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## Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Dogmatism: A Colloquy on Deirdre Nansen McCloskey's "Free Speech, Rhetoric, and a Free Economy"

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### Authors

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# **Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Dogmatism:**

## ***A Colloquy on Deirdre Nansen McCloskey's "Free Speech, Rhetoric, and a Free Economy"***

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## **Introduction**

In a 2019 collection, Deirdre Nansen McCloskey, co-founder of POROI and Distinguished Professor Emerita at The University of Illinois at Chicago, contributed an essay entitled “Free Speech, Rhetoric, and a Free Economy.”<sup>1</sup> Her claim was that rhetoric and liberty are doubly linked. For one thing, any defense of liberty will make use of rhetoric, “rhetoric” understood as “speaking with persuasive intent instead of using physical violence.” For another, the free market in ideas is a rhetorical idea at the heart of free societies. The evidence for the second proposition—that liberty is rhetorical, a matter of sweet talk, is not so persuasive as that defenses of liberty are themselves rhetorical. If true, however, the proposition that liberty is rhetorical is more important. The growth of knowledge may justify a constitution of liberty, as the economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek believed, but rhetoric gives persuasive tongue to both liberty and knowledge. Free speech is more than merely parallel to free exchange. The liberal society is one that gets its rhetoric straight. The present text is a colloquium between McCloskey and eight interlocutors, and some of them with each other. It was originally conducted on a Facebook group devoted to the study of the book *The Dialectics of Liberty* over six days. Many participated, but eight engaged more fully.

*Poroi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis and Invention* is proud to present this colloquium as part of the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of The Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry at the University of Iowa. The participants are Winton Bates (independent scholar, Australia), Elizabeth Bissell (music instructor, Antioch, TN), Roger E. Bissell (research associate, Molinari Institute), Troy Camplin (Ph.D. Humanities, consultant, Camplin Creative Consulting), Philippe Chamy (interpreter/translator), Roderick Tracy Long (Ph.D. Philosophy, Auburn University, Auburn, AL), Kent Rainey Biler (student of Philosophy and Economics, University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE), Jason Walker (Philosophy, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, FL), and Deirdre Nansen McCloskey (University of Illinois, *emerita*, Chicago, IL). The colloquium was organized by Chris Matthew Sciabarra (Ph.D., NYU, Politics, Brooklyn, NY).

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<sup>1</sup> The argument was anticipated in McCloskey (1996).

## Day 1

**Philippe Chamy:** Splendid reading!

**McCloskey:** *J'admire beaucoup votre jugement !*

**Roderick Tracy Long:** I do have a quarrel with what McCloskey's chapter says about Plato's *Gorgias*, one of my favorite Platonic dialogues. One of the aims of that dialogue is to distinguish between two modes of speech – one that aims at truth and one that aims at power. Plato identifies the former with philosophy and the latter with rhetoric, thus drawing McCloskey's ire because she is a longtime defender of the importance of rhetoric.

**McCloskey:** Yes, Plato is charming, and *Gorgias* most of all. But we must not, I am sure you agree, love his eloquence so much that we fall for his authoritarian tastes, the tastes of an aristocrat hostile to democracy. I do defend rhetoric, and long have. My reasons are two: (1) It is the basis of a free society, as its inventors in Sicily understood, and, as the essay argues, (2) There is no “dialectic” that can yield Truth, capital T, only an honest rhetorical discourse getting agreed truth for the nonce. Both of these reasons are assaulted by Plato, everywhere in the writings we have.

**Roderick Tracy Long:** But in her critique of *Gorgias* she says that Plato is defending a *state-imposed* standard of truth. I don't see that in *Gorgias* at all. Maybe she is reading the *Republic* back into *Gorgias*.

**McCloskey:** Hmm. I suppose I am.

**Roderick Tracy Long:** But if so, that strikes me as a mistake. Plato's thought evolved over time, and not always for the better. But I see nothing in *Gorgias* that's favorable to state power; on the contrary, it seems to me to be one of the most magnificently anti-power things that Plato ever wrote.

**McCloskey:** Yes, perhaps I am allowing my distaste for the politics of his later writings (admitting that we don't *really* know the sequence of the writings) to color my understanding of the earlier ones. Yet the anti-power arguments, which I agree are magnificent, are interspersed with anti-rhetoric arguments, too, as though both, power and rhetoric, were the

same. He believes, and many of us do too, footnotes to Plato that we are, that there's a Third Thing, not power and not "mere" rhetoric, but Proof. True, the Proof is not, in *Gorgias*, conceived as imposed by the state. Later it is. Banish the poets.

**Philippe Chamy:** Perhaps the "state-imposed" standard of truth might have been directed more at what is going on today. I find it highly pertinent in light of our current "fake news" hysteria.

**McCloskey:** Yes, and not "merely" rhetorical in China, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, and then the usual suspects such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and on and on.

**Troy Camplin:** Aristotle argued that strong rhetoric requires you to demonstrate *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. What this implies is that if you are going to learn rhetoric, you have to learn not only to be logical/rational, but also to be ethical and to have empathy. This means a liberal education, rooted in teaching grammar, logic, and rhetoric, requires an education in ethics and empathy.

**McCloskey:** Yes. In Cato the Elder's phrase (Quintilian quotes it), the rhetor is "*vir bonus dicendi peritus*," the good man (and woman, dear: *mulier* as much as *vir*!) skilled at speaking. The trick then is to give content to "good." Plato, believing that there is a Good out there discoverable by your and Aristotle's logic, reckoned that no extra work on *being* good was necessary. Such was denied by later ethical thinkers of the classical, and modern, world: We call it "virtue ethics" these days.

**Troy Camplin:** Now ethics and empathy are hardly the same thing, as there are two sides of empathy, one of which can cause us to engage in very unethical actions.

**McCloskey:** Sure. One sort of unethical person is like Donald Trump, whose organ of empathy is broken. But an empathetic person—empathetic, for example, for the poor Hungarian nation, assaulted by Jews and Muslims, can be entirely lacking in ethical character. I would go beyond "engage in unethical actions" and recommend instead (as in *The bourgeois virtues*, 2006) that same ancient, and very modern, virtue ethics: develop a good character (*bonus*) and then act naturally. Action by action doesn't work. Context always matters. Thus, the Trolley Problem.

**Troy Camplin:** And we know that literature increases empathy in adults and in children in part by improving theory of mind.

**McCloskey:** Well, not always. It depends on context. To take an admittedly extreme one, a startlingly high percentage of officers in the SS had advanced degrees in the humanities

**Troy Camplin:** Indeed, as Aristotle pointed out, fiction/myth is more philosophical/ethical than nonfiction/history precisely because the latter only tell us how things are, while the former tell us how things could and ought to be. And when nonfiction storytellers try to moralize, it actually backfires—or, more accurately, it emphasizes the negative aspects of empathy. And yes, empathy does have a few negative aspects. For one, it can reduce utilitarian judgment.

**McCloskey:** I suppose so, but I would not make utilitarian judgments into an all-purpose ethical test, as I suppose you would not either. The “reduction” might be a good thing.

**Troy Camplin:** For another, strong empathy for your in-group means increased hatred for the out-group. Empathy feeds tribalism, while ethics and justice undermine it.

**McCloskey:** Yes, as I noted above.

**Troy Camplin:** Thus, an education in ethics undermines the negative aspects of empathy, and an education in literature increases the positive aspects of empathy, extending it to the Other (thus making us more moral).

**McCloskey:** I do not think reading *Ulysses* is an ethical education, and I’m not at all sure that even Shakespeare is. But I would go along with your argument if aligned with Wayne Booth’s notion of ethical and unethical books. Willa Cather *is* an ethical education.

**Troy Camplin:** One can argue that empathy is a part of the moral order, but it’s a mixed bag portion that has to be balanced out by other moral considerations. But both empathy and morality are important to develop in no small part because they help us live with others, and they help to moderate other social orders. Of course, *pathos* is more than just empathy. It also involves emotions. Meaning, a liberal education needs to educate people in their emotions as well. This is where an education in music and poetry

comes in. Indeed, music is one of the liberal arts, an education in modes and, later, in harmony, though found in the Quadrivium rather than the Trivium, mediievally speaking. But here we can see where they overlap and reinforce each other. And poetry contributes further by bridging music and the literary arts.

**McCloskey:** Now *that* is certainly true. I hope you have read Adam Smith's *The theory of moral sentiment*, which like the philosophers of the ancient Mediterranean, except Plato, speaks at length about ethical education, and the formation of a good character.

**Troy Camplin:** We can see then how deeply interconnected these aspects of a liberal education *are*. A moral education, gained through moral teachings and the arts, is a necessary aspect of getting a liberal education simply for the fact that it's necessary to most properly learn rhetoric. The same is equally true of gaining an emotional education through music and poetry and the other arts, to be able to develop the *pathos* needed to better learn rhetoric. And all of this is just to master rhetoric! The bottom line is that a truly liberal education is a necessary foundation for the creation of a liberal society, including a liberal economy. Free markets require people of good character, with good empathy, and who are logical. Contemporary education hardly supports these aspects of education, and too often undermines them.

