dialogue.

The first part of the article briefly discusses the origin and meanings of *prudentia* as it was employed in the Ciceronian tradition. The notion of prudence as practical judgement in relation to affairs of state is linked here to the Ciceronian mode of arguing *in utramque partem*, allowing a careful examination of different aspects of any given issue before taking political action.

The second part of the article outlines the ways the notion of prudence is used throughout *De vanitate consiliorum*. *Prudentia* is referred to by the characters of the dialogue as a faculty that allows the statesman to make the best of contradictory forces influencing the course of political affairs – a faculty which does not ensure success, but allows one to achieve the best possible result in the contingent sphere of human affairs.

The third and final part of the article discusses the two ways the image of 'two-headed prudence' is invoked in *De vanitate consiliorum*, either in reference to the prudent judgement which carefully examines different aspects of the issue at hand or to the council's indecisiveness which hinders the possibility of consensus necessary to take political action. An interpretation of the dialogue as a rhetorical exercise in prudence is proposed in this part, arguing that the way Lubomirski employs rhetorical deliberation *in utramque partem* invites the reader to constantly exercise his own practical judgement in relation to affairs of state.

Key words: Prudence, Early Modern rhetoric, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, arguing *in utramque partem*

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De vanitate consiliorum, a Neo-Latin dialogue of 1700 by Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski (1642–1702) is a perplexing work – as is testified by the discrepancies between the different interpretations of it which have been put forward over the years. The dialogue, consisting of twenty-five brief inquiries ('Consultationes'), in which Vanity and Truth discuss numerous issues concerning legislation and policy-making in the Commonwealth, has been described as: a socio-technical treatise;[1] a pessimistic diagnosis of the condition of 17th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth;[2] a commentary on techniques of making correct political decisions;[3] a political pamphlet aimed at Augustus II the Strong;[4] a skeptical treatise on the art of rulership;[5] and a dialogue about an "Upside-Down World."[6]

All of these descriptions stem from a single shared premise: that the key to understanding Lubomirski's dialogue lies in figuring out the relationship between, on the one hand, the characters of the dialogue and the subjects which they discussed, and, on the other, the political reality of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the turn of the 17th century.[7] While this approach produced some genuine insights, it led most scholars (with the notable exceptions of Adam Karpiński and Paulina Buchwald-Pelcowa) to overlook issues related to the rhetorical structure of *De vanitate consiliorum*.

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[1] B. Chodźko, *Pisma polityczne marszałka Lubomirskiego w perspektywie uniwersalistycznej refleksji etycznej i prakseologicznej*, Białystok 1998, p. 83.

[2] G. Raubo, *Barokowy świat człowieka. Refleksja antropologiczna w twórczości Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego*, Poznań 1997, p. 94.

[3] M. Mejor, *Stanislaus Heraclius Lubomirius – nobilis Polonus, scriptor Latinus. Uwagi o latinitas Lubomirskiego*, [in:] *Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski – twórca i dzieła*, eds. A. Karpiński, E. Lasocińska, Warszawa 2004, p. 66.

[4] J. Staszewski, *Pomysły reformatorskie czasów Augusta II. Uwagi o dziełach i programach*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 82 (1975), no. 4, pp. 737–740.

[5] Cz. Hernas, *Barok*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 534–535; A. Karpiński, *S.H. Lubomirski – moralista i polityk końca XVII w.*, [in:] *Świt i zmierzch baroku*, eds. M. Hanusiewicz, J. Dąbkowska, A. Karpiński, Lublin 2002, p. 279.

[6] P. Buchwald-Pelcowa, *Świat odwrócony Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego*, [in:] *Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski. Pisarz – polityk – mecenas*, Wrocław 1982, pp. 137–156.

[7] Paulina Buchwald-Pelcowa makes some interesting remarks on how the connection between *De vanitate consiliorum* and the situation of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was perceived in the 18th century. Cf. P. Buchwald-Pelcowa, *Z dziejów recepcji "De vanitate consiliorum" Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego w wieku XVIII*, [in:] eadem *Historia literatury i historia książki. Studia nad książką i literaturą od średniowiecza po wiek XVIII*, Kraków 2005, pp. 493–494.

