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## TWO REPLIES AND A DIALOGUE ON THE RHETORIC OF ECONOMICS

*Mäki, Rappaport, and Rosenberg*

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I am asked sometimes what has been the reaction to the rhetorical approach. I answer as follows.

From philosophers outside of economics, from scholars within economics, and from humanists, journalists, and social scientists elsewhere, the reaction has been just fine, thank you. They seem to get the point reasonably quickly, at least for their own purposes, and take it away with satisfaction. Yes, they say, we agree that economics is argument; yes, we would do better to pay attention to all the arguments.

The reaction has been similarly calm from some of the methodologists of economics, represented here by Uskali Mäki and Steven Rappaport, and a few others. Though not conceding every point, they have tried to understand. Not unnaturally they would like the rhetorical work to fit into the old conversation of methodology. They push it and pull it to make it fit – without success, I think, but at least they are doing recognizably intellectual work.

But from most of the other methodologists of economics, represented here by Alexander Rosenberg, the reaction has been unreasoned fury. The conventional methodologists act like members of the American Medical Association facing a nursing practice act.

Yet I do not believe that it is trade union bloody-mindedness that drives them to fury. I know many of the conventional methodologists personally, and know them in other matters to be honorable and intelligent. Probably it is this: unlike people who do not care about economic methodology, the methodologists are prewired in the part of their brain

that might otherwise deal with rhetoric. As Niels Bohr said, there is a "precluding feature of knowing." Therefore the methodologists find the idea of rhetoric exceptionally difficult to understand. Following a human impulse evident since the cave painters, they identify a new thing poorly understood with their darkest fears. It is not that the conventional methodologists understand what they are reading and then disagree with it. One can show pretty easily that, unlike the non-methodologists, they do not understand it at all. The existing pattern in their thinking obstructs their reception of rhetoric.

Rhetoric observes that laying economics down on a bed of narrowly analytic philosophy has not worked. (You can see at once why rhetoric gets into trouble with conventional methodologists.) Economics, like the rest of the human conversation, is too rich. The least rich of Anglo-American philosophies – as against ordinary language philosophy, say, or neo-pragmatism – has done a poor job of comprehending economics. It sounds neat to reduce economics to syllogism, just as it sounded neat to reduce mathematics to logic and logic to set theory. But when you look with open eyes at actual economic argument the reduction doesn't work, no more than it worked in mathematics or logic. It doesn't work in economic teaching nor in economic theorizing nor in economic philosophy.

When you look at economic argument from the humanistic side of our culture you can see a lot more. You can see the syllogisms, of course, though perhaps most easily in the elementary engineering mathematics that we are pleased nowadays to call "economic theory." But you can also see the choosing of metaphors, the telling of stories, and the appealing to character, even in abstract theory. The rhetorical tradition runs the law schools, the English and the communications departments, and the rest of the verbal culture descended now through 25 centuries from the Greeks. It is a richer way of seeing economic argument. Time to try it; not to throw out what we have learned from the mathematical side of the culture, but to understand what we are reading and writing.

With these claims in mind, then, consider what the analytic philosophers have wrought in economics.

The least contentious case is Uskali Mäki's (1988) suggestion that Arjo Klamer and I combine realism with rhetoric. (I do not know whether Klamer would respond in the same fashion; I merely note here that he has been the co-developer of the rhetorical approach, in his *Conversations with Economists* (1984) and now in a conference volume from Cambridge, *The Consequences of Rhetoric*). Mäki's piece is introduced with a rhetoric of sharp revision – Klamer and I are said to hold "erroneous" beliefs, and the first sentence announces a "critical tone." But in fact I agree with much of Mäki's paper and furthermore admire its style and good sense. I do not find much on which we disagree.

Mäki follows by instinct, as does Rappaport, the "Hippocratic Oath for Pluralists" proposed by Wayne Booth:

II. I will *try* to publish nothing about any book or article until I have *understood* it, which is to say, until I have reason to think that I can give an account of it that the author himself will recognize as just. Any attempt at overstanding [sic] will follow this initial act of attempted respect. . . . Paraphrasing Coleridge: Before I damn a critic's errors, I will try to reconstruct his enterprise as if it were my own. (1974, p. 351, italics his)

Let me try to do the same. As I understand it, Mäki's point is this. McCloskey talks as though a description of economic science could be *true*. (For instance, McCloskey says that Milton Friedman's description is false.) This is proposition number 6. So McCloskey must be committed to truth. So McCloskey might as well accept realism, the talk of true and false.

He is catching me with the Philosopher's Friend, the rhetorical device of catching someone being committed to X at the very moment of arguing against X. Here X = Truth and The Real. Fair enough.

