

The Concept of Gender Crossing in the Deirdre McCloskey's Theory

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Abstract: *This article explores the concept of gender identity of the famous American economist Deirdre McCloskey. The concept has three key elements: Firstly, gender identity does not directly refer to sexual orientation. Secondly, gender identity closely related with individual free choice is one of the most important parts of personal self-determination. Finally, the process of gender identity formation to much extend refers to symbolical social acceptance rather than natural qualities development. The paper concludes that McCloskey's concept represents yet another model of denaturalization of gender differences in contemporary philosophy, as in McCloskey's works sex is seen as a lifestyle, rather than as a physiological reality.*

Keywords: Deidra McCloskey; gender crossing; transsexuality; gender identity; homophobia; transphobia; social acceptance; denaturalization; gender existence; gender policy; humanomics; philosophy; behavior; sex manifestation; sexual orientation; self determination

Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower.

Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre, 2007, 23)

Introduction

The phenomenon of Deirdre McCloskey has a significant meaning for our time. Being a respected expert in economic history and theoretical economics, she has also been involved in a complex debate regarding the origins and nature of gender identity. The fact is that from birth to the age of 52 Deirdre was a male and was named Donald McCloskey. In spite of having been happily married for 30 years, and having had two wonderful children, Donald realized that he belonged to the female sex for most of his life. He dreamed that he would miraculously become a full-fledged woman since he was 11 years old.

The complex experiences associated with a sense of belonging to the female sex contrary to biological reality as well as experience of transformation (transition or crossing in Deirdre's

terms), that McCloskey had to go through in her life provided a basis for reflection on the ontological status of gender identity. Thus, the bold and sincere attempt of well-known scientist to understand and interpret the sex's nature cannot but attract the real interest of researchers.

As D. Raskov notices: “McCloskey is a powerful, brave and honest personality, straightforward enough, shocking and radical at times. From a certain moment McCloskey does not try artificially to separate her life and creativity, individualism often prevails over academic distance” (Raskov, 2015, xiii). In other words, the more personally coloured McCloskey's point of view is, the more valuable it is.

Before turning to the description of Deirdre's position concerning the essence of gender identity, it is necessary to say a few words about the basic theoretical framework on which McCloskey's arguments in economics are based and that made her well known and highly respected in the scientific community. McCloskey herself defines that basis as liberal values promoting unconstrained respect for the individuals regardless of their colour, origin, ethnic identity, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. Economic growth and prosperity cannot be achieved without realizing and cultivating the absolute value of the individual and absolute respect for the free will and the unique potential of every human being.

An inclusive model of society built on breaking rigid binary code, contrasting different groups of people for ages, provides the most favorable conditions for economic growth and progress. According to McCloskey's point of view, the growth in prosperity that has marked the modern era has as its source not the desire to accumulate capital but fundamental ethical attitudes leading to social statement transformation. Ever since the different oppressed social groups (woman, colored, gay, etc.) are not considered second-rate people and get their equal chance, “there appears absolutely incredibly creative and constructive society. There is no need to control them from above; you just give people the opportunity to prove themselves ...” (American professor..., 2016).

As Deirdre notes, capital formation is necessary for economics like oxygen. However, it is impossible to explain all changes in modern economics only by accumulation. “So, what was the cause of our wealth, if not capital accumulation? It seems to me it is due to unique economic ascent that began in Holland and spread further in other countries. It is associated with increasing self-esteem of ordinary people and *the spirit of freedom experienced by the inventors*. People began to respect the inventors, rather than control the economy. (McCloskey, 2013a, 40)

Based on the deep relationship between the laws of economics and ethical guidelines Deirdre McCloskey concludes that economics should be included into the more complex context of sciences dealing with human beings. In this regard McCloskey introduces a special term stating an inextricable connection of economic laws with universal human issues – humanomics (economics with human face). The future, according to McCloskey, belongs to that “humanized” economics: “it is the return of economic problems into a wider range of issues concerning the development of ideas and the change of spirit and values that can bring

us closer to an understanding of how the civilization that made us wealthy appeared and upon what principles it has proceeded.” (McCloskey, 2013a, 40).