**McCloskey:** At this I stood up and cheered! "Free markets requite people of good character." So I said at length in *The bourgeois virtues*.

**Troy Camplin:** I will note that liberal education must be rooted in grammar, logic, and rhetoric. (Not just these—I have mentioned the quadrivium, too—but I'm only going to discuss these three). If any are neglected, you do not and cannot have a liberal education. An education that excludes any of these will necessarily be an **illiberal education and result in an illiberal culture and illiberal society**. Many aspects of education today are postmodern, meaning exclusively rhetorical, meaning illiberal.

**McCloskey:** I believe you are mistaken. It is not the rhetorical education, such as it is, that makes people illiberal—as you yourself just argued a good rhetorical education can go the other way. And "postmodern" has nothing intrinsically illiberal in it. I myself am postmodern, and discuss the matter in some detail in *Knowledge and persuasion in economics*



(1994). I once argued (in a paper available I believe on my web site) that postmodern means simply anti-modernist, and the modernists are sons (mainly sons) of Plato, authoritarians who believe in One True Proof.

**Troy Camplin:** Almost all of our problems with education, from the general lack of knowledge to the rise of the social justice warriors, can be traced to this fact. Grammar and logic are both actively neglected, indeed outright discouraged. I have taught composition classes, and I know. I have been told explicitly not to spend more than a week on either grammar or logic, and most of the composition classes I have taught have even been titled “Rhetoric.”

**McCloskey:** Titled but not actually focused on *vir bonus dicendi peritus*.

**Troy Camplin:** Grammar is of course more than just grammar in the narrow sense of the term, though is most certainly must include that as well. Stratford Caldecott in *Beauty in the word* argues that grammar also includes *mythos* and memory as well. Indeed, he points out that the ancient Greeks understood the arts as being products of the memory. We have to have an education founded in memory, in stories, in understanding the deep relations among things. With grammar, we see that each and every sentence is really a little story, and thus we understand the narrative structure of our thinking itself, insofar as that thinking is rooted in language. More, what are we remembering but tradition? Thus, tradition is tied in with grammar. Caldecott points out that a grammar education (and grammatical world view) is what dominated in the pre-Enlightenment era. With the Renaissance and the rise of the Enlightenment, we moved toward a more logic-reason based education and world view. Logic, thinking, and knowledge are what came to dominate, with the resultant rise in science. Logic is unconnected with tradition, and an over-emphasis of logic can result in a rejection of tradition. Naturally, we need an education in logic, broadly understood, as it helps us better understand what is true (and to reject what in tradition is not true), but its over-emphasis unbalanced us and resulted in a backlash. Rhetoric emphasizes persuasion and it is deeply connected to community. What will persuade people? What will foster community? While Aristotle argues you need *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, if rhetoric becomes overly dominant, it is typically *logos* which suffers (especially if it is logic which is specifically what people are reacting against). And while stories are typically used to persuade and create

*pathos*, those stories are inevitably unconnected to tradition (or outright reject tradition). *Ethos* becomes emphasized over everything, which gets expressed in the postmodern world as 'I am good because I oppose racism and sexism and homophobia, so you should listen to me and do as I say.' While the first may be true (I think it is, anyway), the latter doesn't necessarily follow. More, it gets reversed such that people think that 'Because I am good, I am right,' meaning that if they are right then you are wrong, and if you are wrong then you are not good, and if you are not good you are racist, sexist, and homophobic. More, that *ethos* is based almost entirely on *pathos*, meaning how the person feels about something is what matters. This is where the social justice warriors come from. The danger is that we react against rhetoric in the same way and return to either a pure grammar or a pure logic. Indeed, there are some indications that we are returning to a more grammatical way of viewing the world with complex systems theory. The good news is that complex systems theory is also a logic based on that grammar, and it is a recognition of the necessary fact of community in all things as well. A recognition of deep structures fostering ecological rationality in the creation and maintenance of community at all levels of reality is precisely what systems theory, or spontaneous orders theory, is all about. To understand the world this way means we necessarily must start receiving a liberal education. A liberal education prepares us to understand the world as deeply complex, interactive, and interrelated. Each of the parts of liberal education contribute, but when they are individually emphasized at the expense of each other, education becomes deeply illiberal. Which is why education (and our societies) seems to swing between liberalism and various illiberalisms. Rarely do the three liberal language arts come together to reinforce each other, but when they do, we get a renaissance. Our current illiberal society is dominated by rhetoric. We need to reunite it with grammar and logic (and of course the other liberal arts) to rebuild our educational systems and renew our world. Now you may wonder if one can have a "mere rhetoric" without logic and grammar, and even without *ethos*, meaning all *pathos*. What else is Trumpian rhetoric? (One can point to others, but it's a recent, obvious example.)

**McCloskey:** Agreed.

## **Day 2**

**Troy Camplin:** I also think we miss a lot of things in Plato by (1) assuming Socrates speaks for him (we make the same mistake

regarding Nietzsche and Zarathustra), and (2) failing to do a full literary analysis of his dialogues, paying close attention to the actions of the characters as well. One of these days I'm going to write a book on Plato's *Phaedrus* that lays out my understanding of the work that I expect a good two or three people to read. Indeed, Plato has Socrates distinguish between “true rhetoric” and “mere rhetoric” in at least one of the dialogues.

**McCloskey:** My view is that to get deeply into Plato one must have Greek to a quite high level—which I for one do not. I remember a colleague in Philosophy at Iowa who taught Plato without having it, and I was always astonished that a serious academic would do so. But one relevant point about his Greek I do know. Plato was misled by the distinction in Attic Greek between the {certain, admired, actual} *seeing*-form of indirect discourse “I *saw* John going downtown” and the {merely, rhetorical, easy-to-dismiss} *hearing*-form “I *heard* that John is going downtown.” I believe—but have never troubled actually to find out by going through Plato’s Greek sentence-by-sentence—that it led him to suppose there is an obvious distinction between truth and mere rhetoric, seeing and merely hearing.

**Troy Camplin:** There is a great deal of research out there regarding the role of complex literature in increasing one's morals. It's less about the content than the complexity of the works, though I would tend to think that content has a role as well. The fact that one can point to exceptions to the rule (or, in some cases, seeming exceptions, as they do not agree without own morals at the present time) doesn't disprove the rule. Other factors can be in play as well in the formation of a person's soul.

**McCloskey:** Do you know Wayne Booth’s *The company we keep*? Wayne cannot be doubted as an advocate for liberal education. Neither can I. But we know too many examples of amoral masters of “complex literature” to be so sure as you are that the “great deal of research” is conclusive. I was a graduate of the Summer School of Criticism and Theory in 1988 when it was at Dartmouth, at the very height of the controversy over Paul de Man’s youthful fascism, for example.

**Troy Camplin:** My issue isn't with rhetoric alone, but with rhetoric exclusively--or grammar exclusively or ethics exclusively, etc.--as creating an imbalance that pushes people toward

illiberalism. There is a rhetoric-only postmodernism that's very popular, and very illiberal.

**McCloskey:** But there is in my neck of the woods also an anti-rhetoric-only *modernism* that is very popular and very illiberal, and all the worse because it handles the levers of power. Crazy professors of French are less of a threat, I think, than crazy professors of economics. Though crazy French professors of economics are perhaps most dangerous of all.

**Troy Camplin:** There's also a morality-only postmodernism that has its own illiberal outcomes (one could view much critical theory and the hermeneutics of suspicion as morality-only postmodernism). I'm not a pure critic of postmodernism, but really a post-postmodernist who makes use of much that's good in postmodernism. I'm also a post-post-structuralist (a post-structuralist structuralist). My concern is with an excessive focus on one or the other of the Trivium at the expense of the other three, and I'm pretty sure you agree that all three need to be in balance.

**McCloskey:** Certainly, the trivium and indeed the quadrivium, too, in modern forms are just the ticket for a liberal education. But I repeat that liberal education does not have political *implications*, no *entailments* (to speak of logic; I am sounding here like my friend and former dean, Stanley Fish). What we do need for ethical development, if the child in question is not lacking the ethical synapses entirely, is wide experience combined with the intellectual tools to make something of it self-critically.

**Troy Camplin:** Coincidentally, I consider Hayek to be fundamentally a post-structuralist and postmodernist, and I'm a huge fan of his work (and yours, of course—I can see *The bourgeois virtues* on the bookshelf from my computer at the moment). So don't mistake any criticism of some particular aspect of postmodernism as a blanket criticism of postmodernism! As for myself, I am a truths-as-strange-attractors post-postmodernist, seeing postmodernism as a needed corrective, but not the answer, either. Overall, for me the issues are exclusivity and imbalance. I wouldn't want a rhetoric-only education (which I see too often) or a morality-only education, or a grammar-only education, and I wouldn't want a rhetorical education focused only on *ethos* or *pathos* or *logos*, either. All need to be in balance. Sweet talk, yes, but it has to come from a sweet person as well—and make sense!

