Caught between the competing—but not necessarily incompatible—obligations to truth and to plausibility, the ancient art of rhetoric never satisfied its admirers entirely, nor did it cede all ground to critics. Disciples argued over both its technical precepts and its underlying moral basis. Detractors, most notably Plato, maligned the separation of the craft of speaking from adequate knowledge of the things about which one speaks. The legacy of the Platonic dialogues, with their interventions against the rhetoric of plausibility, was laid claim to by countless inheritors of the oratorical and philosophical traditions, and the attachment of morality to epistemology still guides our thinking about rhetoric.

The Roman successors rejected Plato’s condemnation of rhetoric, although they could not escape the lingering prejudices. The ingenuity and sophistication of Plato’s writings, as well as the appeal to immutable criteria that explain the world, would eventually win out. We are now so wedded to expository arguments and to the truth-value of those arguments that it can be hard to imagine other models of intellectual inquiry. The turn away from Plato by theorists of eloquence at Rome can explain in part why modern scholars and teachers often neglect the Roman dialogue genre. To cite one example, only select enthusiasts had, until recently, lavished serious attention on Cicero’s *de Oratore* (“On the Orator”). His *magnum opus* has since recaptured a place in the canon that occupies scholars and students of Greco-Roman culture.