

# Splenetic Rationalism: Hoppe's Review of Chapter 1 of *The Rhetoric of Economics*\*

by Donald N. McCloskey

*The Rhetoric of Economics* has been reviewed by Austrian economists three times to my knowledge; by Tom G. Palmer in the *Humane Studies Review* (Vol. 4, winter 1986-87), by Peter J. Boettke in *Market Process* (Vol. 6, No. 2, fall 1988), and at much the greatest length by Hans-Hermann Hoppe in the *Review of Austrian Economics* (Vol. 3, 1989). The reviews by Palmer and Boettke were not as favorable as my mother would have written, alas, but they engaged the book seriously, which is all an author in these days of the paper blizzard can reasonably expect. Among other things, they said that I had not taken my own argument far enough, that "rhetoric" was a characterization of economics favoring Austrian over conventional neoclassicism. I am beginning to think they are right. To be sure, critics of the main stream such as Palmer and Boettke tend to overlook the sweet currents of Real Keynesianism or Good Old Chicago, taking what is so ill-advisedly taught to first-year graduate students nowadays as being the whole of neoclassical economics. A candid rhetoric would favor Axel Leijonhufvud, Theodore Schultz, Robert Solow, James Buchanan, and the like over people who think that economics is merely  $\text{Max Exp } U(X,Y)$  s.t.  $k = k(X,Y)$ . But Palmer and Boettke are right that a candid rhetoric would favor the opener kinds of Austrianism, too.

Hoppe's long piece, however, failed to engage the book, and in fact advocates a backward step. To answer it I have to turn away from the direction I am moving. Palmer and Boettke will understand, I am sure, if I leave most of my reply to them implicit in recent and forthcoming writings. They will see the influence of their kind of Austrian thinking more and more in my lucubrations.

It seems to this sympathetic outsider that Palmer's or Boettke's Austrianism is very different from Hoppe's. Hoppe's seems to deny at the outset the high valuation of discovery that is so central to Austrian thinking. Facts of the world beyond cloistered intuition or philosophies of science beyond Immanuel Kant do not seem available to Hoppe. Neither intuition nor Kant is to be disdained, Lord knows. But discoveries from numerous entrepreneurs of intellect have taught us still more, and perhaps it should be put to use. Even  $\text{Max Exp } U(X,Y)$  has a thing or two worth using.

Hoppe's long piece will leave a strange impression of *The Rhetoric of Economics*. The book has ten chapters, most of which are "close readings," as the literary people say, of arguments made by economists. Chapter 5, for instance, examines the metaphors in Samuelson, Becker, and Solow; Chapter 6 examines the style of John Muth's paper on rational expectations; Chapter 7 is an analysis of the rhetoric in a few pages of Robert Fogel's book on American railways; Chapters 7 and 8 examine in detail the rhetoric of quantification in economics.

The main point of the book, in other words, is to use a literary criticism of economics to make plainer the "rhetoric" of the field—that is, to make plainer the way economists argue, badly and well. The first few chapters try to establish that the way economists argue is primarily not a matter of epistemology but of fact. The later chapters, and the bulk of the book, claim to provide some of the facts.

But Hoppe, like quite a few other methodologists, has seized on the early and conventionally philosophical chapters, especially Chapter 1. It is comfortable to construe the book as a piece of philosophy, then to write philosophically. This is a pity, because the book is not a work of philosophy, as Boettke and Palmer realized. It argues—first by precept and then most fully by example—that philosophy without rhetoric is a poor guide to how economists behave.

Hoppe does not join the argument. His interest in the book flags after a few pages out of the first of the ten chapters. Since Chapter 1 with a couple of other slices was the bulk of an article published in 1983. I would hazard the guess that Hoppe did once in 1983 cast his eye over the original article, with damage to his spleen, but has not found the time to read the book. This is my fault entirely: an author who cannot keep the reader's attention beyond the first half of the first chapter has no one to blame but himself. The book is qualitatively different from the article, being largely an empirical rather than a methodological study. I had the chance as the author to get this point across to Hoppe. But I muffed it. I apologize.