I would like to argue that the rhetorical structure of Lubomirski's dialogue should not only be taken into consideration, but that, in fact, it is the very means of persuasion, deliberation and practical judgment which should be regarded as the focal point of *De vanitate consiliorum*.

This article focuses on one facet of the dialogue's rhetorical structure: the way the notion of prudence or practical reason (*prudentia*) is employed in *De vanitate consiliorum* and the manner in which it relates to Lubomirski's use of the rhetorical technique of arguing on both sides of a question (*disputatio in utramque partem*).

In the first part of the article, I briefly outline the way the notion of *prudentia* was understood in the rhetorical tradition stemming from the works of Cicero. In the second part, I analyze the meanings associated with the notion of prudence by Lubomirski and suggest certain similarities between his use of the term and the ones that can be found in the works of some other early modern authors. In the third and final part, I discuss the relationship between the notion of *prudentia* and the rhetorical structure of *De vanitate consiliorum* and offer a new interpretation of the dialogue, using Victoria Kahn's concept of rhetoric as a form of prudence.

Prudence and Rhetoric

The way that the Latin notion of *prudentia* was employed in the early modern period is far too large a topic to be discussed here. Nevertheless, there are certain issues concerning the origin and meanings of the term that any commentary on use of *prudentia* in a Neo-Latin work should take into account.

Even though the notion of practical judgment (*phronesis*) and its connection to rhetoric was already discussed in the Greek rhetorical tradition by Aristotle,[8] it was Cicero's *De oratore* that provided the outline of *prudentia* as a philosophical concept[9] and established a direct relationship

[8] On Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*, see L.S. Self, "Rhetoric and Phronesis: The Aristotelian Ideal," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, vol. 12, no. 12 (Spring, 1979), pp. 130–145.

[9] R.W. Cape, Jr., *Cicero and the Development of Prudential Practice in Rome*, [in:] *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice*, ed. R. Hariman, University Park 2003, p. 37.

between the virtue of prudence (*prudentia*) and a specific rhetorical practice – that of arguing on both sides of the question (*disputatio in utramque partem*).

Prudentia, which is at the core of Cicero's ideal of the training and experience of a rhetorician, is the faculty that provides the orator with the ability to determine and deliver the best argument, using the most effective mode of persuasion, in any given situation. Rooted in the orator's experience, it lacks the unswerving certainty of theoretical knowledge (*sapientia*), and is not concerned with what is universally right, but instead enables him to choose the best course of action in the contingent sphere of human affairs.[10] If we accept Arthur Quinn's remark that the characteristic "color" of the Ciceronian rhetoric would be that of a "skeptical pragmatism,"[11] then we can find no better expression for this attitude than the notion of *prudentia*: a faculty of practical judgment bridging the gap between the incertitude concerning the right course of action and the necessity to act.

But how does Ciceronian orator come to decide on a particular manner of conduct, despite his lack of absolute certainty regarding its results? He does so by means of rhetorical deliberation *in utramque partem*, juxtaposing contrasting claims against each other and carefully estimating their value in a given situation. The orator can employ *disputatio in utramque partem* either as a tool of *inventio*, disregarding the claims contrary to his own in the actual speech, or he may use it as part of *dispositio*, presenting the contradicting opinions in his work,[12] as Cicero did in his own dialogues.[13] Whichever of these two approaches is taken, the use of *disputatio in utramque partem* and the exercise of practical judgment strongly accentuate what Heinrich Lausberg has called the "agonistic" or "dialectical"

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[10] R. Hariman, *Theory Without Modernity*, [in:] *Prudence: Classical Virtue*, pp. 5–6.

[11] A. Quinn, *The Color of Rhetoric*, [in:] *Rhetorik zwischen den Wissenschaften*, ed. G. Ueding, Tübingen 1991, p. 138. See also T.O. Sloane, *On the Contrary: The Protocol of Traditional Rhetoric*, Washington, DC 1997, p. 88.