**McCloskey:** What you are describing is the ideal of General Education in a Free Society, in which the kids take rhetoric (in, say, English) and morality (which would surface in a good course in social science, but also in philosophical or religious ethics) and grammar (seen as a ruled system, thus mathematics, analytic philosophy, and especially elementary [that is, finished] physical science).

**Troy Camplin:** Let me quote James Nichols (1998):

While it is easy to denigrate the art of persuasion, most obviously by contrasting its possible deceptiveness with the truth of genuine knowledge, science, or philosophy, one should never forget the fundamental political fact that human beings must coordinate their activities with other human beings in order to live well, and the two most basic modes of such coordination are through persuasion and by force.

One may note that during periods of high rhetoric, polities tended to be the most stable and freest, while in times when rhetoric degraded, it degraded along with the people's liberty as well.

**McCloskey:** Thus the time after the Sicilian tyrants in which the study of rhetoric was invented in Greater Greece. But Nichols doesn't grasp that "the truth of genuine knowledge, science or philosophy" is a will-o'-the-wisp. He needs to read more Kuhn (and Feyerabend), more James (and Rorty), and more Booth (and McCloskey).

**Philippe Chamy:** I have renewed my deepest respects for rhetoric and the *logos*, thanks to your essay, for which I thank you. It seems to me that rhetoric, as it is practiced in court for example, accepts the idea, within certain established rules and limits, of manipulating or distorting reality consciously, for the sake of defending a client, for example. This is considered fair at court, even if it does involve a certain amount of exaggeration and minimization and even falsification, because there are lawyers on the other side to offer rebuttals, etc. and there is a judge and often a jury. Dialectics, on the other hand, seems to be really different in both form and function from rhetoric. It seems that if one is lucky enough to engage in dialectics proper, one is much freer in the sense that there is absolutely no concern for making sure certain facts are not discussed or hidden or distorted, or for any type of calculation of advantage in terms of use of language. This is because there is no pre-conceived or fully conscious, fixed objective, such as

the defense of a client, or persuading someone to participate in some action—to sell you a house at a certain price for example. Without a fixed objective rhetoric stops, or never begins. Its initiation or continuation would be pointless. In dialectics, however, it seems (or feels) that it is the dialectic itself which carries the practitioner to a destination unknown (consciously) even to himself or herself. The practitioner has no ulterior (final) motive, so (en route) is intellectually free compared to the rhetorician, even bound by the dialectic, on the other hand, as though it came from an outside force, such as a *daimon*. Put in another way, the dialectician is possessed by a question which haunts him *or her* and pushes and pushes curiosity to seek and keep seeking until he finds personal truth—the end result of a quest which I suppose is also the Truth with a capital T. I am not defending authoritarian Truth though, of course. It is in this sense that each person is assumed to have (even if it remains buried) a purpose or a truth. The dialectic, if successful, eventually leads to deliverance from the possession (which is why it requires midwives like Chris). This is my impression from my readings in any case, so I am inclined to think that the separation between dialectics and rhetoric is firmly grounded, while you (Deidre) seem to suggest perhaps the separation has become too wide. Or do you maintain that there should be a fusion of the two? Your additional comments would be most appreciated. Thanks again for your illuminating essay.

**McCloskey:** Yours is an elegant defense of a distinction between persuasion and truth-seeking which I think has been overturned decisively since Kuhn and his masters and successors in the history, sociology, and even much of philosophy of science. Seminars in mathematics, to take an extreme example, are always and necessarily argumentative, taking a position that the four-color proposition has been proven, and defending it by the standard, which evolves (not always in a better direction). The original computer-assisted proof was controversial precisely because it used computers, a new form of argumentation in math. Again, I would cite the Blessed Booth: *Modern dogma and the rhetoric of assent* (1974). Or (to descend a level) McCloskey, *Knowledge and persuasion in economics* (1994).

**Winton Bates:** Deirdre, I enjoyed reading your contribution. The only part I disagree with in it is your assessment of poor Socrates, who gave his life for the cause of free speech. That question has been raised already, so I will turn to another matter.

**McCloskey:** I had the great pleasure a couple of years ago of hearing a Greek actor perform the entire *Apology* (in English) in Athens, on the very spot, as near as could be determined, where according to Plato's version it was first delivered! Socrates, again according to Plato (and not so much our other sources), defended discourse for sure. Whether a Greek could quite defend what we call free speech—for women? for slaves?—is not so certain.

**Winton Bates:** I agree that Adam Smith had a powerful argument in suggesting that the market is a form of persuasion. The point I want to raise relates to the ethics of how far we take such reasoning. How should we, as individuals, decide where to draw the line in using market valuations as a rhetorical device? The best way to illustrate what I am talking about is to quote from a lead article in a recent issue of the *The Economist*. The article, entitled 'A grim calculus,' discusses trade-offs between shutting down economies and saving lives posed by the coronavirus pandemic, but then suggests: "You can make a full accounting, using the age adjusted official value of each life saved. This suggests that attempting to mitigate the disease is worth \$60,000 to each American household" (2020). The article goes on to argue that the cost of the shutdown is far outweighed by the value of lives saved. My initial reaction was to be glad that the "age-adjusted official value of each life saved" wasn't estimated to be just \$20,000. It is easy to endorse this kind of rhetoric when it supports one's moral intuitions. On reflection, however, this kind of rhetoric, which balances the estimated monetary value of a human life against the cost of saving that life, is ethically suspect. Other people can exercise their right to engage in such rhetoric if they wish, but I refuse to join them. However, there is a dilemma. From a public policy perspective there is no avoiding trade-offs between lives saved and quality of lives of those who will have to pay to save them. It seems to me that it would be less offensive to construct arguments for or against shutdowns by making comparisons between different public policy decisions involving similar trade-offs. For example, it would be less offensive to be presented with a discussion of the opportunity costs implicit in public spending to save lives in similar medical circumstances in the past, or in preventing road deaths. You wrote in *The bourgeois virtues* about the immorality of the prudence only approach to economics that attempts to put monetary values on everything. I would be interested in your view of how such thinking should be applied to the rhetoric surrounding current public policy choices.

**McCloskey:** A lucid exposition of some of the issues. (I do not recommend *The Economist*, by the way, as economic education; it seldom gets beyond the conventional and is written by young smart alecks who know only the conventions.) A technical reply is that the value of life is not life-time earnings. My friend's life is a *public* good, too, which is to say that I would put a value on it, too, perhaps larger even than she herself would put on it (her valuation inferred, say, from insurance purchased by her, or a risky occupation entered). I agree with you that within one realm—say this highway off-ramp compared with another design—the cost-benefit calculus is sensible. I have written on “What Michael Sandel can't buy: Review of Sandel's *What money can't buy*” in the *Claremont Review of Books*. A longer version of the piece is available at my website, as is a deeper exploration of the issues, “Saving Private Max U.” I come to liberal conclusions, namely, that the wisdom of social engineers such as economists is to be doubted. Not cast away, but doubted sometimes when applied too widely, as I think you do.

**Elizabeth Bissell:** I enjoyed this chapter immensely. It was packed with logic, wit, and interest.

**McCloskey:** Another person of taste!

### Day 3

**Winton Bates:** Deirdre, thanks for the reference to your review of Sandel's book. I have read the book and agree with your critical assessment of it.

**McCloskey:** Sandel does not dig deep, which one would think a political philosopher should. He is satisfied, at least in this one book of his I have read (*What money can't buy*), with the most superficial appeals to playground “fairness.” I hope he does better elsewhere.

**Troy Camplin:** I've read a fair amount of Booth, and Stanley Fish would also agree that literature doesn't seem to make people more ethical—though they give mostly anecdotal evidence of it. The problem is that I think there's a danger of dehistoricizing and decontextualizing people when making these claims. For example, we find that many of the people in the humanities are Marxists. They are typically Marxists because they imagine “good people” are



Marxists, because Marxists care about the poor. The Frankfurt School and the Italian School Marxists tend to focus on culture and how to undermine contemporary culture to recreate the culture. Some interpret much of what they (and a number of postmodern thinkers) are doing as undermining values as such.

**McCloskey:** Agreed (though “anecdote” is evidence, too). The Marxist (or at least marxoid) academy will not learn about economics or economic history beyond the usual suspects repeating the thoughts of The Master. People like David Harvey, whom in some ways I admire, construe all *echt* economics after the 1870s as merely bourgeois propaganda. This is an intellectual fault.

**Troy Camplin:** The problem is that many of the “postmodern” leftists in the humanities close themselves off with their anti-value, anti-meaning, anti-responsibility, anti-truth deconstructed world view from such benefits as the humanities could bring them. We should not be surprised that such people are not exemplars of virtue, let alone wise. The Left, being generous with other people's money, but not their own, see theft as a virtue. These are, fundamentally, not good people.

