

## Performance Against Dialogue, or Answering and Really Answering: A Participant Observer's Reflections on the McCloskey Conversation

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My career as a friendly critic of Deirdre McCloskey's approach to the rhetoric of economics has been an extremely rewarding experience. I have learned immensely. I have learned about rhetoric, about economics, about McCloskey, about myself—and about the difficulties of scholarly debate. The experience has been rewarding because it has given me the opportunity to develop building blocks for my own preferred understanding of the rhetoric of science and of economics in particular. For this side of the experience, I refer to my other work [see especially Mäki 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1997]. At the same time, the experience has been somewhat frustrating: I am not convinced that McCloskey and I have been able to generate a fully genuine debate or dialogue that would have consistently met some of the central norms of genuine scholarly conversation. It is some of these frustrations that I want to share with others in what follows.<sup>1</sup>

My strategy is the following. I will first make a few conceptual distinctions which can be used to suggest criteria of successful scholarly conversation. I will then explain why I think we failed again to meet those criteria in our recent exchange in the most prominent forum that was generously provided to us, *The Journal of Economic Literature*. To my "Diagnosing McCloskey," McCloskey replied in terms of a contrast that was presumably intended as devastating: "Modern epistemology against analytic philosophy" [Mäki 1995; McCloskey 1995]. My reaction here is to suggest another contrast: a meta-level contrast between dialogue and performance.

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In a sense, what I suggest to do here is an impossible undertaking. This is because I am going to play two roles between which there is an unavoidable tension. On the one hand, I am a participant in an ongoing debate; on the other, I pretend to act as a judge, assessing the debate from a meta-level point of view. My hope is that irrespective of the possible irritating effects this may have on my readers, the endeavor may be instructive and legitimate. The hope is that I am also playing the third role of a participant observer who is submitting more general ideas about scholarly controversy—ideas that have been inspired by his limited experience as a participant in a particular debate.

### *Two Types of Conversation*

I will begin with the idea of two types of conversations, to be called "conversation as dialogue" and "conversation as performance." I will base this idea on two primitive ideas, or more precisely, on two other simple distinctions: one concerning the type of audience addressed, and the other concerning the type of response produced in a conversation.

The first primitive distinction can be characterized as follows. Persuasion, as well as conversation, presupposes at least two participants: the persuader and the audience (the persuadee). There is an agent doing the persuasion, and there is another one being persuaded. I want to enrich this scheme by suggesting a further division within the category of persuadee or audience. The distinction I have in mind and that I hope will be helpful for understanding the functioning of different types of conversation is one between a *second-party audience* and a *third-party audience*. The distinction should be intuitively clear. Second-party audiences in a conversation are somewhat analogous to teams in a football game. Third-party audiences are similar to the spectators of the game. Let us say second-party audiences are the *participants*, and third-party audiences are the *spectators* of a conversation.

A more specific version of this distinction is one between expert audience and inexperienced audience. *Experts* participate, or at any rate are able to participate, in a conversation because they have the required expertise, while *non-experts* adopt the role of spectators at most because they lack the expertise required for participation. An intellectual asymmetry prevails between experts and non-experts.

This forms a basis for my distinction between two types of conversation. One type of conversation takes place between two or more active expert participants, each serving in the roles of persuader, on the one hand, and immediate persuadee or second-party audience, on the other. A conversation between these participants is what I call *conversation as dialogue*. Such a conversation as dialogue includes attempts to persuade second-party expert audiences.

It is often the case that the rhetoric used in a conversation does not aim at persuading the immediate second-party audience. It is rather intended to persuade rela-

tively passive spectators, a third-party audience of non-experts that is watching and assessing, but not actively contributing to, the conversation. I call this type of conversation *conversation as performance*. Such a conversation involves attempts to influence a third-party audience—the spectators—rather than a second-party audience—the participants. The third-party audience may lack the expertise to assess the accuracy of descriptive claims and the soundness of arguments, and thus tends to be guided by impressions in its judgments. The persuasion of non-expert third-party audiences may thus not be based on thoroughly scrutinized solid arguments. Certain familiar kinds of political debate exemplify paradigmatic features of conversation as performance. Therefore, we might also say that conversation as performance is a matter of practicing political rhetoric.

The second primitive distinction is concerned with types of responses by a second-party audience. In a conversation involving two or more participants, the participants put forth claims, questions, arguments, and suggestions. In relation to these, the other participants—the second-party audience—may behave in three ways: not reacting at all, reacting but "merely reacting," and reacting by addressing points made in detail and essence. I call the first two types of reactions by the joint name, "answering" (or we might also say "apparent answering" or "evasive answering") and the last type, "really answering."