[12] On the use of so-called "one-sided" and "two-sided" arguments as means of persuasion and on the relationship between the modern notion of "two-sided argument" and *disputatio in utramque partem* or *dissoi logoi*, see D.J. O'Keefe, *Persuasion*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. T.O. Sloane, New York 2001, pp. 575–583.

[13] R.W. Cape, *op.cit.*, p. 43, emphasizes the connection between *prudentia*, *disputatio in utramque partem* and the genre of the dialogue, in which interlocutors employ witty banter and irony in presenting their contradicting claims.

character of rhetoric:[14] the orator's duty is not merely to propose a certain course of action but also to argue a contentious issue and "win over" either a hypothetical or an actual opponent.[15] This connection between the Latin notion of *prudentia* and the rhetorical *disputatio in utramque partem* was widely recognized in the early modern period and disseminated by the iconography of "two-headed prudence."[16]

Aspects of *prudentia* discussed in *De vanitate consiliorum*

Perhaps the most helpful passage for understanding Lubomirski's use of *prudentia* is found in the third 'Consultatio' of *De vanitate consiliorum*: 'De discordiis civilibus, et unione animorum' (*On Discord Between Citizens, and on Unanimity*). While Vanitas expresses concern about the dissent among citizens of the Commonwealth, Veritas advises her to embrace it and, instead of leading people towards consensus, make use of internecine antagonisms. Not only can the discord be considered useful (as long as the mischievous fight among themselves, the Commonwealth is safe), but according to Veritas, it should be viewed as the guiding principle of the world,

> Discordia elementorum, mundi vitaeque est harmonia. Tunc plane interire mundum necesse erit, cum ad aequalem quietem omnia devenerint. (III, 2)
>
> [Discord is the harmony of elements, the world and life. If everything came to a uniform peace, then clearly the world would have to perish.]

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[14] See H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, transl. M.T. Bliss, A. Janssen, D.E. S., eds. D.E. Orton, R. Dean Anderson, Leiden 1998, s. 63.

[15] It can be argued that this approach inverts the relationship between rhetoric and probability: it is not because certain issues are dubious that we argue for or against them, but rather by arguing for or against them those very issues are put into doubt. See Ch. Perelman, *Imperium retoryki. Retoryka i argumentacja*, transl. M. Chomiszcz, ed. R. Kleszcz, Warszawa 2004, p. 157: "to argue on behalf of a certain thesis is to point out that it is not evident and obvious to everyone. If one needs to prove the existence of God, then it means that his existence is no longer unquestionable."

[16] See V. Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance*, Ithaca–London 1985, *passim*. On the iconology of 'two-headed *Prudentia*' and its relationship to rhetorical *controversia*, see T.O. Sloane, *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric*, Berkeley 1985, pp. 57–63.

The statesman's duty is, therefore, not simply to pacify the strife among the people of the Commonwealth, but to find an appropriate means of using those very internal tensions for the advantage of his own goals and those of the state. This emerges from the following passage, in which the classic topos of the Ship of the State is employed,

> Non minus damnosa est navigatori nimia malacia, quam tempestas. Non progreditur navis sine ventis, sed g u b e r n a t o r i s p r u d e n t i a novit ex ventorum varietate vela moderari." (III, 2)[17]
>
> [The calm sea is no less harmful to the sailor than the tempest. The ship will not move forward without the winds, but it is the p r u d e n c e o f t h e h e l m s m a n which knows how to move the sails in accordance with the winds.]

The *prudentia* of the helmsman (or the statesman) is therefore a faculty which allows him to make the best out of contradictory forces influencing the course of political affairs. His task is not to steer the Ship of State, but to let it be driven in a certain way – not to strike, but to roll with the punches,[18] as Veritas says in a later passage, in which the Ship of the State metaphor is employed once again,

> Ubi vidisti Nautam sapientem ad unum semper ventum vela vertere? Tempestati parendum est, non resistendum, nisi velis rem constantissime perdere. (VII, 8)[19]

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[17] S.H. L u b o m i r s k i, *De vanitate consiliorum liber unus*, Warszawa 1700. The Roman numeral indicates the 'Consultatio', and the Arabic, the point of discussion, as marked in this edition.

