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## Reply to Munz

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Munz has not grasped the main point of *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, which is that intellectual historians need an art of argument.\* According to Munz, rhetoric is what is left over when rational argument is finished, being merely "the power to persuade when more rational methods fail." "[W]e rely on rhetoric when there is no or little evidence for a statement. . . . The heart of the matter is that when a statement can be shown to be true, no rhetoric is required to persuade people to give their assent." Rhetoric is said to concern "a number of irrational, psychologically effective devices." The Munz definition leaves rational persuasion as something outside of rhetoric. "There is one great exception where persuasion takes place without rhetoric," namely, "reasonable or rational evidence."

But the point of *The Rhetoric* is that reasonable evidence goes beyond some seventeenth-century lever for attaining certitude. On the contrary, what is reasonable is the whole art of argument, more rich and precise than, say, falsificationism or evolutionary epistemology. Anything but the whole art of argument is too thin for a satisfactory account of what happened in science. We need a way of examining how scientists do actually argue. Scientists use reliably attested facts and first-order predicate logic, to be sure, but they also and rationally use metaphors (they call them models) and other figures of speech. All of this, all the way from the logic to the metaphors, is rhetoric.

To say that science is what survives scientific criticism is all right, though perhaps a trifle vapid. But rhetoric enables the historian of science to see the scientific criticism in detail. Why did Darwin persuade? Why do economists disagree? Why does paleoanthropology depend on a story of climbing out of trees? Why do experiments end? The tautology of "surviving criticism" cannot answer such questions. As *The Rhetoric* shows, rhetoric can. *The Rhetoric* shows in a couple of dozen case studies that rhetoric is and has been since Gorgias of Leontini and Protagoras of Abdera a rational study of all that persuades more and less reasonable people in science and elsewhere. It is more not less rational to examine all the arguments.

The equation of the new rhetoric with irrationality is mistaken on three counts:

In the first place, logically speaking and most controversially, what Munz reckons as evidence and logic themselves depend on rhetorical decisions. The

\* I thank Steve Fuller, John Nelson, and Allan Megill of the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry for their comments.

rhetorical decisions are not mere ornaments or trickery. They establish the constitution of rationality. Rules of argument, even something as fundamental as the law of the excluded middle (which is set aside in some forms of logic and mathematics), are instituted by rhetorical agreement. They win arguments, unless the agreement is set aside for some purpose. That statement A must either be true or false is something we accept because it is useful in certain classes of dispute between people. It is not written in the stars. The law of the excluded middle is not God's own rhetoric, or else God would have made it impossible for humans to imagine transfinite numbers or impossible for humans to make statements such as "France is hexagonal." J. L. Austin said: "Suppose we confront 'France is hexagonal' with the facts, in this case, I suppose, with France, is it true or false? Well, if you like up to a point . . . it is true for certain intents and purposes, . . . for a general, perhaps, but not for a geographer."<sup>1</sup>

So Munz's "logic" is not something timeless and independent of human rhetoric. It entails a rhetorical decision that we human beings make. It is perhaps unnecessary to argue the same point about Munz's "evidence." What counts as evidence depends on human decisions about what is persuasive.<sup>2</sup> Logically speaking, then, rhetoric grounds logic and evidence.

In the second place, rhetorically speaking, logic and evidence are forms of persuasion. Munz cites with approval Horton's brisk assertion (which will come as a surprise to many anthropologists) that "primitive cultures do not share our standards of rationality and objectivity" because "they have been insufficiently exposed to debate." Rhetoric is precisely the study of debates. A syllogism is an argument in a debate; so is a smoking gun; so is an  $R^2$  statistic; so is an analogy; so is an appeal to authority, such as any science must use daily. Rhetorically speaking, rhetoric includes logic and evidence.

In the third place, historically and sociologically speaking, arguments beyond logic and evidence narrowly defined have in fact played a large role in all inquiry, including science. It would be a poor rationality that left them out.

Having made the initial and apparently incorrigible error of identifying rhetoric with irrationality, Munz cannot see how one could mount a rhetorical criticism. "Criticism" in his lexicon is the same as evaluation, the giving of stars in the manner of movie critics. He has read Northrop Frye but does not appear to have understood him. Munz asserts that if one cannot go "behind language" (Wittgenstein), "criticism of rhetorical figures is impossible." "The employment of rhetoric, in other words, escapes criticism." Huh? What does Munz think *The Rhetoric* was about, if not the criticism of rhetorics?

The more intemperate parts of Munz's rhetoric need criticism themselves. There is much misreading in his piece. For instance, Michael Leff says no such thing as that serious thought is "the art to persuade by methods other than appeals to truth or reason." The introductory essay of the book, to take another example, does not "belittle" the achievements of Galileo and Newton. That would be a strange thing to do. We are all very glad to have *Eppur si muove* and  $F = ma$ . Anyway, Galileo was a master rhetorician, as indeed was Newton

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, 1972), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache* (1935); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Chicago, 1988).

in his calculated lack of exuberance and his canny manipulation of the politics of science. Both thought they needed to be rhetors in order to succeed.

Munz's most intemperate rhetoric against rhetoric is concentrated on "relativism." He identifies the authors of *The Rhetoric* with people who do not believe "in the real world or . . . what went on in the mind of . . . authors" and above all with people who are committed to "relativism." On the loosest rendering of "relativism," though, the identification is erroneous, on the evidence of the text (in his frequent remarks about relativism the text recedes into the background).