*Answering* is a matter of evading, ignoring, or missing an argument or suggestion made by another participant. It is a matter of no action or misguided or misdirected action by a second-party audience. Whenever evasive or apparent answering dominates the type of response in a conversation, the conversation often also takes on the form of performance, provided there is a certain kind of non-expert, third-party audience present. If there is something like a causal relation between the two, it may often run the other way around: in certain circumstances, the presence of a third-party audience makes mere apparent answering more likely than if it were absent. This might be the relevant regularity: if the persuasion of the third-party audience is judged desirable, and if the third-party audience lacks the expertise required to tell the difference between answering and really answering, then mere apparent answering is more likely than if these two conditions were not met, *ceteris paribus*.

*Really answering* is a matter of engaging in a detailed argument with an understanding of the points made by other participants or with a genuine and sincere attempt to acquire such understanding. It is a matter of "testing one's notions by mutual criticism, listening, really listening, to other remarks" [McCloskey 1994, 100] and then answering, really answering. Really answering is characteristic of a genuine dialogue, of open-minded mutual scrutiny of the concepts and conceptions held by the participants. Such a dialogue leads to learning from one another and from the confrontation itself. We may conjecture that if the participants of a conversation are experts and there is no third-party, non-expert audience whose persuasion

would be highly valued by any of the participants, then the conversation tends to take on the form of a dialogue.

Really answering conforms to the canons of the McCloskeyan *Sprachethik*: "Don't lie; pay attention; don't sneer; cooperate; don't shout; let other people talk; be open-minded; explain yourself when asked; don't resort to violence or conspiracy in aid of your ideas. We cannot imagine good conversation or good intellectual life deficient in these. They are the rules adopted by the act of joining a conversation . . ." [McCloskey 1985, 24; 1994, 99]. Most importantly, really answering presupposes "paying attention," "cooperating," "being open-minded," and "explaining oneself when asked." Really answering is part of what McCloskey calls "honest conversation" (for an examination of McCloskey's notion of *Sprachethik*, see Mäki and Vromen [1998]).

Now the two categories of conversation suggested above will not necessarily exclude one another, either conceptually or empirically. What we actually observe is not a strict dichotomy, but rather a continuum. Provided some prerequisites are met, the overlap between the two can be considerable to the extent that conversation as performance will closely approximate conversation as dialogue. There are certainly several such prerequisites, but let me mention two that would seem to be relevant to our case. One is related to the structural and cognitive attributes of the relevant group of spectators: the third-party audience should be homogeneously competent in the sense that the majority of the influential members of this audience should be sufficiently well informed about the topic under discussion and sufficiently skillful in (assessing) the type of reasoning relevant to the topic or, in short, they should be experts. The other prerequisite is related to the moral attributes of the participants: the second-party audiences should observe the canons of the *Sprachethik*, in particular, "paying attention," "cooperating," "being open-minded", and "explaining oneself when asked."

It seems obvious to me that in the case of much—but I would not dare estimate how much—of the discussion on the rhetoric of economics in the course of the last 10-15 years, these prerequisites have not been met, and therefore conversation has tended to take on the form of performance. Part of the reason for this is not only that few people in the relevant third-party audience—consisting mainly of practicing economists<sup>2</sup>—have been well informed about theories of rhetoric, but, more fundamentally, that only few of them are competent in metatheorizing in general. This fact about the third-party audience has helped to generate a tendency for the conversation to take on the form of performance with ample opportunity to exploit the relative ignorance of these spectators.<sup>3</sup> This has been so especially when the conversation has been in written form or, if in the form of oral discussion, when the number of spectators has been large. This opportunity, in turn, has created the temptation to forget about the *Sprachethik* and to practice mere apparent answering. Political rhetoric has played a non-negligible role.



## *The JEL Exchange*

### *My Diagnosis*

My Diagnosis [Mäki 1995] was originally motivated by a perception of unclarity in McCloskey's writing. Frankly, I did not understand everything that she had written. This perception inspired me to engage myself in a project of conceptual clarification. I believed this project would be useful for myself, as a means of self-education as it were. I also believed it would be useful for the thousands of readers of McCloskey's work who, so I thought, could not possibly have understood everything they read other than in an intuitive fashion. Finally, I believed it would be useful for the rhetoric of economics project, the basic tenets of which I shared. I thought conceptual clarifications would help make progress in a project that appeared to be in a state of theoretical stagnation.

