Chapter 10

Homo Amans in the Economy: A Utopia?

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Abstract A *Homo amans* oriented transition economy is not a utopia. In essence, the transitional economy we so urgently need today concretely involves assigning an inter-cultural and inter-religious interpretation to responsibility within the economy. This means providing a response (transition) to social-economic questions based on a form of trust (transcendence). Effectively, this means responding to a form of trust or admiration that has been received. It involves concrete attitudes emerging from reasonable rationality within the economy. An economy in which the *Homo amans* takes the *Homo economicus* by the hand, becomes, step by step, a responsible economy. In its turn, a responsible economy corresponds to the ethics of virtue, which connects the rational to the reasonable. As a virtue, responsibility is that positive characteristic of trust that focuses on providing the proper response to the social-economic questions that we encounter. In this chapter we therefore call for concrete, *here-and-now* economic changes throughout the world. Instead of a *u-topia* or a *dys-topia* we can witness today the emergence of what we refer to as a '*u-globia*'. It therefore does not involve a polarization between *Homo economicus* and *Homo amans*, or between the economy and ethics.

10.1 Meaningfulness and Reasonableness Behind the Quest to Define and Understand the Need for Love Within an Economic Context

Dictionaries generally formulate meaningfulness in terms that involve us "assigning meaning to something." At the heart of the economy is the quest to satisfy our needs using the scarce resources available. If we consider this in the light of meaningfulness, the economy essentially boils down to *assigning meaning* to the fulfilment of needs. Compare this with Mill's definition of *Homo economicus* in the discussion paper (Nullens and Van Nes, Chap. 2, p. 10, this volume): "a being who desires

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wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end”.

For the average citizen or business manager, however, to speak of meaningfulness in relation to the economy readily calls to mind the involvement of ethics. On many occasions during recent decades we have seen entrepreneurs make cheap use (or abuse) of ethical values. For example, consider the “Dieselgate” scandal at *Volkswagen*, and *Starbucks* that sells its “fair trade” coffee while evading taxes. The marriage of convenience between the economy and ethics is not evident. Both the economy and ethics proceed from rationality, as well as from reasonableness – a concept that is all too frequently confused with rationality. Both the economy and ethics can be elaborated from an exclusively intellectual judgment (known as rationality), as well as from an inclusive human judgment (known as reasonableness). Rationality approaches labor, technology, and nature from an exclusively intellectual perspective. The economy thus entails a risk of extremes, as with the elaboration of a free market economy or a communist economy which could theoretically be rationally justified purely in terms of freedom and equality, respectively. In ethics, pure rationality can lead to an exclusively materialistic ethic or to an ethics of utility: acting in order to acquire the greatest possible material comfort or utility, respectively. The perspective of reasonableness, however, offers a different standpoint from which to consider labor, technology, and nature. This perspective of a more human judgment, which also allows for feelings like fear, hope, empathy, and love, is a standpoint that goes beyond an exclusive rationality. For example, it could bring us to a social or ecological economy, or to an ethics of care or happiness. In the discussion paper by Nullens and Van Nes in this volume, it is interesting to read how behavioral economists, together with neuroscientists, today insist more and more on the importance of this reasonableness.

Both the economy and ethics can thus proceed along paths that either are or are not laudable from a humane perspective. The solution thus cannot simply be to adopt an ethical approach to problems arising in the economy. Moreover, it means that both the economy and ethics can evolve into either dystopia (in which everything will backfire) or utopia (which is allegedly not feasible). Today all over the world we hear people warning of the risks of a so called neo-liberal economic dystopia, with negative outcomes such as the climate crisis, burnout phenomena, financial disruptions, and excessively unequal income distributions. Another common interpretation equates an ethics of happiness with utopia (for example, as translated into Gross National Happiness in Bhutan).

However, as noted by, for instance, Stephen Toulmin (2001), both the economy and ethics originally emerged from within a broad sense of reasonableness such as that of Aristotle. With regard to progress, scholars up until the Enlightenment also called for moral recovery. The reasonable ethics underlying the economy would nevertheless degrade into the ever more dominant ethics of rational utility proposed by Jeremy Bentham. This occurred along with the breakthrough of the economic sciences in the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. As proposed today by Martha Nussbaum, however, one path that could bridge this tension between rationality and reasonableness might indeed involve the acknowledgement

of human feelings. From the perspective of reasonableness, the identification of emotions, which transcend exclusive rationality by definition, can also generate knowledge concerning what is important to our actions – and, more specific to our topic, economic action. Think of current altruistic leadership theories such as servant leadership, as mentioned in the discussion paper by Nullens and Van Nes.

