

Don Quijote and the
Bourgeois Virtues:
Eric Clifford Graf's
*Anatomy of Liberty
in Don Quijote de la
Mancha*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, my late French grandfather opened a number of factories in Spain, which gave him the opportunity to enjoy several extended sojourns and immerse himself in local culture. His shenanigans with the village pharmacist, doctor, judge, and captain of the Guardia Civil are the stuff of family lore. I once asked him if he had read *Don Quijote* while he was living in Spain. His reply was emphatic: “Non, je ne l’ai pas lu... je m’en suis nourri!” (No, I didn’t read it. I *nourished* myself from it). Perhaps the pace of life is faster now, and perhaps I’m busy working, while he was enjoying months of downtime in a foreign country, in between bouts of consulting. I, too, read the first modern novel in the original Spanish, but I think I suffered a lot more than he did. It’s great, to be sure, but it was also clearly written for a readership without television and other modern distractions. The novel can be slow and dense, but it is also rich with insight into the human condition, early modern Spain, and the tensions of transition to a new intellectual and economic paradigm.

Eric Clifford Graf’s *Anatomy of Liberty in Don Quijote* is a magisterial and useful guidebook to the first modern novel. Graf has an intimate and loving knowledge of the novel—but he has also read everything, from epics to economics, and from political theory to the Scholastics of Salamanca. In the first section, I will briefly review Graf’s book. In section two, I will summarize Deirdre McCloskey’s bourgeois virtues, as juxtaposed against the noble virtues, as a framework within which to analyze one slice of the complex and rich novel. In section three, I will apply McCloskey’s framework to *Don Quijote*. The final section concludes.

2. ERIC CLIFFORD GRAF, *ANATOMY OF LIBERTY IN DON QUIJOTE DE LA MANCHA*

It would be futile to attempt to summarize the 1,000+ pages of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* here. Alonso Quijano, an hidalgo (a member of Spain’s lesser nobility), reads too many chivalric epics. He loses his reason and imagines himself to be a knight errant, committed to righting wrongs and defending *la veuve et l’orphelin* (widows and orphans), and hopefully a few damsels in distress along the way. He renames himself Don Quijote de la Mancha, has himself knighted in a dodgy but funny *benedicto militis*, and takes as his squire a local peasant, Sancho Panza. Adventures ensue, not least the famous episode of tilting at windmills. All through the novel’s funny and grotesque episodes, we are treated to allegories and commentaries—on religion, liberty, the status of wom-

en, slavery, inflation, economics, politics, and the uneasy shift to the early modern world—as Cervantes deftly walks us through Spain of the early seventeenth century and provides insights into eternal questions of the human condition.

Enter Eric Clifford Graf’s (2021) magisterial commentary, *Anatomy of Liberty in Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Graf masterfully weaves his knowledge of literature, and especially epic literature, with deep reading across multiple disciplines. Epic literature and the classics are there, of course—but so are the Scholastics of Salamanca, the Austrian School of Economics, inflation and monetary theory, history (from the expulsion of the Moors to different forms of slavery and Habsburg mismanagement of the realm), as well as careful readers of *Don Quijote*, from Frédéric Bastiat to John Locke, and from Thomas Hobbes to Karl Popper, with a dash of Aristotle and Plato. It’s all in there, it’s messy, it’s rich, it’s deep, it’s complicated, and yet Graf manages to weave it all together into an intelligible and enlightening story. These may be Clifford notes, but they are not Cliff’s Notes. The interested reader should heed the words of Aeschylus (1997, p. 109): “we must suffer, suffer into truth.” Graf’s book is no substitute for suffering through the long, dense, repetitive, sometimes boring novel, to find the gems of wisdom, historical insight, and humor. Rather, Graf offers a complement to the book, which will cast light on the erudition and teaching of Cervantes.