[18] A similar metaphor for the way the *vir prudens* conducts himself in the world of politics is employed in the second book of Cicero's *De re publica*. In his discussion with Laelius, Scipio compares a politician possessing the virtue of *prudentia* to an elephant driver who is able to steer the massive animal merely by means of a "gentle touch,"

> sed tamen est ille prudens, qui, ut saepe in Africa vidimus, immani et vastae insidens beluae, coercet et regit [beluam] quocumque volt et levi admonitu aut tactu inflectit illam feram. (II 67)
>
> [For he is the prudent one who, as we have often seen in Africa, sitting upon the enormous beast, controls it as he wishes and manages the beast by means of light admonition and gentle touch.]

[19] In this passage *sapiens* is used in the same way that *prudens* was employed in the 'Consultatio Prima'. While Lubomirski seems to be fairly consistent in his use of *prudentia*, he was not very strict about differentiating between *prudentia* and *sapientia*.

> [Where have you ever seen a wise sailor who always tries to catch only one wind in his sails? You must surrender to the tempest, not resist it, if you do not want to lose the cause on account of your inflexibility.]

I deliberately began my analysis with the third 'Consultatio' in *De vanitate consiliorum*, even though the remarks concerning prudence and its relationship to choosing from among a number of contradictory opinions already appear in the first one. I did so because the propositions put forward in the first and third 'Consultationes' seem to contradict each other; and it is much easier to explain the way Lubomirski makes use of these contradictions if we reverse the order in which these two parts of the dialogue are considered.

After several propositions concerning the summoning of the Council are dismissed by Veritas in the first *Consultatio*, Vanitas states that she wants to select the most prudent men as her advisors,

> VAN. In arduis et difficilimis rebus requiram multos, et quidem prudentissimos consiliarios.
> VER. Require potius duos tantum, et simplicissimos; occasionem et necessitatem. Brevissima tibi dicent, et facillime, et quidem plura ac utiliora; quam strepitus multorum sermonum, inter se diu dissidentium. (I, 8)
>
> [VAN: For the troublesome and difficult issues, I will summon many truly prudent advisors.
> VER: Preferably summon only two and the simplest ones: the occasion and the necessity. They will speak to you freely and in brief, yet saying more and more useful things than the din of many speeches contradicting each other.]

Not only is the advice of the *prudentissimi consiliari* dismissed as less useful than that of "the occasion and the necessity," but internal discord is no longer something to be embraced and employed for the statesman's purposes. Why is this so?

The first part of the answer is quite simple. If the two guiding principles the statesman should be aware of are the opportune moment (*occasio*) and the necessity of action (*necessitas*), then what he needs to possess is, in fact, *prudentia*: the faculty of practical judgment, rooted in his experience and allowing him to make necessary decisions even without absolute certainty. If the same faculty were to be shared by many different advisors selected by the statesman, their perceptions of what could be done and

what was necessary to do might differ so much that it would render him unable to act.

The second part of the answer is a somewhat more nuanced. It is the apparent contradictions themselves which testify to the statesman's use of prudential judgment. The ability to modify or disregard certain rules of conduct, if they run the risk of preventing one from taking some necessary action, is an essential characteristic of *prudentia*. A *vir prudens* may either make use of the internal conflicts in the Commonwealth or he may try to evade them, if need be, guiding himself in both cases by the principles of *prudentia.* He may also, however, disregard the prudential judgment of others if that is what the situation calls for. It is for this reason that the advice concerning the 'proper adjustment of the sails' is undermined in the tenth 'Consultatio', where the issue of the occasion for action arises once again. While discussing how to choose the right moment to declare war on the Commonwealth's neighbors, Veritas states,

> Occasio ut ventus; ventus est occasio navigandi, sed saepe deserit alto mari, & qui plenis velis inchoavit, non semel fallaci stetit in anchora. Tu vero remis naviga, occasionem tibi dent vires tuae, non alienae. Et sic fortunam non captabis, sed parabis. (X, 3)
>
> [An occasion is like the wind. The wind is an occasion for sailing, but often it deserts us in the middle of the sea; and the one who started out with all sails set has often ended up anchored in the wrong place. Propel your vessel, instead, with the oars, so the occasion will come from your own strength and not that of others. And, in this way, you will not be seeking luck, but making it yourself.]