As my initially innocent project of conceptual clarification developed, further ambiguities and inconsistencies in McCloskey's writing began to emerge. It became obvious that without such conceptual clarification, not all the problems with McCloskey's position can be seen. It appeared to me that her commentators have partly failed because they have not done this part of the job. In any case, my project started as one of "clarifying McCloskey" and ended as one of "diagnosing McCloskey": clarification revealed problems other than those of unclarity. In spite of this, I never considered my Diagnosis to be an attack; rather, it was intended as an act of offering a helping hand in a collective endeavor to pursue a sound theory of the rhetoric of economics.

Such a role fits with my understanding of a proper task of philosophy, namely, the task of an under-laborer. There are other important reasons for tackling McCloskey's project from a philosophical point of view, as I did in my Diagnosis: (1) the idea of a rhetoric of economics or science in general involves a number of exciting philosophical issues; (2) McCloskey has the habit of attacking philosophers for misunderstanding the nature of economics and science in general; and (3) paradoxically, McCloskey herself has the habit of philosophizing a lot.

What I did in the Diagnosis was to submit reconstructions of McCloskey's usages of two key terms, those of "rhetoric" and "truth." I ended up with the suggestion that she holds the view of rhetoric as persuasion in a conversation guided by the *Sprachethik* and that she holds a coherence theory of both justification and truth. I then further suggested to explicate her implicit theory of truth as one that depicts truth as socially constrained coherence (which I coined the "elite theory of truth") and as morally constrained coherence (the "angel theory of truth"). According to the elite account, truth amounts to coherence with beliefs held by the elite of the economics profession, while according to the angel account, truth consists in coherence with beliefs held by economists whose behavior conforms to the *Sprachethik* in a

*herrschaftsfrei* conversation—coherence in a dominance-free and morally appropriate conversation. I then was led to the observation of problems of internal coherence: McCloskey's assessment of current economics fails to be supported by her meta-theoretical theses. Finally, I suggested some revisions in her views so as to help her restore coherence to her thinking about economics and its rhetoric. In particular, I recommended combining rhetoric with realism and, in particular, a correspondence view of truth with a coherence account of justification.

### *McCloskey's Reply*

I do not know of a better way of responding to McCloskey's reply than to comment on some of its individual claims separately. I believe this exercise may be of some pedagogical significance, too. I number these claims to provide the future discussion with an opportunity of having some structure.

1. "Where we disagree is on analytic philosophy. In a nutshell, Mäki wants to go on with a project of analytic philosophy c. 1955 that most professionals now think is dead" [1995, 1319].

On the face of it, this appears to be an authoritatively demolishing claim. But frankly, I find it hard to understand what the sentence might mean if it were to make a statement of even minimum plausibility. Let us look at some of the elements of the sentence:

- 1a. "... analytic philosophy c. 1955 ..."

I am afraid I do not know what McCloskey means by this. Late Ludwig Wittgenstein, Willard Van Quine, John Austin, Gilbert Ryle, Wilfrid Sellars, Peter Strawson, Rudolf Carnap, Stephen Toulmin, Peter Winch? The expression sounds like a reference to something that is not only somewhat old, but also most likely old-fashioned and outdated. This is probably the rhetorical intention here; indeed, elsewhere McCloskey refers to "old-fashioned analytic philosophers" [p. 1320]. Other than that, I do not have a clue as to why McCloskey did not pick up analytical philosophy circa 1975 or 1995.

- 1b. "... that most professionals now think is dead."

Here McCloskey presents herself as knowledgeable about the situation in philosophy to be able to make such an authoritative-sounding claim. While logical positivism, for example, is dead (and was more or less so already in 1955), analytical philosophy, broadly conceived, is not. It is in many ways different from what it used to be in "c. 1955"—with the important qualification that it was neither uniform then nor is it uniform now—but it is not dead at all. Note that with this claim McCloskey is not providing me with a piece of new information—nor, I presume, is

she intending to do so. This claim seems to be addressed to a relatively ignorant third-party audience.

When McCloskey refers to "most professionals," one becomes curious. Who are they? McCloskey herself has made references to people like Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman, and Hilary Putnam. Indeed, these philosophers of the old generation have changed their minds about many issues in philosophy. Two qualifications are relevant here. First, their work can still be characterized as analytical in the broad sense—the only sense relevant in my own case. Second, they seem to have relatively little following within philosophy compared to their popularity outside professional philosophy. Note that many other, similarly distinguished, philosophers in the older generation go on as they used to—e.g., Quine, Strawson, Donald Davidson, John Searle—and are highly respected within philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

1c. "... Mäki wants to go on with ..."

This is at least as questionable as claims (1a) and (1b). What I think I share with analytical philosophy c. 1955 and c. 1995 is an obsession with conceptual clarity and argumentativeness, but I wonder what else there is that would need to be invoked to ground my approach. I use some very simple analytic techniques to pursue conceptual clarity and interpretation of meanings, but they are techniques that were used by analytical (and by many who are often identified as non-analytical) philosophers in 1955 as well as in 1995.

