

Towards a “bourgeois” ethics. Liberalism, conservatism and communitarianism in Deirdre McCloskey’s work

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Abstract

Deirdre McCloskey’s intellectual profile combines transgender experience, Anglican faith and a formative background within the Chicago school of economics. She is the author of a trilogy titled *The Bourgeois Era* (2006-2016), in which she furthers an original analysis of the Industrial Revolution. She finds the causes of the enrichment of the Western world in the late XVIII century in the “revolution of ideas” generated by the spread of liberalism and a new “bourgeois” morality (as opposed to the “aristocratic” one, which characterized the *Ancien Régime*): it was this “change of narrative” that created the conditions for economic development. In this essay, I will show the connection between the ideas of the bourgeois trilogy and some traditions of modern and contemporary political thought, in order to show McCloskey’s contribution to the debate around neoliberalism. McCloskey, in fact, criticizes neoliberalism “from within”, that is, by means of the categories of classical liberalism, as a reaction to a “moral problem” of neoliberalism: she aims in fact to replace *homo oeconomicus* with communitarian ethics. However, I will also outline how the tension between free market individualism and moral communitarianism represents an unresolved dichotomy, undermining the author’s attempt to “humanize” the Chicago perspective.

Author information

Alessandra Antonella Rita Maglie took her Master’s degree in Philosophy in 2016 at the University of Turin. After her studies of Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil and Günther Anders, which constituted the focus of her Bachelor’s and Master’s thesis, her research interests have recently shifted from political philosophy to history of ideas. In recent years, she has developed an interest in gender studies, which has led her to studying the work and personality of Deirdre McCloskey. Her doctoral thesis is focused on McCloskey’s intellectual biography, within the line of thought of classic liberalism.

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