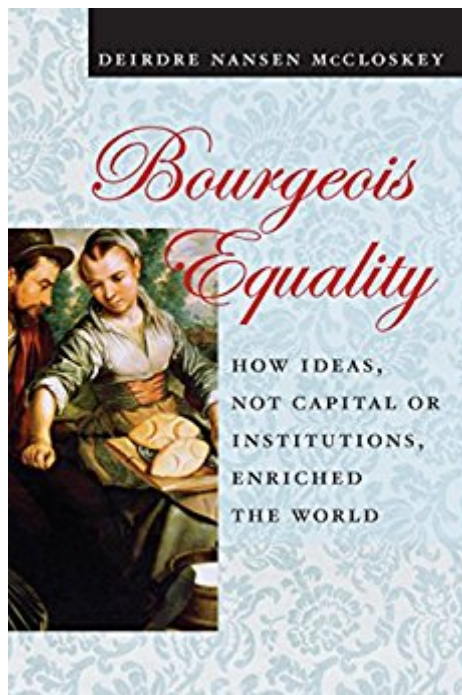




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Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital Or Institutions, Enriched The World



Synopsis

There's little doubt that most humans today are better off than their forebears. Stunningly so, the economist and historian Deirdre McCloskey argues in the concluding volume of her trilogy celebrating the oft-derided virtues of the bourgeoisie. The poorest of humanity, McCloskey shows, will soon be joining the comparative riches of Japan and Sweden and Botswana. Why? Most economists—from Adam Smith and Karl Marx to Thomas Piketty—say the Great Enrichment since 1800 came from accumulated capital. McCloskey disagrees, fiercely. “Our riches,” she argues, “were made not by piling brick on brick, bank balance on bank balance, but by piling idea on idea.” Capital was necessary, but so was the presence of oxygen. It was ideas, not matter, that drove “trade-tested betterment.” Nor were institutions the drivers. The World Bank orthodoxy of “add institutions and stir” doesn't work, and didn't. McCloskey builds a powerful case for the initiating role of ideas—ideas for electric motors and free elections, of course, but more deeply the bizarre and liberal ideas of equal liberty and dignity for ordinary folk. Liberalism arose from theological and political revolutions in northwest Europe, yielding a unique respect for betterment and its practitioners, and upending ancient hierarchies. Commoners were encouraged to have a go, and the bourgeoisie took up the Bourgeois Deal, and we were all enriched. Few economists or historians write like McCloskey—her ability to invest the facts of economic history with the urgency of a novel, or of a leading case at law, is unmatched. She summarizes modern economics and modern economic history with verve and lucidity, yet sees through to the really big scientific conclusion. Not matter, but ideas. Big books don't come any more ambitious, or captivating, than *Bourgeois Equality*.

Book Information

File Size: 2214 KB

Print Length: 768 pages

Publisher: University of Chicago Press; Reprint edition (April 21, 2016)

Publication Date: April 21, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01D9WANCA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #136,008 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #69

inÃ Â Books > Business & Money > Economics > Income Inequality #114 inÃ Â Kindle Store >

Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Economics > Economic History #229 inÃ Â Kindle Store >

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Customer Reviews

Brilliant analysis of the great enrichment that has expanded human wealth 70 fold in less than 2 centuries. This is more amazing when we note it occurred in the face of devastating wars and economic crisis. Opens up the field of cultural economics, which can be very useful in examining the potential and weaknesses of current policy. McCloskey examines literature, history, religion, and government institutions to trace this overlooked power of the unleashing of the economic and innovative power of the common man. once he was afforded the dignity and respect previously reserved for the ruling class. It sheds light on the current global rejection of elites who either forgot or never learned the lesson enshrined in her book.

The first book, in my 59 years as a reader, that I've found intellectually beautiful. McCloskey is lucid, clear, focused, and funny, ranging from history going back tens of thousands of years to, if you wait for it, a slur at the Cubs outfield in the book's closing pages. She persuades not only that ideas and ethics have given the world 200 years of widespread prosperity, but also that relative income (income inequality) counts for far less than how much better-off today's poor are than the poor of 60, or even 40 years ago.

My many thanks to Ms McCloskey for this book. It reinforces my Libertarian mindset, and my distrust of left leaning intellectuals. As an unapologetic member of the Bourgeoisie, and a proud participant in the creation of things that make life better for everyone. I can't understand why anyone would want to have time stand still. What time would they choose? The Great Enrichment, based on trade tested betterment is an astonishing feat of our species. Why would anyone sneer at it? It is a shame that so many people, educated at the most prestigious institutions don't seem to get it, and that we are still faced with a predisposition, on the part of some, to repeat the mistakes of the past, such as the impoverishment of Socialism, or Fascism.

An original perspective, supported with citations from many different sources. Ethics come back as a foundation of modern societies. Equally useful notes and bibliography

As others have touched on, this is not an easy read, even for those well versed in economics and history. It is very dense, packed with obscure and winding references, often drifting off on tangents whose relevance is not immediately apparent, and probably could use a good editing. All in all though it is an incredible accomplishment in the field and a must read for anyone interested in how the world got to the place it is. This is the book Thomas Piketty only wished he could write, a dazzling achievement in depth and scope that will leave you thinking.

Book like new condition. Although I think a book of contrasting opinions could just as easily be written with the same depth of references, it is written with great skill. This makes me like reading it, though I'm not thoroughly convinced of the points made yet. Happy with purchase.

Radical, comprehensive in its historical analysis, from art to literature to Adam Smith and more, literary and vivid

A tour de force! I love her optimism and I hope some of it rubs off on me as I read through this sprawling and wonderfully rich book. It contains a set of arguments for the power of voluntary trade-tested betterment to raise the poor more than the rich, moving the world to a more equal enjoyment of the blessings of freedom.

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