Clearly, if the rules for prudent statesmanship do not anticipate a situation in which the statesman finds himself, it is prudent for him to overthrow those rules in order to accommodate changing circumstances.

While Lubomirski's *gubernator prudens* is able to adapt to changing circumstances in the contingent world of human affairs (as the metaphor of adjusting the sails illustrates), *prudentia* is not a sure means of attaining success in this sphere. For example, a prudent lawmaker may pass a law that could be used for mischievous purposes,

saepe etiam constitutiones, quas prudentissimi virorum in orbe terrarium circumspectissime conscripserunt, et quae visa sunt summe necessaria, in perniciem rerumpublicarum versa sunt. (XIII, 10)

[Often regulations which were written by the most prudent men in the world and which appeared to be supremely necessary, have been turned around to become the ruin of commonwealths.]

It is worth noting how the relationship between prudence and necessity – which was briefly touched on earlier – is established in this quotation from Veritas. While it is the statesman's duty to take political action (introduce laws, form policies, and so on), his decisions do not rely on certain knowledge, but rather on his experience and his faculty of practical judgement. Therefore even *viri prudentissimi* can introduce laws which, at a given time, "appeared to be necessary" ("visa sunt necessaria") for the well-being of the state, but which are not necessarily right or in themselves. Accordingly, due to changing external circumstances, they can be used for purposes which were never intended by the original legislators.

The same is true with regard to Veritas' remarks on the art of warfare. Prudence does not guarantee victory in war, since the prudent military leader, according to Veritas, can be no surer about the outcome of his plans than theologians can be about their speculations,

VER: Habeo et officiales generalesque, peritissimos belli duces.
VAN: Bellum nemo unquam satis didicit. Habes ex illis et imperitissimos fortunae tuae aleatores, quandoque liberalissimos praeliorum amissores, et quandoque parcissimos armorum conservatores: utrosque tamen prudentissimos et innocentissimos bonorum malorumq[ue]; belli authores, & quorum sors cum Theologis convenit: quia cum bene et prudenter agant, nunquam tamen scire possunt, an odio vel amore fortunae digni sint. (XVIII, 9)

[VAN: I have officers and generals who are very skilled in warfare.
VER: No one has ever learned enough about war. You have among them the dice players, ignorant of your fortune, at times careless in dealing with the lives of their troops, at times very sparing in preserving arms. Both these types are the most prudent and the most innocent perpetrators of what is right and what is wrong, and the fate of those who write about war is like that of theologians: even if they act in a right and prudent way, they can never know for sure whether they deserve Fortune's hatred or love.]

Veritas maintains that the outcome of military actions does not rely solely on the skill of the generals: events are always influenced by fortune and therefore cannot be predicted with certainty even by the most prudent of men. It is telling how Lubomirski in this passage differentiates between two synonymous Latin terms, *fortuna* and *sors*, both of which can be used to denote "fate," "destiny" or "chance." While *viri prudentissimi* can know their *sors* (that is, they can have awareness that their knowledge of the outcome of their actions is fated to be uncertain), their *fortuna* (the actual result of those actions and the way they influence their lives) remains hidden from them. Things can turn out for the good or the bad; but in his dealings with fortune, the prudent military leader is no more certain about his prospects for success or failure than if he were a gambler (*aleator*). Yet this relationship between *prudentia* and *fortuna* is somewhat paradoxical, similar to the way it is treated by Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503) in his *De fortuna* and *De prudentia*: fortune makes the course of even the most prudent actions unpredictable; but if it were not for fortune's unpredictability, there would be no need to act prudently. As Victoria Kahn has remarked in relation to Pontano's treatises,