The Austrian economist F. A. Hayek peppers his works with Latin phrases, and with paragraph-long quotations in French and other languages, without offering translation—because, clearly, an educated reader will know those languages. The same applies to *Don Quijote*: the footnotes in my *Edición del IV Centenario* were invaluable, for context and for helping me through the sometimes archaic Spanish, which was alien to my eyes—I learned Spanish at the US Foreign Service Institute, at the visa window at the US Embassy in Mexico City, and over doctoral fieldwork and Malbecs in Buenos Aires, but I have no formal training in early modern Spanish, or in Spanish literature.¹ Graf goes beyond the footnotes, offering both in-the-weeds subtlety and a 30,000-foot view of the novel.

Graf (p. 3) opens the book with a clear statement of his theses: (1) to explain *Don Quijote* as a realist bourgeois solution to a “confusing labyrinth” of social, political, and economic problems; (2) the novel anticipates Montesquieu’s *doux commerce*, the sweet commerce that softens relationships among market participants, in the extended market order; and (3) the gradual replacement of chivalric idealism with bourgeois common sense. He then proceeds with five chapters, each addressing each of his book’s five subtitles.²

Graf reminds us that *Don Quijote* takes place against the backdrop of the wars of religion. The novel offers a satire against religious authority and coercion (p. 16), as Cervantes places freedom of religion as a foundation for the other core freedoms of classical liberalism (p. 17). The novel expresses particular disdain for religious orthodoxy and the arbitrary whims of the Inquisition (p. 22), suggesting instead a bourgeois, private, Erasmian “inner Christianity,” a religion for individual self-control, rather than control of others (p. 21). Graf (p. 47) also explains that Cervantes was well aware of Spain’s debts to Islam and Arabic culture, while also maintaining disapproval of Islam’s treatment of women and its generally coercive nature.

Graf (p. 56) walks us through the proto-feminism of Cervantes, as the novel contrasts strong, independent women with the clumsy knights they really don’t need, but who insist on saving them. In the early modern era, women need no longer fall into one of two archetypes, in the Mary-Eve dichotomy (later dubbed the Madonna-whore complex by Sigmund Freud); they can now be individuals. In fact, women are routinely portrayed as being more responsible at household and financial management than the men who are mired in chivalric fantasy (p. 68) or machismo (p. 66). Cervantes and Graf use the treatment of women as a springboard for other transformations in the post-medieval era. Just as women are now individuals (or increasingly recognized as such), society requires a transformation of the *caballero*, from a knight to a bourgeois gentleman: gentlemanly behavior, respect for women as individuals, good manners, and proper marriage, are to replace the coercion of women (p. 58). More generally, chivalric *ociosidad* (leisure) must be replaced by bourgeois work, and early modern religion must make room for women, with freedom from the oppression of both Mohammed and Luther, in Catholicism—but the Catholicism of the Scholastics, not that of the Inquisition, of course (p. 69).

Graf then turns to slavery. After a rough start, in which Sancho cooks up a plan to turn Africans into gold through slavery, the novel is optimistic (pp. 213-214). The early modern Spanish intellectuals had already attacked race-based slavery as absurd and unsustainable, while also foreshadowing modern economics, in the observation that remunerated work is more efficient than slavery (pp. 124-126; Mises 1996, XXI.9). This intellectual turn parallels Sancho's transformation from serf to independent contractor (pp. 114, 117)—a transformation that matches the bigger turn from a pre-modern world to a bourgeois world, from epic heroism to market realism. The novel abounds with descriptions of the honorable nature of work, and the move from coercion to mutual gains from trade, as governed by a wage contract (pp. 123-126).

