

# Recentering Economics: The Human Person in New Economic Thinking

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## Introduction: A New Anthropology for a New Economics<sup>1</sup>

“Economics,” according to Greg Mankiw in his well-known *Principles of Economics*, “is the study of how society manages its scarce resources.”<sup>2</sup> The use of the word “managing” captures something essential about the methodology of economics, because it implies measuring; you cannot manage what you cannot measure. This measuring defines the discipline of economics. Adam Smith (1723–1790), for example, sought to assess the wealth of nations by measuring national production. Moving to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred Marshall (1842–1924) developed the insight that instead of focusing on production alone, economics should also consider the valuation of the goods being produced by individual customers, which gave rise to the market value of production as the central metric in economics—its tools are all about measuring efficiency in markets.

This focus on measuring efficiency translates to the way the human person has been conceptualized in economics, namely as a *homo economicus*. This term was introduced by John Stuart Mill, who defined it as “a being who desires wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end.”<sup>3</sup> This did not mean, for Mill, that such a calculating rationality is all there is to human existence—he considered such a proposition to be “absurd;” rather, he saw it as “the mode in which science must necessarily proceed.”<sup>4</sup>

In economics, the conception of the human person as a *homo economicus*, a thoroughly rational and self-interested person—which, again, ought to be understood as a necessarily reductionist view of the human person—has become important; it underlies, for example, the conception of a rational consumer as a perfect judge of his or her own self-interest, consistently making choices that maximize his or her welfare. This way of looking at the human person can—according to most economists—be applied to all human reality, leading to economic theories of such diverse phenomena as religion, military tactics, and marriage. As Jack Hirshleifer, writing on the expanding domain of economics, observes, “What gives economics its imperialist invasive power is that our analytical categories—scarcity, cost, preferences, opportunities, etc.—are truly universal in applicability.”<sup>5</sup> This expansion is understandable given the great successes that have been achieved by means of this approach to reality, a success that is often insufficiently acknowledged, as has been pointed out by Deirdre McCloskey, among others, in her many publications.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these successes, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the conception of the *homo economicus* came under criticism. Writing in 1936, the well-known British economist Maynard Keynes wrote about the impact of human emotion on our economic behavior, using the term “animal spirits.” As he says, “The Markets are moved by animal spirits, and not by reason.”<sup>7</sup> In recent decades, this insight has been further developed by the research of behavioral economists; specifically noteworthy in this context is the work of Richard Thaler and Vernon L. Smith. These insights from behavioral economics open up new ways for economic ethics to proceed.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, while the conception of a human being as rational is increasingly criticized, the human drive toward utility maximization is still largely unchallenged. This can be problematic because the anthropology underlying this maximization exercise is an individualist one—also called

<sup>1</sup> We are grateful for helpful comments received on an earlier version of this paper by Dr. Arttu Mäkipää and Eveline Kapteijn-Kruijswijk, MA.

<sup>2</sup> N. Gregory Mankiw, *Principles of Economics*, 2nd ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001), 4.

<sup>3</sup> John S. Mill, *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (London: Parker, 1844), 137.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Mill, “On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It, Essay V: Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy,” in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John S. Mill (Dammweg: Pergamonmedia, [1830] 2015), loc 4641, chapter V, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Hirshleifer, “The Expanding Domain of Economics,” *The American Economic Review* 75, no. 6 (1985): 53–68.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936), book 4, chapter 12, section 7, 161.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Lisa Herzog, “Economic Ethics for Real Humans: The Contribution of Behavioral Economics to Economic Ethics,” *Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Unternehmensethik* 9, no. 1 (2008): 112–128.

“methodological individualism.” This framework misses the “inherent sociality” of human existence and is therefore indicative of a lack of intentional normative guidance for social relationality. Economists have often been very positive in their expectation that if all people act out of enlightened self-interest, this will serve the greater good—a belief that shows the Deist roots of economics. Adam Smith famously formulated his belief in an “invisible hand” through the self-interested individuals and firms that end up doing what is in the best interests of all.<sup>9</sup> This belief has been echoed by others. In such a view, ethics thus becomes subservient to individual rationalism, and with that, it is swallowed up in this supposedly beautiful framework called economics.