**McCloskey:** Thus in Chile, a leftist goes to a high-end restaurant and consumes a high-end meal, with very expensive wine. When the check comes, he starts shouting that *those* people over there, those capitalist running dogs, should pay, and walks out. It actually happened. The BBC tried to arrange a debate between me and Thomas Piketty, but Piketty would not do it. If such an event happens, I am going to inquire politely what he has done with his massive royalties from his books, which sit on coffee tables worldwide for virtue signaling. If it turns out he gave a good part of it to the poor, I will take him more seriously. I tithe in my church, giving 10% of my income to my Episcopal church to distribute competently (as I would not know how to do) to the actual poor. I am not a saint, just a normal Christian liberal. Part of the theory of hard Marxism is precisely that such acts merely prop up a corrupt system (the system that has increased the real income of the poorest of the poor in places like Japan and Finland, since their miseries of 1800, by about 3,000 percent).

**Troy Camplin:** But that is not necessarily the fault of the literature they are reading, or even of the humanities as such -- at

least, not all of the work being done in the humanities, anyway. At the same time, one could counter by simply asking whether or not most people who read a lot of literature are racists, sexists, homophobes, or any of a number of things we would consider immoral. If humans are naturally these things (with culture reinforcing them), it seems odd that so many in the humanities would reject racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Yet what else does literature do but put us in the shoes of the Other? How many people in the humanities have read stories of people of different races, ethnicities, religions, beliefs, sexual orientations, genders, etc.? Through this empathetic entering-in of the Other through literature we are made more moral.

**McCloskey:** I agree. Through reading of the Other in books Keats (n.d.) declared,

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen.

You will find conservatives railing against the flood of memoirs, which seem to embarrass them. But memoirs, like foreign travel and wide acquaintance, make us better, because more understanding of the Other.

**Philippe Chamy:** Well, seems like the Dialectic has been dethroned in one fell swoop by a *coup d'état* (or Kuhnian Revolution) instigated by Rhetoric. So long beloved Holy Grail of Truth. Please ask dearest Deidre what we are supposed to do with those who claim to be the Masters of the Method to Truth because they are Masters of The Dialectic. Off with their heads? Is there not a single place at the table of the new paradigm of Rhetoric for them?

**McCloskey:** I realize that you are angry about something I said, but I cannot quite grasp what it is. I have a long history of defending rhetoric, yes? The “dialectic” I don’t regard as an engine of Truth is Plato’s, after he fell in love with geometry, not the commodious sort of the title of the collective volume from which my essay came. It could also be called simply rhetoric, if the word were not so dirty in many people’s eyes.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** I don't want to speak for Deirdre McCloskey, but I think that in her exposition she's operating with a much narrower definition of "dialectic" here than is enunciated in the wider anthology. See here, for example:

<http://www.differencebetween.net/language/the-difference-between-rhetoric-and-dialectic/>

Her contrast between rhetoric and dialectic harks back to that representation. But when one looks at the larger point of her essay one sees that she is fully in keeping with the dialectical sensibility of this collection of essays. Note that her very proposition that "rhetoric and liberty are doubly linked" is itself a "dialectical" proposition in the way that this anthology defends: She is saying, in essence, that *in the wider context* rhetoric and liberty are reciprocally reinforcing factors in the creation and nourishing of free societies.

Moreover, the notion of "rhetoric" that Deirdre develops goes beyond that of the "unilateral process" of "persuasion" that is depicted in the ancient view. From where I sit, she is embracing a highly contextualized or "dialectical" view of "rhetoric" wherein the "give-and-take" of "persuasion" is echoed in both free speech and free trade, each a reciprocally reinforcing element of the other. She even compares this explicitly to the highly dialectical Habermasian notion of the "ideal speech community," stating that, "Liberty depends on—indeed is the same as—Habermas's ideal speech situation. Liberty has a rhetorical definition. It is why liberty of speech and liberty of expressions analogous to speech, such as offers of money or burnings of flags, are foundational" (2019, p. 161). For McCloskey, "good rhetoric" is "a matter of establishing *ethos* and in other ways persuading each other to cooperate" nonviolently, akin to the dialogical give-and-take that is one aspect of how *we* see dialectics in this volume.

**McCloskey:** Well said!

**Philippe Chamy:** Chris Matthew Sciabarra, now is the time to bring out the big guns of Rhetoric against Deidre—your head is at stake!

**McCloskey:** Huh?

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Philippe Chamy, not at all! She came to this volume because she implicitly accepted its contextual foundations. That's why she's in the volume! I think my head will still be firmly attached in the aftermath of this discussion of her very worthwhile contribution!

**McCloskey:** Yup.

**Roger E. Bissell:** First of all, Deirdre is an awesome writer. Stylistically, she's my favorite of the collection by a wide margin. (Sorry, guys; you're all wonderful, too, but she's magical!) Secondly, I agree with Chris that however a person \*labels\* what they refer to (as "dialectics," "logic," "rhetoric," "scientific method," "Socratic method," "dialogue," whatever) what matters most deeply - for this volume - is that a writer has a multi-faceted perspective and dogged pursuit of the truth rather than a narrow ideological bias that squeezes away inconvenient facts. On the *formal* side, we have distinguished between dialectics as a theoretical approach, dialectics as a set of particular techniques, and dialectics as one's actual methodological orientation and analytical approach of aggressively keeping the context of whatever one is investigating. This third aspect of dialectics as a discipline is dialectics as ACTUAL context-keeping, dialectical method IN ACTION. (None of this is the same as "the dialectic," which is the unfolding of a process of conflict-resolution, tension-release, whether in an intellectual controversy or a social-economic-political conflict between two or more parties. Not to mention the further extension into biological or even physical processes of resistance-change. "The dialectic" is on the *material* side, the side of *what* is studied or critiqued rather than *how*. There's plenty of each to go around in the volume. All we hope is that people won't needlessly get confused as to which, if not both, is the main focus in a given chapter—and if both are involved, in what ways each is involved. When we get to my chapter, I'll address this issue again in my introductory remarks. But back to the "star of the show." Deirdre is very adroit both at working from a dialectical orientation (of wide-scope context-keeping) and at zeroing in on "the dialectic" as it unfolds in economic and social and political reality. And with the kind of rhetorical and stylistic panache I could only dream of wielding.)

**McCloskey:** Again, well said!

**Philippe Chamy:** To Roger Bissell I reply, Well, I tried to woo her to say something nice about dialectics; if you read me you must have seen that I left her many tenders. And, I got roundly and firmly rejected. She even persuaded me to reject myself. I did get "Elegant," of which I am extremely proud! But no place on her dance card nonetheless. Myself, I would be quite afraid of trying to foist the label of "dialectic" on someone who has shown in her own life a decidedly dogged determination to label herself, all by herself, without any mansplaining, and against all odds. But I wish you

luck. In the meantime, I am calling myself a rhetorician until and unless Madame Deidre says something nice about dialectics.

**McCloskey:** I am still not getting your drift. And it's OK to mention my gender change, but here I do not see its relevance.

**Roger E. Bissell:** To Philippe Chamy I reply, I solidly concur with what Chris said above about Deirdre. He pointed out her arguing for a strong linkage between rhetoric and liberty. This is very similar to Ayn Rand's case for the deep tie between freedom of speech and economic and political freedom, and Chris has tagged this as clearly dialectical as well. And, for the Q.E.D. on this, Rand would not comfortably have accepted the label of "dialectical" for this (or any of her acute analyses) any more than Deirdre would. But as Chris notes, it is not what someone calls themselves or accepts as a label, but the sensibility and approach they bring to their subject that matters in the context of this volume. We are most fortunate and pleased to have Deirdre's (and everyone's) contributions to this exploration. And unlike Rand, who would surely have held the Sign of the Dollar in front of us to ward off our invitation to be part of the fun, Deirdre graciously accepted. Now, how about we discuss the actual contents of her essay, eh? This "meta" stuff is not going to go away soon, but in only four short days, Deirdre's chapter will.

**McCloskey:** Ayn Rand worries me. She was decidedly uninterested in—indeed, fiercely hostile to—dialogue. Her epigones such as Murray Rothbard followed her lead in this.

**Philippe Chamy:** In reply to Roger Bissell, The lady, or rather, in this case the man, . . . .

**McCloskey:** *Surely* you're not using the gender-change card?! This January 2020, I replied in a published letter to the editor to one Schmitz who had attacked my liberalism in a prominent essay in the constative Catholic magazine *First Things*. He insisted on calling me "he" throughout. Witty, eh?

**Philippe Chamy:** . . . doth protest too much methinks. The essence of her essay is a defense of rhetoric against and in opposition to dialectics. Are we not discussing this? Or do we just pretend that this frontal and total attack did not really happen? If we minimize this attack on dialectics it seems we would be engaging in rhetoric. It would be highly disingenuous to then later insist that dialectics in fact never ignores the context.

**McCloskey:** I am still not getting it. Perhaps it is because in economics I face Platonists (Platonists unaware, of course) who are convinced that a “scientific method” they heard about in high school chemistry is a machine for arriving at Truth. That’s my complaint about an ancient conviction, initiated by Plato, that there is a Method analogous to geometric proof, which he called dialectic, and which many 17<sup>th</sup>-century enemies of rhetoric (Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Newton) believed they were using.