Graf (pp. 129, 131-133) places *Don Quijote* in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition of “princely advice” manuals, with their wisdom on the art of governing—an art which amounted to avoiding factionalism and sustaining the modern state. Cervantes expresses his political worries throughout the novel: skepticism of mass democracy (p. 134) and unchecked monarchs (p. 150); factionalism opposed to a cosmopolitan bourgeois order (pp. 131-132); communism, free-riding, and egalitarianism (p. 137); Platonist utopianism (p. 146); colonialism and imperialism (p. 148); and debasing of the currency to compensate for fiscal mismanagement (pp. 167-169). Throughout the novel, Cervantes advocates Aristotelian realism (p. 146), constitutionalism and legal protection of rights (pp. 152-156), rule of law (pp. 155-158), and “agrarian, autarkic aristocracy” as a bulwark “against the tyranny of urban bribery” (p. 162). Graf (pp. 137-146) also suggests that Cervantes had certain affinities for the virtues of republicanism. In this respect, the analysis of Sancho's governorship (pp. 155-156 and 159-161), with parallels to “Federalist 51,” is particularly important: is Sancho a just governor, or is he corrupted by power, as we might anticipate? Incidentally, Frédéric Bastiat (2002), in his short story, “Barataria” (1864), makes Don Quijote the voice of ugly, Platonist, pre-modern thinking, with aristocrats cultivating virtue on the back of slave labor, while Sancho is the voice of classical liberal economics and liberty.

Finally, Graf discusses economics in *Don Quijote*. He deepens his discussion of earlier themes, like the move away from predatory behavior, serfdom, and slavery to wages and mutual gains from trade (pp. 174, 199-200, 222-228), or the problem of debased currency (pp. 174-175). Graf also discusses the economic revolution of the seventeenth century, a revolution that parallels the political and philosophical developments of the early modern era. The Church was still anti-capitalist (p. 176), and the Salamanca School was emerging in response to a need for new theological and catechumenal justification and guidelines for mercantile and banking activity (p. 177). New ideas were emerging about economics: subjective theory of value over labor theory of value; *doux commerce* over predatory behavior or the privileges of nobility; competition over state-protected monopoly (p. 180). Returning to Sancho's governorship, we see an early economic and Public Choice analysis of Sancho's price controls (pp. 203-204).

Graf (pp. 229-236) closes with an epilogue on the allegorical use of various animals in the novel.

3. THE BOURGEOIS VIRTUES

We now turn to Deirdre McCloskey's bourgeois virtues, a framework I will use to analyze one particular (and particularly important) element of Cervantine thought and Grafian analysis, *videlicet* the turn from the noble virtues of chivalry to the bourgeois virtues of the modern commercial age.

Over the past 15 years, McCloskey has written a three-volume study of the bourgeois turn (*The Bourgeois Virtues*, *Bourgeois Dignity*, and *Bourgeois Equality*), a 2000-page concentrate of history, economics, and philosophy. The first book is the one which concerns us here (McCloskey 2006a). As it is a beautifully crafted 600+ page essay in erudition and clarity, I will rely instead on a much shorter, synthetic work, McCloskey's initial shot across the bow before the full fleet salvo (McCloskey 2006b). I could also simply rely on the title of McCloskey's more recent synthesis: the bourgeois deal comes down to *Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich* (McCloskey and Carden 2020).

McCloskey argues that capitalism is deeply intertwined with virtue. The economic miracle of the past 200 years, which saw human income per capita rise by a factor of 20 or more, “the material side of capital-

ist and bourgeois success is, of course, wonderful” (McCloskey 2006b, p. 8). But there is more (if that were not enough): “bourgeois life *improves us ethically*, and would have even if it had not also made us rich” (McCloskey 2006b, p. 9; original emphasis). Capitalism is associated with higher material well-being, less poverty, more liberty, more leisure, and more artistic creativity. But it is also associated with inter- and intra-personal virtue: just as capitalism relies on these virtues, it nourishes them; we have here, in the phrase Graf so frequently and lovingly quotes, Montesquieu’s *le doux commerce*.

McCloskey (2006b, p. 10) reclaims the seven virtues—in “a jury-rigged combination” of the four pagan virtues of an Athenian freeman citizen and the three Christian virtues. She explains that, “jury-rigged or not, the Seven cover what we need in order to flourish as human beings.” She clarifies that, although she is herself Episcopalian and working within her home tradition, these virtues map onto “other ethical systems—Confucianism, for example, or Talmudic Judaism, or Native American shamanism—and these can be lined up beside the Seven for comparison. There are many ways to be human. But it is natural to start with the Seven, since they are the ethical tradition of a West in which bourgeois life first came to dominance.”