Among contemporary economists, there is increasing recognition that this implicit ethics can and should be challenged, and that we need an explicit normative framework for economics, specifically with a focus on human flourishing within planetary boundaries. This asks for an anthropology that is broader than the focus on *homo economicus* but that does not seek to supplant this approach either, ignoring the many valuable contributions that this anthropology has made to the field of economics. This ties in with the appeal of the economist Edmond Malinvaud, who affirmed the importance of a broader anthropology while asserting the abiding necessity of retaining the method of rational choice.<sup>10</sup> Connected to this is the insight that the anthropology cannot be too broad either; looking at the human person from the perspective of the economics of necessity requires a limitation, as is the case in other academic disciplines as well.<sup>11</sup>

To this dialogue, we at the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE) of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (ETF) have sought to make a contribution by proposing a relational anthropology for contemporary economics entitled *homo florens*. Central to this hypothesis is an understanding of the human being constituted, socially and phenomenologically, by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. In this paper, we first briefly describe this hypothesis, which is more fully described in the volume *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics*.<sup>12</sup>

Second, this report presents a number of other initiatives within the European context that aim to develop normative frameworks for economics. This direction is similar to the one proposed by a recent report published by DEMOS Helsinki, *Turning the Tide*.<sup>13</sup> That report focuses strongly on economic tenets, academic production, and the procedure through which the listed initiatives attempt to engage with and within the public space to advocate for policy change; this white paper moves on a different level. This paper will focus on a smaller group of initiatives to provide more space for the discussion of their underlying anthropology. It can be said, then, that while *Turning the Tide* focuses exclusively on the economic features of the initiatives and the procedure for bringing economic discourses into the public space, the present report wishes to focus, instead, on how anthropology, philosophy, theology, and ethics play a role within economic understanding.

We have identified three main directions that have contributed to shaping anthropological models that can be examined as alternatives to *homo economicus*.

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<sup>9</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), book IV, chapter II, paragraph IX.

<sup>10</sup> Edmond Malinvaud, “Conceptualization of Agents in Positive Economic Theories,” in Edmond Malinvaud and Mary Ann Glendon, eds., *Conceptualization of the Person in Social Sciences: The Proceedings of the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 18-22 November 2005* (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2006), 419–41.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this, see Arttu Mäkipää, “The Paradox of Economic Progress,” in Arttu Mäkipää, “The Narrow Path from Human Capability to Social Progress: Insights from the Theological Anthropology of Emil Brunner for Contemporary Economic & Social Sciences” (PhD diss., Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, 2021), 183–220.

<sup>12</sup> Jermo van Nes, Patrick Nullens, and Steven C. van den Heuvel, eds., *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics* (Cham: Springer Open, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Lancaster Gronchi and Buckton Saramaki, *Turning the Tide: Landscape Analysis of an Emergent Economic Movement in Europe* (Helsinki: DEMOS, 2021).

- The pluralist approach: within this cluster of alternative economic approaches (which runs from feminist economics to the Austrian school of economics), there is not one specific anthropology—yet implicitly, they assume that human beings are complex, multidimensional creatures. While not discarding the paradigm of the *homo economicus*, the (often implicit) anthropology of the various approaches within this grouping assumes that such a paradigm is too limited to explain. Therefore, it advocates a multidisciplinary and heterodox approach in economics to provide the necessary instruments to understand the human person in its multifaceted complexity. Examples of this anthropology have been found in the British “Rethinking Economics” initiative (which has, today, created a global network of students and researchers) and the German “Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik” initiative.
- The environmentalist approach: this approach gives priority to the relations between human beings and the environment. The fundamental anthropological model of the proposals that move in this direction understands our environment as a “shared oikos,” a shared home. In this sense, it aims to reconceptualize both the relation of the human person toward “property” and the relations between people themselves as co-inhabitants of a shared “commons.” An example of this anthropology has been identified in the French “Communautés de la transition” initiative.
- The relational approach: this approach understands the human being as inherently relational. This anthropological model assumes that the reason for human actions is to be found in our being in a community and that economics should focus on an anthropology of “relations” between one person and the other. Examples of this model have, for example, been identified in the Italian “Economy of Francesco” and “Scuola di Economia Civile” initiatives.

