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For as long as human beings have had the ability to communicate, we have endeavored to persuade one another. Whether it be for the purposes of mere survival, or to control the circumstances of our lives, or to bring someone around to our way of thinking, or merely to win an argument, we have relied on some form of persuasion—either physical force or, what we would consider more “civilized” means, speaking and writing—to accomplish our goals and purposes. The art of verbal persuasion, in a word “rhetoric,” was discovered in the West in the democracies of Syracuse and Athens during the fifth century BC. Citizens in democratic societies were expected to express themselves in assembly, represent themselves in courts of law, and participate in other civic functions. As a result, in order to enable people to operate successfully in society, attempts were made to describe effective means

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of verbal persuasion, and a theoretical system evolved that enabled citizens to plan and execute a successful speech in public—in other words, to win an argument.

Several centuries later, Rome's greatest orator and one of the greatest speakers of all time, Marcus Tullius Cicero, secured Rome's highest political office, the consulship, having relied heavily on this art of verbal persuasion to make a name for himself in Roman society. Trained from boyhood in the technicalities of rhetoric, Cicero excelled not only as an effective public speaker, who won the vast majority of arguments in which he was involved, but also as a theorist in the art of verbal persuasion, having written during his lifetime several treatises that have rhetoric as their subject. And although he is highly critical of the typical rhetorical handbooks of the day, he was, nonetheless, steeped in their doctrine and reliant upon their methods. In fact, this rhetorical education for civic duty, handed down by the Greeks and adopted by the Romans, remained a primary element in the training of all educated people throughout the Middle Ages, into the Renaissance, and even down into modern times.

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Given the centrality of rhetoric, that is, the art of verbal persuasion, in our Western tradition, I present here a short anthology of passages from Cicero's writings, primarily his rhetorical treatises, that capture the essence of this ancient rhetorical system of persuasion, a system that helped to make Cicero and countless other orators effective speakers, able to convince people and win arguments. Readers will, I hope, find these selections interesting in their own right, as well as useful when thinking about their own efforts to persuade. Indeed, whether arguing with a friend over a trivial issue or presenting a brief before the Supreme Court, the goal of a speaker is still to persuade, and knowing the most effective means of persuasion in any given circumstance will lead to the successful realization of that goal. A peculiar paradox of contemporary American society is that, at a time when we find many schools, colleges, and universities talking seriously about fostering oral competency and good communication skills in their students, we actually see very few effective public speakers in action, in the courts, in our communities, or in the public arena of political life. While this book is certainly not intended to remedy that

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situation, my hope is that those who think about speaking in public and want to win arguments will find it appealing, and will delight in the realization that the techniques for effective oral persuasion discovered and enunciated millennia ago still make sense and have great relevance for those who would speak convincingly today.

In order to simplify matters and allow for smoother reading, I have avoided appending footnotes to names and terms that might present challenges to readers who are unfamiliar with the historical period or the technical subject matter. In lieu of such notes, a glossary of names and terms has been included near the end of the volume to which the reader can refer when seeking more detailed information or clarification. In addition, a list of suggestions for further reading on the subject has also been appended, consisting of both primary works by Cicero in English translation as well as secondary works that elucidate and comment upon ancient rhetoric and oratory, Cicero, and his works. All translations, except those from *De oratore*, are my own. *De oratore* passages were previously translated jointly by my colleague, Jakob Wisse, and me, and appeared originally in our complete translation of the treatise, published

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by Oxford University Press in 2001, *Cicero: On the Ideal Orator*. Occasionally, I have altered a word or two of that original translation in the passages that appear here.

I would like to thank Mr. Robert Tempio, executive editor and Humanities Group publisher for Princeton University Press, for suggesting this volume to me, and for his guidance and direction in seeing it through to publication; and Sara Lerner, senior production editor. I owe a debt of gratitude also to my copyeditor, Jennifer Harris, and to the anonymous referees of the Press, whose corrections, observations, and suggestions improved the manuscript greatly. I dedicate this little book to Augustus James May, in the hopes that, as he grows in age and wisdom, he will realize the ideal of the Elder Cato, becoming a *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (“a good man, skilled in speaking”).

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