Thus, in economic theory, McCloskey demonstrates the belief that overcoming the binary structure of society under the influence of liberal values is the condition for the growth of material prosperity because a lot of opportunities, early clamped in the grip of discriminating stereotypes, appear. In an unprecedented coincidence a conviction in positive potential of social inclusion had to be tested not only in theory of well-known economist McCloskey but also in the personal life of the biological man Donald McCloskey. From age 11 he has felt his own woman’s nature, regular dressing up as woman and dreaming to be accepted into woman society.

McCloskey represents that class of people who for many centuries did not get from western civilization an *equal chance* for respect, recognition and development of own potential. McCloskey says that ideas about gender identity were formed through fundamental clash of binary and inclusive civilizations, both in society and in Donald-Deirdre personal drama.

Thus, “gender” position of Deirdre McCloskey can be stated in three important postulates:

Gender identity does not directly refer to sexual orientation

One of the most difficult circumstances that McCloskey had to confront in the process of sex transformation is changes of people’s attitude. The fear caused by smearing of traditional binary structure of society that has a clear distinction between the male and female social roles, provokes cautious attitude towards people who decided to “cross the border.” McCloskey fully felt the consequences of this “*transphobia*” first of all, among the closest people.

The transformation of sex was preceded by the divorce from his wife and separation with two beloved children who did not want to continue to communicate. McCloskey’s sister did not accept his decision for a long time and actively prevented him from the gender change addressing to the police and mental institutions. The professional community, which could endanger the further development of McCloskey's academic career, turned out to be more tolerant and in fact Deirdre did not suffer any professional damage.

Found herself in the epicenter of social *transphobia* McCloskey understands that one of its most important constituent element is fear of gender “crossing” which identifies desire to change sex with homosexuality. The term itself, used to refer to people who have changed their biological sex, transsexual, refers to sexual relations (“sex, sex, sex ...”). Actually for this reason, Deirdre insists on more appropriate, from her point of view, term “Crossing” (“transition” or “crossing”) which does not have sexual connotations.

The first time McCloskey faced with the fact that in social consciousness there is no difference between homosexuality and transsexuality was during a conversation with a psychiatrist, which could more accurately be called interrogation because the verdict of

Donald's psychological sanity at the decision-making stage of sex change depended on the opinion of the specialist. It is rather paradoxical conversation. Young and obviously well-trained, by McCloskey's remark, psychiatrist asks Donald the following questions in a harsh manner: "Are you a homosexual? Have you ever had a homosexual experience? Do you wish to become one?" (McCloskey, 1998, 83). McCloskey is shocked by the irrelevance of the questions for the assessment of psychological sanity of the transgender and their inconsistency with the subject of research. "Doesn't he know the difference between homosexuality and transsexuality, who you love and who you are. This is a psychiatrist?" (McCloskey, 1998, 83).

Interpenetration of meanings of gender identity and sexual orientation is indeed substantial for classical social discourse. American philosopher Judith Butler explains it by using the term intelligible gender, defining indissoluble unity of sex, gender and desire. Traditionally male and female are opposed to each other under binary oppositions and, in fact, do not have independent content not referring both of them to contrary term with negation (male is not female, woman is not man). That is why heterosexuality is the confirmation and the necessary attribute of the male in the traditional culture or, at least, its noticeable demonstration: "to couple with woman in order not to be (or not looks like) a woman". Accordingly, "crossing" of man's identity must be associated with heterosexuality smearing.

However, Deidra McCloskey herself expresses extreme disagreement with this terminology confusion. On the one hand, the reasons why transsexuals and homosexuals are subject to similar criticism in the society are clear: people "don't want anyone to have a free choice if it is an unusual choice or if they don't understand it or it freaks them out" (McCloskey, 2013b, 2).

On the other hand, gender change and the change in sexual orientation can not be identified. "Stop thinking of gender change as being about sex, sex, sex. Stop believing the locker-room theory that gender changers are gay, and gays want to be women. Whom you love is not same thing as who you are. You can love your dog without wanting to become a dog. You can want to become an adult, as our kids do, without having much of an idea of what it's actually like to be an adult" (McCloskey, 2015, 1).