In addition, this paper will briefly explore the possible interactions between the proposal for *homo florens* and the other proposals examined.

### **Homo Florens**

Economics is a human activity. An understanding of such activity, therefore, cannot be achieved without an effort to understand the human person. We have seen an alternative understanding of the anthropology on which an economic system is founded. The *homo* behind our understanding of economic systems is a character, a necessary foundation on which successive theoretical understandings are built. In the case of contemporary economics, as Harry Hummels has argued in his foreword to the volume *Relational Anthropology*,<sup>14</sup> the *homo economicus* is a character who is thought to act in accordance with their own interests and aims for personal wealth and well-being.<sup>15</sup> In being a “character,” however, it reveals the presupposition and the prejudices of those who have built the successive theoretical construct (i.e., contemporary neo-classical economics). In addition, in being a character, this *homo economicus* reveals just a typified human being, not a human person in its historicity, its social, ethical, and intellectual existence. Of course, it can be argued that all anthropological models are “typified” and that all the anthropological models proposed so far fall into the same category of the *homo economicus*; this certainly is true. However, by taking into account a plurality of understandings of the human being, we are able to conceive its actions (economic, but also ethical, social, etc.) in a fuller manner, coming close to human actuality.

Moreover, anthropological frameworks not only influence the way we understand human action; they also—indirectly—encourage a determinate code of conduct. Studies indicate that economics professors and students have a diminished tendency toward prosocial behavior and a

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<sup>14</sup> Jermo Van Nes, Patrick Nullens, and Steven C. van den Heuvel, eds. *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Springer Nature, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

general disregard for altruistic values and behavior.<sup>16</sup> One of the major causes of such a moral shift has been determined as the adoption of the *homo economicus* anthropological framework. As Kate Raworth argues in her *Doughnut Economics*, the idea of the “rational economic man” stands at the heart of contemporary mainstream economics.<sup>17</sup> She argues that this anthropological model is also one of the causes of the placement of “utility” at the heart of economic theory.<sup>18</sup> However, this anthropological model not only possesses an explanatory purpose—it also serves an educational one. Raworth argues that the model of the *homo economicus* not only is used to “explain” certain economic facts but also encourages people to “behave” in a certain way. The idea of the “rational economic man” can influence the way we act in financial markets and may influence the way we act outside of them as well.<sup>19</sup>

As argued also in *Relational Anthropology*, the concept of *homo economicus* was originally conceived by John Stuart Mill with the intention of providing a foundation for studying human behavior through the lens of economics.<sup>20</sup> It had both an explicative function, i.e., to assume that economic behavior could be explained only in terms of people’s pursuit of wealth and that economic decisions are rational decisions, and a prescriptive function, i.e., that economic conformation of society should be structured in a way to allow the decision-making process of the *homo economicus*, and that such decisions should be aimed at the maximization of wealth or satisfaction.

However, while it is necessary to reduce the complexity of the human being to study it, it is also necessary to move beyond the focus on rationality, considering other motivations as well.

For this reason, in 2019, the Institute for Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE) proposed a research path that produced, among its many results, the already mentioned volume *Relational Anthropology*, with the aim of integrating and complementing the framework of the *homo economicus* with the concept of *homo florens*, which is a further development of the original proposal of *homo amans*. In the beginning, the concept of *homo amans* seemed to give excessive preponderance to the virtue of love (even at the expense of other virtues). The aim, however, is to develop an anthropology of relationality that looks at human beings as complex individuals living in a network of trust-relationships. For this reason, since the aim is to link this paradigm to a sense of “human flourishing,” the concept of *homo amans* was replaced with the concept of *homo florens* to give a full account of the complexity of the relationality intended by the proponents and further expand the field of research. The proposal is to conceive the human being as a being that can “flourish” through the acknowledgment that there are some human tendencies beyond self-interest that should be fostered and encouraged.<sup>21</sup>