The length of Hoppe's review of portions of Chapter 1 out of 10 is strange, if flattering. But the length does not come from a complexity of argument; it comes from the

repetitions of four simple points. The piece may be heard as a fugue with four themes, each repeated ten or a dozen times:

- 1.) McCloskey shares "relativism" with some other misled people, none of whom see that "relativism" is self-refuting (pp. 179-185 of Hoppe's piece and elsewhere throughout).
- 2.) McCloskey attacks empiricism, which is a good thing to do, but does so in a way annoying to someone who prefers the *a priori* (pp. 185-192 and elsewhere).
- 3.) McCloskey does not consider methodological dualism (pp. 192-198).
- 4.) McCloskey attacks the possibility of prediction (near the end of Chapter 1), and even quotes Mises, but he should have pushed further into the *a priori* (pp. 198-206).

A point of context will be helpful: Hoppe's piece is long and repetitious because he is on a big game hunt. The little McCloskey-beast could hardly inspire such an expedition. Right from the beginning it is plain that his targets are Feyerabend, Rorty, Gadamer, and Derrida. I am flattered to be put in such company. Although, shamefully, I have not read a single page of Gadamer or Derrida, I have read many pages of Feyerabend and Rorty, with pleasure and profit; and I count Rorty a personal friend. I would rather not be saddled, though, with every imagined disability of these eminent men. My poor argument has enough real disabilities, worthy of criticism and quite unrelated to what some philosopher has said, that a critic does not need to turn to imaginary ones. Much of Hoppe's argument, to put it another way, is irrelevant to the book I actually, clumsily wrote. Much of his argument is based on a misreading of Richard Rorty or of Paul Feyerabend, not on a misreading of Donald McCloskey.

Hoppe has a fine passion for ideas. But his passion has led to certain extraordinary misreadings, on which his argument turns.

First, I am not a "relativist," nor is the book "relativistic," if relativism is taken to mean what Hoppe wants it to mean. Hoppe wants it to mean the philosophy of a Valley Girl: anything goes, arguments are all equal, scholarship does not advance, we have no way of reaching common ground.

I believe on the contrary that good scholarship must force its arguments over many difficult hurdles, that good and bad arguments are often easily distinguished, that scholarship does and will advance, and that scholars have numerous ways of reaching common ground, if they will stop yelling at each other and take them. Since I have actually written (in British

economic history) some science following these principles, I could scarcely oppose them.

In one of Hoppe's numerous returns to this first theme he remarks "such relativism would once more literally be impossible to adopt, because it is incompatible with our nature as acting talkers and knowers" (p. 191). I entirely agree, and say so to the Valley Girls in my classes. Chapters 2 through 10 of the book argue that our nature as acting talkers and knowers is crucial to economic sciences. Non-rhetorical approaches to science ignore our nature as acting talkers and knowers. Since they too would be incompatible with our nature, Popper's refined positivism or Hoppe's splenetic rationalism or various other versions of science simpler and meaner than life itself would be impossible to adopt.<sup>1</sup>

Nor, second, am I a skeptic, as could be affirmed by people who know me or have read my books, including the one Hoppe is talking about. In politics, if you care, I am an anarchist, but am certainly very far from being a nihilist. In politics and in science I have a standard of truth. It is the same one that Hoppe advocates. He uses many times the metaphor of a "common ground as the basis for objective truth." That is fine with me. The book says the same—though not in the chapter Hoppe studied—quoting for instance the mathematician Armand Borel: "something becomes objective... as soon as we are convinced that it exists in the minds of others in the same form that it does in ours, and that we can think about it and discuss it together" (p. 152). Chapters 8 and 9 of the book are about "truth based on common, objective grounds," namely truth in statistics, and how such truth depends on the common ground for comparison that we as acting speakers and knowers have occupied. Hoppe and I entirely agree that the purpose of science and scholarship is nothing like "entertainment" but rather is the serious job of attaining common ground for action. His notion of "the common ground of terms being used and applied cooperatively in the course of a practical affair, an interaction" (p. 183) is fine. He goes on to note that "Talk, whether fact or fiction, is inevitably a form of cooperation" (*Ibid*). Admirable. As Palmer put it, the "elevation of conversation to the ethical standard by which rationality is to be judged" leans McCloskey toward classical liberalism, "for the market economy is a kind of grand conversation, a forum for persuasion" (p. 13). We all agree. It's in the book.