**Roger E. Bissell:** In reply to Philippe Chamy, We have already discussed it, at increasing length. But the essence of her essay is not an attack on dialectics. It is a DIALECTICALLY SENSITIVE argument for the deep linkage between rhetoric (free speech), capitalism (economic freedom) and political liberty. We are trying to get PAST labels here, if you would be so kind to acknowledge and engage accordingly. Your point is taken that there is a secondary labeling disagreement. As for the “the man doth protest too much,” I hope you’re referring to me, otherwise we’re going to have to call Security on this.

**McCloskey:** Please, no muscle here! My motto is, If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

**Philippe Chamy:** I reply to Roger Bissell, Deidre has not even answered my question yet and you already want me to shut up because “we have already discussed it at length.” That strikes me as rather authoritarian, and I am beginning to see more clearly why Deidre associates dialectics with authoritarianism. Well, my dear Roger, all you have to do is mansplain to Deidre—not me—that she is a dialectician unbeknownst to herself, like M. Jourdain, and get her to concede that this is really her True Identity, and I will not only concede, but will be in awe of your dialectical method. You will have earned the title of King of the Method to Truth. I tried to get her to say something nice about dialectics and failed. Your turn. Unlike Rand, she is far from dead and also unlike Rand she will willingly engage you. May the best wizard with the best method win! And also, just because you let her into the collection of essays does not mean she is not a Trojan horse. *Caveat emptor*. And good luck.

**McCloskey:** I still do not know what is in what I said, or have said for nearly forty years now, that evokes such heat. (By the by, it’s DeiRdre. Without the R it is coded in Northern Ireland

(too small to be a country, too large to be an insane asylum) as Protestant.)

## Day 4

**Troy Camplin:** Aristotle, in agreement with Plato, contrasts rhetoric and dialectics. Plato has Socrates argue that dialectics is personal and is what he practices in the *agora*, while rhetoric is what orators practice and is intended for a mass audience. From this perspective, this discussion comes closer to approaching dialectics as practiced by Socrates. A written essay or a written dialogue has more of a hybrid feel to it than does a speech intended for the public. It is public, in a sense, since anyone can read it, and yet the more one engages the text the more “conversational” it is. A well-researched text is also something of a dialogue, as one engages other thinkers, agreeing and disagreeing and expanding on their thoughts. And yet, it's also more like a speech, since you have an audience who isn't really able to ask you questions, but who are either going to be persuaded or not.

**McCloskey:** Accepted, and a useful reminder, which I had forgotten. But Plato does appear to think that his logic chopping settles the issue.

**Troy Camplin:** A Platonic dialogue is thus a synthesis of dialectics and rhetoric. This is something which Plato himself of course understood. And while dialectical thinking has itself evolved so that the single thinker, contemplating in his or her den or library, attempts to engage with as many perspectives as possible and to take in as full a context as possible, and finally to synthesize as much as possible, there is a lack of eloquence in the final product that Socrates claimed to have himself. Ironic as Socrates may have been, we only have to read a handful of contemporary scholarly essays to see how un-ironic that lack of eloquence has become among too many scholars. I, too, am guilty of this in my own scholarship—and without excuse! While I do tend toward a rhetoric of clarity when possible, I do not write as beautifully in my essays as I'm capable of writing.

**McCloskey:** When I went from college to graduate school, I noticed my style sharply deteriorating, because in graduate school I was committed to truth—whereas as an undergrad I could merely be eloquent and get a good grade.

**Troy Camplin:** I acknowledge the proliferation of meanings in my poetry—interpretation should proliferate meanings in a poem's analysis—but the intention of dialectics is to discover the truth of things. Are these not in conflict? Perhaps not. If we understand that we can and cannot step into the same river twice, we can begin to understand that the proliferation of interpretations results in the creations of eddies, swirls around an absent center of truth we cannot ever realize but may perhaps be able to recognize as through a glass, darkly. No rhinoceros, for example, is or could ever be a perfect specimen. All actual rhinos only ever approximate the ideal rhinoceros—some are closer, some are father away from that ideal, whatever that may be, or could ever be understood to be. This inability to ever reach True Rhinocerosness, though, shouldn't imply there's no such thing as a rhinoceros! Each actual rhinoceros is but another step into the river, another swirl of being emerging and dissipating once again.

**McCloskey:** The thought is Platonic, the ideal. And splendidly poetic. Wallace Stevens (n.d.) made a related point, though instead focusing (correctly I think) on the incommensurability of language and the real, instead of positing an idea to which language approximates:

And when she sang, the sea,  
Whatever self it had, became the self  
That was her song, for she was the maker.

(Stevens uses the word “maker” twice, and as classically educated knew well that “poet” comes from Greek for “maker.”)

**Troy Camplin:** Which is true of physical objects like rhinos must surely be even more true of such “things” as freedom, justice, beauty, ethics and morality, and even truth itself. Each are contextual and historical and particular and universal simultaneously—particular instances creating a strange attractor, an absent center one can never reach, and which attracts and repulses simultaneously, the tensions necessary for their continued existence. A justice without the injustice and unfairness of mercy is an unjust justice, and we need to realize that it's the tension between justice and mercy which creates true fairness and allows us to live in a just world.

**McCloskey:** You and Plato are what the medieval philosophers called “realists.” Realism is fine for practical



uses, though it does tend to be used as a weapon against harmless “relativists” like Stevens and Rorty and me.

**Troy Camplin:** Equally, beauty is unity in variety and variety in unity (see Francis Hutcheson), and both are necessary for something to have beauty. That beauty—at which virtue aims—is a foundational aspect of freedom, justice, ethics and morality, truth—and rhinoceroses! The dialectic seeks the unity; rhetoric seeks the variety; and yet, dialectic seeks to persuade each particular individual, while rhetoric seeks to persuade the masses. But humans are neither islands nor masses, but rather are socially constructed individuals always already social and thrown into a social context. How, then, can we not most forcibly persuade with a synthesis of rhetoric and dialectics? And how can we possibly reach truth when beauty is truth and truth, beauty—and we aren't writing the truths we seek to bring to light in the most beautiful ways possible?

**McCloskey:** My ears perked up when you said, “Dialectic seeks the unity.” It is that tendency to “unity,” universal truth, that worries me, not because I do not believe in universal truths (here is a probable one: all even numbers are the sum of at least one pair of prime numbers), but because the universality is so routinely used as club to beat on people who believe that discourse should be open and friendly. I agree with your very useful point about a mass audience and a one-person audience, a speech and a dialogue. But I do not see how anything persuasive can be un-rhetorical.

**Winton Bates:** It is interesting that while Aristotle is searching for the truth about the topics he discusses, he is also engaging in an effective (soft sell) form of rhetoric. By recognizing different points of view at the outset, he seems to be more persuasive than he would be if he presented his own view without providing context.

**McCloskey:** Spot on. The same is true of the Divine Doctor. Aquinas will say “Cicero says thus and such. The Philosopher [viz., Aristotle] says buzz buzz. I say NNNN.”

**Philippe Chamy:** She refers to an actually historically existing canon of dialectics, which she rejects, and she does not reference any historically existing dialectical canon which she approves of specifically. Which historical dialectic (aside from your “commodious” one, which is not part of the canon yet) does she agree with? Agreeing to the label dialectician in your context does

not count (though clearly she is) because there is a wider world of scholars and writers in which she operates. I don't see that in any of her comments she has said anything at all in favor of dialectics. The question worth exploring is the reason why she prefers the label rhetoric.

**McCloskey:** If you understand me to be saying that Plato claims to have a dialectic method that is to be contrasted with rhetoric—even though, as Winton Bates just correctly put it, a dialectic entails a rhetoric—then you will see why I don't like it, as fake news about rhetoric. Socrates uses an *elenchus*, say. All right. Why is it not rhetoric? Of course it is talk meant to persuade, as all argumentative talk is, in this case by using a wrestling move to embarrass the opponent in the opinion of listeners, and maybe even to get the opponent to realize her error.

**Philippe Chamy:** This is an important question and I feel we are sweeping it under the table in panic. I read Deirdre to say, in answer to my original defense of dialectics, that since Kuhn dialectics has been thoroughly discredited.

**McCloskey:** Only if dialectics is understood as a dispositive method. I believe Plato thought it was, analogous to the geometry he loved, founding a “philosophy” which he contrasted again and again with the mere chatter of the marketplace and the democratic assemblies such as the Areopagus and the law courts. If dialectics is understood as serious, rigorous, thoughtful conversation, then I certainly have no objection to it at all, though observing that it is rhetorical, as all persuasion must be. Not dispositive. Not slam bang. Some things are, for the nonce, for instance the parallel postulate. Until in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in mathematics it was not. What is crucial is

our ability to engage in continuous conversation, testing one another, discovering our hidden presuppositions, changing our minds because we have listened to the voices of our fellows. Lunatics also change their minds, but their minds change with the tides of the moon and not because they have listened, really listened, to their friends' questions and objections. (Rorty, 1983, p. 562)

If that's dialectic, three cheers for it.