As argued by Nullens and Van Nes, today, overall human flourishing is hindered by the ongoing dominance of the *homo economicus* paradigm in contemporary economics, degenerating into problems that have not only personal but also social relevance, as they result in an unsustainable society (not just in environmental terms).<sup>22</sup> Their answer is to wholly rethink human

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<sup>16</sup> See, among other studies, Robert H. Frank, Thomas Gilovich, and Dennis T. Regan, “Does Studying Economics Inhibit Cooperation?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7, no. 2 (1993): 159–171; Björn Frank and Gunther G. Schulze, “Does Economics Make Citizens Corrupt?” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 43, no. 1 (2000): 101–113; Long Wang, Deepak Malhotra, and J. Keith Murnighan, “Economics Education and Greed,” *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 10, no. 4 (2011): 643–660; and Andrew L. Molinsky, Adam M. Grant, and Joshua D. Margolis, 2012. “The Bedside Manner of Homo Economicus: How and Why Priming an Economic Schema Reduces Compassion,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 119, no. 1 (2012): 27–37.

<sup>17</sup> Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist* (London: Random House Business Books, 2017), 81-83.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 83-85.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 85-88.

<sup>20</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

nature and stop emphasizing the rational, desiring, deciding subject that is the core of *homo economicus*. Thus, they take inspiration from Smith<sup>23</sup> by considering the human person as

a conscious, reflexive, embodied, bodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who—as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions—exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world.<sup>24</sup>

Under these terms, the human person is not just a mix of components. Instead, it constitutes a distinct personal being. It focuses on the realization of the human “good” as a realization of our nature. It is a framework that tries to keep together, consistently, both personal agency and a social context of loving relationships, which become the ground for human flourishing.<sup>25</sup>

Nullens and Van Nes argue, against the reductionism of contemporary scholarship, for the foundation of *homo florens* on the Judeo-Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, which are considered universal dispositions of human beings rather than just cultural products. In addition, following McCloskey,<sup>26</sup> they argue that the virtues of faith, hope, and love are an integral part of the history of European prosperity.<sup>27</sup> Faith is about our awareness of identity, “a backward-looking virtue.”<sup>28</sup> Hope, by contrast, is “forward-looking.”<sup>29</sup> Love is like “a commitment of the will to the true good of another” and has “the quality of attachment.”<sup>30</sup>

These virtues mark human beings as inherently “questing, expecting and relational” beings.<sup>31</sup> At the center point between these three virtues lies the concept of *homo florens*. Nullens and Van Nes, in addition, give preeminence to the virtue of love, identifying this virtue as the predominant character of this new model of *homo*.<sup>32</sup> Love is a universal concept, despite being extremely complex and prone to a multiplicity of interpretations. Nullens and Van Nes attempt to find a sound definition that could be the foundation for an anthropology of *homo florens*. They focus on the fact that love is a relationship more than an attitude<sup>33</sup> and agree that it is both the result of an inclination “to do good,” inherent to human beings, and at the same time influenced by one’s social environment. Because moral exemplars embody love on a regular and consistent basis, we normally want to imitate them.<sup>34</sup>

Our natural inclination to do good, and the very existence of exemplars that embody, *inter alia*, the virtue of love, raises the question of what factors make people develop into such exemplars. Following Emde’s study, they argue that keys to the formation of the social self in early childhood are (1) reciprocity (e.g., turn-taking, fairness), (2) empathy (e.g., emotional communication, compassion), and (3) valuation (e.g., the internalization of rules and standards).<sup>35</sup> In this way, they have introduced the concept of *homo florens*—a holistic anthropological model that is phenomenologically constituted by the virtues of faith, hope, and love and refers to humans as questing, expecting, and relational beings who want to foster human flourishing.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Christian. Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, pp. 15-16

<sup>26</sup> Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 91-300.

<sup>27</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues*, 153

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>31</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 17-19.