Nor, third, do I wish to "keep the conversation of economists going without ever claiming to say anything true" (p. 186). Hoppe says that McCloskey "wants to replace this permissiveness [of bad positivism] with an even greater one. He wants us to engage in talk, endless and unconstrained by any intellectual discipline whatsoever" (p. 189). That's not right, and knowledge of my person, or more to point, knowledge of my book would not suggest it. On the contrary,

I have no wish for conversations to go on forever, aimlessly, and I have never raised such a strange ideal. I wish conversations to end when they should. I wish merely that they would end rationally, as too often they do not. (It might be worth noting that the *Review of Austrian Economics* has evinced little interest in the rational truncation of conversation.)

Many conversations in economics are of course truncated by bad arguments, such as the conversation between some Austrian economists and the rest of the profession. Hoppe reads my opposition to bad arguments as advocating never ending conversation. In particular he misreads my remarks about "conversation stoppers." I never would say that there do not exist proper conversation-stoppers, for some arguments. It would be silly to say so. (People who have studied a lot of modern philosophy have a weakness for the rhetorical ploy of rewriting what someone has said in a new, silly form, in order to simplify the job of refutation.) Obviously, there are plenty of conversation stoppers, such as the rhetorical *tu quoque* I am going to use a little later, or the request that philosophers actually lay out their three acres of justified true belief.

I suppose if Hoppe thought about it he would want to withdraw the suggestion that I or any other moderately rational person would deny that conversations do end: "You don't think it's raining? Well, look outside" or "You think arithmetic is complete? Well, look at Gödel's proof." When I refer to "conversation stoppers" in economics it is not in aid of endless conversation. It is in aid of getting the stopping optimal. Maybe even Hoppe would agree that it is not correct to stop a conversation among economists by shouting "But Mises says you are wrong!" If Hoppe would read Chapters 8 and 9 he would see this, because there I examine the silliest of modern conversation stoppers in economics, one that Hoppe too would find silly, I think: significance testing.

Nor, fourth, do I wish intellectual constraints to be loosened. It is harder, not easier, to take into account all arguments, up and down. Scientific life is easier, not harder, if by contrast we are satisfied merely with observable implications or synthetic *a priori* or any other slogan. The book, and especially Chapter 1, criticizes 3x5-card philosophies of science. The wonder is that philosophers have been able to sell them.

What is getting in the way of Hoppe's understanding of Chapter 1 is his adherence to what might be called Hoppe's Lemma (the honor of the name could be shared, since it is the commonest argument against pragmatists and rhetoricians): if you are not a rationalist you are an irrationalist. Irrationalists, it says, are mere feelers and jokers. According to the Lemma, a non-rationalist indulges in *mere* rhetoric, and has no standards of truth. You must either do what we philosophers claim to be doing or we will declare

that you are interested merely in *entertainment* (to use Hoppe's indignant italics). There are two modes of mental activity, according to Hoppe: on the one hand science following rationalist postulates and on the other hand entertainment, emotion, mere opinion, chatter.

I am surprised at Hoppe's suggestion that novels and poetry are "entertainment" in such a sneer-provoking sense that *War and Peace* would rank with "Wheel of Fortune." This cannot be what he means. The word "entertainment" must be a mistake, and cannot summarize his real beliefs about literature and philosophy. According to the crude dichotomy of science and entertainment, either there is first-order predicate logic combined with *a priori* knowledge or there is mere gab. Surely there is a lot in between.

Philosophical argument would be one candidate, *War and Peace* another. To use the philosopher's favorite rhetorical device, saying that "entertainment" covered such a large area would leave philosophy with no account of its own activities. It would put philosophy into the category of (mere) entertainment. (The argument is a variant of the usual reply to Hume's peroration about casting metaphysics into the flames: Hume's book would be the first to go.) But that cannot be right. Something is wrong. Philosophy is serious, not flameworthy. The point is that most modern philosophy does not fit into its own account of knowledge. It does fit a rhetorical account of knowledge. This being the case, philosophy should perhaps relax its 2400-year old sneer at rhetoric.

Hoppe believes his Lemma that anti-rationalism equals irrationalism because he has convinced himself, as many philosophers and their students have, that philosophy is a bulwark in defense of truth. The fuzziness of their rhetoric shows in their overlooking of the distinction between truth and Truth.

