

# Review of: "Liberalism Caused the Great Enrichment"

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Many economists would take exception to Deirdre McCloskey's view of utility maximizing as presented in her opening paragraph. Specifically, Deirdre McCloskey writes,

"The agent in economic models does not have agency. He merely accedes to a budget line or to a law or to a custom or to a habit of thought facing his already known utility function. He does not create, that is, but reacts in requisite fashion. Human action, the liberated will, is absent. He is a vending machine, not an innovator, or not even an ordinarily choosy consumer exploring her tastes."

Many economists would respond that there is nothing in utility maximization that prevents people from valuing creativity and innovation. However, if utility maximization is combined with a materialistic view of reality, then McCloskey is correct – if people have no soul or spirit that can innovate, then utility maximization reduces people to "vending machines."

McCloskey's paper is not an attack on utility maximization per se; it is an attack on a materialistic world view. In contrast to a materialistic world view, if men and women are made in the image of a creative God (as presented in both Judaism and Christianity), then people would naturally get utility from creating. McCloskey's paper is an argument, based on economic history, for the human soul.

Towards the end of her paper, McCloskey emphasizes "Dignity, Liberty, and Prestige" from innovation – these three naturally flow from being made in the image of a creative, good God.

McCloskey could also have pointed out that the "vending machine" view of humans is inconsistent with guilt, shame, regret, and conscience. The fact that humans experience these phenomena implies that humans have souls. People are not just "vending machines."

McCloskey only briefly alludes to an extremely important implication of her paper for today's world. Five lines above the subtitle "Necessary Routines are not Sufficient Causes," she says "A university without free speech, for example, is a reproducer of dogma, not a maker of innovation." How will our future be affected by abolishing honor's classes, by stripping National Merit scholars of their awards or even knowledge of their awards, and by not insisting that every child knows how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide because individualism is racist? McCloskey's paper implies that the future will be destroyed.

There are some typos in the article that should be fixed. For example, one sub-title reads "Efficiency is not he point" and 14 lines above that sub-title it says "begun to flourish it Brtain."

