

The first history of early modern conversation in English

The concept of conversation began as a minor mode of rhetoric in the time of Cicero, but expanded to become rhetoric's default mode by the end of the seventeenth century. *The Concept of Conversation* traces the rise of conversation from its origin in the leisured, philosophical conversations of noble Romans to its medieval adoption of the universalising aspirations of Christian thought to its Renaissance transformation into a political and social model of ever-increasing scope and application. *Concept* then examines how the rise of conversation spread out from the history of rhetoric to include the histories of friendship, the court and the salon, the Republic of Letters, the periodical press and women. It also revises Jürgen Habermas' history of the emergence of the rational speech of the public sphere as the history of the emergence of rational conversation and puts the emergence of women's speech at the centre of the intellectual history of early modern Europe.