These, then, are the seven bourgeois virtues (McCloskey 2006b, p. 10):

The leading bourgeois virtue is the Prudence to buy low and sell high. I admit it. There. But it is also the prudence to trade rather than to invade, to calculate the consequences, to pursue the good with competence...

Another bourgeois virtue is the Temperance to save and accumulate, of course. But it is also the temperance to educate oneself in business and in life, to listen to the customer, to resist the temptations to cheat, to ask quietly whether there might be a compromise here...

A third is the Justice to insist on private property honestly acquired. But it is also the justice to pay willingly for good work, to honor labor, to break down privilege, to value people for what they can do rather than for who they are, to view success without envy, making capitalism work since 1776.

A fourth is the Courage to venture on new ways of business. But it is also the courage to overcome the fear of change, to bear defeat unto bankruptcy, to be courteous to new ideas, to wake up next morning and face fresh work with cheer...

Beyond the pagan virtues is the Love to take care of one’s own, yes. But it is also a bourgeois love to care for employees and partners and colleagues and customers and fellow citizens, to wish all of humankind well, to seek God, finding human and transcendent connection in the marketplace ...

Another is the Faith to honor one’s community of business. But it is also the faith to build monuments to the glorious past, to sustain traditions of commerce, of learning, of religion, finding identity in Amsterdam and Chicago and Osaka.

Another is the Hope to imagine a better machine. But it is also the hope to see the future as something other than stagnation or eternal recurrence, to infuse the day’s work with a purpose, seeing one’s labor as a glorious calling ...

I use this framework because it offers a key to understanding the underlying intellectual and virtue shift in Don Quijote, in the hopes of adding insight to Graf’s already rich account.

4. DON QUIJOTE AND THE BOURGEOIS VIRTUES

I will now comment on *Don Quijote* through the combined optics of McCloskey and Graf. I will explore the bourgeois virtues in three sections: (1) a shifting world; (2) lingering chivalry; and (3) the question of birth vs. action in the world order.

1. A New Code for a New World

As described above, Graf emphasizes the shifting world of *Don Quijote* and early modernity. That world is moving away from serfdom and towards wage labor, away from feudalism and towards a commercial order, and towards respect for women, other religions, serfs, and others who did not have a voice in the pre-modern order. Naturally, a new world requires a new code—and much of the tension in *Don Quijote* comes from the uneasiness of a changing ethical and economic world. It's not so much, perhaps, a question of one world's superiority over the other, or if this change is progress or regress—but the uncertainty of not knowing one's place in the world.

If the reader will forgive a pedestrian reference, *Don Quijote* is reminiscent of the Bellamy Brothers' 1985 country hit, "Old Hippie":

He turned thirty-five last Sunday
In his hair he found some gray.
But he still ain't changed his lifestyle
He likes it better the old way.
So he grows a little garden in the backyard by the fence
He's consuming what he's growing nowadays in self defense
He gets out there in the twilight zone.
Sometimes when it just don't make no sense.
...
He's an old hippie
And he don't know what to do.
Should he hang on to the old?
Should he grab on to the new?
He's an old hippie
This new life is just a bust.
He ain't trying to change nobody
He's just trying real hard to adjust