**Philippe Chamy:** In reply to Chris Sciabarra, I think Deirdre’s defense of rhetoric against the old dialectics, which is not your dialectics, Chris, is EXTREMELY worthy of exploring, and this exploration does not imply a rejection of your dialectics. I already knew that free speech is tied to a free economy. I DID NOT know there was an argument in favor of rhetoric as against the dialectic, so for me this is fascinating. Interminable chants like mantras about context keeping and the value of dialectics in general are the dead horse for me. But I will keep my peace.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Philippe, Deirdre noted that she was aiming SPECIFICALLY at a Platonic version of dialectic, which is not what we have laid out in the introduction to the book. I agree with Troy that Aristotle, too, contrasted dialectic and rhetoric, but Aristotle saw rhetoric as “an offshoot of dialectic ... a branch of dialectic and similar to it.” For him, “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art.” It is crucial to the mode of exposition. It is an aspect of dialectical method that takes into account the interests and concerns of the audience (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.2.1355b27-28, 1.2.1356a25). And I don't think we're engaging in chanting a mantra here; you'd be surprised just how poisonous context-dropping is to social inquiry. It is rampant throughout the social sciences, in some instances, proudly adhered to in the name of “specialization.”

**McCloskey:** Yes. I am an economist by training, carefully trained to ignore and disdain politics, sociology, literature, philosophy, history, anthropology, and anything else what would disturb the narrow “dialectics” of an economics violating the sweet and learned practice of its founder, the Blessed Adam Smith.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** And it has led to terribly one-sided, one-dimensional defenses (and attacks) on human freedom, which is, of course, precisely what the contributors to this volume are exploring...contextually. Every contributor to this collection comes to it from their own specific context. But they would not have joined in as contributors if they were not comfortable being placed within the Big Tent that *The dialectics of liberty* constitutes. How anyone defines themselves (be it Troy as a dialectical materialist or Deirdre as a rhetorician, etc.) helps us to grasp where they might be coming from in the larger “canon” that we have described as “dialectical.” Each brings their own “take” to the centrality of dialectical method in the defense of liberty. Ultimately, every contributor accepts the

central premise of the volume: That our understanding, defense, and nourishment of human freedom depends upon the larger context in which it is embedded. In essence: \*CONTEXT MATTERS\*. The volume unites all the contributors on this essential, distinguishing characteristic at the heart of a dialectical "sensitivity." I truly, honestly, and sincerely do not know what else to say on this topic or how many other ways to say it.

**McCloskey:** I say. Hurrah!

**Philippe Chamy:** Chris Matthew Sciabarra, I think that being a good rhetorician and a polite person, Deirdre will never directly reject your version of dialectics. Being true to herself, though, she rejects the label as it is used everywhere else except here. My original comment to her was to get her to point out at least something about dialectics which she accepts. I was surprised to have gotten what I read to be a total rejection. Specifically, since she said that since Kuhn dialectics is discredited. However, I think that deep down she is against all dialectics and rejects all versions of it even as she makes an exception out of love for you. I agree with context keeping, your work and the work of the contributors is very important, I agree with that too. I repeat from an edit above in case you missed it: I already knew that free speech is tied to a free economy since I read Rand; I did not need to wait for Deirdre to tell that to me. I did not know there was an argument in favor of rhetoric as against the dialectic, so for me this is fascinating. I honestly and sincerely think she is inviting us to relabel ourselves. Too bad it's treated as a hot potato.

**McCloskey:** I am puzzled that about this we are so wound up and apparently wounded, too. (Is there anything more insane than English spelling of vowels?) Surely it is an uncontroversial point—yes, after Kuhn—that science is rhetorical. We tried in the conference in the early 1980s at Iowa that eventuated in the Red Book on *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (McCloskey *et al.*, 1987) to get Kuhn to admit that he was a rhetorician. He wouldn't bite. A few years later we gathered to Iowa the Strong Programme gang in the sociology of science, mainly British, and tried it on them, too. No dice. But I suppose there is no one here who denies that science and scholarship and marriage and sports talk and faculty meetings are rhetorical.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Philippe Chamy, you are wrong about Deirdre. Sorry, friend. I had extensive phone conversations

and email correspondence with her, in which we went through many of her essays to come up with a piece that she would expand on for the purposes of this volume because she found great value in its central thrust. She was fully committed to this project and its theme. We had no relationship or interaction prior to this anthology. The love grew out of our interactions working toward a common goal. She certainly didn't need our volume to make a name for herself; if anything, we were honored that she accepted our invitation and graced our anthology with such an eloquent essay. But at no point did I ever believe that she was simply being polite in contributing to the volume. At no point has she ever expressed any rejection of this anthology's dialectical core—whatever her criticisms have been of other approaches to dialectic.

**McCloskey:** My mother certainly taught me to be polite. (She, at fully 97 years of age, is listening to NPR upstairs right now in my sister's house in Bloomington, IN, where during the plague I occupy the basement.) But she also taught me to tell forthrightly the truth as I saw it, which has gotten her and me into trouble all our years. The truth is I fully support the idea of a contextual dialectic.

**Philippe Chamy:** Chris Matthew Sciabarra, to be clear, I fully understand that Deirdre is a dialectician as you define it and that she values your work and this work. Out of love is meant in the sense, for the love of this project.

**McCloskey:** Well, both. *Amor omnes vincit.*

**Kent Rainey Biler:** I just finished catching up, and this chapter was my favorite so far. Isn't the false dichotomy of Dialectics as opposed to Rhetoric a form of Dualism and not Dialectical Inquiry itself? I would think they're not necessarily opposed, but interdependent and intertwined. For instance, the rhetoric of Chris Matthew Sciabarra convinced me that Dialectical Inquiry was worth its weight in gold, and I in turn convinced my Marxist friend Joshua Rector that it's indeed applicable to Libertarianism. I don't believe that Ms. McCloskey is opposed to Dialectical Inquiry *per se*, just that she understands the importance of persuasion. As for addressing McCloskey directly: Ms. McCloskey (can I call you Aunt Deirdre?).

**McCloskey:** I am honored.

**Kent Rainey Biler:** My friend has this saying that he considers an “Iron Law.” It goes like this: “A perfectly crafted argument is no different than a gun to the head.” Obviously, this chapter deals with what constitutes coercion, so I’m just wondering how exactly you’d respond to such a statement?

**McCloskey:** Your friend is deeply mistaken, and you must in friendship exercise all your rhetorical skills to get him to realize how terribly childish, ignorant, authoritarian such a notion is. Once sweet persuasion is defined as coercion, coercion is made OK. Remember the Anti-fa woman a few years ago calling on the men to come over and expel a journalist from their rally: “We need some muscle over here.” It’s like talking about “verbal rape;” it devalues the horror of actual, physical rape. Consult Booth, *Now don’t try to reason with me*, or some pages of mine in *Why liberalism works* (2019). We need a word for real, physical coercion. That your friend is merely embarrassed that he can’t actually find an argument against, say, Milton Friedman does not mean that Milton (the mensch) was coercing anyone.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** I would agree completely that it is a false dichotomy if interpreted in the way: “Aunt” Deirdre uses “rhetoric” and the way I and my co-editors (and many of our contributors) use “dialectic.” And I would go further. I would say that the kind of Platonist “dialectic” that Deirdre criticizes is the same kind of “dialectic” that I criticize in the first chapter of “Total Freedom,” which as she says is very much rooted in the “synoptic” tradition of Plato.

**McCloskey:** Agreed.

## Day 5

**Troy Camplin:** I suppose one could ask the question of any relativist: relative to what? Even the physical example I gave of rhinos posits each actual rhino is a relativistic realization of an absent center that cannot itself ever be actually realized. How “realist” is something that is inherently unable to exist?

**McCloskey:** So I guess you are not an enthusiast for the Idea of a rhino? Welcome to nominalism, namely, as Humpty Dumpty said, that we are the masters, that is all. I recur to

Wallace Stevens' "The Idea [note] of Order [which we impose] at Key West" (n.d.).

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
... tell why the glassy lights,  
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there, ...  
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea, ...  
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.  
Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
The maker's rage to order words of the sea.

Our rage.

**Troy Camplin:** I posit, too, that everything is always changing and in movement (one can and cannot step into the same river twice—Heraclitus). Everything changes relative to everything else. There's no solid ground, but only ever-shifting sands over which there are ever-flowing streams. Rhinos as a kind of animal emerge as an eddy in the stream and will one day disappear. That's hardly universal—but it can have a degree of durability, of duration that is not insignificant. Here in the cosmos, there is nothing that is eternally, universally true; rather, we find everything to have different degrees of duration—even the laws of physics.

**McCloskey:** It is the little word "is" that does the work here (shades of Bill Clinton). Listen to the physicist Niels Bohr in 1927: "It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how nature is. Physics concerns what we can *say* about nature." We. Say. With words. About categories involving philosophical and ethical analysis. The German poet Rose Ausländer (n.d.) wrote,

In the beginning  
was the word  
and the word was with God  
And God gave us the word  
and we lived in the word.  
And the word is our dream  
and the dream is our life.

We dream of categories, in our metaphors and stories, and with them we make our lives, especially our scientific lives. It's ethical acting. The good person skilled at speaking.