Let us look at this issue a bit more closely so as both to clarify my position and to provide an immanent critique of McCloskey's charge. My point is that if I am identified with analytic philosophy, so should McCloskey. The first general feature (yet perhaps not a defining feature) to note about much of analytical philosophy is that it is based on the acknowledgement of the importance of language. I share this belief, and so does McCloskey. The rhetoric of economics project is premised on the conviction that language matters a lot.

What I share with analytical philosophy is the idea that it is *one* task of philosophy to pursue elucidation, clarification, unpacking, or if you like, deconstruction, of the terms and phrases and arguments people use. This is what my Diagnosis suggested to do with some of the expressions used by McCloskey, and this is what McCloskey's favorite philosophers Goodman, Rorty, and Putnam do c. 1995. Moreover, this is precisely what McCloskey herself has been doing, namely, critically unpacking the language economists use!<sup>5</sup> Thus if this is what makes someone adhere to analytical philosophy, McCloskey and I are in the same company.<sup>6</sup>

There is another characteristic of analytical philosophy that I tend to share: the idea of analysis as the technique of "taking apart" when pursuing elucidation. It is a matter of looking at bits and pieces in a detailed manner in the pursuit of understanding whole messages. It is a matter of taking parts as a serious focus of scrutiny in a piecemeal approach toward understanding the whole. Ironically, there is here a striking analogy with McCloskey's perception of what good economics amounts to.

According to her own testimony, she is an adherent of the Marshallian partial approach of the old Chicago school. Analysis in the sense of "taking apart" is a constituent of this approach. By this analogy, we are again in the same company.

On the other hand, I also think philosophy cannot accomplish what it should be doing without supplementing analysis with synthesis, or "taking apart" with "putting together." Even conceptual clarification and interpretation require an interplay between the two: a "hermeneutic circle" has to be in play. When attempting to understand the expressions McCloskey uses, I have had to look at the whole as well as the parts of her writing, each informing the other. Now McCloskey has occasionally characterized her approach as interpretive in the hermeneutic sense. Again, we are in the same company. Analytic hermeneutics is an option that we might share.

One final immanent counterargument against claim (1) is this. Occasionally, McCloskey has explicitly subscribed to pluralism about method. Now in contrast to this commitment, claim (1) suggests to dismiss one approach—an approach that she herself appears to share—as being out of the question. This amounts to doubly contradicting herself.

I cannot imagine that claim (1) was addressed to me in order to persuade me, McCloskey's second-party audience. I can easily imagine the claim was intended for the third-party audience. Its task appears to be to persuade the readers of the *JEL* that my approach is outdated and thus misguided; this seems to be the main message of the reply, as can be witnessed by its title, "Modern [i.e., presumably up-to-date] epistemology against analytic philosophy." The problem, of course, is that the majority of the third-party audience of the *JEL* exchange had no expertise to check, in a cost-efficient fashion, whether McCloskey made a good case. She appears to be exploiting the relative ignorance and innocence of our spectators in a conversation-as-performance. She is exploiting it to undermine my credibility: "Mäki's message is outdated, he is not worth listening to."

2. "Mäki argues that I adopt what the philosophers called in 1955 a coherence theory of truth. . . . The philosophers in 1955 contrasted this coherence theory with a 'correspondence theory' . . ." [p. 1319]

This is very much like claim (1). McCloskey here suggests that the contrast between the coherence and correspondence theories of truth is outdated. I can assure that she has no chance to persuade me to accept the claim. I have done my share of exploring the very recent—and impressively vast—literature on theories of truth and can inform McCloskey that the contrast between the two theories of truth is alive and well in professional philosophy today. The many books published in recent years on truth contain extensive discussions of the coherence theory, using this label for it. Not only in 1955 but also today, specialized discussions about truth contrast the coherence theory with the correspondence theory. Again, I find it hard to imagine that claim (2) would have been addressed to me, McCloskey's second-party audience. The claim seems to make sense only if addressed to the relatively unin-



formed third-party audience. It appears to be a move in the conversation-as-performance.

Claims (1) and (2) share an important feature, in addition to both being addressed to the non-expert spectators: their function seems to be to undermine my credibility in the eyes of the relevant third-party audience. Such ploys effectively undermine the possibility of sincere dialogue and manage to substitute it for a political performance.

Let us then look at a few claims that McCloskey's reply makes about the substantive aspects of theories of truth, a topic that plays a major role in my Diagnosis.

