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As the world struggles to come to grips with the rise of new populisms that call into question the legitimacy of technocratic expertise, the historical understanding of the processes by which the characteristically modern modes of meaning-making came into existence has never been so important. Politically-motivated attacks on 'science' are difficult to counter in a climate of generalised scepticism for all forms of authority, but cultural historians have an important part to play by offering an adequate historical framing for the terms of the debate. The origins of modernity are routinely associated with the empirical attitudes of the 'scientific revolution' and the liberal rationalism of the Enlightenment; but this story tends to be studied either conceptually by historians of science, or politically by cultural historians. For it to make sense as the backdrop to modern debates, the political and epistemological dimensions of the emergence of modernity need to be put more firmly into contact with one another. This book attempts to do so by focusing on the theme of the emergence of disciplinarity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