<sup>32</sup> This is one of the reasons behind the original proposal of “*homo amans*.”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

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 socio-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. An economy in which *homo florens* takes *homo economicus* by the hand becomes, step by step, a responsible economy.<sup>36</sup> What, however, are the characteristics of the *homo florens* framework?

So far, the paradigm has been presented as relying on the foundational virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the value that such a paradigm can have for economic interpretation has been argued for. However, a proper description of what this anthropological paradigm entails has not yet been given.

The *homo florens* concept understands human freedom as both negative and positive within a context of community and relationality.<sup>37</sup> This should not be understood as an invitation into ideological categories or an acceptance of an authoritarian society, where the community dictates the role of the individual. Instead, the concept of *homo florens* conveys an understanding of human freedom that is in harmony with the surrounding community. Following Fromm's discussion regarding the polarization between "freedom" and "culture,"<sup>38</sup> the *homo florens* paradigm understands that it is only from a deeper understanding of love and community that a new sense of identity and individual freedom can develop. A mentally healthy person is a person who lives by love and respects life—not only that of their own but also that of their fellow citizens. Hence, the idea of *Homo florens* is not meant to limit freedom but to help people become free persons.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of *homo florens*, in addition, does not wish to reduce the complexity of human beings to the identified virtues of faith, hope, and love. Proponents understand that the human being is not "only" that. However, they do believe that the traits of faith, hope, and love are foundational to our relational constitution as human beings. The framework is founded on the presupposition that human beings, from birth onwards, have an innate potential to love. Whether or not external factors determine an act as an act of love, the very fact that people can act as such proves their ability to do so. We believe that this is a capacity common to all human beings. The interesting point of such an interpretation is that it gives prominence to our capacities for concern and empathy.<sup>40</sup>

The idea is to integrate the current social environment with a renewed importance for relations and the emotions that are at the foundations of those relations. In this sense, the broad ethical concept of care, integrating justice and love, might be an interesting avenue for further investigation. The ethics of care does not start with our individuality but with relationality.<sup>41</sup> It recognizes that human beings are highly dependent on others and calls for taking responsibility for those who are dependent on us. Of course, this opens new questions that should be investigated: are we naturally caring beings that take responsibility for those around us, and not just for ourselves?

Still, the *homo florens* concept possesses potential transformative power. What we need is a change in our epistemic structure, in how we understand our nature as human beings and our relations with our fellows and our world. This change does not need to be "radical" or extreme; it may be just a shift in our understanding that slowly gains support in society. This transformative process can start as a set of claims belonging to a restricted group niche and then expand to embrace the whole community. Therefore, a theory of change needs to be developed to harvest the fruits of the *homo florens* model.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 179-180.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>38</sup> E. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), chap. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 210-212.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 212-213.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 219.

## Heterodox Economics: Various Interpretations for a Varied Anthropology

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a renewed approach toward economics, and the assumption at its foundation, focuses on a different understanding of its anthropological models. An important step in this direction is to reframe our understanding of the relations that human beings establish with the subject of “economics” itself. This is the case in initiatives such as “Re-thinking Economics” and the “Netzwerk Plurale Oikonomie.”

- The Re-thinking Economics (RE) initiative is an international network of scholars at economics departments across universities, student associations, and academic societies and groups located on various continents. The initiative was inspired by a letter published in 1992 in the *American Economic Review* calling for a broader economics education. However, the initiative was properly established only after the events of 2007/8—when the global financial crisis shook not only the global economy but also the foundations of the science of economics itself. The initiative advocates for educational reform in economics departments and provides a home for students who wish to debate different ideas.<sup>43</sup> Today, RE focuses its activities on lobbying economics department to make reforms through local groups. They produce research on how economics underrepresents and excludes large groups of our global population and other economic interpretations and lobby for reading lists to include a greater diversity of scholars and theories in their curricula. The activities of the group led to the foundation, in 2011, of Rethinking Economics International, a student-led non-profit organization that works to support the global network to change economics education. Founded in the UK, the initiative works to empower and grow individual student organizers, local groups, and national networks around the world to reform economics curricula, diversify the discipline, and build a community of future-focused economists. This work has led to the organization of conferences, seminars, and research groups that are active to this day. A notable example is the group “Rethinking Economics Netherlands,”<sup>44</sup> whose core mission is to introduce theoretical and methodological pluralism in economic departments at Dutch universities while also addressing real-world economic problems within the Dutch national context.<sup>45</sup>
- A similar history is shared by the Netzwerk Plural Ökonomik (NPO). This initiative focuses its activities on German-speaking countries, creating a network of students and young economists as part of the international movement for more diversity in economics. With over 30 local groups and superregional projects, they are a non-profit association for a pluralization of research, teaching, and practice in economics. Since their foundation in 2007, they have organized hundreds of events, developed academic publications, and built an internationally renowned website for economic education.<sup>46</sup>