It is important to rediscover that emotions like fear and suffering, but also hope and desire, have been shown to have played at least some role in the foundation of the gradually emerging economy, as well as within the realm of ethics. On the one hand, consider the emergence of welfare economics, arising from the fear of not or never having enough, and the ethics of care, with its view to transcending feelings of suffering. On the other hand, consider the economics of well-being and the ethics of happiness, which express such feelings as hope and desire. One could even imagine that economic scarcity (the lack of resources with which to satisfy our needs) – the very heart of economics – arises from emotions. More specifically, scarcity emerges from both our fear of never having enough and our desire and hope of satisfying our ever-increasing desires. Our economic scarcity, or our lack, thus emerges from our fears concerning our desire for food and clothing, as well as from our desire for money (as argued by Locke) and for private property (as referred to by Rousseau 1755) and last but not least, from our fear of not being seen, or our endless desire to be loved (as discussed by René Girard 1978). The origin of the economy, you could say, is our endless need to be loved. This is expressed by feelings like fear and hope. The *Homo amans* within an economic context, started thus as a *Homo economicus* looking forward for recognition, for love.

10.2 Justice and the Natural Predisposition to Love

What could be a feasible principle for spanning the described tension between dystopia and utopia, or between rationality and reasonableness? Since the beginning of philosophy, the concept of justice has offered a solution in this regard. Justice is a virtue. It essentially consists of granting to others that to which they are entitled in order to survive. Also, Nullens and Van Nes in their discussion paper insist, with Christian Smith, that virtues are important. In the description of the virtue of justice, we can recognize the rational judgement that, if we rationally want to avoid dystopia in society, one arrives at the notion that each person has the *right* to survive. Just as plausibly, however, in justice we can recognize the reasonable judgment – which is connected to our feelings – according to which we must thus *grant* this to the other, if the human right to survive is not to become a utopia. Here *Homo amans* comes to the fore.

Like Joseph Torchia in the discussion paper by Nullens and Van Nes, the twentieth-century French personalist Ricoeur (1990) arrives at this point. Proceeding from his assumption of free human individuals, Ricoeur states that individuals are able to achieve full success in their freedom and attempts to be happy, only through a natural predisposition to love. It is through encounters with other people that an

individual becomes a person. Each time, we do indeed feel called to respond to the invitations or challenges of the other – whether the other is our partner, an employee, a refugee, or that other who is regarded as strange, like nature around us. The desire to articulate freedom is also recognized in the other. Freedom should thus emerge from intersubjectivity, from the relational. However, according to Ricoeur, this should clearly be understood as an “option” with respect for the other (whether person or nature) an act of granting to the other. We know that we cannot live decently unless we promote that which is unique in ourselves and in others. This option does mean (compare with the view of Dennis Krebs expressed in the discussion paper by Nullens and Van Nes) that I must choose to restrict myself to some extent, in the sense of restricting my natural urge to see everything as an object of my endeavors. One aspect that is of fundamental importance in this regard is that Ricoeur opens this intersubjectivity to the entire world. Ricoeur thus rejects an individualistic ethics, as a human being is not merely an individual, but is rather constituted as a person, and this in the various layers of the “we,” anchored within the whole of such entities as economic structures and institutions.

Since time immemorial, people have adopted two possible criteria for the concrete realization of this justice or granting to others that to which they are entitled in order to survive. We elaborate this justice either by emphasizing “to each according to his or her merits” or by focussing on “to each according to his or her needs.” If we attempt to realize justice through the principle of “to each according to merit,” the market takes center stage. If we attempt to realise justice through the principle of “to each according to need,” however, the government takes center stage. With the market, we risk more individualism and inequality. With the government, we tend more towards collectivism and an equality that might be too strict. An excessive impact of the market within society is currently confronting us with the utopia of the free market, which ultimately risks transforming into a dystopia. We need only consider the climate crisis, burnout phenomena, and excessively unequal income distributions. When excessive place is reserved for the government in utopian and unaffordable plans, this also ultimately results in dystopia. It is therefore no coincidence that Joseph Amato (2002) describes a personalistic economist as a person who, out of respect for the human person, seeks to safeguard human beings from the consequences of such extreme individualism as well as from those of extreme collectivism.