All such reasonings must confront, however, another *tu quoque*: that you, oh philosopher, are in turn arguing rhetorically. You are committed to rhetorical thinking at the very moment of arguing against rhetoric and for a narrowing in thought. Such a *tu quoque* is not a rejection of Mäki, whose practical reasoning, as I say, I accept. It is merely a rejection of the notion that we can leap to a higher realm of truth by an argument outside of human rhetoric. Rhetorically and philosophically speaking, the ploy of arguing the "self-contradiction of relativism" is in fact a draw.

Mäki makes a good point about truth's being semantic and certainty being epistemic. He's correct that when talking about Truth with a capital T, I had in mind the certainty part. Most of the epistemologists have also confused the two, so I'm in good company. But it is well worth keeping the two distinct.

Yet as a practical matter I think it somewhat doubtful that economists "may be thought of as referring to the world." Many of them do not. They are referring to a model, a metaphor, making a blackboard point about it.

The word "true" here might better be replaced with the Goodmanish word "right." To use an example of J. L. Austin (1975), someone may state that "France is hexagonal." Is it true or false? Well, it's not true or false, though it is a proposition. It's right or wrong, for this or that human purpose, from this or that choice of human perspective. If worlds are merely "right" and not "true" then perhaps it becomes less obvious that my world and Mäki's are very different.

Anyway, I agree with Mäki. He has helped change my mind about surrendering the words "true" and "real" and "foundations" to the pleasures of the philosophers. I welcome Mäki's invitation to reclaim the words. The philosophers in English-speaking countries have too long made their living by taking such words hostage and demanding ransom from the rest of us: When a philosopher is in the room he insists that everyone talk about philosophy, his way. Generally (though not in Mäki's case) the purpose has been to silence the revolt against philosophical hegemony by pinning "irrationalism" and "idealism" on the revolutionaries. It's time to stop this false rhetoric. I myself, for example, declare openly that I am a realist, am devoted to reason, and have never once wavered in the practice of empirical scholarship.

This is more than the modernist philosophers can say about themselves. Truth to tell, they have given the word "truth" a merely psychological value. It performs for them the speech act of affirming sincerely: "I am *really, truly* persuaded of this, when I call it True." The modernists use "truth" to register an emotion about the subject, which is probably why they become so ill-tempered when called on to defend it. The registering of emotions, by the way, is how the modernists characterize most aesthetic and moral judgments. "Good" and "beautiful," they say, merely register favorable emotions. To which the reply is *tu quoque*.

My only objection to Mäki's invitation to realism is that I wonder whether we can accomplish much on such a high level of abstraction. Kant said so, I know, but does it really matter to the way you treat your dog or read your books whether you believe in Hume's or Protagoras's definition of the real?

The second of the three conservatives, Steven Rappaport, follows like Mäki the Hippocratic Oath for Pluralists. Unlike Mäki, he has taken the trouble to read some in the immense and distinguished rhetorical tradition. If I had one sentence of advice for my methodological critics it would be this: emulate Rappaport and learn what you are talking about (e.g. Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey, 1987).

The distinction Rappaport (1988) draws between "evidential" and "non-evidential" rhetorical devices is the center of his argument. The "non-evidential" rhetorical device – for instance the sneer – is not "analyzable into a set of premises and a conclusion." "Evidential" devices are.

I should note as a preliminary that this popular figure of philosophical reasoning – "I cannot judge your proposition unless I can 'analyze' it into the form of a valid syllogism with correct premises" – is not obviously, utterly, without question a good idea. The philosopher will say of an argument by analogy, for example, "It is helpful [above all the philosopher, like the man from the government, wishes to be helpful] to recast the argument so that it is logically valid. For in that case, all

questions about its *soundness* can focus on the truth of the premises." The crucial point is that then the philosopher is free to supply the missing major or minor premise, and since these are unlimited in number he can choose one that makes the resulting argument silly or sound, as he wishes. It is the usual way that philosophers deal with "fallacies" or other arguments that their methods do not treat: drag the argument under the streetlight, deforming it as it is dragged. We should worry that most of human reasoning has to be treated in this rough way.

Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst have recently pointed out a rhetorical contradiction in such a method (1983, p. 179ff). They observe that when the missing premise is supplied in a hostile way it entails a contradiction at the level of those pragmatic rules that make speech possible at all. In particular, it entails the supposition that the speaker of the incomplete argument follows the principle of cooperation in speech (namely, that the argument can be made complete and is intended to be made easily complete) yet grossly violates what has been called "the maxim of quality" (namely, that the argument is meant to be true). The maxim is violated because the argument requires a patently untrue premise in order to be complete, the one indeed supplied by the hostile philosopher.