The above quotation, however, expresses not only outrage over the confusion of transsexuality and homosexuality. Another important problem is also touched upon here: transsexuals like homosexuals are perceived in society through the prism of sex. Traditional discourse does not consider them as people with unique preferences in love or identity, but rather as sexually anxious individuals who do not possess the usual human dignity at all or, at least, possessing them in an abnormal and perverted form. This fact can also be explained by means of the traditional binary code: dichotomy reasonable/sensory and mental/physical is an important part of usual dualistic paradigm of philosophy as well as male/female hetero-/homo-sexual. The overturning of the former cord is inevitable followed by the failure of the later one. It is either a reasonable heterosexual man or sensual effeminate gay.

The binary code sets the sensation scheme given above and believes it to be single option. The famous modern researcher of the phenomenon of homosexuality Francis Mondimor notes that if in ancient times Sappho was spoken of as “a poet who loves women”, today a similar heroine is more likely to be described as “a lesbian writing poems” (Mondimor, 2002, 26). In other words, the exalted epithets do not apply to those who decide to go beyond the legitimized binary system, which in itself devalues the person, denies their right to human dignity.

Gender identity closely related with individual free choice is one of the most important parts of personal self-determination

Gender identity is traditionally presented as a bio sex prolongation, and is defined by sex or represents some kind of manifestation of sex in society. At the same time, society assumes institutionalized mechanisms to encourage *correct gender* and to marginalize and stigmatize *incorrect* one that is inconsistent with bio constant. The deletion mechanisms (or shame mechanisms in Judith Butler terminology) are realized, according to McCloskey, by so called *gender policy* represented by psychiatrists who are assigned to check the individual choice for adequacy. However, to what extent is this intervention into delicate human choice acceptable? “We need to ask, - Deirdre confirms, - whether we want to invite psychiatrists to have power over all the comparably important business of life?” (McCloskey, 2000, 5). For example, the birth of a child is even more serious and irreversible process than sex reversal. How many parents go through years of psychological preparation for this important event? Getting married, choosing a career and buying a house are the significant events in life. Is it required to have long-term and costly psychological counseling and “adequacy tests” before them?

The psychiatric certification would evidently make life absurd for the same reasons that it is absurd in regard to gender crossing. “The psychiatrists don’t know anything worthwhile about having a child or buying a house or being a gender crosser, as most psychiatrists admit. And even if they did know, in matters not affecting other people’s rights, we regard ourselves as free individuals. The freedom question is, why not?” (McCloskey, 2000, 5). Deirdre McCloskey is surprised by the fact that psychiatrists have allowed themselves to become gender policemen instead of showing respect for the right of people to be who they want to be.

The very existence of a gender policy in the form of psychiatric certification, the mechanisms of social ostracism or transphobia shows that the original thesis of a traditional binary system is wrong. If gender were merely the form of bio dichotomy of male/female on social level, no mechanisms of deletion or shame would exist because of their complete uselessness. Gender police and gender policemen call into question both the strict biological definition of gender identity and the very unshakable “*natural*” basis of gender.

The process of gender identity formation to much extend rather refers to symbolic “social acceptance” then natural qualities development.

It seems difficult to understand this thesis in the context of the gender crossing related with sex reversal in fact. Deidre McCloskey belongs to that small group of people who, realizing their self-accessory with opposite-sex orientation, sooner or later undergo a number of surgical and hormonal interventions, changing their physiological properties. At first glance it seems that medicine invocation confirms the thesis about biological definition of gender identity: surgical interventions and hormones are necessary in order that the sense of belonging to the opposite sex would eventually become a kind of real basis and desire become reality. However, it seems to be not so easy.

Talking about what exactly gives a person a sense of belonging to a particular sex McCloskey comes to the conclusion that physiological properties are of secondary importance. Neither any property nor a whole set of features can make a person male or female. “Many men – McCloskey confirms - do not have penises, on account of war or accident or disease. This does not for most purposes make them less men. A man is a man because of his look and behavior, not because of what is secretly in his pants” (McCloskey, 2000, 5).

The same can be said about women: “You become a woman by being treated as one of the tribe. Nothing else is essential” (McCloskey, 2000, 2). It also concerns ethnic identity; a person is Dutch when he is perceived as a Dutchman. “You can be a masculine woman – McCloskey continues - as by some stereotypes many women are, yet still be treated as one of the tribe. No piece of conventionally feminine behavior is essential if the overall effect makes you accepted in the tribe. Biology is not decisive. The dialogue with other members of society about whether Deirdre was part of the women’s tribe has a personal side. Does Deirdre treat herself as a member of the women’s tribe? Am I a woman? Yes’ (McCloskey, 2000, 5).