The theoretical framework of both initiatives assumes that how we understand (learn) economics in science is also related to how we do business. The one-sided responses from economics are reflected in the multifaceted crises of the present. For although economics offers a variety of theories and methods to understand real problems, the scientific discourse is mostly limited to a single approach: that of neoclassical thinking. For this reason, the aim of both initiatives is to

<sup>43</sup> “Rethinking Economics,” accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.rethinkeconomics.org/>.

<sup>44</sup> “Rethinking Economics Netherlands,” accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.rethinkingeconomics.nl>.

<sup>45</sup> Recent academic productions developed by the group include the following:

Sam De Muijnck, Joris Tieleman, Maarten Kavelaars, and Francis Ostermeijer, “Thinking Like an Economist? A Quantitative Analysis of Economics Bachelor Curricula in the Netherlands,” last modified 2017, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www.rethinkingeconomics.nl/publications>.

Sam De Muijnck, and Joris Tieleman, *Economy Studies: A Guide to Rethinking Economics Education* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> “Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik,” accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.plurale-oekonomik.de/>.



advocate for a pluralistic interpretation of economics. The economics of the future needs diverse perspectives and starting points: not only free market, growth, and competition, but also cooperation, responsibility, and distribution must be addressed during research to be socially just and ecologically sustainable in the future. This assumption also resonates with the *homo florens* proposal in its call for interdisciplinarity and dialogue between different fields and spheres of society. As Glas has argued, a reframing of economics (and of society) will need a transdisciplinary approach guided by an overarching and inspiring view, which is informed by a worldview or worldviews, with contributions from all relevant stakeholders and a set of useful conceptual distinctions.<sup>47</sup>

In this regard, while the academic production of both initiatives is strongly rooted within the field of economics, the work also allows for considerations of the anthropology that gives substance to their economic claims and opens the field of discussions to the “non-expert” in economics. One example could be the work *The Econocracy*.<sup>48</sup> This book claims that contemporary economic education is ill-suited to form the plethora of economic “experts” who graduate every year from economic faculties to face the issues that the contemporary world presents. The core assumption of the work is that “economics affects everyone, so it cannot be left to the ‘experts.’”<sup>49</sup>

For the sake of developing this argument, the authors introduce the concept of “Econocracy,” which can be defined as the realization that economics has become a separate part of society, something that stands on its own, with its own rules, rituals, and assumptions. At the same time, while being “separate” from the rest of society, the economy is also understood as the “ruling” reality; everything else finds its meaning only in the measure to which it contributes to the advancement of the economic chain.<sup>50</sup> The assumption that economics (and economists) works as a “science” that provides merely “technical,” neutral data often masks the fact that technical calculations are used to push political judgments.<sup>51</sup> The result is that political processes are hijacked by economists and economic theories, giving rise to societies “ruled” by economics. This has led to the marginalization of the role of the citizen and the increasing importance of “technical” knowledge and of those who wield it.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the economics taught today does not teach how to address problems in the real world, but, instead, how to wield power and manipulate it in political contexts, guaranteeing the reproduction of the “Econocracy.”

