

## Conversation with Deirdre McCloskey: Win-win-win-win ... lose

By George F. DeMartino\* and Deirdre Nansen McCloskey\*\*

Scientific judgment requires quantitative *judgment*, not endlessly more machinery. As lovely and useful as the machinery is, at the end, having skillfully used it, the economic scientist needs to *judge* its output (Ziliak and McCloskey 2004, 527).

GEORGE: My graduate education was mainly in Marxian political economy. Deirdre, hear this: I studied economics at UMass-Amherst on purpose – to escape *bourgeois* thought!

DEIRDRE: Some of my best friends are Marxist.

GEORGE: I know. People thinking “surely she’s joking” don’t know you very well. Yes, like many progressive economists, past and present, I did my doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Department of Economics specifically to immerse myself in the rich Marxian tradition of political economy.

DEIRDRE: I feel your pain. I swam a bit in some of the main currents of Marxism, though chiefly through assigned reading I got as a college student and then as a graduate teaching assistant. I was a casual Trotskyist, not politically active but “feeling the feels,” as the kids say today, singing Joan Baez, dreaming of solidarity. But I didn’t do the hard reading. I mean, I haven’t read *Capital* Volumes II and III.

GEORGE: At Amazon prices, how could the price theorist resist? Seriously, though, you are one of the biggest readers in economics today. And your writing, Deirdre, has led to an unintended consequence for me. Over the past decade this Marxian-trained economist has spent far more time reading McCloskey than Marx.

DEIRDRE: Winning.

GEORGE: (*laughs*) I certainly didn’t intend it. But as I turned my attention toward the ethical responsibilities of economists (DeMartino 2010), I found myself drawn to your work. So I hope you will consider me a most appreciative and respectful critic.

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