But my main problem is that I wonder if any proposition is *not* so analyzable, if sufficient pragmatic context is allowed. For example, any perlocutionary act can be reduced to syllogism (sneering at people undermines their authority; people with less authority are less persuasive; and so forth to the conclusion that the argument sneered at is overturned).

But what is this "non-evidential"? It is revealing that Rappaport slips metaphor into the category. Banning such a common mode of argument as metaphor signals a radically conservative move. Rappaport wants to define "evidential devices" to be the devices reducible to syllogism. But then he wants further to keep out of the syllogistic category most of the pragmatic content of speech – for instance, the tone of voice with which a French bureaucrat rebuffs one's application, and the metaphors the bureaucrat will use.

To reduce argument to syllogism is quite strange, at least after what has transpired in philosophy since 1960. Rappaport says (1988) that "non-evidential devices" are not arguments. J. L. Austin would reply (1975 [1962], p. 54) that "the truth of a statement may be connected importantly with the truth of another without it being the case that the one entails the other in the sole sort of sense preferred by obsessional logicians."

Rappaport's arguments for giving up philosophical thinking about metaphor and pragmatic context are not strong. He simply does not want to deal philosophically with certain matters. His argument is driven to a non sequitur: "Irony often occurs where *no* argument is present.

This makes irony a non-evidential rhetorical device. . . ." Well, I suppose so. But wait a minute. Ordinary statements about the world – "It is raining," say – also occur in contexts without an argument in view. Does that make them non-evidential? Something has gone wrong with the criterion dividing evidential from non-evidential devices.

To be sure, if we stick with Rappaport's "evidential" devices, then a narrow epistemology will suffice to deal with science. But the argument is achieved by definition. Define "evidential" to mean "those few devices of argument that logicians have carved out as worthy of attention." He twice uses the phrase "arguments (in the logician's sense)," showing his awareness that the definition is a radically narrowing one. Induction is out: no arguments (in the logician's sense) have been found to justify it. And certainly there is no justification in logic for the choice of a metaphor of progress or of foundationalism. That leaves a great deal of science out in the cold.

I cannot imagine Rappaport wants to go this way. It would leave his "epistemological methodologists" in charge merely of the house-keeping task of making sure conclusions follow from premises (in the logician's sense).

It becomes evident what is wrong with Rappaport's claim that epistemology pursues truth while rhetoric pursues mere persuasion (cf. Martin Hollis, 1985, in a comment on my work). If you *define* "truth" to be such-and-such a narrow construct, ignoring all the weighty objections to British empiricism, then of course there will be no difficulty in showing that rhetoric does not pursue truth. This is why I would rather write it Truth, to keep in mind that Truth is some special, narrow definition, pleasing to certain philosophers. It borrows prestige from the ordinary meaning of truth (small t), which scientists use to say that the metaphor of a production function or a macroeconomic equilibrium is "true."

Once again I am moved to claim back the word "truth" from the philosophers. Otherwise they are going to get away with rhetorical murder, as did Plato on this same point. Rhetoric is not hostile to truth. The "relation between persuasiveness and truth" is not "incidental." The relation is close, *as close as we poor humans are going to get*. What is persuasive to good people is what is true, for now. If Rappaport and Hollis and the rest have some other way of identifying Truth, a non-trivial truth for all time, I'd like to see it.

Put it this way. We would all be in favor of justified *true* belief, if we could get it. We would also be in favor of rock candy mountains and whiskey springs, if we could get them. Rappaport says that "justification involves giving reasons to believe that claims are true," which is fine with me. This much gets us the end bits, the justified and the belief, which we all pursue. A conversation in which people did not *believe* what they said or were not required to give *justifications* for what they said would not be worth participating in. But the middle bit is the tough

one. It is that assurance of Truth somehow defined independently of human conversation.

We can't get there from here. There is no Archimedean point outside the conversation of mankind from which to lever up the world. It would be swell if there were, and even more swell if sitting in an armchair talking epistemology could achieve it. But unhappily the age of wonders is past. It ain't there. How do I know? Because Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and some lesser lights have tried to find it and have not.

So far as practicalities are concerned, Rappaport claims that epistemology can provide "standards" for warranted belief in economics. I believe his claim is unwarranted. No one would seriously argue that the rules of first-order predicate logic and other housekeeping would suffice for good science. Well, then, are they necessary? No, as the history of science suggests. Are they at least goods, desiderata, along with others? Well, of course. A syllogistic argument is persuasive sometimes, though not the only persuasive argument.