Small-t truth is what we use every day to get across the street or to detect another subatomic particle. By contrast Big-T Truth is a philosopher's construct, justified true belief. When I say, as in Chapter 1, that the philosopher's construct of Big-T Truth is of no use to economic science, and that it in fact infects economics with the sneering rhetoric of modern philosophy, the philosopher (and Hoppe) turns to the audience and says, in effect, "You see: McCloskey is against truth [small-t: DNMc]. He can't hold such a position and still make it across the street."

There's a lot of evidence in Hoppe's piece that he doesn't grasp the distinction between truth and Truth and therefore is not aware of his own rhetorical move. He would have done well to read Chapter 3. When he quotes me advocating a rule of conversation, "Don't lie," he adds *sotto voce*, "how could we, if there were no such thing as objective truth?" (p. 189). Well, there *is* such a thing as objective truth, the agreement we all make for purposes of navigating the world

and society. We know when we are lying about the air temperature outside or the rational choice inside. The problem is that there doesn't seem to be any way of knowing whether we have hold of Objective Truth, capital-O, capital-T. Its presence or absence would seem to be knowable only to God. No one from Plato down to the present has been able to say how we mortals would know a Big-T Truth when we saw it.

I've said that I agree with Hoppe's pragmatic criterion of truth (he will be angry that I call it "pragmatic," because any deviation from his way of talking makes Hoppe angry; the anger, though, may at least send him to the texts about pragmatism). But he wants to build a bridge from this pragmatic and sensible position to his favored ontology, Reality (with a capital R). Understand: like you, I live squarely in a world of reality, small-r, a world in which it rains sometimes in Iowa and in which the IRS has unconstitutional powers. What is at issue here is the philosopher's construct, Reality, which may or may not exist, like Truth. I don't know, though I reckon God does. In contrast to Hoppe, I claim only to know about reality and truth.

But I do know from the history of philosophy that, unfortunately, there does not seem to be any way of getting from Truth in epistemology to Reality in ontology. We all wish there was, and many thinkers since Plato have contributed to floating logs and tossing bricks into the river to build a bridge between the two. But empirically speaking the bridge looks like a hopeless job. If you try to walk across the few finished pieces you fall right in. The construction time has exceeded that of a new defense system: at present, reckoning from the pre-Socratics, 2500 years and counting. As an empirical scientist I have to conclude that further investment in the bridge is not a high priority.

The philosophers claim that their notions of Truth and Reality and a Brooklyn Bridge between the two are necessary to prevent "permissiveness" and, as they invariably put it, "anything goes" (I myself never said such a thing as "anything goes," and never would). The philosophers should reflect coolly on their worries (Chapter 3 again may be therapeutic here). They will see that their fears about "permissiveness" and lack of discipline are perhaps neurotic and surely authoritarian, an appeal for a central planning of the intellectual marketplace.<sup>2</sup>

Scrutiny of how people actually argue will persuade the philosophers that their constructs do not play a foundational role in mathematics or science or married life or common law or other species of practical reasoning. The philosophical definitions of Truth and Reality play "merely" rhetorical roles. It is crucial for the aggrieved husband to claim that his view of the marriage is Reality. No biologist is going to want to claim anything less than Truth for her version of cell chemistry. But when it gets down to deciding who is going

to take out the garbage or what the next experiment on crab glands is going to be, then lower-case, garden-variety reality and truth do the job just fine, thanks.

I do not say that good philosophical work cannot be done about lower-case truth and reality. It can, and has been. But to get the whole story the philosophers are going to have to examine all the arguments, not merely the ones that suit a crystalline realm of Truth and Reality.

So Hoppe is quite wrong when he summarizes my argument as "Economics, too, is merely rhetoric...[The conversation of mankind] exists not for the sake of inquiring about what is true, but for its own sake; not in order to convince anyone of anything based on objective standards, but in the absence of any such standards, simply in order to be persuasive and persuade for persuasion's sake" (p. 180). His "merely" in "merely rhetoric" is the problem, and shows how little he grasps the point of the book. Repeatedly he uses the metaphor of the rhetorical approach ending up "in mid air". "If statements are merely and exclusively verbal expressions hanging in mid-air, what reason could there be for any one statement to ever give way to another?" (p. 190).<sup>3</sup> He then broadens the attack to Kuhn and Feyerabend (which illustrates his tendency to wander off the subject of the book) by reducing their position, and (he thinks) mine, to the transparently silly assertion that science is "merely and exclusively verbal expressions hanging in mid-air". Having made the reduction his remaining task is easy: just sneer. (As I've said, much of modern philosophy depends on this rhetorical device.) Of course one need not bother to give reasons why such a silly statement about science should be replaced by another, non-silly, Hoppean statement.