3. "But we do not have to choose between them . . . We use both theories in scientific argument daily. . . . Rom Harré . . . and Hilary Putnam . . . and I myself . . . would reject the on-off definition . . . I hold both coherence and correspondence theories . . . [Old-fashioned analytic philosophers] sound like Humpty Dumpty. You need to choose. Don't argue. No need to discuss it. *Choose*" [pp. 1319-1320].

This can be divided into three separate claims, each inviting a response.

3a. "Rom Harré . . . and Hilary Putnam . . . and I myself . . . would reject the on-off definition."

This misrepresents the positions of both Harré and Putnam. Neither of them holds the correspondence theory. This leaves McCloskey alone in holding the composite view.

3b. "You need to choose. Don't argue. No need to discuss it. *Choose*."

This seriously misrepresents the approach of most analytic philosophy. If anything, the practice of analytic philosophy consists of discussion and argument—a dialogue, if you like. Like other people, analytic philosophers take many beliefs as given and are in this sense dogmatic. Yet, if McCloskey were able to come up with a serious argument for synthesizing the two theories of truth, it would very much be a reflection of the professional ethos of analytic philosophers working on theories of truth to answer—to really answer. But the burden of the creative synthetic move is on McCloskey. I and many others would be very excited to see such a revolutionary contribution.

3c. "But we do not have to choose between them . . . We use both theories in scientific argument daily. . . . I hold both coherence and correspondence theories . . .

What I said above is that McCloskey would need to and is most welcome to argue for this idea; it is not sufficient just to assert it. This invitation manifests the spirit of analytic philosophy. Asserting is not enough. Choosing is not enough. Arguments are needed.

Note that, in our conversational context, claim (3c) is different from (1) and (2) in that its refusal is implied by the argument of my Diagnosis. However, McCloskey does not directly confront my argument on these matters, which would suggest that she did not see that the argument did imply the refutation of (3c). It was one of the most fundamental suggestions of my Diagnosis to distinguish between theories of truth and theories of justification (and parallel to this, between truth and plausibility). This gives me reason to read (3c) as an indication of a misunderstanding of what theories of truth are for. The idea that theories of truth are "used" in daily scientific practice may be revealing here. Theories of truth are theories of the nature of truth—theories of what it is for a statement (sentence, belief, utterance) to be true. Instead of so much being "used" in daily argument, such theories are typically invoked on those rare occasions when a major philosophical issue becomes explicitly articulated. Theories of truth are *not* theories about how we can discover truths, how we can tell a true claim from a false one, or how we can measure the degree of truthfulness of a given claim. The latter theories are theories of knowledge involving various criteria of truth. Criteria of truth are invoked by practicing scientists in their daily arguments; thus, we might say that theories of knowledge and those of criteria of truth in particular—rather than theories of truth—are "used" by them frequently.

My Diagnosis suggested a conjunction of a correspondence theory of truth (leaving its details open at this stage) and a coherence theory of justification (involving the acknowledgement of the role of rhetorical persuasion). Thus, I agree that we need a synthesis between coherence and correspondence theories, but this is not the sort of synthesis envisioned by McCloskey. This reasoning was included in my Diagnosis. McCloskey's reply did not directly confront my reasoning—she did not even mention my fundamental distinction—and thus did not engage in an argument. On this, she did not participate in a conversation as dialogue.

There are variations of this same omission in many passages of McCloskey's reply. Here is one:

4. "... the people speaking in a conversation of science are often worth listening to when a scientific assertion is at issue. I don't see how else we can decide whether a scientific assertion is true. If the antipragmatists have any other meaning, let them for heaven's sake reveal it, let them grant us access to it!" [pp. 1320-1321].

Now if the question is, "How else can we *decide* whether a scientific assertion is true?" the question is *about justification, not about the nature of truth*. My Diagnosis tried to be very explicit and clear about my answer to *this* question: *herrschaftsfrei* conversation may indeed be one of the important features of a reliable procedure of *checking* whether scientific assertions are true (while the sense in which they are or are not true is the question of the nature of truth). This is one of the basic ideas of my Diagnosis.

5. "In all seriousness, unless we 'impose severe moral and social constraints on conversation' how are we going to know if the results from the labs and libraries are to be credited?" [p. 1321].

This is very similar to claim (4). Again, the issue invoked by (5) is concerned not with the nature of truth, but with justification, that is, with "how are we going to know" whether scientific hypotheses are true. The false impression given by McCloskey notwithstanding, I said it unambiguously in the Diagnosis that I agree on the message of (5).

Let us then look at McCloskey's reactions to my two specified reconstructions of the coherence theory of truth, which I labelled "the elite theory" and "the angel theory" of truth.

