

Identity, Equality, Freedom: McCloskey's *Crossing* and the New Trans Scholarship*

By Martha C. Nussbaum**

Deirdre McCloskey's *Crossing* ([1999] 2019) is a book of unsurpassed integrity and courage. Rereading It now, with its new 2019 Postscript, I am in awe, more than ever, of the personal fortitude it describes and expresses, as it narrates the professor's journey, against hideous opposition, from repression to freedom. I am equally in awe of the intellectual and emotional daring exhibited and expressed in the writing of the story. We all should examine ourselves, trying to sort out who we really are and what we stand for in life. But so few engage in this Socratic quest, or, if at all, only hastily in brief moments of crisis. For the most part we are content to slide along in our familiar social and professional categories. Particularly where gender is concerned, it is so much easier to accept social norms than to struggle against them. McCloskey's life, by contrast, has been an extended reckoning with the self in all its guises, first in the living of a life of personal searching and eventual defiant freedom, and then in the splendidly written telling of the tale, hilarious and terrible, the trenchant percussive prose summoning us not just to see and feel with Donald, Dee, and finally Deirdre, but also to search ourselves with as much comparable honesty as we can muster, as people not very used to such probing. Anything less would be to refuse to listen, one of the common failings the distinguished author of *The Rhetoric of Economics* (McCloskey [1985] 1998) most justly castigates.

My topic is the relationship between Deirdre's story and the recent flood of feminist and transgender scholarship that asks what gender is, what a woman is, and what trans women and trans men are.¹ I'll get there, though my quick answer is that Deirdre's courageous narrative is for the most part a benchmark to which the efforts of gender theorists can and should be held accountable, and not the other way round. In its subtlety and its multi-faceted wrestling with the self, Deirdre's *Crossing* makes most academic journal articles look flat. One and a half centuries after Schmolter and the so-called *Methodenstreit*, economics is still flat, eschewing the task of wrestling with the self. There is, I think, one big ingredient missing or, if present, underdeveloped, and I will dwell on this. But I've discovered that any even partially adequate reckoning with

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¹ I will be referring later to the contributions I consider particularly central and interesting.