Among the commonest of rhetorical turns in philosophy is the *tu quoque*, that is, the demonstration that someone is doing or using X at the very time he argues against X. Hoppe recurs to the turn in attacking his straw man of "relativism." A "relativist" who says,

1.) "It is true that there is no truth," is contradicting himself: at the very time he argues against truth he is using the concept of truth. Hoppe believes, although he does not argue the case, that my position about economics being rhetorical has the self-defeating character of "relativism."

It does not. A technical reply is that Hoppe here again cannot see the difference between truth and Truth. It is not self-refuting to say,

2.) "It is true that there is no [sublunary standard for judging our access to God's own] Truth."

In this form the assertion has always been an objection to philosophy in the style of Plato. You can see why Platonists like Hoppe cannot bring themselves to treat their opponents with civility: it seems so *obvious* to them

that (2.) is the same as (1.) and that (1.) is self-refuting. But there is a more important reply. To assert that the statement,

3.) "Economics is rhetorical,"

is in some way self-contradictory (the assertion I repeat is not argued; Hoppe merely lays statement (1.) next to statement (3.) and asserts that they are somehow connected) *is itself self-contradictory*. Why? Because the assertion uses rhetoric at the very time it argues against rhetoric. One commits a contradiction weighing at a higher level against one's argument if one argues that there exists a contradiction weighing against a rhetorical approach to argument. So there.

My reply is not a piece of "mere" rhetoric; or at any rate, it is no more "mere" than is the *Philosophers's Friend*, the assertion of self-contradiction. Both are instances of the figure *tu quoque*. The reply is a variation on the earlier rhetorical argument that a philosophy spurning rhetoric in favor of a radically narrower conception of argument is left with no account of its own arguments, which are not in fact narrow. In the midst of tossing his straw man of "relativism" about the room in mock combat, for instance, Hoppe says that "One cannot argue that one cannot argue" (p. 181). Startlingly, he does not see the self-contradiction in this, that he is arguing (rhetorically) that one cannot argue that one cannot argue (narrowly and anti-rhetorically). His footnote 6 comes close to self-awareness on the matter, but does not arrive.

— . —

Hoppe's piece, then, does not exhibit much skill at reflecting on its own philosophy or reporting on other philosophies, setting aside that the book is not chiefly philosophical. Hoppe's understanding of the philosophical traditions under attack is surprisingly shallow. I've mentioned that the piece exhibits no familiarity with pragmatism, which precisely asserts as Hoppe does that "observations as well as words are constrained by action." Not reading Dewey, James, and Peirce is going to make it hard for Hoppe to read Rorty or even McCloskey with much understanding.

Another problem with the piece is the blurring of categories for attack. I am called a "hermeneuticist," which would surprise students of the subject. The word is as close as Hoppe can get to the right one, "rhetorician." The two traditions are related (as are others such as pragmatism, pragmatics, semiotics, informal logic, communication studies, and literary criticism). But it shows how little Hoppe has studied the traditions he thinks he disagrees with that he cannot keep them straight.

I must defend hermeneutics, though, from one of Hoppe's calumnies. Though its main literature is in German he has apparently understood little of it. No one who had read as

much as an encyclopedia entry on the subject could characterize it as "an uncritical appeal to and acceptance of authority" (p. 198). It is of course exactly the reverse. Hermeneutics came out of the aptly named "critical" tradition of biblical interpretation, the "high criticism" that so radically undermined the authority of the Christian Bible in the early 19th century; which was in turn a result of ("lower") Latin and Greek textual criticism since the early Renaissance, critical and emendatory of classical texts. In English the word "critic" is first used c. 1600 in this sense, and especially to mean one who judges unsympathetically.

