

How to be Human – Though an Economist. Deirdre McCloskey. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2000. Pp. 287. Cloth \$59.50, Paper \$16.95.

Many readers will know that Deirdre McCloskey, the former Donald McCloskey, underwent a profound and controversial life change a number of years ago. It was in 1976 or thereabouts. That was when she stopped doing economics and instead devoted herself to telling the rest of us how to do economics. Now I have nothing personally against methodologists. I have friends who are methodologists. And McCloskey may rightly claim to be the world's brightest star in methodology. But I am afraid that those who appreciated the works of the brilliant decade McCloskey had as an economist, when confronted by this collection from her last decade as a methodologist, can but regret that decision.

The book organizes 48 short essays and book reviews, many from her column in the Eastern Economic Journal, into fifteen sections, which are the rules for doing economics. Rule 7 is thus "Learn to Write at Least Competently." This rule seems to be immediately violated by the title of Rule 12 "And Don't be Silly about A-Prime, C-Prime "Proofs" in Economics, Either." But you get the flavor. The intended audience is the young economist, who are to be saved from the vices of the middle-aged men who dominate economics and brought "back to science" through Aunt Deirdre's womanly truths. The truths, insofar as they can be put into slogans are: pay attention to how you write, don't use t-tests, no existence proofs, no blackboard proofs, listen to women, and get some love into your analysis. The rules reflect, like strata in an archeological dig, the issues that have occupied McCloskey in the last twenty years. These successive layers of concern are not harmonized in any way, for this is gonzo methodology. You visit an issue, lay out some stuff, stir them up, move on. The latest strata, the "Aunt Deirdre" persona (p. 235), seems forced. Aunt Deirdre commands those boy economists to feel the

transforming power of love as women know it. But in McCloskey's hands love is just another cudgel to club the boys with.

It is not that McCloskey is incapable of being entertaining and informative. When the Gods handed out gifts they gave her enough eloquence, style, and panache that whole cities and tribes must have been rendered mute and dull. There are some very engaging pieces in this collection, such as her appreciation of that old crank Alexander Gerschenkron. It is not that economists are doing just fine, and need no reproach. McCloskey is right that economics today is mainly a vast waste of human energy. McCloskey is right that the most praised forms of the discipline are often the most stunningly pointless, if the end aimed at is to make statements about the world. McCloskey is right that in economics it is better to be smart than to be right.

But we all know that when the Gods give great gifts they exact a price. The price they extracted from McCloskey was to also give her an ego that is at least the match of her talents. That ego has survived her gender transformation completely intact. There is nothing wrong with a little ego and self-promotion, especially when allied to wit. But in this work ego and self-promotion is a constant and monotonous drum beat. "Come", she cries, "hear the story of Deirdre. I alone battle the entire economic establishment. Watch me administer hand-bagging to Nobel laureates."

But the picture of the struggle over method in economics that McCloskey presents, Deirdre versus the Nobels, is too Homeric. Economics is not a monolith. There are many divisions, many factions. There are people quietly doing work that is impeccably "scientific" in every sense that McCloskey could desire. These people are not standing over the battered body of Ken Arrow howling their triumph (see pp. 238-9). But they are having more practical effect on the direction of economics than McCloskey ever will. The pointless work that Deirdre so

rightly abuses will always exist. How could it be otherwise? There are in the USA alone over 15,000 faculty in Economics departments. There just are not enough issues to keep 15,000 people occupied if they were constrained to deliver empirically testable propositions. Further, despite McCloskey's complaint in her book title, economists are human, all too human. And humans want not just love and connection, they also want to have fun. Ingenious deductive methods and rococo theoretical variations establishing nothing are fun. Or at least more fun than tedious, plodding work that results in some not so remarkable truths about the economic world.

"The Rules" stated by McCloskey, "t-tests out, love in," cannot function as a practical guide. For she offers no exemplars of interesting and sound work. All How to be Human offers is a superficial ranking of well known economists on the McCloskey scale: the good Nobels versus the bad. Amartya Sen we learn is a good Nobel. Why? Because he reminded economists that "we live in an ethical universe" (p. 62). And that's as much as we get on Sen. A quick search through the 500 names listed in the index yielded only one person under age 40. And that name is there because McCloskey cited her joint work with this student. Did economics end sometime in the 1980s, or did McCloskey just give up reading it? I know lots of young economists, none famous, whose work has taught me interesting things about the world within the last year: Maristella Botticini, Brian Jacob, Adriana Lleras-Muney, Marianne Page, Gary Richardson, Hans-Joachim Voth, Marianne Ward, to mention names at random. Most of these people have attractive jobs and are well on their way to their first BMW. McCloskey's readers, presented with his bleak strictures, would have no idea of these possibilities. So this reviewer would replace McCloskey's 15 rules for the young with one piece of advice. If you can say interesting things about the world using economics you will not starve. Of course, if you can also axiomatize them that BMW will be in the driveway a lot quicker!

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