For this reason, the authors claim, we need a rediscovery of pluralistic views in economics. Since economics, as a social construct, is a varied reality that depends on human relations, attitudes, thoughts, and instincts, it cannot be reduced to just one paradigm. We need alternative interpretations and even alternative forms of education to integrate economic teaching with real-world problems. A similar argument is also proposed in the volume “Rethinking Economics,”<sup>53</sup> where it is argued that no branch of economics can claim to have a monopoly on economic knowledge. The various schools of economic thought point out different human phenomena that play a part in the development of economic facts. In this sense, it should also be noted that the authors call for a better consideration of the contributions that social and hard sciences can make to economics.<sup>54</sup>

An excellent introduction to this framework of interpretation can be found in Ha-Joon Chang’s *Economics: A User’s Guide*.<sup>55</sup> In his book, Chang claims that economics cannot be

<sup>47</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 131

<sup>48</sup> Joe Earle, Cahal Moran, Zach Ward-Perkins, *The Econocracy; On the Perils of Leaving Economics to the Experts* (Manchester University Press, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, III

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 2-3

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 7-9

<sup>53</sup> Liliann Fischer, Joe Hasell, J. Christopher Proctor, David Uwakwe, Zach Ward-Perkins, Catriona Watson, *Rethinking Economics; An Introduction to Pluralist Economics* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>55</sup> Ha-Joon Chang, *Economics: The User’s Guide* (London: Penguin Group, 2014).

considered a “hard” science with one given reality that can be objectively decomposed and studied. Different economic theories emphasize different aspects of reality and form different interpretations and moral and political judgments of that reality, with a worrying tendency to fail to predict real world-changing economic events. The subject matter of economics is, banally, the “Economy,” as a complex system of interactions between human beings, work, technology, money, organization, and taxes; it is a science that tries to understand and organize human things of life. However, precisely because it tries to understand and conceptualize human things, it cannot rely on an idealization of concepts.<sup>56</sup> Not only does real economics involve complex organizational systems (corporations, states, cooperatives, etc.) but the human individual itself is not the elegant decision-maker, driven by desires and rational choices, depicted in economic theories. The anthropology on which Chang’s interpretation of economics rests is that of an imperfect human being, historically and culturally bounded, that is tied to and influenced by a myriad of factors. This interpretation does not undermine the importance of the individual; instead, it makes it matter more. Because we admit that human beings are influenced by many factors, that they are shaped and pushed by society around them in many ways, then we can appreciate the free will of those who make choices against social conventions and norms, even against their own interests. In this sense, we can develop an appreciation of “real” choices based on the lived experience of the decision maker.

A similar interpretation has been offered by Tielman and Muijnck. In their book *Economy Studies*, they claim that if we are to effectively manage our economy, we need an all-around, real-world understanding of how economic sectors are intertwined with each other, how citizens economically depend on each other, and how the economy is embedded in our society at large. A single theoretical framework cannot be sufficient for this. A range of approaches that prioritize different methodologies, assumptions, units of analysis, and outcomes will be necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the problem at hand.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, pluralism is a critical necessity of economics education because, to fully answer any question about an economy, an economist must look at the problem from multiple perspectives that utilize different assumptions.<sup>58</sup>

This approach is founded on the acknowledgment that different theories offer diverse insights into human nature and on what influences and inspires human action in the economy, offering more adaptable solutions to real-world problems. It also allows economists (and their students) to obtain more concrete knowledge about economic facts in a vast array of contexts.<sup>59</sup> This, in turn, it allows us to consider the multiplicity of values and reasons that take place in the unfolding of economic action. We must take into account the values that take the stage in economics when considering the “outcomes” of economic processes but also the values that take the stage as “causal” variables and even the values that come to play in the “analytical tools” of economists.<sup>60</sup> As human beings are complex creatures, the multiplicity of variables, decisions, and reasons that play into the unfolding of economic choices is simply too complex and extended to be reduced to one theoretical framework.