On a close look, then, Rappaport follows a long philosophical tradition, in assuming his conclusions. The theorem goes like this: We want good arguments. Good arguments are defined (by Rappaport) to be "evidential." Evidential arguments are defined (by Rappaport) as what philosophers like to talk about. Therefore, to get good arguments we philosophers should continue talking as we have, epistemologically. I am not opposed in all circumstances to begging the question. In certain fundamentals it may prove necessary and virtuous. But that is a rhetorical excuse for a philosophical argument, and I am not sure Rappaport would want the help.

I turn then to Alexander Rosenberg, without much enthusiasm. Unlike Mäki and Rappaport, he has not read with seriousness, and in thinking about what he did read he has had recourse to imaginative reconstruction. Unlike Mäki and Rappaport, though like others of his fellow analytic philosophers, when he cannot understand something he curls his lip in a sneer.

His emphasis on prediction is out of proportion to anything in the book, and in other ways his paper is out of proportion. He has taken many pages to do his work, which puts me in an awkward position. To catalogue every misrepresentation would be a bigger job than the paper itself. Rosenberg misrepresents philosophy, rhetoric, economics, my views, and along the way most other things. Yet to allow the misrepresentations to stand would suggest that I find them persuasive. Perhaps the most ancient of philosophical genres will do:

SOCRATES: Welcome, Ion! And whence come you to pay a visit? From your home in California?

ION: No, Socrates, I come from Chicago and the festival of philosophers of science there.

SOCRATES: What! Do the citizens of Chicago, in honoring the field, have a contest between philosophers of science, too? And did you compete?

ION: Yes. I carried off the second prize in Reactionary Declamation.

SOCRATES: Well done! I envy you philosophers of science, who must be conversant with so many fine scientists. And you have to understand their thought, not merely learn their lines. All that, of course, will excite one's envy.

ION: What you say is true, Socrates. We are in the vanguard producing "a body of knowledge about human behavior . . . that will enable us to improve the human condition."

SOCRATES: Bravo! You really are a splendid fellow. I suppose then you look deeply into the empirical work of the scientists, in the manner of the sociologists or historians or rhetoricians of science, and help the scientists understand how they have arrived at this or that piece of knowledge. I mean those pieces of knowledge that will enable us to improve the human condition.

ION: Well, no, not exactly. We tell them whether or not what they do is a science. And we warn them against "trendy" "new names, like 'deconstruction'." McCloskey's book puts me in mind of these trends, which I do not understand and cannot spell.

SOCRATES: And does this McCloskey refer to them, ever?

ION: No.

SOCRATES: I see. And these new trends: they oppose factual inquiry?

ION: No. But "the philosophical confidence of empirical social science seems everywhere in retreat. And empiricist social scientists can console themselves" only with philosophy.

SOCRATES: I see. Tell me, Ion. What do you mean by "empirical"?

ION: It means, of course, "caring about the facts in one's science."

SOCRATES: And "empiricist"? Is it the same?

ION: No. It refers to a particular doctrine of certain British philosophers, these three centuries past.

SOCRATES: Then a scientist could be *empirical*, that is, devoted to studying the world and its ways, yet not be an *empiricist*, that is, devoted to a particular account of the relation between sense data and thought?

ION: Uh, yes, I suppose so.

SOCRATES: And such a one might be, say, a British economic historian, much devoted to factual inquiry, more devoted even than most philosophers of science, yet still think on empirical grounds that British *empiricist* philosophy has recently been an encouragement to intolerance and close-mindedness in science?

ION: What you say is true, Socrates. But it makes my methodological

arguments so much *easier* when the two words are conflated. In any case, one who does not admire empiricist philosophy will doubtless indulge in a "sophistic invitation to complacency about economics, and an attempted seduction of the discipline into irrelevancy." This McCloskey, a Corinthian, I think, does exactly this. "If McCloskey's doctrine is right, there is no hope for improvement in economic knowledge."

SOCRATES: My word, Ion, that is terrible. Who are these terrible sophists like McCloskey?

ION: Well, I know about them only from Plato, their first and chiefest enemy. Thank the gods, I've never read any of them – except, of course, you yourself, brave Socrates, the leading Sophist of them all.

SOCRATES: You are too kind. I have never pretended to the wisdom of a *Sophistes*, which is to say, a "wisdomer," a master of his craft, a professor. You say you have read nothing of them. I suppose if Plato says they are bad, that will have to do. But have you read anything of their intellectual descendants – Cicero, say, or Quintilian, or St. Augustine's rhetorical works, or any of the modern masters, such as Burke or Perelman or Booth?

