

DUNCAN STANDON IRONMONGER

Reminiscence for his Memorial Service, by Michael Bittman

These thoughts cover two broad topics – first, Duncan ironmonger’s qualities as a human being and secondary, his intellect contribution to stock of economic knowledge.

AN OUTSTANDING HUMAN BEING

Duncan was a very generous person; he was very open to people and very welcoming and helpful. Erstwhile colleague, Michael Pusey, once described me as the “most suspicious person on earth”, while I hope this was an exaggeration, it certainly never applied to Duncan. I don’t believe he ever regarded anyone as an enemy. Duncan was internationally well connected, knew Richard Stone and all the other major players in economics, especially economic statistics, and had links to many other influential people. Of course, he had an appropriate biographical background for this specialization. After leaving school Duncan worked for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including being a proofreader on the national accounts and in the evening study Economics at the branch of the University of Melbourne located in Canberra (later to become the ANU). This led to scholarships to study in Melbourne and Cambridge.

When we first met, he was starting a new phase of his career, no longer directing the Melbourne Institute for Economic and Social Research he had a small unit called the Centre for Applied Research on the Future in the Faculty of Architecture with support from then federal Minister for Science (Barry Jones) and grants from the Australian Research Council. We had met a couple of times and he had realized we were both interested in data gathered by Time Use Surveys. He invited me to a ‘summer school’ built around Marilyn Waring. They had discovered each other before Marilyn achieved her extraordinary level of world renown. Duncan recognized how innovative her ideas were and realized that she was destined for stardom. It so happened I was reporting on a small survey I had done with the aid of my students at this summer school. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has done a pilot Time Use Survey in the Sydney Statistical District after a parliamentary directive. Through a complicated set of circumstances, together with Jonathan Gershuny at a conference in Budapest, we had persuaded the Head of the New South Wales branch of the Bureau of Statistics to release confidentialised unit record data from the pilot survey. I was approached by a representative of the Office of the Status of Women about doing analysis of this data. I eagerly accepted the invitation, not realizing how unfit I was for this job.

Unfortunately, when I started studying at university I realized that the pattern of my reading and writing development had exhibited all the symptoms of dyslexia and, moreover, a still have the condition in a milder form. In those years unit record data came on a large reel of magnetic tape. You submitted punch cards into a hopper and returned to find out what results the computer had produced the next morning. Computers in those days handled instructions very literally and cannot accommodate dyslexic errors in keying punch cards, so I soon realized I needed someone who could use the newly emerging interactive programming that you could conduct using a computer keyboard connected to the network. However, the budget I had was laughably small and my knowledge of programming was inadequate. Somehow, I managed to find a student who accepted the job of producing a small number of statistical outputs at an affordable price. Under the contract the deliverables due by the end of year. Almost half the year had passed and I had no useable output. In desperation I rang Duncan. Without hesitation he said come down to

Melbourne and I (with the help of my staff) will sort something out. In my undergraduate sociological training the only multivariate analysis we were taught was Chi-squared because mostly the data was nominal but time is measured in continuous units starting from zero. So Duncan started teaching me appropriate forms of multivariate analysis while his assistant Bill Lloyd-Smith started producing some output.

Meeting Bill Lloyd-Smith revealed another aspect of Duncan's openness. Bill was seriously hearing impaired and communicating this to him required patience and ability to use very short sentences. But Bill had worked at the Australian Bureau of Statistics and was a talented programmer. Clearly, Duncan recognized these skills and was unfazed by the hearing impairment. Duncan regularly made brave and inclusive employment decisions and collaborated widely outside the usual limits of a fellow economist. Bill managed to communicate the programming commands that unraveled the complicated obstacles that prevented my employee from producing the output that had been requested.

Later in that same year, together with another of Duncan's staff (Susan Donath, a talented statistician and analyst who was studying a higher degree in Women's Studies) we developed a method of studying changes in the average time allocated to activities in 1974 and 1987 using the available data from Melbourne and Sydney respectively. All this activity was included in my report *Juggling Time*. Due to a complicated set of circumstances this report became the centre of a government community education campaign with associated mass media interest that meant a daily menu of engagements for me talking about my report.

Duncan's reaction to these events, which brought no direct credit to him, revealed another of his admirable characteristics. He believed anything by anyone that drew attention to a topic that interested him was a success to be enthusiastically welcomed. The generosity of this attitude contrasted strongly with the growing individualistic and competitive attitudes being fostered by university management performance reviews and their associated research metrics.

In 1992 Duncan joined the International Association for Time Use research, which I joined 4 years earlier and we both regularly attended their conference for many decades. Duncan was more experienced than me with negotiating foreign locations. In our native Australia, crossing the road via a zebra crossing is a right, meaning cars give way to pedestrians, but in Rome it resembled a bull-fight. Fortunately, Duncan explained the safe way to cross a busy road was to walk without hesitation, at a predictable pace and trajectory, and the cars will steer around you.

