

John Wilson Dickhaut

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I first met John Dickhaut in January 1973, when I interviewed at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business as a rookie faculty candidate. I noticed his unusual combination of simultaneous playfulness and intensity. Later that fall when I joined him as a colleague, he was going through a difficult personal phase. That unusual combination kept showing up often in conversations—his light-hearted comments had a serious undercurrent, and his serious remarks covered the ideas he was have fun playing with and turning over and over in his head. I once asked him about his intensity, and he told me about his training in method acting when he hurt someone with a knife on the stage, and fortunately for us all, turned from stage to scholarship.

John had graduated from Ohio State three years earlier where he had been trained in behavioral research in accounting, focusing on how individuals used information to make decisions. This area of research derived from ideas on psychology and social psychology, and his dissertation was recognized with the Manuscript Award given by the AAA for outstanding work by young scholars in the first five years of their careers. The commitment to understand information stayed with him through the following four decades as it became both deeper and broader. His intellectual curiosity, ferment, and honesty never let any doctrinal walls confine him. His free spirit constantly rebelled against any attempt to fit him into any convention or definition. Not surprisingly, chair of the department in which he worked had to be really good at improvisation.

During the seventies and the eighties, when we both served on the faculties of the University of Chicago and then at the University of Minnesota, I saw him dance through a world of ideas with his characteristic panache. There were years when you could not separate his right hand from his chess board, while the left carried a dog-eared copy of one or the other volume of Bruno de Finetti's *Probability* in the other. He took his books everywhere--to meetings, classes, and bed—ever ready to talk about the particular theorem or idea that excited or upset him at the moment. A year later, he may be in a different landscape, perhaps with his backgammon set, and a copy of Maurice DeGroot's *Optimal Statistical Decisions* this time, but just as immersed in both. When he started running, even bitter Minnesota winters will not keep him from doing his eight miles until the doctors had to almost force him to stop. What we saw come out of him during the past 25 years was a result of that deep immersion and constant ferment inside. Like in a volcano, what we saw above surface was but a small fraction of the vast pool in turmoil inside him.

John was not interested in impressing anyone with his work. He lived in a world without hierarchy. Everyone he worked with was a friend, a lifelong friend I might say, especially the PhD students who were drawn to him by his intensity, charisma, commitment to work that know no boundaries of time and calendar. What he wrote, when he did, just oozed out, almost as a by-

¹ Comments at Memorial Service for John Dickhaut at Chapman University, January 13-14, 2012.

product of his thought and life. There was no separation between the two. I never saw him write for the sake of writing, or to get a publication. In the business and economics departmental culture where intellects are often sought to be measured in pages of publications and number of citations, John did not even pretend to fit in. To him, the idea of doing research for promotion or tenure was alien; it wouldn't be research, and he would not be a part of such an enterprise. And yet, by not trying to do so, he ended up being a model of scholarship.

John hated being predictable. How do you characterize this unique man? In words of *Bhagwata Gita*, he was a *karma yogi* who enjoyed his work, without dwelling of the fruits of his labors. Ultimately, he was a man who would not be modeled.