ION: By Zeus, no! We philosophers do not read what we know we will disagree with. That would be a waste of time. Knowing what we will disagree with is a special philosophical knack, *verstehen* of a wonderfully non-empirical sort. Why, just the other day I was talking to an eminent American philosopher who informed me proudly that he had never read a page of Hegel and never intended to do so. A splendid, noble gesture. I suppose he does all his philosophy without reading.

SOCRATES: I see. That certainly is wonderful. But tell me, Ion, what exactly is objectionable about this wretched McCloskey's work?

ION: Oh, many, many things. Chiefly that "if he is right, economists will have to consign their subject to the status of a *genre*, a stylistic tradition in literature."

SOCRATES: Tell me, Ion, is philosophy a *genre*, that is, a *kind* of writing?

ION: To be sure.

SOCRATES: And so also, I suppose, are history and mathematics? Are these not also written by human authors with intent? Or are they automatic writing, that appears without authorship and intention?

ION: No. They are *genres*, it would seem.

SOCRATES: And economics? Is it not then a *genre*?

ION: O Socrates, your style of argument is tiresome. I suppose it follows, but I cannot accept the conclusion. The status of economics would be lowered if we started to talk about it in literary ways.

SOCRATES: Your devotion to logic has limits, Ion. Tell me, would economics, if treated as a type of writing, be lowered in status below mathematics? For one can talk of mathematics in these same ways. You

seem much concerned with status. Is a seeker after truth concerned with status?

ION: Oh, that's all right for you to say, I am sure. But it is *frightfully* important for me that economics retain status as a science. After all, I am a philosopher of science, not of that other rubbish. It is very, very important that my friends and I be able to sneer at library *science* or food *science* (about which, of course, we know nothing at all, except how awfully vulgar their practitioners must be, were we to meet them; nor, you can bet, will we undertake to learn anything about such matters; and this for a very good reason: *Because they are not sciences*). Demarcating science from non-science is our main activity as philosophers of science, and I can tell you it is a very, very important thing to do. Very.

SOCRATES: I see. Would it matter to the conduct of physics whether it were called a science?

ION: Uh, no.

SOCRATES: And would it matter in the laboratory or library if the word "science" lost its peculiarly English meaning, which it has had since the early to mid-19th century? Would it matter if "science" came to mean, as it does in most languages, merely "careful and honest thought and observation"?

ION: No, I suppose not. But what would philosophy of science be *about* if science were just careful and honest thought and observation? After all, you can't expect to have academic societies for the study of such an ordinary thing. Or journals. Or academic positions. Really, you don't seem to understand how important it is that science be *special*, separate from the rest of culture. My word, if it weren't separate I would have to *learn* something about the rest of the culture!

SOCRATES: A powerful point. What else, then, of this beast McCloskey?

ION: Well, he "makes [his] claims about prediction the linchpin of his argument against 'modernism'." "[T]hat prediction is both unnecessary and absent in many sciences is central to the whole edifice of McCloskey's 'post-modernism'."

SOCRATES: Where does he say these things? I read the book last night and do not recall much on prediction and its absence in other sciences. He says it in a couple of places, in the midst of other arguments on which he seems to place much greater weight.

ION: Oh, there are plenty of places where McCloskey emphasizes prediction, all right, and I intend to devote a great deal of time to talking about them, whole numbered sections, because I know – I have *verstehen*, in fact – that they are there, concealed somewhere, implicit, immanent. Let me see. Well . . . I'll find them later, I assure you. McCloskey "recurs repeatedly to comparisons between [evolution] and the whole discipline of economics." It's somewhere here. Let me see.

. . . Anyway, I know as much about biology as I do about economics, and you can hardly blame me for using my stuff.

SOCRATES: In these passages that you cannot at present find, what does he say?

ION: He wishes to waive "prediction as a reasonable demand on scientific theories."

SOCRATES: Really? That does seem extraordinary. Do you mean that he would not care if a theory were predictive, if it could be?

ION: No.

SOCRATES: Doesn't he merely state, in one or two places, among other arguments, that prediction is an unreasonable *requirement* for taking a field of study seriously?

ION: Well, yes, I suppose he does. But it is outrageous for him to compare economics with evolution, which is a theory with many problems.

SOCRATES: I am again humbled before your wisdom. I, fool that I am, thought that evolution was one of the half dozen or so great ideas of the 19th century. Yet you can see all sorts of grave problems in it from your easy chair.

ION: You are right to think me wise. For instance, I can make astronomy lie down on a hypothetico-deductive bed, too, even though astronomers do not think in this way. And I am also an expert on the philosophy of history, of which all that anyone would wish to know is contained in a conveniently brief article written by Carl Hempel four decades ago. As Hempel said, if you cut the head and feet from the historical sciences they fit naive positivism beautifully. All this is highly relevant to "McCloskey's mistakes about biology, astronomy, and geology."