On a more serious note, this is not a new theme in literature. Where does the Flyte family fit within the new order of *Brideshead Revisited*, a world of doubt, divorce without annulment, Catholicism and adultery, and long-haired Hooper rebels in need of a forced haircut? It is the world of Hemingway's lost generation, enjoying a miserable and happy *fiesta* in post-war Paris, or Camus's alienation, or the Samurai in the Meiji restoration. Increasingly, I fear it is the alienation of the college professor who still believes in education (and not decanal malarkey like "retention", "assessment instruments" or "the student experience"). While he has other reasons for his alienation (like an overactive imagination, or insanity), Don Quijote is not sure of his place in this new world of land grants, commerce, and rule of law over chivalric privilege. He laments a lost era of pastoral idyll (Cervantes 1.11; Graf 2021, p. 137). He enjoys pontificating on the virtues of chivalry, much like an old soldier who strips his sleeve and shows his scars—except the other gentlemen present no longer "think themselves accursed they were not [t]here" in the battle (Shakespeare, n.d., Act IV, Scene 3, Verse 67). For Don Quijote, knight errantry is a complete science, because it requires all matter of "well-rounded skills" (2.18)—but is he merely justifying a lost and useless craft? Don Quijote dismisses the new

class of merchants, looking down his nose at filthy lucre: the martial arts are the most noble, followed by letters, and (far below) business (1.39-41). He contrasts chivalry's weapons with the "tongue" employed by the bourgeois, the lawyer, and the woman (2.32). Of course, it is these very "habits of the tongue," as McCloskey frequently refers to them, that allowed the move to the world of early bourgeois prosperity, away from the violent and impoverished (if chivalrous—how nice) feudal world.

As Graf deftly explains, the early modern world was in flux. Don Quijote considers money to be *infra dignitatem*, much like an impoverished nineteenth-century earl refusing to work or the Japanese officer in World War II who hired an underling to touch the dirty cash of his wages. Sancho's request for wages (2.7 and 2.28) is clearly a bourgeois move, as is his intention to seek profit from his governorship (assuming, of course that he is an honest bourgeois citizen-legislator and does not acquire it by graft or extortion). A horrified Duchess retorts that his mission is justice, not profit (2.36), and Don Quijote quickly reminds Sancho that the virtues required for a successful governorship are humility, justice, and good manners (2.42 and 2.43). These, of course, smack of a Platonic philosopher-king, rather than a wise administrator of the treasury and the realm (then again, we can all long for such virtues in contemporary politicians!). Throughout the novel, we see examples of violence averted by the bourgeois virtues, as when the knights want to fight, but the squires negotiate for peace (2.14). Don Quijote, in his own transformation, suggests that idle hands (the very mark of the pre-bourgeois aristocracy) are the devil's workshop (2.70). Sancho and Don Quijote agree that work would be beneficial for Altisidora and would guide her away from the mischief of *ocio*—and towards *necocio* (a precursor, of course, to *negocio*).

In a final, ironic twist, Don Quijote calls for a public reading of Teresa's letter to Sancho (2.52). Indeed, in the pre-modern world, gentlemen don't read each other's mail. This sentiment was echoed as late as 1929, when Secretary of State Henry Stimson withdrew the State Department from the new US cryptanalysis program. Fortunately, in true bourgeois fashion, Stimson, by then Secretary of War, accepted the realities of world war, and relied heavily on cryptanalysis to defeat the Axis. Is Don Quijote still a noble gentleman, who respects the privacy of correspondence? Or is he turning into a more pragmatic bourgeois?

2. Chivalry Dies Hard

Intellectual and cultural paradigm shifts are difficult, or even painful, for an individual. For a society (or humanity), they can be sources of immense turmoil. Without the tensions surrounding the world's move to the bourgeois virtues, there would be no *Don Quijote*. Indeed, chivalry lingers; while Don Quijote increasingly moves into the modern world, he still has one foot firmly planted in the old order. Chivalry dies hard. As described above, Don Quijote pontificates on the lost Elysian world of pastoral chivalry and the superiority of the way of the warrior. There are still strict rules of chivalry (1.15), even if those rules seem to be changed arbitrarily and fluidly—whether out of convenience, or as a concession to a changing world. Don Quijote must go through an *adoubement* before he can be a knight—but he makes up the rules on the fly and ends up being knighted by an innkeeper (1.3). In a parallel to the Catholic sacrament of confirmation, Alonso Quijano renames himself. Both the *benedicto militis* and this second baptism (from the Old French, *baptiser*, to name) exhibit the tension between the two orders: the noble code of chivalry requires certain protocols and ceremonies, but Don Quijote carries them out with brazen bourgeois autonomy.