As is usual in such viewing with alarm, Munz connects epistemic with cultural "relativism": "Where those values and ways differ, we have to conclude that all values and ways are relative." The argument is a commonplace, but it is a *non sequitur*. Why the Ilongot's code of honor in the Philippines would alter the epistemological status of moral values in New Jersey is not clear. Munz identifies *The Rhetoric* with Humpty Dumpty and the view that "there is no question of using rhetoric to get people to support a standpoint. . . . One simply hopes that people will like the rhetoric well enough to join in, endlessly and aimlessly, world without end." This is a strange remark. In twenty different fields the book investigates precisely "using rhetoric to support a standpoint."

The philosophers who think they are enemies of rhetoric have a small set of arguments, *koinoi topoi*, common places, which they handle like rosary beads, without much thought. Most of the arguments are taken unexamined from Plato, such as Munz's remark that rhetoric flourishes "in societies . . . in which propositions are counted as true because they are current in a given community"—for which see Plato, *Gorgias* (e.g. 471E, 474B, 475E, 487E; cf. 502E, 516E). A few arguments are taken from propositions current in the conservative community, especially the demonology of "relativism," and most especially the notion that there are serious people (as distinct from Valley girls) who believe that "all positions are considered to be equally valid." One wishes the epistemological conservatives would abandon the rhetorical device of waving a list of unnamed lunatics, lunatics holding opinions for which no textual evidence is offered, as though it were a list of communists in the State Department.

When Munz cannot think of anything else to say, he associates the writers of *The Rhetoric* with Nazis and other totalitarians. The turn has a long and disreputable history. Peter Novick in his recent book, *That Noble Dream*, observes that "as early as 1923 Bertrand Russell had made a connection between the pragmatic theory of truth and rigged trials in the Soviet Union (in 1937, by the way, John Dewey chaired a retrial of Trotsky). In a 1935 discussion of the ancestry of fascism he made it clear that doubts about the existence of objective truth figured prominently in that genealogy" (289). Again I ask my conservative friends to recognize and amend their rhetoric. The unrestrained character of the assaults on "relativism," and the willingness to tar people of good will with fascism or Stalinism, must conceal some terrible weakness in the conservative case.

So Munz has misread the book in his hurry to attack a political position that he does not like (largely unrepresented in the book and certainly unrelated to mine). It is similar to a recent case in economic history, in which a reviewer

attacked a book for its leftist leanings, which as it happens were those of *another* author with the same last name.

Munz's intellectual as distinct from his political purpose is to clear a space for a Popperian, evolutionary epistemology. No fault in that. But he does not acknowledge explicitly that the rhetoric of inquiry has points in common with such an epistemology. An epistemology which "characterises scientific knowledge as the set of hypotheses which are left over when all criticisms are temporarily exhausted" sounds reasonable to me, though it must be noted that the standards for exhaustion are rhetorical. When Munz praises Vernant for arguing that "social necessity" in the Greek city states required the evolution of a rational discussion, I can only agree. Such is the history of Sicilian sophists after the fall of the tyrants. The sophists catalogued the rules of argument, because they had to have rules in free courts of law.

Evolutionary epistemology, in other words, sounds like a vaguer form of the rhetoric of inquiry. Munz admits as much in passing, when he claims that evolutionary epistemology makes rhetoric "redundant." It is a strange sort of history of ideas that sneers at a tradition of 2500 years, half of the culture of the West, now surviving half-recognized in academic fields like law, linguistics, social psychology, literary criticism, history and sociology of science, and communication studies, and then claims that a novelty favored by Karl Popper and Peter Munz, which "has barely managed to make itself heard at the end of our century," now makes an old and large tradition "redundant."

Viewed from the rhetoric of inquiry, though, evolutionary epistemology has a defect. It lacks explicit arguments. Munz does not notice that his epistemology itself depends on a metaphor of evolution (there is by the way considerable doubt that Darwin or his modern students would recognize Munz's version of evolution). The evolutionary epistemologists want to claim the grounding of evolutionary Science itself (set aside that Popper was for decades scornful of Darwinianism as a science). But the "evaluation," "criticism," and "refutation of mistakes" on which a Popperian wants to stand must themselves involve rhetorical standards, as I've noted. Refutation entails a *refutatio*. In Munz's treatment the standards by which "mistakes" in the evolution of science would be "criticized" are left tacit. We can be more rigorous in the history of ideas. Evolutionary epistemology is not rigorous about the matter it claims as its most rigorous concern: criticism.

Munz's piece contains a good deal of slapdash history. Especially he has slapped and dashed at the history of the new rhetoric. The new rhetoric did not rise out of "linguistic imperialism" or, less likely, "relativism," but out of a social fact: we live in an age of intellectual diversity. That is why so many serious people have turned to rhetoric. Kenneth Burke observes, "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall." Rhetoric flourishes where disagreement flourishes, which is why rhetoric has a special connection with free and open societies.

In the intellectual world the diversity shows even in the realm of science, as I can attest as an economic scientist and as others have attested as physical or biological scientists. The *new* rhetoric responds to the new diversity. Consequently it is wider than rhetoric as defined by Aristotle, as something different from dialectic. The new rhetoric, in the old age of the idea, finds uncertainty

even within the certainties of dialectic. We all have long agreed that  $1 + 1 = 2$ , as new as this convention must once have seemed. But on the frontiers even of mathematics the rhetorical rules must be argued and reargued—witness the recent controversy over the computer-assisted proof of the four-color proposition. In other words, a serious account of criticism and progress in science *requires* rhetoric. Munz and the other Popperians come to the borders of criticism and then stop. They stop on the verge of a rhetoric of inquiry because they are more interested in the project of demarcating Science from other thinking than in giving an account of science in its diversity.

The point of *The Rhetoric* can be put briefly. The only way to evaluate an argument as a whole is by the standards of the whole art of argument. That whole art is not first-order predicate logic alone or quantification alone, or for that matter *Verstehen* or narrative alone. It is the art of the good person speaking skillfully, the scientist inventing and arranging his arguments. In a word, it is rhetoric.

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