Given the risk and the reality of all these excessively utopian and dystopian effects, along with the failure of the alliance between the market and the government, it looks like it is now up to the citizen to take the lead within our society. Consider the ideas of young people throughout the world who are taking to the streets to protest about climate change, or what we call the “yellow vests” who are challenging economic injustice in France and elsewhere. Not to forget the rise in the percentage of voters during the last European elections. It might refer to citizens attempting (in a personalistic way) to develop their own (economic) freedom but however in solidarity with others and the planet in search for adapted economic institutes: what we call *an economy in transition*. This means acting no longer rather as egocentric individuals (as in the pure *Homo economicus*) but at least as human

persons (as in *Homo amans*). Only in such a circumstance can we speak of citizens who consider that – economically – everyone is of equal *value* with regard to our common lack of food, warmth, and recognition. It appears that the floor belongs to *Homo amans*: the human as an involved person expressed in compassion, love, and hope, rather than only as an egocentric individual or *Homo economicus*.

10.3 Factors that Encourage the Promotion of *Homo Amans* in the Economy

Which points of departure do we need to develop if we want to promote *Homo amans* in the economy?

10.3.1 *Responsible, as in Responsible Economics*

First of all, we can no longer consider data such as nature, labor, technology and, last but not least, our so-called infinite needs as neutral data that we can just use in our economic models. We discover that this cluster of data happens to contain the most important factors that cause the economy to degenerate into dystopia. Starting with compassion we can transform this cluster of data into a *cluster of responsibility*.

There is thus increasing talk of what one calls *Responsible Economics*, or a responsible economy. With regard to the ecosystem, labor, technology, as well as our infinite needs, one no longer escapes one's responsibility. The worldwide CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) approach in the economy also illustrates this abundantly.

10.3.2 *Inter-relational, as in the Social Economy*

A result of this cluster of responsibility, which is receiving attention from the perspective of *Homo amans*, is that there is a greater emphasis on the inter-personal, the *inter-human*, than on individualism. The satisfaction of fundamental human needs – for respect and self-development – depends primarily on the quality of the inter-human relationships concerned. Only by way of a qualitatively rich personal relationship with the other do you encounter human needs at a deeper level. Whereas in the present economy, competition is steadily increased, the satisfaction of essential human needs demands co-operation and solidarity with the other. The other can be a colleague or client, a patient, the poor, a foreigner, the disabled, and so on. The *Social Economy* attempts to convert this into practice.

10.3.3 *Enough, as in the Circular Economy*

Subsequently, the choice for a *Homo amans* attitude in the economy calls the infinitude of human needs and desires into question. It is important to recommend a limit, a *finitude*, to human needs, if only for the sake of yet another element of the aforementioned cluster of responsibility, to wit, the environment. Thus, we will talk about *an economy of enough*, rather than our dystopian economy of dissatisfaction.

This is reflected in what we call a *Circular Economy*. Central to a circular economy is the prevention of the exhaustion of scarce resources, the recycling of waste, and the use of energy sources such as the wind and the sun. Actual applications include, among others, *Cradle-to-Cradle* projects, in which one produces on the basis of components that can be reused after their cycle of life has run out. A more radical form of a circular economy is what one calls an *Economy of Frugality* (Bouckaert et al. 2008). Here, far more than in a circular economy, moderation, temperance, is paramount.

10.3.4 *Balanced, as in the Happiness Economy*

Furthermore, the distinction in the economy between the means (such as labor or technology) and the ends that must be achieved (profit, for example) has to be criticized because this distinction detracts from our respect for the other. To receive the other as they are cannot be reconciled with using them as a means towards an end. On the contrary, in a sensible way, *means and ends* have to be balanced *relative to each other* in view of man's happiness.

In the *Happiness Economy*, we see that certain aspects of this view have been developed with, among others, Richard Layard (2005) as a pioneering thinker and *Gross National Happiness* as an application. Money is then a means and not an end. Through adapted forms of technology that do not undermine human happiness, we are given the opportunity not to regard machines as merely a means of achieving maximum efficiency. When labor as a means is too drastically reduced in favor of capital, we will feel the need to re-emphasize the neglected value of *qualitatively* rich and rewarding labor as an end in itself.