6. "He tries to convict me of an anti-democratic delight in an 'elite'. (I wonder if we are talking about the same social world here. Economists an 'elite'?) . . . I'm puzzled therefore that Mäki thinks I'm an elitist, and not properly postmodern or democratic or whatever" [p. 1320].

My Diagnosis provides a somewhat elaborate reconstruction of a notion of truth as "socially constrained coherence," where the social constraint is based on a division of potential participants in a conversation between those whose opinions matter and those whose opinions do not matter, baptizing the former group as "elite." In the course of developing this idea, I quote from McCloskey's writing as supportive documentation. McCloskey ignores this reconstruction; instead of directly commenting on my suggestion—such as assessing the conceptual structure of the reconstruction and attempting to show that I have misquoted her—she appears to give the third-party audience the impression that I have used something close to an unfriendly *ad hominem* argument. No real answering and hence no dialogue here.

7. "Truth in science depends on ethics, says McCloskey and most modern students of the matter . . ." [p. 1321].

There are two components in this claim that need a response.

7a. "Truth in science depends on ethics . . ."

Once again, this may mean two different things: (i) the nature of truth depends on ethics, and (ii) the collective discovery of truth depends on ethics. As I made clear in my Diagnosis, I agree with the second claim but not with the first.

7b. ". . . most modern students of the matter . . ."

My estimate would be that most "modern students" of theories of truth and justification disagree on both (i) and (ii), but that there are more of those who agree on [ii] (such as myself). If I am correct, (7b) misrepresents the situation in the work on theory of truth.

8. "... Mäki wants to go on with the old program of epistemology before 1955, the program of finding Big-T Truth independent of history or society or ethics" [p. 1322].

Once again, this offensive claim would be incomprehensible were we not to see it as based on the conflation of the concept of truth and the ways of finding the truth. My Diagnosis was very explicit in granting that the *finding* of truth indeed is dependent on "history or society or ethics"—and here I invoke the *concept* of truth in McCloskey's senses [t1] and [T3], that is, in the sense of the correspondence theory [Mäki 1995, 1306]. It is also notable that McCloskey refuses to use my definitions of different concepts of truth (or to provide her rival definitions), but instead continues to use the ambiguous expression "Big-T Truth." As a result, claim (8) itself remains hopelessly ambiguous. One of the major messages of my Diagnosis is that we need to eliminate at least some of this ambiguity to be able to carry on the discussion with any hope for progress.

The same ambiguity is reproduced in the first paragraph of page 1322, which begins as follows:

9. "More broadly, Mäki wants to argue that there is an inconsistency in a rhetorical theory of truth. He is mistaken. A rhetorical theory of truth is a theory of small-t not Big-T truth . . ." [p. 1322].

McCloskey then goes on for the rest of the paragraph without informing the reader what she means by "small-t truth" and "Big-T Truth." In the Diagnosis, I had attempted to provide an opportunity for making progress in the conversation by submitting specifications of a number of concepts of truth. McCloskey fails to exploit the opportunity and hence also does not really answer. Moreover, I would like to question the claim, "Mäki wants to argue that there is an inconsistency in a rhetorical theory of truth" by questioning one of its presuppositions, namely, the presupposition that there is a "rhetorical theory of truth." I haven't yet come across with such a theory. By implication, I did not want to argue against it. I have only attempted to bring in some clarity to McCloskey's usages of the vocabulary of veracity. We fell short of generating a dialogue, because McCloskey did not really answer to my attempt.

10. "... he doesn't understand that my talk about 'a heavenly mind', as he puts it, is a figure of speech . . ." [p. 1320].

I thought I fully understood the meaning and function of the term 'God' in McCloskey's characterization of capital-T Truth. Based on this presumed understanding, I said it is "a metaphor" [Mäki 1995, 1306].

We then come to an interesting and important issue.

11. "Mäki says that for the truth of my argument the economists must be observed acting ethically—'strictly'. Oh, oh. His case depends on that word



'strictly'. . . . If it were not for the word 'strictly' his charge of inconsistency would not work. . . . But of course I do *not* claim that economists have lived lives of virtue, strictly. . . . There is no inconsistency, no begging of the question, in arguing that good science has an ethical base, though never achieved *strictly*" [p. 1321].

McCloskey here fails to acknowledge the explicitly stated purpose for which I made the assumption. My purpose was to show that (a) if, as it seemed, McCloskey's reason for rejecting correspondence theories and for accepting a coherence theory of truth is based on the essential attainability and "operationalizability" of truth on the latter, denied by the former; and (b) if an unattainable and "unoperationalizable" moral constraint is built into a coherence concept of truth as McCloskey seems to be implying; then (c) I just wonder in what way the concept of truth as morally constrained coherence would be better than the concept of truth as correspondence.