> it is precisely because fortune is inconsistent and unpredictable, precisely because we are ignorant of it, that there is both the room and the need for the exercise of prudence. Because everything is not causally determined by natural law or fate, there is room for the causality of free will, or for the persuasions of rhetoric.[20]

The final part of the statement by Veritas quoted above is a paraphrase of a passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Vulgate,

> Sunt justi atque sapientes, et opera eorum in manu Dei; et tamen nescit homo utrum amore an odio dignus sit. (Ecclesiastes 9: 1)
>
> [There are just men and wise men, and their works are in the hand of God: and yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love, or hatred.]

Not only does the introduction of this paraphrase reinforce the parallel between the theologian and the military leader, introduced by Lubomirski, but it also emphasizes the notion of *prudentia* as the faculty concerned

[20] V. Kahn, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

with taking action in the contingent sphere of human affairs. It is no longer a question of what intrinsic qualities men possess ('sunt justi atque sapientes'), but how they act in a particular situation ('bene et prudenter agant'). Yet this subtle semantic displacement is undermined as soon as it is recognized: for if it is the prudent course of action, and not the virtues of character, that matters, why then do the effects of one's decisions remain uncertain? Veritas has already explicitly answered this question, however: prudence cannot guarantee or assure us that we will attain the desired outcome of our actions.

When discussing the uncertainty of prudential judgments in *De vanitate consiliorum*, it should be pointed out that there is a flip side to that coin. While *prudentia* allows the statesman to take actions, despite any doubts he might have about their outcome, it is also repeatedly presented in the dialogue as an ability to withhold or delay action. In the twelfth 'Consultatio', when explaining how laws proposed by the statesman's opponents should be dealt with, Veritas links *prudentia* directly with the virtue of patience,

> Prius enim opus est ut pateant obstacula, quam amoveantur. Prius investitgatur omne arduum, quam superatur. Nihilque vicit unquam prudentia, quod prius patientia non cognovit. (XII, 3)
>
> [It is necessary to make obstacles visible before removing them. Every difficulty has to be investigated before it is overcome. Nothing was ever won by prudence which was not previously investigated with patience.]

A similar remark occurs in the twenty-first 'Consultatio', in which the interlocutors discuss what conditions are favorable for taking military action,

> Prudentissimi ducum saepissime elegerunt magis credere securitati suae, quam fortunae. Temerarios quosque magis puduit solvere obsidionem, quam perdere exercitum. Semper compensari potest, quod distulit prudentia, sed rarissime, quod abstulit calamitas. (XXI, 8)
>
> [The most prudent leaders very often choose to trust their own self-assurance rather than fortune. It is the characteristic of reckless men to be more ashamed of withdrawing a siege than of losing their army. One can always make up for what prudence has delayed, but only rarely for what defeat has taken away.]

According to a modern pundit, if 'prudence' is ever referred to in contemporary public discourse, it becomes an excuse for inaction or for excessively conservative politics;[21] but such connotations are not necessarily absent from early modern uses of the term. For example, the inscription in Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*, perhaps the best-known sixteenth-century representation of *prudentia*, reads, "*EX PRAETERITO/PRAESENS PRUDENTER AGIT/NE FUTURA ACTIONE DETURPET*." The use of negation and of the subjunctive mode here make this sentence strikingly similar to the remarks of Lubomirski discussed above: the prudent course of action in the present is not so much that which allows for certain actions in the future as that which tries not to spoil them.[22]

While the various aspects of *prudentia* which have been examined above point to significant similarities between Lubomirski's use of this term and its employment in the tradition of Ciceronian rhetoric, it may seem that none of the passages which I have quoted up to this point corroborate the strong connection between prudence and rhetorical persuasion which I have suggested at the beginning of the article. There are, however, at least two places in *De vanitate consiliorum*, both in the fifth 'Consultatio', where a direct like between rhetoric and prudence is established. In the first of these, Vanitas states that she will "send a most prudent man and an eloquent orator" ('mittam virum prudentem, et eloquentem oratorem;' V, 3) as her envoy to negotiate with the hostile neighbors of the Commonwealth; after which, the following exchange ensues,