10.3.5 *Authentic, as in the Purpose Economy*

A fifth offshoot of the transition in the economy is the fact that the principle of rationality, according to which the economic subject takes those decisions that maximize utility, is put in perspective (Wilkinson 2008). In light of the cluster of responsibility and, among others, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the emphasis has shifted

towards the *more authentic needs* of man. Think of the need for respect and self-development that we discussed earlier.

It is this emphasis on authenticity that is also central to the *Purpose Economy* in which one embarks upon the search for meaningfulness. Not just through personal achievements, but at least as much through meaningful contacts with others and contributions to the *bonum commune*, the common good. Thus, economic growth is focused not so much on the further increase of the consumption of material goods, but much more on services that are useful for the ethical and cultural enhancement of living standards or happiness.

10.3.6 *Meaningful, as in the Economy of Communion*

Finally, from the perspective of *Homo amans*, an economy in transition will adopt a different attitude towards the price presupposition of the prevailing economy. This assumption makes it all too easy for individual utility seekers to co-ordinate their respective preferences. However, it is not because something or someone doesn't yield an immediate utility that it is therefore without value, or needs to be priced through some method of assessment.

By proposing that things can only be *partially expressed in money*, we can avoid reducing values that cannot be expressed in money to a common denominator of "price." We don't just reduce elderly people to a cost. The same goes for the daily labor of a spouse at home, for nature, and for human life in general. We do not merely propose so-called solutions such as an affordable retirement home, potential wages for homemakers, or cost-benefit analyses.

In all of this, we stop reasoning in terms of pure prices in the service of our self-interest. On the contrary: as in the worldwide *Economy of Communion*, the focus is on sharing. The profits of an enterprise of the Economy of Communion flow not only to sustainable investments, but also to meaningful work and concrete support for those who are on the edge of society, on whom it is hard to simply put a price.

10.4 The Interconnection with Trust

We have described justice as granting to others that to which they are entitled in order to survive. It is a fact that the transitional economy just described – that we need but that also is already appearing all over the world – attempts to substantiate this *being entitled to survive*. Think of the Circular Economy, the Social Economy, the Happiness Economy, The Economy of Communion, CSR, the Purpose Economy, and so on. If we wish to prevent this transitional economy from being labeled a utopia, however, we must also consider the question of how the *granting to others* that to which they are entitled in order to survive can be realised effectively. We therefore should actually question – as in the discussion paper by Nullens

and Van Nes – whether we are not in need of the lung of transcendence, in addition to the lung of the contemporary social-economic transition. What do we mean by this? At the start of this chapter, I described the current economy in the light of meaningfulness as assigning meaning to the satisfaction of our needs (which for an entrepreneur often amounts to turning €1 into €2 as quickly as possible). In the economy, therefore, meaningfulness has traditionally meant using the market and the government to address our lack of food, money, and possessions, along with our desire for recognition. If the current generation behind the developing transition economy is also open to transcendence, the most prominent role is no longer played only by the act of *making* meaningfulness yourself (turning €1 into €2), but at least equally by the act of *discovering* meaningfulness outside of yourself. In the economy, discovering meaningfulness outside yourself thus refers to the situation in which citizens – however much in cooperation with the market and the government – truly acknowledge the common lack of and hope for food, money, possessions, and recognition all over the world and the planet. Moreover, this situation proceeds from compassion – from sharing in the suffering and hope of everybody, inclusive nature.