But I'll let Don Lavoie and others show in detail how little Hoppe understands the "hermeneutics" he and Murray Rothbard attack with such unrestrained animosity.<sup>4</sup> My chief concern is Hoppe's treatment of the tradition of rhetoric. Many philosophers reviewing the book have felt comfortable in their ignorance of rhetoric. How do they know how to behave towards rhetoric? Plato told them. Such appeal to a narrowing authority is I am afraid typical of modern philosophy, which less and less takes knowledge as its realm. Have the philosophers who are certain they know what they don't like read Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, for instance? Have they taken the first steps in understanding the other half of our intellectual culture, for example, by looking at Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, or the modern masters such as Burke, McKeon, or Perelman.<sup>5</sup>

The rhetorical tradition, the philosophers should realize, is the main alternative to the philosophical one, and encompasses it. The academic study of rhetoric has been in disfavor since the 17th century, but survives unnamed in departments of literature, communications, and law. Our lives depend on rhetoric—how arguments are made, good and bad, and how to distinguish them. A philosopher will offer the ignorant reply, "But that's the job of logic." He has not heard that logic is a subset of rhetoric and he does not realize that human argument, even in philosophy, must be wider than one formalization of logic. It is most distressing to see people sneering at something they seem to know so little about. We professors are not supposed to act that way.

— . —

Professor Hoppe's tone in the piece is of more than local interest. The hackers say that they "flame" when attacking someone else's item on a computer bulletin board with foul temper and foul language. Hoppe has flamed on my book. I object to the flaming, not for myself (if you can't stand the flame, get out of the kitchen) but on behalf of our traditions of civility. Hoppe wears proudly the badge of "extreme" rationalist—the position, worthy of respect if in the end hard to use for life, that such important matters as economic science are to be based on the *a priori*. But the churlish form he has given to it suggests that a better description would be "splenetic" realism.

Aren't we all tired of such yelling and sneering in academic prose? And wouldn't we all prefer even the sanitized formulas of official scientific writing to productions like Hoppe's? His piece is strewn with hysterical overstatements, the academic equivalent of yelling in the face of one's opponent. A mild instance among many: "McCloskey's first round against empiricism then is a complete failure"—he wrote these intemperate words a few pages after conceding that even in his strange reading of the book "McCloskey's first criticism is well-targeted." Would Hoppe advocate talking like this to his wife? To his colleagues? To a mass rally?

Yelling and sneering, sadly, is characteristic of modern philosophy. It comes from ignorance of rhetoric. If I were a philosopher I would be worried that my field finds it impossible to remark on other traditions or even other philosophers without descent into abuse of rhetoric. The philosopher Stanley Rosen begins his book *The Limits of Analysis* by noting of the dominant, analytic school that it evinces "a general failure to understand the rhetorical nature of its own justification... [T]he typical practitioner of analytic philosophy... [succumbs] to the temptation of confusing irony for a refutation of opposing views."<sup>6</sup> That seems to be right. The philosopher Clark Glymour begins his book on *Theory and Evidence* with the following *jeu d'esprit*, a model for open-minded inquiry: "If it is true that there are but two kinds of people in the world—the logical positivists and the god-damned English professors—then I suppose I am a logical positivist."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, another eminent American analytic philosopher said proudly to me that he had never read a page of Hegel and furthermore (he added with a smile) proposed never to do so. Young philosophers are amused by such behavior on the part of their elders, which testifies to its emotional function: erecting barriers and defining the barbarians, to whom we philosophers need not pay serious attention.

The sneer has spoiled academic life, which could if it wished exhibit the morality of conversation at its best. Professors use the sneer and get away with it, perhaps because in lecturing to sophomores they do not have to hold themselves to high intellectual standards; or because more and more these days the professors feel no need to speak to the department next door. The mathematician sneers at the political scientist, the physicist sneers at the chemist, the economist sneers at the sociologist, and the philosopher sneers at everybody.

The sneering and yelling is often defended as fair in war. The battle of the books has always been a scholarly amusement, though always and properly seen as ridiculous by outsiders. From the first page of his piece Hoppe reveals the intellectual world in which he lives, a world in which academic discussion is a matter of "attack," "gaining ground," and being "ready to invade," divided into "soft" and "hard."

Such a world is needlessly mean spirited and ugly. But worse it is a world in which it is hard to get anywhere.