SOCRATES: You seem angry at McCloskey.

ION: As well I might. He is a great danger. He is part of a conservative conspiracy to retain "the *status quo* in economic theory" (that, you see, is why his work is so popular among Marxists and other revolutionaries, as a trick to lull the rest of us into complacency). McCloskey "downgrade[s] the importance of empirical testing. . . . Doing this requires repudiating Positivism. This is a motivation for surrendering the empiricism that economics shares with all the other social sciences."

SOCRATES: Does McCloskey ever propose to limit the facts that an observer should take into account?

ION: No, I suppose not.

SOCRATES: Then he is not abandoning empirical work but *empiricism*. Aren't you perhaps again mixing up *empiricism*, the doctrine, and *empirical work*, the scientific practice?

ION: O Socrates, you are such a pedant! One must watch every little suffix when you are around. Yes, I suppose I am mixing them up. But what of it?

SOCRATES: Well, I am not clear on what Positivism has to do with better empirical testing. Enlighten me.

ION: What do you mean? Isn't it obvious that *empiricism* leads to *empirical*?

SOCRATES: A little story. Two positivists make love. One says to the other, "You enjoyed that. Did I?" On this account, does positivism broaden or narrow the facts that an observer takes into account?

ION: Umm . . . It radically narrows them – to the facts observable by another.

SOCRATES: And when an economist infected by half-remembered positivism scorns non-quantitative evidence, does the positivism broaden or narrow the evidence?

ION: Well, I guess it narrows it, to the quantitative.

SOCRATES: Which approach to science, then, is the most empirical, a positivism that radically narrows the evidence or an anti-positivism that looks at it all?

ION: I can't understand your words.

SOCRATES: Consider this, as Roy D'Andrade put it in the book you are holding there, and which I think you have glanced at, *Metatheory in Social Science* (1986, pp. 33, 39): "[T]here is the potential of an enormous increase in fidelity of interpretation through taking account of wider rather than narrower ranges of relevant material. . . . One cannot expect to improve upon Freud by observing less about human beings than he did."

ION: Because of remarks like that I did not read much in the book.

SOCRATES: As is your habit.

ION: But you don't understand. This narrowing positivism is *good*. It was expressly "designed to combat fanaticism and intolerance," especially from the Nazis and the Stalinists. Surely it is *good* to be narrow. "Marxism-Leninism and Racist science turn out to be simultaneously cognitively empty and morally dangerous." "[H]istoricist economics . . . [is] mere chronicle or taxonomy, and Veblen's work . . . [is] entertaining fiction."

SOCRATES: You sweep by several points of logic here, as is the custom of the philosophers most passionately devoted to logic, especially when they are speaking of their passions. What is the connection in a positivist philosophy between cognitive emptiness and moral danger? The only person of the Vienna circle who gave the connection much thought (aside from Moritz Schlick, who was murdered by a student who took his lectures on the meaninglessness of moral law too literally) was Wittgenstein, and he in the end was not of the circle. I once heard A. J. Ayer lecture, astonishingly, on tolerance, and asked him after the lecture if he in his positivist youth had been tolerant. He allowed as he had not been. Positivists have asserted from time to time that positivism was *designed* to have moral effect, and I am familiar with Hutchison's notion,

formulated when the threat of fascism was at its height, that an authoritarian and intolerant positivism would be the best bulwark against it. But like any law of prohibition (a prediction of economics, this), its result diverged from its design. The emptiness of racist science was anyway a result of proto-positivism itself (and of actual positivism, in the person of Karl Pearson). As to Karl Marx whom you regard as absurd and cognitively empty, I leave him to a discussion in the *Review of Radical Political Economy*, forthcoming. I am nonetheless struck by your confidence that a set of ideas that has engaged most of the social thinkers in the West for a century is "empty." Your tolerance, Ion, for other visions of economics, such as Marxism and the horrid taxonomy and fiction of institutionalism, is admirable.

ION: Thank you. I have always prided myself on my tolerance: it comes from my devotion to narrowing the empirical evidence. I am persuaded, for example, that my auto mechanic uses positivism when he fixes my car.

SOCRATES: This is wonderful, Ion! An auto mechanic who is a philosopher.

ION: I did not say he was a philosopher, merely that he behaves *as if* he were a philosopher.

SOCRATES: I see. Well, that is certainly a powerful way of putting it, on which we can erect all manner of social policies.