> V. VAN. Sed multa prudentia et dexteritate sua persuadebit, et negotia perficiet.
> VER. Sat tum temporis prudens erit, si ante infectas res tempestive redierit. At si prudentiam eius ex multitudine literarum mensurabis, tu imprudens, ille felix, quod nihil agendo plura tibi, quam illi, ad quem missus est, persuadebit. (V, 5)

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[21] R. Hariman, *op.cit.*, p. 14, "Prudence is rarely referred to or honored explicitly in contemporary discourse. Periodically, political elites will refer to it when having to rationalize inaction. (This usage was captured perfectly by the comedian Dana Carvey, who satirized President Bush père by wagging his finger and saying, 'Wouldn't be prudent. Wouldn't be prudent.')."

[22] In the fourteenth 'Consultatio', the figure of Janus, who is aware of things both past and future, is mentioned by Veritas, "facilius est res nondum actas formare; quam transactas reformare. Vellem te in hoc desiderio Iani facies habere, ut tangendo praeterita, respicias futura." [It is easier to shape things which are not yet done than to reshape those which are already done. I would like you to have a Janus face in this desire of yours, so that, while touching on past things, you gaze at future ones.]

> [VAN: But he will be very persuasive by means of his prudence and skill, and he will accomplish many tasks.
> VER: He will be prudent with regard to time if he returns at an opportune moment, before spoiling the deed.[23] And if you measure his prudence from the number of letters, you will be imprudent, and he will be happy, for, by doing nothing, he will persuade you more than he will the person to whom he was sent.]

Prudentia can therefore be considered both as a tool of rhetorical persuasion (as the use of the ablative case in 'prudentia… persuadebit' suggests) and as a defensive measure allowing one to shield oneself from rhetorical *vis* of an eloquent man. But to analyze the relationship between prudence and rhetoric in *De vanitate consiliorum* by focusing on the remarks of Vanitas and Veritas concerning the art of oratory would be a return to the interpretative approaches which I set aside at the start of this article. The question that needs to be answered is therefore not, "How is the relationship between rhetoric and prudence described in the course of the dialogue?", but instead, "How do the remarks concerning prudence relate to the rhetorical structure of *De vanitate consiliorum*?"

A two-headed council

As we have seen, the stance which Veritas takes towards internal tension in the Commonwealth and the difference of opinions from which it stems changes between 'Consultationes': from considering discord as something that could be put to good use by the statesman to advising Vanitas to quell any quarrels, if this proves necessary. In the very first 'Consultatio', when Vanitas considers summoning a council, Veritas argues that the disagreements between the different members would prevent reaching the consensus needed to take political action. Her comment begins with an exclamation,

[23] This remark seems similar to the inscription in Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*.

O, quam anceps illud erit! (I, 6)

[How uncertain it [the council] will be!]

Throughout *De vanitate consiliorum*, different shades of uncertainty are described almost exclusively by the use of *dubium* (18 instances) and *incertum* (11 instances) or their derivatives. *Anceps*, however, appears only three times in the dialogue: when contradictions between different opinions are described (I, 6); when the uncertainty of relying on the experience of others instead of one's own is discussed (XV, 4); and when the potential risk of starving the army by invading a country which is either too small or too vast to feed the troops is considered (XVIII, 4).

The figurative meaning of the Latin adjective *anceps* is, of course, synonymous with *dubium* and *incertum*; however, its literal meaning is more interesting in relationship to the passage from the first 'Consultatio' just cited. An *anceps consilium* is, literally, a 'two-headed council': one that could perhaps be represented by an image not very different from the "two-headed *prudentia*" mentioned above.[24] This image, I believe, would be a perfect frontispiece for *De vanitate consiliorum*, in which two characters with names which are quite similar in form, but very different in meaning, constantly put forward propositions to each other by means of rhetorical *controversia*, but never manage to achieve a consensus.