Hoppe's is a European, even Central European, world of discourse. I am disoriented by the irrational violence of his sneering and posing and ranting and viewing with alarm. Even some familiarity with British academic life does not prepare me. Welcome, I suppose to the *Review of Austrian Economics*. May I suggest to the *Review* Austrians, as a mildly sympathetic outsider, that they really must do something about their tone?

Hoppe delights for instance in tarring people with Nazism. Indeed he actually *does* go "so far as to smear everyone committed to [any other position] as a dangerous, potential dictator—revealingly, without ever going to the trouble of explaining what the ethical or methodological principles *are* whose *a priori* grounding allegedly implies such a threat" (p. 207). Why hasn't it occurred to European intellectuals who use this and similar rhetorical devices that their intemperate speech is overheard, and used to justify literal thuggery? How many real nihilists have been inspired by professor-talk about West Germany being "fascist" and capitalism being "exploitative?" The danger from the left and right is Hoppe's poisoned world of discourse, not the tolerant pragmatism or the cultivated hermeneutics or the reasonable rhetoric at which he flails.<sup>8</sup>

One source of Hoppe's fury against me in particular seems to be that I do not know German and have not read his works.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, instead of complaining about what is in the book (most of which has nothing to do with philosophy) the piece complains repeatedly about the German-language philosophy neglected in the book. I am ashamed that I do not know German, and will undertake to learn it as soon as the great pressure of other ignorances allows. Perhaps Hoppe will take a similar vow concerning Italian, Greek, and the rhetorical tradition.<sup>10</sup>

The other source of Hoppe's fury is the suspicion that I and people like me do not believe in synthetic *a priori*. Even paranoids have real enemies, of course, and the abusive way in which some of the less polite Austrians defend a priorism does in fact produce quite a few enemies. Portraying McCloskey as an enemy of Austrian economics, however, is at best peculiar. I am a supporter of many Austrian positions, on prediction, for example<sup>11</sup>; the reevaluation of introspection in the book could be construed as sympathetic with some Austrian positions on method; I agree with the anti-statism of many Austrians. I am in short an ally. That I might possibly have unsound views on synthetically *a priori*, one might think, would be a venial sin, a worry to the editors of the *Review of Austrian Economics* but not perhaps as serious to other Austrians as Hoppe makes it out to be.

But no: Hoppe, in the style of fanatics left or right, cannot bear the slightest deviation from his line. When I make a

Misesian argument about prediction, and then—unlike the rational expecters and random walkers employing the argument—actually do mention the great man, does Hoppe welcome me as a comrade in arms? Not on your life. He quotes at length the very passage I advert to, as though he, not I, had first made use of it. He then proceeds to rant about my deviationism. His chief anger is reserved for those closest to his position (Hayek among them, at whom he also sneers).<sup>12</sup>

For instance, when I have bad words for bad empirical work in economics Hoppe is temporarily mollified, because he misunderstands my words as philosophical objections. He thinks I would agree that "Empiricism [by which he appears often to mean empirical work, not merely the narrowing doctrine of empiricism, of which we both disapprove] is a methodology suited to the intellectually poor" (p. 188). "Austrian" arguments like this give Austrian economics a bad name. Surely it is unreasonable to dump Kepler, Darwin, and numberless historians into the category of "intellectual poor." Philosophy commonly has such bizarre effects. By crippling our capacity to examine all the reasons it makes us less reasonable.

Hoppe's one mention of the book beyond Chapter 1 is a refutation of my views on why economists believe the law of demand. Again his argument consists of stating my position and then asserting the contrary, leaving argument to another occasion. He presumably would not deny the empirical fact that economists are persuaded that the law of demand is true (small t) by econometrics and introspection. His objection appears to be that their persuasion is not "founded." The word "founded" has special force in Hoppe's world. It means something like "providing a justification according to epistemological criteria." What are epistemological criteria? Those arguments of which Hoppe approves. One begins to wonder if Hoppe has forgotten what an argument is. Perhaps he has lived too long among students and colleagues who agree with him, and has forgotten that arguments are supposed to persuade doubters, not merely to embolden the faithful in the pursuit of heretics.

There is something in the makeup of what Eric Hoffer called true believers that impels them to attack their natural allies. Thank the Lord. If the true believers cultivated allies with anything approaching social competence the register of crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind would be still more crowded with their names.