Deirdre stresses that the process of gender crossing in the biological aspect can never be completed. All the medical trials that people undergo can not give them a complete identity with people from birth having properties of a particular sex. A person changing sex from male to female, will never know what it means to be a girl, or what it means to have two X-chromosomes ... Physiological transformation cannot be complete and it is necessary only to the extent that will allow an individual to integrate into the conventional space of the female community. The sacred “Welcome” is rather the door into woman life” (McCloskey, 1998, 6), it gives Deirdre the opportunity to feel herself “a woman among women” (Kumin, 1999, 3).

This symbolic acceptance into the society is what McCloskey has been lacking ever since Donald felt his belonging to the female sex. It was essential for him that his inner sensation was confirmed by his external perception by other people, rather than by certain physiological properties.

However, it remains unclear whether sex reversal can really be considered a matter of free choice. Does freedom depend on something? Or does the notion of freedom refer only to social constraints that can not and should not limit the opportunity of sex reversal if the person has internal reasons for it? McCloskey inclines towards the later – everybody is born with some natural endowments.

Regarding gender identity, they may coincide or not with physiological properties, but, nevertheless, they are really given. Any person should have the right for self-understanding and self-awareness that is given to him from birth unless it violates or restricts the rights and freedom of other people. “Why, then, did Deirdre join the women's tribe? - McCloskey asks, - The question does not make sense, because it asks for a prudential answer when the matter is identity. Asking why a person changes gender is like asking why a person is a Midwesterner or thoughtful or great souled: She just is. An identity is both made and not made” (McCloskey, 2000, 2). In the modern world, romantic and positivist ideas coexist together. They presuppose that we all have fixed, internal identity, and the only task for a person is to express it correctly. McCloskey does not agree with this statement, although she can not completely deny some internal predisposition to a particular activity, social role, etc. “We make ourselves, - Deirdre confirms, - which is our freedom as human beings. The romantic view does have something in it. You make yourself Dutch or American, a nurse or an accountant, a recluse or a social butterfly, piece by piece. But you have tendencies, which can be traced back to childhood. Anyone who has watched a child grow is impressed by the thrust of character. The dismal, fretful infant in arms will in 80 years be a dismal, fretful old lady. The cheerful infant will always be an optimist. No wonder people devised a word for it, the soul” (McCloskey, 2000, 2).

Conclusion

We do not have any fixed identity, but some tendencies can be traced from childhood and they should be respected and listened to. Man, making up his identity, works on his own inclinations and forms individual self. For example, Deidre recalls one case in Holland when a year after the beginning of the sex reversal she tried to explain to her friend the difference between a woman's and a man's gait. Deirdre could not remember the man's walk because she forgot it. (McCloskey, 1997, 117). However, for many years before crossing Donald had tried to create his manliness in spite of his desires, suppressing his femininity, becoming captain of the football team, a gentle husband for his wife and the father of his children. The individual is constantly in the process of self-creation but he is much happier if this creativity does not contradict some inner mystery determining our preferences.

Thus, the concept of gender in Deirdre McCloskey's theory proceeds from: firstly, the need to distinguish between gender identity and sexual orientation, if possible, taking both these significant characteristics of the person out of the context of “only sex.” Secondly, McCloskey proposes to consider gender identity not in the context of manifestation and awareness of one's physiological nature but in the context of free choice as one of the most important and necessary attributes of human existence. And, thirdly, Deirdre McCloskey eliminates the consideration of sex reversal from the sphere of biology, declaring this aspect

significantly less important in comparison with the symbolic acceptance into the group, which is the real goal of Crossing.

In other words, McCloskey's construct is one more model of denaturalization of sex differences in modern philosophy. Talking about gender differentiation in the context of gender crossing, Deidre McCloskey reveals the leading role of acceptance in the conventional domain of the reference group in sex formation as a lifestyle. Sex is no longer regarded as a given physiological property, as an unshakable natural basis for gender identity. In McCloskey's theory sex is the part of unique inclinations of the human soul, which we should develop step by step, forming our self-identity, becoming free and, eventually, a happy person.

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