Following the release of *Juggling Time* I ended 18 months of research Fellowship with three months of working at the Households Research Unit with Duncan. Duncan had an unending stream of intellectual discovery and the work was great fun. Not only was this a stimulating intellectual opportunity but Duncan and Heather treated me like family, accommodating and feeding me in their splendid home with all the amenities for comfortable living arranged around a jungle-like central courtyard. Extraordinary generosity.

Thereafter whenever my work brought me to Melbourne I met with Duncan. He was always excited to share his new discoveries and he would talk for more than a day describing them all. I met some of his associates including Jimmy Tran Van Hoa, an emerging Vietnamese scholar that Duncan took under his wing and helped him become a Professor of Economics and specialist on the emerging tiger economy in South-East Asia. Jimmy held Duncan's skills as an economic statistician in the highest regard and produced a festschrift, *Advances in Household Economics, Consumer Behaviour and Economic Policy*, in Duncan's honour including a galaxy of international

contributions. So, I am not the only one to benefit from Duncan's enthusiastic and collaborative mentoring.

In the second decade of this millennium, I was happy to support the late Geoffrey Harcourt in nominating Duncan for an Australian Honour and in 2013, the Governor General awarded Duncan a Member of the Order of Australia "for significant service to economics as a researcher, author and academic". In truth the citation could just as easily have been for an outstanding open, helpful, warm-hearted, generous, community-oriented human being.

AN INTELLECTUAL INNOVATOR

After leaving school Duncan worked for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including being a proofreader on the national accounts and in the evening study Economics at the branch of the University of Melbourne located in Canberra (later to become the ANU). This led to scholarships to study in Melbourne and Cambridge. In Cambridge he used an early computer and his mathematics to write an innovative treatise on new commodities. On his return to Australia he succeeded Roland Henderson as the Director of the Institute for Economic and Social Research, when the University of Melbourne decided to replace Duncan with a right-wing economist all his colleagues in the Institute defected in protest and set themselves up as a commercial forecasting operation. The University of Melbourne was left with Duncan and agreed he should continue with the title of Associate Professor and an annual salary of \$10 less than a full professor. Initially he had a sponsor in the Faculty of Architecture and Building with the support of Barry Jones, a former quiz show champion now a Federal Minister in the Labor government, who had written a book on futurology called "Sleepers Wake". About this time Duncan got interested in non-market production and had won competitive research funding for a Leontief input-output modelling of what he called the 'household economy'. This coincided with the UN revision of the SNA and the suggestion for developing 'Satellite Accounts' to capture everything inside the production boundary not measured by conventional national accounts.

Duncan was internationally well connected, knew Richard Stone and all the other players. I am convinced that he and Luisella Goldschmidt-Clermont immediately went beyond the practice of simply valuing the labour input using some version of market wages (e.g. general housekeeper, market specialist or opportunity cost). The Leontief-style analysis led to the recognition that as in the calculation of GDP there were capital as well as labour inputs to household production, and that valuation of their output was more meaningful than mere valuation of their inputs. He began by arguing that the production of meals at home was the largest (if unpaid) industry in Australia. But when the first national survey produced good quality data about secondary activities, he soon noticed that the time parents spent in childcare swamped on all other industries, in terms of the total hours the Australian adult population devoted to this activity.

Later he credited Andy Harvey and A K Mukhopadhyay with suggesting the services produced by households were in implicit within the time survey and could be reduced to **seven outputs**: (1) accommodation, (2) meals, (3) clean clothes, (4) childcare, (5) transport, (6) volunteering, and (7) education (Ironmonger and Soupourmas 2009). counts of a number of the outputs of household production. A time use diary contains records for

- each night's accommodation, whether at home or elsewhere;
- the number of eating occasions (meals, snacks and drinks) at home or elsewhere;
- the typical loads of household laundry a day or week;
- the hours parents devote to the care of their own children;

- the number, duration and purpose of trips in a private vehicle;
- time devoted to volunteering for an organisation and to informally aiding a relative, neighbour, or stranger; and
- time spent in self-education and in assisting children with homework, class assignments or coaching.

Other activities such as house cleaning, shopping and gardening can be regarded as 'ancillary' or 'auxiliary' activities that contribute to the value of the final outputs, as is the case in the market economy.

I could go on, but the point is that Duncan's ideas are highly original and, in my opinion, way in advance of the input valuation of non-market production as fraction of GDP (which values both capital and labour inputs to the market economy). I think that even in incomplete form these ideas should be available to students of the care economy.