Graf discusses the problem of money and payment. On his first foray, Don Quijote carries no money (1.3); a knight is detached from such vulgar and pedestrian (and bourgeois!) considerations as money or payment for services. Although Don Quijote learns to carry money and eventually matures into bourgeois responsibility, there lingers aristocratic detachment, as he ignores filthy lucre and the consequences of his actions on others (the negative externalities of honor, perhaps) (1.30). Throughout the novel (1.8, 1.15, 2.52), it is made clear that only a knight may fight a knight; anything else simply wouldn't be proper—but it's not entirely certain if this is really noble honor or a cover story for bourgeois prudence.

Motivations throughout are unclear, because allegiances (to the old code or the new) are unclear. Don Quijote (1.25) appeals to the prudence of Ulysses and the wisdom of Aeneas—early hints of bourgeois vir-

tues—but immediately tempers it with Platonic chivalry. Throughout the novel, it is not entirely clear what ultimately moves Don Quijote—is it honor (an intrinsic good for a knight) or glory, in which the knight gets the girl, the gold, and the grounds (1.30)?

Finally, the tensions of temporal law are palpable. Don Quijote makes an early claim that knights are exempt from temporal laws (1.10), as his mission is a crusade. This claim is repeated later (1.45). Duels were prohibited by the Council of Trent, but knights seem to find a work-around (2.56). In a literal sense, Don Quijote considers himself to be an *out-law*—an irony, because the Catalan thieves follow justice and what we might today call rule of law (2.40); unlike the priest who burns books according to his whimsy (1.6 and 1.47); unlike a monarchy that grants privileges to one religion over another; and unlike the Duke, who keeps adding conditions for Sancho’s governorship, in lingering aristocratic whimsy over rule of law and contractual obligation (2.41). In a possibly apocryphal saying, Thomas Mann commented that, in a sick society only the sick are well. In the evolving world of Don Quijote and early modernity, the Church, the nobility, and the crown—who are supposed to uphold the law—operate with pre-modern arbitrary whims. It is bandits—literally the outlaws—who follow modern rule of law. The knight is caught between the two orders. Interestingly, Catalonia (technically, the Principality of Catalonia) had one of the first European constitutional parliaments, limiting the power of the Crown, dating to 1283. The nod to Catalonian outlaws who follow the law may be coincidental—but, knowing Cervantes, it probably isn’t. (I thank Eric Clifford Graf for pointing this out.)

To continue the irony, Sancho, who is nothing in the pre-modern order (a peasant, the lowest of the low, above only serf and slave), becomes a governor. We learn early in the novel that he has more common sense than Don Quijote (1.20, 1.25, etc.). In Barataria, he is more of a judge than governor, and he dispenses justice with common sense and wisdom (2.45, 2.49, 2.53). Sancho (Cervantes 2004, 2.55) the illiterate peasant concludes with a tension that reflects the move from the pre-modern to the bourgeois: “Si el gobernador sale rico de su gobierno, dicen dél que ha sido un ladrón, y si sale pobre, que ha sido un parapoco y un mentecato” (If a governor comes out of his government rich, they say he has been a thief; and if he comes out poor, that he has been a noodle and a blockhead; own translation). Alas, the wise judge quickly yields to the rent-seeking legislator, who establishes price controls on select goods, but conspicuously not on others, to benefit himself, as Graf (2021, pp. 203-204) explains.

In one of the novel’s most famous sayings, Don Quijote (Cervantes 2004, 2.58) reminds Sancho, in bourgeois fashion, that “la libertad, Sancho, es uno de los más preciosos dones que a los hombres dieron los cielos; con ella no pueden igualarse los tesoros que encierra la tierra ni el mar encubre” (freedom, Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts that heaven has bestowed upon men; no treasures that the earth holds buried or the sea conceals can compare with it; own translation). But, as he explains the central value of freedom, Don Quijote cannot resist the pull of pre-bourgeois virtue, as he places honor as high as freedom. He continues (Cervantes 2004, 2.58): “por la libertad, *así como por la honra*, se puede y debe aventurar la vida, y, por el contrario, el cautiverio es el mayor mal que puede venir a los hombres” (for freedom, *as for honor*, life can and should be ventured; and on the other hand, captivity is the greatest evil that can fall to the lot of man; own translation, emphasis added).