I wrote the book because, yes, I am tired of academic discourse such as Hoppe's, and want to bring that sort of "conversation" to an end. I would expect the many reasonable people among Austrian economists to agree. The philosophical point of the book—recall that the philosophy is mainly confined to Chapter 1 and a few later scraps... is

that the Valley Girl madness of anything goes is in fact a consequence of ignoring rhetoric, not of recognizing it. Sadly, anything does go in an argument that refuses to recognize and control its rhetoric. If one refuses to recognize that human argumentation is rich and complex the arguing does not merely disappear. It goes underground, to emerge as sneers and yelling and intolerance. The most unrestrained and irrational rhetoric, I am saying, comes from those most hostile to the idea of rhetoric.

## Notes

\*I would like to thank Don Lavoie, Harold Leiendecker, and Matt Kibbe for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup>See my "Sartorial Epistemology in Tatters: A Reply to Martin Hollis," *Economics and Philosophy* 1 (April 1985): 134-137.

<sup>2</sup>Do philosophers realize how much they sound like parodies of sadomasochists when they talk about "discipline" and "permissiveness"? John Cleese as The Philosopher.

<sup>3</sup>Incidentally, the sentence quoted is a case of Hoppe's method of argument, down to the punctuation. When Hoppe used a "?!" in his manuscript he was signaling his unwillingness to argue; he was pounding the table; he likes pounding tables.

<sup>4</sup>See Don Lavoie, ed. *Hermeneutics in Economics*, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup>See John Nelson, Allan Megill, and D.N. McCloskey, eds., *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

<sup>6</sup>New York: Basic Books, 1980, p. xiii.

<sup>7</sup>Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. ix.

<sup>8</sup>I must defend Bruce Caldwell and his version of tolerant pluralism, mugged in Hoppe's footnote 10. Hoppe's idea of an argument, I have noted, is to put exclamation points after his sentences! This is characteristic of modern philosophy, especially in its central European mode! Hoppe's conception of "founding" an ideology is surprisingly narrow! In a paragraph that makes wild comparisons between Mussolini and modern pluralists he nonetheless does not see that the main argument for the pluralism he so despises is moral and political! But perhaps the oversight is unsurprising in one so comfortable with methodological authoritarianism!

<sup>9</sup>Hoppe goes so far as to correct my use of "Doktor Herr Professor." "The Correct nomenclature," he barks, "is 'Herr Professor Doktor'" (p. 209).

<sup>10</sup>And economic history. He makes an argument heard frequently that I hope is not typical of the grasp of economic history *chez* Rothbard: that "hand in hand with [the] development [of natural sciences] went a steady, universally recognized process of technological advancement and improvement" [p. 24]. Such an argument for science is vulgar; and it has supported the excesses of Big Science. But mainly it is historically mistaken. I realize that everyone who is not a historian of the matter thinks it is true, this correlation between scientific and technological advance. We all get it in the newspapers. But few historians of science or of technology or of the economy believe it. Modern economic growth had been going on for a century or longer before science had any

but a tiny effect on technology. The earliest date of a significant effect for science would be 1900, on a generous reckoning. A more rigorous dating would be the 1940s, with an antibiotic that for the first time made medicine good for patients rather than bad, a practical use of airplanes (*viz.*, bombing), the universalization of radio, and so forth.

<sup>11</sup>Incidentally, Hoppe's elevation of the issue of prediction to a major role in the argument is out of proportion to its place in the book. The disproportion shows how closely he adheres to the usual philosophical questions and how little he had read beyond Chapter 1. Alexander Rosenberg, another philosopher, makes a similar mistake, and no economist reviewing the book has, which suggests to me that it is the importance of prediction and control in the received philosophy of science that is causing the misreading. See "Two Replies and a Dialogue: Rosenberg, Rappaport, and Maki," *Economics and Philosophy* 4 (1988): 150-166. I have elaborated a few thoughts on the matter of prediction in "The Limits of Criticism: If You're So Smart Why Ain't You Rich?" *The American Scholar* 57 (Summer, 1988): 393-406. But it is not important in *The Rhetoric of Economics*.

<sup>12</sup>Hoppe condemns Hayek for his "deviations" from what was originally a "much more Misesian methodological position" (pp. 208-9).