ION: Yes, I intend to do so, and thereby "improve the human condition." And meanwhile I will cast out the skills of practical reasoning and public discourse that those wicked Sophists introduced and that despite all the attempts of us philosophers have survived in law schools, legislative assemblies, and departments of literature, not to speak of the fallacy-filled talk of the man and woman in the street. "[R]hetoric . . . cannot hope to foster any improvements in the cognitive merits of economics. It can only improve the marketing and public relations skills of economists."

SOCRATES: Ah, I see you are also a deep student of the rhetorical half of our civilization. Pray, what do *you* mean by "rhetoric"?

ION: Sneaky talk.

SOCRATES: Is this the definition McCloskey gives?

ION: No, but do you think I can listen all day to such stuff? That literary talk gives me a headache.

SOCRATES: You have read deeply in ancient and modern literary criticism?

ION: Of course not! What do you take me for? I am a *philosopher*, a lover of blackboard wisdom, and therefore know instinctively, without reading, the "real meaning of the rhetorical approach." I just know it, by *verstehen*.

SOCRATES: I take it you are at least well acquainted with rhetoric,

and have mastered at least one of its classic texts, on the level of an elementary book in first-order predicate logic? Otherwise you would not be so confident in your sneering at it.

ION: My God, you are dense! Haven't I already told you that we philosophers can deliver judgments on Hegel without reading Hegel, science without doing science, knowledge without telling how to achieve it? Do you think it would be much of a trick to have opinions about rhetoric without reading a few dead Greeks and their followers? Come, come, my good man: don't be a dunce. And if I didn't read Cicero and Burke, I certainly wouldn't read McCloskey with the attention due a serious argument. Mostly I just "yawn and say, 'so what?'"

SOCRATES: But surely this McCloskey isn't saying that unwarranted arguments are good?

ION: He certainly is. Why, it's all over the book. Uh . . . here . . . uh . . . well . . . I'll find the pages soon, I assure you. "McCloskey thinks he can persuade us that what makes a bit of science good is the artfulness of its presentation, instead of the warrant of its argument."

SOCRATES: And where does he scorn warrants, these warrants that are arguments for an argument?

ION: Well, again I can't find him saying it in so many words. But that's what he means, I can assure you. My *verstehen* in such matters is wonderfully accurate. I have no need for the mere human device of citations and close reading.

SOCRATES: Ah: *verstehen*. You have mentioned that several times. I thought you were hostile to mere "interpretation" and *verstehen* in science.

ION: In science, yes. But philosophy is different.

SOCRATES: I see. But return to this wild McCloskey's advocacy of mere "artful presentation" in science. What do you mean by "presentation"?

ION: The style, the ornaments. In a word, rhetoric.

SOCRATES: And this style is easily distinguished from the substance?

ION: Of course: don't you know about the distinction between style and substance? My sophomores know it very well, and frequently speak to me about it. I have learned much from the intellectual distinctions current among my sophomores, a wise crowd, I assure you. Style/substance; subjective/objective; opinion/science. The sophomores are amazingly good metaphysicians.

SOCRATES: Tell me, Ion: does skiing have a style?

ION: Of course. American or European, good or bad.

SOCRATES: And is bad skiing still skiing?

ION: Certainly.

SOCRATES: At what point does bad style lose the *substance* of skiing?

ION: I do not understand.

SOCRATES: Well, if I have no experience in skiing – have never seen it, say – and skis are strapped to my feet and I am ordered downhill, I will not do a stylish bit of skiing?

ION: Certainly not. You will fall every couple of yards. The very thought of Socrates on skis!

SOCRATES: Well, when I finally reach the bottom, have I skied down the hill or not?

ION: Uh, yes. In a manner of speaking.

SOCRATES: And if I rolled down hill?

ION: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: So style and substance are not separated by virtue of some essence of substance and style, but as a matter of speaking?

ION: It would seem so.

SOCRATES: So the “artfulness of the presentation” in science is after all not so easy to distinguish from the “warrant of its argument,” the style from the substance?

ION: As you say.

SOCRATES: And, to consider the other side, McCloskey does not reduce his argument to *mere* style, in the sense of advertising, does he? He examines at length the warrants for significance testing, for instance, and speaks at the same time about the style (or what is indistinguishable, the substance) of using them?

ION: Yes. I admit that I rather skimmed that part of the book.

SOCRATES: Very well: you and I have moved together from the sophomore to the junior class in aesthetics.

ION: Ugh! Aesthetics! It is another one of those meaningless subjects. I am glad to say that I am as ignorant of it as of rhetoric or of literary criticism. Yet of course I can offer judgments about these matters. Anyway, “McCloskey has abdicated the right to identify some reasons as cognitively good and others as bad.”