3. Birth, Merit, and Shifting World Orders

The move from a feudal order to the bourgeois order parallels the shift from the pre-modern world to the modern world of the Enlightenment. The pre-modern world can be summarized as follows: an epistemological appeal to what intellectual historian Alan Kors (quoted in Klutsey 2020) refers to as “the presumptive authority of the past,” rather than reason; a static world order, rather than meritocracy; fear, rather than mastery, of nature; limited commercial exchange; and rule by the few over the many. The modern project substituted reason for tradition, meritocracy for birth, and mastery of nature through science and technology over fatalism; it added the economic miracle of property rights and free trade, as well as democracy.

Naturally, the transition did not take place overnight (and it is still incomplete, or even regressing, in much of the world). But the seeds were planted (Pippin 1999; Wenzel 2008; Hayek 1948).

As a way to relate *Don Quijote* and the bourgeois virtues, I look at that quintessential hallmark of bourgeois thinking: social mobility and meritocracy. Returning to McCloskey's (2006b, p. 10) framework, this requires a combination of temperance (to invest in oneself), the courage to take informed risk, and "the hope to see the future as something other than stagnation or eternal recurrence, to infuse the day's work with a purpose, seeing one's labor as a glorious calling."

Tensions abound within the novel. In many ways, Don Quijote himself tried to make his own life and (largely) failed, as the pull of the pre-modern world was still too strong (2.63). As Graf explains thoroughly, the novel contains seeds of feminism, as strong women make their way through the world, or attempt to, despite the lingering pre-modern norms and conventions that prevent them from realizing their bourgeois and individual potential. *Don Quijote* (2.19) asks whether marriage is ultimately an individual choice or a social choice, and it never really answers the question—but the mere asking of the question in 1605 Spain was itself an act of bourgeois rebellion.

Another question floats throughout the novel: does birth matter, and how much? Does birth make a man (as it makes a noble), or is it deeds? The question surfaces early (1.20, 1.21, 1.43), in general terms. Can just anybody own an island, or must there be a claim—whether heredity or the ability to govern (1.50)? The question continues in Sancho's argument for social mobility (2.5) and Don Quijote's thoughts on virtue versus birth (2.6). Even nobility is not exempt: does it come from birth, or can it be acquired through virtuous action and martial skills (1.16 and 2.20)? Sancho claims the prerogative, acquired through education from the duchess rather than noble birth, to advise the duke and duchess on protocol; Don Quijote is horrified (2.37). In the end, Quijote (Cervantes 2004, 2.42) appears to contradict himself—an unsurprising tension in a changing world—when he advises Sancho that "la sangre se hereda, y la virtud se aquista, y la virtud vale por sí sola lo que la sangre no vale" (blood is inherited and virtue is acquired, and virtue is worth on its own what blood is not worth; own translation).

5. CONCLUSION

Don Quijote, the first modern novel, is rich with insight. We could talk about the nature of reality and conceptions of the self (with a nod to Jorge Luis Borges) or dig deeper into epic and picaresque. But my remit in this short essay—a foreign expedition for an economist, to be sure—was to discuss Graf's book. Graf dives into liberty, and I have followed him on one aspect of this analysis, the shift from pre-modern noble virtues to the modern bourgeois virtues.³

NOTES

- 1 All references to *Don Quijote* are to this edition, by part and chapter.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, all page numbers in this section are to Graf (2021).
- 3 I thank Charlotte Thomas, Patricia Bart, and especially Eric Clifford Graf, for their insights, comments, and guidance. The usual disclaimer applies.

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