**Troy Camplin:** But from our human duration, that's long enough and true enough. From our limited human understanding, though, it can all be overturned tomorrow as we come to different understandings (overturned? perhaps more accurately, turned into special cases). Regardless, we continue to find certain patterns of behavior emerging at different levels of complexity, and I suspect that the cosmos is better understood than known—the poets understand just as much, but in a different way, from the scientists (especially when those poets are internally-externally consistent and truly want for everyone what they truly want for themselves).

**McCloskey:** On Easter Sunday (Christ has risen indeed. Halleluia!) I of course agree that “poets” (makers of words, such as the New Testament) “understand just as much,” or more. Again, Wayne Booth, who said once that a possible answer to the question What is the Life of Man is, “A babe was born in Bethlehem.” This from a lapsed Mormon.

**Troy Camplin:** What, then, does the scientist do? Try to understand things of sufficient duration that those things create patterns in the cosmos, including the human noosphere. Shifts in understanding create shifts in focus and meaning and value, which never actually fully overturn the past, adding instead layer upon layer upon layer, beautifying and complexifying our understanding. Is this “realism”? Is this “relativism”? I suspect that the realist would accuse me of relativism just as the relativist accuses me of realism. Both, simultaneously, is an option. What's what we makers of meaning do.

**McCloskey:** But your talk of increasing the layers, you will agree, is the conventional talk of physical scientists of little philosophical or rhetorical sophistication. And they certainly think of themselves as realists. Yet I accept, and largely agree with, your pragmatic position.

**Troy Camplin:** I think Plato is getting a bit of a bad rap when it comes to his position on rhetoric. It's a much more complex position than many give him credit for having. For example, if we take Plato's *Phaedrus* (which I have taught several times in several rhetoric classes), we see Socrates criticizing a piece of rhetoric presented to him by Phaedrus, which Phaedrus is praising as being a wonderful example of the art. (Coincidentally, the structure of Plato's *Phaedrus* seems to parallel that of Euripides's *Hippolytus* [whose stepmother's name is Phaedra], and there may be something in the meaning of Plato's dialogue we can garner from



that fact.) Yet, what is presented is rather dull and uninspiring. It's actually a terrible piece of rhetoric! Socrates then makes the same argument, but much more beautifully and persuasively. He then flips it and makes the opposite argument, just as beautifully and persuasively. Then, he goes on to argue that his argument for and against love are in fact the same argument! Part of the problem with the original piece of rhetoric is that it's not particularly persuasive. It's not really all that well-written, and it's uninspired. (It is lacking in spirit—a spirit which fills Socrates in order to create his own arguments.) Where's the passion? Where's the enthusiasm (being filled with the gods)? It's nowhere in the original piece, and those elements are why it fails as a piece of rhetoric. What Plato criticizes in *Phaedrus* is poor rhetoric, not rhetoric *per se*. Poor rhetoric doesn't actually convince anyone, or only convinces a person long enough for someone else to come along and present at least just as weak an argument. Shall we all just flow with the wind? Or should we at least try to reach some kind of understanding about ourselves and others, about what makes us virtuous people among other people within our cultures and societies? Does it matter whether or not we should love the lover, or not love the lover? (Or, as Socrates suggests in suggesting both arguments are the same argument, are things more complex than that?)

**McCloskey:** Oh, I don't think there is any question that Plato despised rhetoric, along with all the other practices of democracy, and claimed that he was devising a Method (philosophy, dialectic, geometry and all the other precursors of, say, modern logical positivism, and modernism more widely). That Plato was himself a better rhetorician than *Phaedrus* (in the dialogue which I, too, have taught many times, with John Nelson in Political Science at Iowa, and with John Lyne of Pitt when he was at Iowa) is merely a case of Cicero's joke that Plato was a great rhetorician in attacking rhetoric. Plato's brilliantly persuasive appeals to a *mythos* (which he attacked when Homer was doing it), such as the parable to the cave, points the joke.

**Jason Walker:** I will only add this much: My study of Plato has convinced me that almost everything he puts in the mouth of Socrates should be taken with a grain of salt, in that he uses a lot of dramatic irony with his dialogues, and it's not uncommon to find Socrates contradicting himself from one dialogue to another. In this instance, *Gorgias* is kind of a funny dialogue, in that while Socrates lambasts rhetoric, he uses it himself, just as in other dialogues, he rejects poetry while being poetic, and rejects myth and storytelling

just before telling elaborate stories about how the afterlife is supposed to work. I get the impression that Socrates, if he were alive today, would be the kind of guy who'd perform a rock ballad warning listeners about the dangers of rock music to the youth, and just after shredding through a guitar solo complain bitterly that guitar solos undermine any artistic value to rock.

**McCloskey:** Yes, which is why Plato has such a hold on our imagination down to the present. Alfred North Whitehead noted that all of us, if philosophically inclined at all, are merely footnotes to Plato. The hold is especially tight among the more sophisticated (note the word) among us. Such people, being playful foxes rather than somber hedgehogs, delight in the trope of tropes, irony. I recently wrote an essay on the economist Joseph Schumpeter in which I noted his heavy use of irony to protect himself from criticism, taking both sides simultaneously, which disarms anyone who takes one side. It's a way of being witty, and he uses it massively. Another case is an old essay by the economist Robert Solow on so-called "production functions" (I discuss it in *The rhetoric of economics*). Solow announces at the outset that he believes both that they exist and that they don't. Ha, ha. How can anyone resist such charm?

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Synoptic versus Contextual Unity. This is a two-part point addressing a very important point raised by Deirdre with regard to the dangers of so-called "dialectical" unity when it is viewed through what I have called a "strict organicist" or "synoptic" lens. In my contribution to the volume I distinguished among strict atomism, dualism, monism, and strict organicism. I have argued that the Platonist view of dialectic was marred by strict organicist (or synoptic) premises—for which I believe Aristotle corrected in his own magisterial presentations of dialectical method in *Topics* and elsewhere, arguing not for a 'synoptic' unity, but for an understanding of the larger context by a continuous variation of one's "point of view" on any issue under consideration. And yet, the strict organicist understanding of 'unity' has, throughout intellectual history, often contaminated approaches that had legitimate dialectical elements as I have defined them: the emphasis on grasping the 'whole' through its constituent parts and their relationships among one another, made transparent by varying our vantage points and the levels of generality on which they are viewed, both systemically and dynamically, and so forth).

**McCloskey:** Yes, for example in biology one can view life from a strictly microbiological viewpoint, or from the cellular viewpoint that has been so dogmatically asserted since DNA, or from the whole organism, or from the ecology in which organisms float. In economics, what Chris is calling “strict organicist understanding” causes economists to demand that everyone should think only of individual behavior and add it up, rather than thinking of the whole market, say. I am writing a book that will appear from the University of Chicago Press in the fall of 2021 attacking such dogmatism, which one finds for example in the fashion for “behavioral” economics.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** All of this reminds me of a discussion in *Total freedom* prompted by a very important issue raised by one of our members, Lester Hunt (who has been very supportive not only of my work but especially of *The dialectics of liberty*, for which he has provided a wonderful endorsement on the back cover). I will just cut and paste the relevant sections of “TF” to illustrate the very real problems with ‘organicist’ (or ‘synoptic’) unity in contrast to ‘contextual’ unity, the first certainly lending itself to the kind of authoritarianism that Deirdre—and, I suspect, most of us—find abhorrent:

Somewhat less surprising is the anti-collectivist stance of such individualists as Rose Wilder Lane and Ayn Rand, both of whom railed against strict organicism. Lane rejected the “beelike” view of “human society as an organism,” for “[i]n the human world, there is no entity but the individual person.” Rand repudiated all attempts to reify the concept of “society,” which cannot be viewed “apart from its members.” For Rand, “‘society’ ... is not a separate, mystical entity .... You cannot claim that you have a healthy forest composed of rotting trees. I’m afraid that collectivists cannot see the trees for the forest.” But Rand also lamented the “[t]he rapid epistemological degeneration of our present age---when men are being brought down to the level of concrete-bound animals who are incapable of perceiving abstractions, when men are taught that they must look at trees, but never at forests. (Sciabarra, 2000, pp. 164-66)

It is ironic that Rand the individualist was herself criticized by some for having projected a kind of strict organicism in her evaluation of people who belonged to her so-called Inner Circle. Rothbard satirized the Rand “cult” in his one-act “morality play,” “Mozart

Was a Red.” He depicts the cult leader as somebody who could allegedly grasp a person's inner life by an assessment of their musical tastes. “Your taste reveals your musical premises,” says the cult leader, “[b]ut the system of premises interconnect, on a deeper, and therefore on a more important level.” Rothbard gives humorous form to what Lester Hunt has identified as “the problem with the totality.” Like Walker, who indicts Rand's cultic “totalism,” Hunt suggests that “the habit of seeing everything as connected with everything else ... would tend to give [us] other habits, ones that tend to be very unfriendly to liberty.” Since Hunt believes that this problem might be endemic to "dialectical" thinking, he is worth quoting at length:

Suppose I notice that you have made a mistake of some sort. To the extent that I have the habit of thinking in totalistic terms, I am apt to think there is a great deal more wrong with you than this one mistake. This will be true whether the mistake is moral, aesthetic, or philosophical, whether you are attracted to a person I find unworthy, or do not adequately appreciate the music of Rachmaninoff, or have wrong views on the problem of free will. At the very least, you are ignorant of the logical import of all the truths that support the idea you have rejected or the virtue you have failed to show. Worse yet, if I expect your thinking to constitute an organic whole, then I will suspect that your error will bring with it many other ideas, ones that must also be faulty somehow. On such a view, there will not be many small mistakes, and harmless ones will be far between. But in that case, people who appear to me to make mistakes—that is, people who disagree with me---will be ones that I find unwelcome and undesirable. If this is true, then I am that much less likely to show the virtues of civility and tolerance. But these virtues are an essential part of a free society, because they require me to act in such a way that I leave others free from irrational pressure to subject their way of thinking to mine. (Sciabarra, 2000, pp. 164-66)

**McCloskey:** This is all very good stuff. It explains why when we disagree with each other, as I did most strongly with my sister Laura this very morning about the basic integrity of George Bush II (I took his side, despite his disastrous errors in Iraq), we tend to suppose that there is some deeper fault in the other person. In science and scholarship, if Professor A disagrees with Professor B, she will therefore be inclined to suspect deep evil in B and will stop talking to him. Why talk to Hitler? Thus Nancy MacLean in *History at Duke* wrote a

disgracefully calumniating and unscholarly book about the economist James Buchanan, and now refuses to speak to anyone who criticizes her, because such people are obviously “conservative” (they are not) or “racists” (they are not, though she accused Buchanan of being one, in part *because he came from Tennessee*), and anyway such evil people teach at universities that the Koch Foundation has supported (e.g. Duke).

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Synoptic versus Contextual Unity (Part Two):

If we inferred something about the totality of a person's character from the vantage point of a single aspect (for instance, a person's like or dislike of Rachmaninoff), this inference would be an instance of context-dropping. It would amount to the reification of a single aesthetic response as a whole unto itself, not merely one moment of a complex totality. In order to evaluate the meaning of such an aesthetic response, one would have to know a lot more about the context of the responder, about those experiential, emotional, psychological, and social factors that influence the formation of a person's sense of life over time. That sense of life, so important to aesthetic response, as Rand herself says, is deeply personal. Attempts to elevate one's aesthetic judgments to the level of dogma and to use them as guides by which to evaluate other peoples' characters can only create a stultifying, authoritarian environment. So Hunt is correct; totalism is *not* friendly to liberty or tolerance or civility. But "the problem with the totality" is only a problem when viewed in strict organicist [or synoptic] terms. There is no "problem with the totality" in dialectics. The totality must be viewed *contextually*, for that is the only \*human\* way of understanding it. (Sciabarra, 2000, p. 166)

**McCloskey:** A splendid line of thought. The “aesthetic” word is correct. In a novel, for example, the writer has to line up the characters as consistent wholes just to keep the thing from becoming a confusing jumble. But people are inconsistent, and often the most consistent along us, such as Lenin, say, are properly viewed as monsters. George Orwell noted that the Hindu-saintly Gandhi was willing on three occasions to let his family face starvation rather than eat meat. Orwell was arguing against saints. St. Catherine of Siena starved herself to death at the age she supposed Jesus died by confining her

eating to the host. (McCloskey, D. N. (2006). Humility and truth. *Anglican Theological Review*, 88(2), 181-96. Surely you subscribe.)

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** I make an additional point with regard to Karl Popper's own critique of the synoptic canvas cleaning of the social engineers who acts as the "artist [who] clamors, like Archimedes, for a place outside the . . . world on which he can take his stands" (Sciabarra, 2000, p. 94). But the world always continues to function, even as the artist tries to remake it. I cite another one of our contributors and members, my friend Dave Prychitko on this point, who argues in a Popperian-Hayekian vein

... that we cannot 'break with the whole of tradition' or 'leap outside time and history.' He highlights Gadamer's lesson, that '[w]e can question everything ... but not all at once .... As opposed to critical scrutiny from some exterior, utopian position, our task must be "based on immanent criticism," as Hayek so characterized it. (Sciabarra, 2000, p. 94 n. 18)

**McCloskey:** Gadamer's remark reminds me of the remaking while under sail of wooden warships, which always had plenty of carpenter's mates and the spare parts for them to work, an image used also by Otto Neurath of the Vienna Circle, and called "Neurath's Ship." You can't rebuild the whole ship all at once, but you can erect a new mast or permanently plug a gash in the side, ending up in effect with an entire rebuilding.

**Chris Matthew Sciabarra:** Hunt warns that if such totalistic thinking is something entailed in dialectics then dialectics may be inimical to liberty. In this regard, Hunt's critique mirrors Popper's view that the emphasis on totality is the methodological moment of political totalitarianism. The critiques of Rothbard, Walker, Hunt, and Popper are more accurately leveled against strict organicism than against dialectics. The confusion is not unusual, for, as the history of dialectics shows, thinkers such as Plato and Hegel internalized a tension between totalism and contextuality. Theirs is a struggle between a longing for the divine and a human need for comprehensiveness, a struggle that well illustrates the distinction between strict organicism and dialectics.

**McCloskey:** Bravo!

**Troy Camplin:** Is there only a single set of conditions under which one will come to prefer Rachmaninoff over Mozart, or vice

versa? That seems unlikely. We know that we can have two superficially similar systems with quite different underlying architectures. Different experiences can give rise to the same outcomes. One of my favorite anecdotes that occurred to me personally and involved an interaction between me and the poet-philosopher Frederick Turner, under whom I took classes on poetry writing and on beauty and who was on my dissertation committee. I had had him in the class on beauty, so the two of us had gotten to know each other and our world views. In fact, our world views are very similar, from aesthetic tastes to our support for free markets to our religious Omnism and our Darwinianism. In the poetry writing class I had with him, he started the class by asking us to share our backgrounds. To begin, let me share Turner's background. This is an important thing to understand for the anecdote. Frederick Turner is Scottish and is the son of the famous anthropologist Victor Turner, meaning Fred grew up in Africa for many years. His parents were Marxist atheists, but later converted to Catholicism. Fred's brother helped invent the MRI. Fred has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature several times for his sci-fi epic poems. He has the equivalent of a Ph.D. in literature from Oxford. So when Fred asked us to share our backgrounds, this is what I said:

I was born in South Bend, IN, but grew up in rural Kentucky. My father was a coal miner with an 8th grade education and my mother was mostly a housewife, with a high school education. I was raised in a fundamentalist Baptist church, but I majored in recombinant gene technology at Western Kentucky University. After getting bored with biology while working on my Master's, I dropped out and took undergraduate English classes in preparation for a Master's in English, which I got at the University of Southern Mississippi.

I was at the time working on my Ph.D., so naturally I didn't need to mention that, which was in progress. So when I finished with my background, Fred leaned up over the table and said, "How on EARTH did the two of us come to the same conclusions?!?" We came to the same mental states because different pathways can lead to the same outcomes. That's a fact of complex systems. Fred came to the same conclusions about free markets as I did, though he came from a background of Marxist atheist scientists while I came from a background of fundamentalist Baptist coal miners. Now, if two people from such diverse backgrounds can practically share an entire world view, surely there are more than a few pathways to get one to Rachmaninoff.

**McCloskey:** What a wonderful and illuminating story! (Second cousins of mine [once or twice removed], by the way, built Gary, and stayed to work in the mills.) As I said, humans are “inconsistent,” if that means “not following, say, a Marxist theory that class position determines thought.”

**Roger E. Bissell:** Here is my final benedictive comment on Deirdre's chapter, which I enjoyed very much: One of the most satisfying things about it was her clarifying explanations of some of the things liberty is NOT. Imagine if Chris, Ed, and I had titled our volume, “*The dialectics of being rich and powerful*” (Dahl and Lindblom). Or “*The dialectics of rotating democratic rule*” (Aristotle). Or, my personal favorite, “*The dialectics of not having to cope with the persuasive power of the vigorous arguments of others*” (too many anti-libertarian types to mention). It would have been a far different book—far less worthy and far less promoting of genuine human political freedom—if we and our authors had embraced any of these false idols. The other thing, near and dear to my heart, is the theme of her chapter, persuasion/rhetoric as the link between free speech and a free economy. This says it all, “Free speech is more than merely parallel to free exchange” (McCloskey, 2019, p. 150). Indeed. It is the communication channel for free exchange, whether of ideas or of material goods and services. Libertarians, Objectivists, and others have long been adept at exposing the false alternative (even 50 years ago only very roughly definitive of “liberals” and “conservatives”) between civil liberties and economic liberty and showing how they are inextricably linked. Deirdre is a formidable expositor of the true alternative: freedom (voluntary interaction, persuasion) vs. force.

**McCloskey:** Thank you, Roger. (And for the word “benedictive.”) I am working now on a paper connecting free will as understood philosophically and theologically with, again, free markets. And thank you all very much for getting me back into my beloved rhetorical studies. I regret not going to Alta anymore (Is it still going?)

**McCloskey:** Yes.

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