McCloskey says in the reply that her concept does not require strict adherence to the *Sprachethik*—that something less than that would do. The annoying problem with this conversational strategy is that I actually anticipated this retreat in my Diagnosis by offering an additional argument against it, but McCloskey's reply chooses to ignore this additional argument.

The additional argument in the Diagnosis [p. 1313] is an infinite regress argument. Suppose truth is defined as morally constrained coherence. In order to measure [A]: <the degree to which truths about the economy have been attained>, we should be able to measure [B]: <the degree to which the moral constraint holds> (note that this grants the possibility that it does not actually hold strictly). But in order to measure [B]: <the degree to which the moral constraint holds> we should be able to measure [C]: <the degree to which a meta-level statement about [B] is true>. This can only be done by measuring [D]: <the degree to which the moral constraint holds at this meta-level>. And so on and so forth *ad infinitum*. The conclusion from this argument is that even if we grant that economists are not angels—even if they do not strictly adhere to the *Sprachethik*—truth becomes inoperational and unattainable: the very features that motivated McCloskey to reject the correspondence theory. Thus, my response to (11) was already explicitly included in my Diagnosis, yet was ignored in the reply. No real answering, no dialogue.

12. ". . . Mäki finds irritating my suggestion that economics is in pretty good shape. He wants me to offer philosophically acceptable reasons for saying it is. But I am a simple economic historian and cannot offer philosophy to prove such a thing. I offer merely the evidence of my writing and reading on economic history and the teaching of price theory. I think that's where you judge whether economics is in good shape . . . not in the philosopher's study" [p. 1322].

It is false to claim that "he wants me to offer philosophically acceptable reasons . . ." My *Diagnosis* was very explicit about its argumentative strategy: it is based on immanent reading and criticism. I was not after "philosophically acceptable reasons" other than reasons meeting the condition of consistency, if this is such a reason. I was after reasons that would be consistent with other things that McCloskey says. And I could not find such reasons. Both her praise and criticism of actual economics are ungrounded in her meta-theoretical framework. This was my explicit message [p. 1315] that the reply failed to really answer.

Note that McCloskey says that I am "irritated" by her claim that economics is in a pretty good shape. This is only part of the story about my "irritation": I also made it clear that I am puzzled by her claim that it is *not* in a good shape. That McCloskey omitted this negative part of her assessment of economics is interesting from a rhetorical point of view. Could it be that the fact that our third-party audience, readers of *JEL*, mainly consists of mainstream economists, played a role in this omission? In the reply, McCloskey presents herself as viewing economics favorably and me as being irritated by this, and she ignores the dramatically negative statements she has given about the state of economics. Could this be an example of skillful (third-party) audience sensitivity?

The flavor of claims (1) and (2) is also being reproduced by (12). The talk about "philosophically acceptable reasons," which are only entertained "in the philosopher's study" but which are unavailable to "a simple economic historian" who bases her judgments on a practitioner's experience, can be made understandable if taken to be addressed to the third-party audience of practicing economists, exploiting their natural prejudices against esoteric philosophical speculation as against the craft of everyday research practice.

### Conclusion

I have suggested that the recent exchange between McCloskey and myself fell short of meeting the conditions of genuine dialogue and exhibited features that are more characteristic of conversation-as-performance. I have focused on her role in this, and I leave it for McCloskey and others to provide perceptions about my role. Three final remarks.

First, the issue of consistency. My strategy in the *Diagnosis* was to specify some key terms so as to remove ambiguity and, based on these suggested specifications, to point out inconsistencies or tensions between McCloskey's statements. The most interesting tension is that between her rhetorical meta-theory and her assessments of the current state of economics. The reply contains nothing that would release the tensions that I pointed out. On the contrary, one of the lesser tensions has been reintroduced and established as a major one. In the reply, McCloskey makes a new claim, namely, that she indeed holds both the correspondence and coherence theo-

ries of truth (claim [3]), i.e., that the appearance in her earlier texts was not just appearance, but reality. This amounts to rendering "official" the relatively harmless tension I pointed out between some of her usages of the truth vocabulary through suggested specifications. An additional problem is created because, on standard formulations, the two theories do not fit together. Correspondence theories presuppose holding a distinction between the concept of truth and epistemic considerations (such as justification), while coherence theories standardly presuppose the denial of such distinctions.