SOCRATES: What does “cognitively” mean here?

ION: It is a magic word among us philosophers. It means whatever species of argument my logic teacher in graduate school told me was non-fallacious.

SOCRATES: Does it include induction?

ION: Certainly not! Why, it is scandalous how filled with fallacy are the practices of induction.

SOCRATES: I see. By your definition, then, most “cognitive” matters seem to have little to do with scientific practice. I recommend to you a paper by Rappaport. Scientists use induction, metaphors, stories, and appeals to authority daily, but your way of philosophizing about their activities will define all these as “non-cognitive” (or we might say “non-epistemic”), imprisoned forever back in the “Fallacies” section of the elementary logic books.

ION: Dammit, that’s where they belong! The actual reasonings and

arguments of scientists are so bloody *rich*! It is extremely difficult to fit them into this nice, simple bed we philosophers have prepared. I think we do better in philosophy of science if we *define away*, as “non-cognitive,” 95 percent of the problem of scientific reasoning. Then we can search for the keys over here, in the light of the lamppost.

SOCRATES: That is excellent work, Ion, if you can get it. Does McCloskey offer arguments about good and bad arguments?

ION: Yes. Besides repeated reference to good and bad practices of argument throughout, he has two long chapters on quantification and statistical significance towards the end of the book, a sustained treatment of the good and bad rhetoric of a major argument in economics. As I say, though, my interest was in the first three chapters, where he talks like a philosopher. For most of the book he talks like a literary critic or an economist, with episodes of statistician. I just couldn’t bear his detailed talk about the goodness or badness of economic and statistical arguments. So I didn’t read them. It is so much easier to be a philosopher if you read only about what you think you already know.

SOCRATES: So McCloskey writes a lot about good and bad arguments. I seem to recall that he said that being a good person, for instance, had to do with the sorts of arguments one produced. Yet I thought you said McCloskey had “abdicated the right” to have such opinions.

ION: Well, I didn’t mean that he didn’t assert his right and, damn him, exercise it. I mean that anyone who doesn’t think all important arguments in science are “cognitive” as defined by a coterie of academic philosophers active in England c. 1940 has no intellectual rights at all, and certainly no rights to courtesy or to close reading. McCloskey will be lucky if we do not get together and run him out of our Popperian Open Society. It’s too *complicated* to assess arguments unless you use my definitive (3 by 5) file card exposition of philosophy of science. It’s really neat: in about five minutes you can learn the philosophy of science without reading anything but the card, and you will never again have to consider the question of scientific argument. If we don’t get rid of these metaphors (Mary Hesse calls them models) or stories (Larry Laudan calls them research traditions), our lives as philosophers are going to get awfully complicated.

SOCRATES: So it would seem. But if McCloskey does offer a way to “criticize” economics in every sense, what is his crime?

ION: He would make economics a non-policy science.

SOCRATES: Does he say that?

ION: No. You really haven’t been listening! He doesn’t need to actually *say* something for my *verstehen* to detect it.

SOCRATES: Do you have an argument *for* economics as a policy science?

ION: No. Economics is filled with predictive problems, just as that rubbish by Darwin falls short of my standards in not being predictive.



Understand, and this time try to pay attention: certain kinds of physics, as interpreted by nonphysicists of a century ago, are the only models for true science. Economics doesn't qualify. For instance, the "advances" in economics that McCloskey values are laughable.

SOCRATES: Why is that?

ION: They do not make economics more predictive: aren't you listening? You really do need an ear examination. These "advances" – hah! – are mere applications, mere storytelling.

SOCRATES: I see. Science is defined to be what is predictive, in the pattern of the 19th century's understanding of certain branches of physics. So when science proves to be nonpredictive or in some other way deviant from this model, it is the scientist, not the philosophy of science, that is defective.

ION: Certainly. At last you are hearing the point.

SOCRATES: In other words: you can second-guess the artists and scientists of the world. That is truly wonderful.

ION: Yes, so it is.

SOCRATES: I admire your wisdom more than I can say. Yet there is one respect in which I blame you: in our conversation you have quite unjustly neglected to reveal to me the method of achieving this profitable wisdom in second guessing. One would think you would share it with your friends if it is so easy to acquire from the chair. Such neglect is unjust. On the other hand, if it is not easy to acquire, and you are divinely possessed in having it, I cannot blame you. I conclude, Ion, that you are either a man unjust or a man divine. Which it is to be?

ION: It is far lovelier to be deemed divine.

SOCRATES: Then this lovelier title, Ion, shall be yours, to be in our minds divine, and not a scientist, in praising science.

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