The debate between Vanitas and Veritas is not governed by the principles of question-and-answer. Each time Vanitas is considering a certain course of action, Veritas points out difficulties which her interlocutor has overlooked and often introduces further controversial matters. Ironically, it is not Veritas' task to speak the truth, but instead to turn every single issue into a debatable one; her role is not to assert, but constantly to raise new questions.

Let us consider, for example, this passage from the sixteenth 'Consultatio', in which the issue of taxation is debated,

II. VAN. Inveniam tamen modum Contribuendi.
VER. Prius quaerendum est, quomodo quaeras, quam quomodo invenias: Tu autem prius invenisti necessitatem, quam modum; melius est quaerere modos, antequam opus sit, quam non posse habere, cum opus fuerit. Ut scias

[24] See n. 16 above.

genera contributionum, scire te oportet prius genera populi, quale praevaleat lucro, quale numero? Observa, quid tibi prosint urbani, quid mercatores, quid agrestes, quid extranei, quid domestici, quid merces ab extra, quid ab intus provenientes; quid invectores, quid evectores, quid ab hominibus exigas, quid a rebus; quid ab otiosis, quid a laboriosis: quos liberare utilius tibi est, quam aggravare; quorum luxus tibi sit proficuus, quorum utiles propinationes, et quot guttae, tot nummi. Haec prius videnda tibi erant, et ratione praevidenda, quam necessitas praeveniret cogitationes tuas: quia exactius providetur et tutius, dum exigit providentia, quam cum necessitas. (XVI, 2)

[VAN: Nevertheless, I will find a method of taxation.
VER: In the first place, we should ask how to look for it rather than how to find it. You, however, have found the need before the method; it is better to look for methods before the need arises than not to have them when it does arise. In order to know the types of taxation, you first need to know the types of people: which of them earn the most? Which are greatest in number? Observe what the townspeople will bring you, what the merchants, what the peasants, what the foreigners, what your own countrymen. What will those who import goods give, what those who export them? What should you demand from the people, what for the goods themselves? What from the unemployed, what from those in work? Whom is it more useful for you to exempt from paying than to make pay more? Whose luxury is of benefit to you, whose drinking is useful (for every drop, there is a coin). These are the things which you should consider and foresee in your mind before necessity outstrips your thoughts. For we are more exactly and securely farsighted when it is foresight rather than necessity which makes the demand.]

While Veritas' advice may seem sound, the diligence with which every issue is divided into further issues is almost ludicrous. The abundance of possibilities raised by each issue is brought out by the use of rhetorical figures based on repetition (anaphora: *quid … quid… quid…*; and homoioteleuton: *extranei … domestici*; *Mercatores … agrestes … merces … provenientes … invectores …evectores*), while the contrast between subsequent elements is accentuated by the use of antiphrasis: *extranei … domestici*; *hominibus … rebus*; *invectores … evectores*. No advice concerning the right course of action is provided – except the advice to deliberate further on the issues that have been raised and, by doing so, exercise foresight (*providentia*) or, perhaps we should say, prudence.

While reading passages like the one quoted above, we cannot but wonder about Lubomirski's purpose in producing a work which goes to such great lengths to multiply apparent or real contradictions, to undermine or overturn its own previous statements, and to put each issue through the ringer of rhetorical *controversiae* and paradoxes. In my view, to consider this elaborate procedure as merely the expression of an aged politician's disillusionment would be as naïve as trying to identify any kind of positive political program in Veritas' remarks. It is much more fitting, I believe, to describe *De vanitate consiliorum* as a rhetorical exercise in prudence.

Reading the arguments between Vanitas and Veritas entails constantly discerning and deliberating about a number of political issues. The aim is not to learn the correct answers to questions concerning the statesman's duties, nor even to learn what the "right" questions are, but instead to practice the activity of deliberating about those issues. As Victoria Kahn has demonstrated, the deliberative rhetoric of early modern works on prudence aims at engaging the reader in the activity of discrimination and, by doing so, training the faculty of practical reason,[25] that is, the Ciceronian virtue of *prudentia*.

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