The second remark is concerned with what we agree and disagree on. McCloskey ends her reply with a reminder of the many things we agree on. I agree that we agree on many things, such as "that economics has a rhetorical aspect, that sometimes its rhetoric is good and sometimes not so good" [p. 1322].<sup>7</sup> However, I do not agree that "we agree that it's time to put away the philosophical tools" [p. 1322]. On the contrary, I think that we need both philosophical tools and rhetorical tools to understand economics, and that they importantly complement one another. In particular, I believe we need philosophical tools to understand the rhetorical aspect of economics; importantly, philosophical tools are needed to sharpen the rhetorical tools of analysis. I even tend to think that our partly failed conversations provide confirmation to this belief.

Let me close with a final remark. McCloskey's formulation of *Sprachethik* requires that participants of a conversation "pay attention," "cooperate," are "open-minded," and "explain themselves when asked." Posing questions such as "what do you mean?" and "what's the argument here?" are thus ethically legitimate moves that oblige the respondent in a conversation. In my reading of McCloskey, I have pursued clarity on these matters by raising these questions, submitting possibilities, and pointing out the problems that they involve—cooperatively, if you wish. This is an obsessive characteristic of analytic philosophy that I share. The conversational ethics of analytic philosophy includes that of McCloskey's *Sprachethik*.

### Notes

1. Some of the central references constituting the published side of the debate are Mäki [1988a, 1988b, 1993a, 1995, 1997], Mäki and Vromen [1998], and McCloskey [1988; 1994, 199-205, 272-279; 1995; forthcoming]. In addition, there have been numerous unpublished encounters, including a fascinating course McCloskey and I taught together on the rhetoric of science at Erasmus University. The extensive bibliography of the second edition of McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics* [1998] does not cite the 1995 *JEL* exchange between us.
2. Of course, there is a substantial number of non-economists—sociologists, historians, business students, students of rhetoric—who have played the role of spectators in the conversation of the rhetoric of economics, even though I doubt they typically have not followed the discussion very closely. In any case, my impression is that these audiences are more receptive than economists themselves to the idea that economics is rhetorical.

3. An important qualification is needed. It is my firm opinion that a sound metatheory of economics is impossible to reach without using the expertise of practicing economists as an input. Thus, addressing economists as an audience so as to turn them from spectators to participants is cognitively indispensable for the goals of metatheoretical inquiry. This is so, for example, when suggesting analyses of the figures of speech used by economists: those who use them should be consulted. On the other hand, when claims are made about the state of the art in fields other than economics itself, say philosophy of science or the theory of rhetoric, it is only natural and forgivable that economists are not fully informed and therefore are not able to provide constructive input to the conversation. Such cases give opportunities of misusing the ignorance of the spectators—as opposed to using their expertise and thus turning them into participants.
4. McCloskey has had the habit of appealing to the authority of external experts by providing long lists of names and references intendedly—but sometimes not actually—to support her claims. I have done my best to refrain from this practice (I have held the innocent view that it is the substance of the arguments put forth that should matter, and that we should, ourselves, understand and scrutinize these arguments). Yet, let me make an exception and provide a very short list of names of a few philosophers of science (as it is the philosophy of science that is relevant to the study of economics as a science) whose work I find more or less appropriately analytical: Peter Achinstein, John Bigelow, Richard Boyd, James Robert Brown, Nancy Cartwright, Michael Friedman, Ronald Giere, Clark Glymour, Ian Hacking, Mary Hesse, Clifford Hooker, Paul Humphreys, Philip Kitcher, Larry Laudan, Jarrett Leplin, Ernan McMullin, Ilkka Niiniluoto, Leszek Nowak, Stathos Psillos, Wesley Salmon, Dudley Shapere, Elliot Sober, Paul Thagard, Bas van Fraassen, and James Woodward. It would be interesting to see McCloskey's complaints about their work in current mainstream philosophy of science, which is far removed from the positivist and Popperian ideas that McCloskey has had the habit of bashing.
5. One irony here is that while the analytical movement in philosophy forcefully emphasized the importance of language and its analysis, this is precisely what McCloskey has argued should be taken seriously by economists and those who study it from a meta-theoretical point of view: the major message of her rhetorical approach has been that it is the language that economists use that matters a lot and therefore has to be investigated. An underlying presupposition of my Diagnosis was that the language McCloskey uses to characterize economics matters and therefore has to be scrutinized.
6. While I agree that the elucidation and interpretation of linguistic expressions is *one* task of philosophy, I do not think it is its *only* task. I believe philosophy should also provide general yet informative claims about the world. This makes me part the company of analytical philosophers in the narrow sense.
7. Even if we agree that "sometimes its rhetoric is good and sometimes not so good," we appear to disagree on why precisely it is sometimes good and sometimes not so good.

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