However, such an emerging evolution from a *making* of meaningfulness (turning €1 into €2) towards a *discovering* of meaningfulness within our current transitional economy is more than simply a pious return to a sort of religious transcendence that calls you to compassion. The origins of the transitional movement – the all too expansive dystopian effects of our economy – invite us to a re-interpretation of the mimetic desire that helped to bring about the economic dystopia. What does this mean? The eighteenth-century French philosopher Rousseau (1755) speaks of the important distinction between *amour propre* and *amour-soi*. *Amour propre* refers to the self-love of the individual, which imitates or mimetically desires that which is desired by another human (for example, consider the world of advertising). Rousseau distinguishes this *amour propre* or self-love from what he refers to as the *amour-soi* of the human person. The individual discovers – Ricoeur explains in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) – that only in a respectful relational context with the other in adapted institutions, can he truly develop his love for freedom. This *amour-soi* renders humans open to external models to be imitated. Humans today indeed seem again attracted by external models to be imitated. Not the internal models that we “like” or not via Facebook or Twitter, but external models as an expression of a transcendent desire that today’s society needs so much. An external model to be imitated that has gained fascination today is the *Dalai Lama* with his compassion and the empathetic appeal of the Buddha; or *Pope Francis*, with his call with Christ for a new humanism, applied within what he refers to as a prophetic economy. Not to forget, of course, in this era of fake news, the external model of the philosophical admiration of *truth*. As it comes to the fore, we want to know the truth and we want and try to act in consensus with it.

The described receptiveness in the finding of meaningfulness ultimately amounts to trust. Trust indeed involves being open to the possibility that something (like truth) or someone (like the Buddha, Christ, or the o(O)ther) is ultimately to be

trusted. With this trust, we surround ourselves with a relationship of love or equal value, which – and this is crucial – also calls us to see the concrete other as actually being of equal value. This trust replaces the fear or desire that leads us to treat the other – including nature – unequally or to enter into competition, to exploit the other, whether it's my employee or nature. In the discussion paper Christian Smith speaks about “loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world” (Nullens and Van Nes, Chap. 2, p. 15, this volume). The reception of this trust is tangible in the uniqueness of nature, in the admiration of truth, in the loving gaze that we feel from the Buddha, in the mystical consolation that we experience through Christ, and, last but not least, in an authentic meeting with the o(O)ther. In this context, the tension between the economy and ethics is surpassed by the transcendental dimension – in other words, by trust. As argued by another twentieth-century personalist Emmanuel Mounier in his *Manifeste au service du personnalisme* (1936), such openness to transcendence does not depend upon an exclusively Christian inspiration. But according to Mounier, a personalistic culture and economy are possible only when we are open to the transcendent. If we are not, we will not be able to move beyond modernity, with all of its technocratic awareness, he explains (Abicht and Opdebeeck 2015, p. 89).

10.5 Conclusion

In this reflection with reference to the discussion paper, I have tried to outline that a *Homo amans* oriented transition economy is not a utopia. In essence, the transitional economy we so urgently need today concretely involves assigning an inter-cultural and inter-religious interpretation to responsibility within the economy. This means providing a response (transition) to social-economic questions based on a form of trust (transcendence). This amounts to providing an ultimate response to a form of trust or admiration that has been received. In an article, Dries Deweer describes this art of receiving as follows: “the deep-seated awareness that life is given to us – that we receive it – which makes us willing to bear responsibility” (Deweer 2016, p. 716). In all cases, it involves concrete attitudes emerging from what we have previously elaborated as reasonable rationality within the economy. The core of the current economic dystopia – inequality – is called into question because, proceeding from trust, each person is indeed perceived as being of equal value, thereby giving rise to empathy, compassion, or mercy. Our era thus corresponds to what was emerging throughout the world even during what Karl Jaspers (1949) called the axial period (*Achsenzeit*) between 800 and 200 BC, and was expressed by such figures as Socrates, Confucius, Buddha, or Jeremiah: empathy, compassion, or mercy are a *conditio sine qua non* when a context is dystopian.

We can conclude that an economy in which *Homo amans* takes the *Homo economicus* by the hand, becomes, step by step, a responsible economy. In its turn, a

responsible economy corresponds to the ethics of virtue that connects the rational to the reasonable. The justice, hope, compassion, and love of which we speak are all virtues. As a virtue, responsibility is that positive characteristic of trust that focuses on providing the proper response to the social-economic questions that we encounter. I therefore call for concrete, *here-and-now* economic changes throughout the whole world that can bring a sense of peace, as it were – on the part of humans in relation to their fellow humans and nature. It thus does not involve a polarization between the *Homo economicus* and the *Homo amans*, or between the economy and ethics, or between rationality and reasonableness – or between dystopia and utopia. Instead of a *u-topia* or a *dys-topia* we can witness today the emergence of what I refer to as a ‘*u-globia*’: a concrete, worldwide development of transition and transcendence.

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