At first glance, this anthropological model is different than the *homo florens* model. While the pluralist model focuses on a much more abstract concept of “human nature,” which is considered multifaceted and complex, without apparently deeply analyzing any specific feature of said human nature, the *homo florens* model, while acknowledging such complexity, focuses strongly on the human capacity for love and relationality. It considers the “being in a community” of the human person. However, this does not necessarily create a rift between these two anthropological models. As Glas has argued, economic interactions can be intrinsically normative.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 176-189

<sup>57</sup> Sam De Muijnck, Joris Tieleman, *Economy Studies: A Guide to Rethinking Economics Education* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 66-68.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 80-84.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 96-98.

<sup>61</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 122

That is, practices and actions, more than theoretical knowledge, help ingrain normativity in our customs and tendencies. In this sense, the *homo florens* approach, with its attention to the relational features of human nature, can lend assistance to the pluralist model precisely in the moment when we need the “transition” from theoretical/scientific understandings to informed social practices and help to direct such social practices toward positive outcomes. In this sense, these two anthropological models, although different on a theoretical level, could work in reciprocal integration at the moment of their implementation into the social discourse. The *homo florens* model can be a strong foundation for building the overarching worldview that can substantiate, at a social level, the pluralist proposal.

### **A Shared *Oikos*, a Shared Existence: The Environmental Problem**

Another direction within the cultural movement that aims to reframe economic thought focuses on looking at the relation between the human being and its environment. Instead of focusing on the relations between individuals, or between human beings and the “system” of economics, this third operation of reframing aims to analyze the relations that human beings establish with nature as a system that sustains life itself with the aim of reshaping the human way of life toward less exploitative structures in a way that can guarantee the long-term survivability of both the human species and the biosphere.

An exemplary initiative in this direction is the French initiative “Campus de la Transition” (CdT), which is focused on teaching, research, and experimentation. It was created in 2018 by a collective of lecturer-researchers, entrepreneurs, and students united by the idea of promoting an ecological transition to address the issues that humanity is facing in 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> This initiative is a laboratory that offers new multidisciplinary teaching programs aligned with ecological issues. The Campus offers various forms of training to students, teachers, and professionals, in addition to accompanying companies and institutions in their transition. The aim is to make these audiences aware of the urgency of an ecological and social transition and to equip them to contribute to it. The initiative is driven by two convictions:

- 1) No systemic transformation can take place without a deep personal appropriation and understanding of the stakes. Solving complex problems goes beyond individual initiative and requires an approach that is intellectually and ethically structured in a new way in terms of representations of the world (epistemology) and associated metrics (indicators).
- 2) A simple and coherent way of life that allows for peaceful relationships with oneself and with others. The campus promotes the idea of a good life (*buen vivir*), full of meaning, in a respectful and more adjusted relationship with all forms of living, with the wealth of the planet, and with human frailties for the generations to come.

Meeting environmental and societal challenges requires thinking about new economic models, new criteria for discerning what is good for humanity and the planet from what is not, and social institutions to concretize such discernment. For this reason, the campus offers a place for experimentation, research, and high-level higher education on the processes of transitioning to a new economy that respects and values ecosystems and natural balances. The public at which it is aimed consists of students of the *Grandes Ecoles*, doctoral students and researchers, local governments, NGOs, and companies.

Its main activities consist of courses aimed at different audiences (from students to managers), research actions in conjunction with partners in key economic and social sectors, and experimentation engaged in a holistic transition process, where the environmental dimension is

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<sup>62</sup> “Campus De La Transition,” last modified 2018, accessed October 30, 2021, <https://campus-transition.org/>.

closely linked to that of social inclusion through cooperative workshops focusing especially on the topics of the bio-regional economy, permaculture and social inclusion, and finance and governance.

The CdT published its core theoretical tenets as a manual, *Le Manuel de la Grande Transition*,<sup>63</sup> which offers an introduction to the core concepts and the theoretical framework that inspires and guides their work. The manual focuses on the necessity of a “Great Transition.” This term is used to denote the necessity that we, as a collective, need to drastically change the way we live, manufacture, consume, travel, protect ourselves from the elements, and spend our free time<sup>64</sup> to establish a new form of society that is not exploitative toward the environment and assures a continued (and more just) survival of human species on earth. It is a transformation that touches many spheres of human life at once, from economy to ecology and social and political frameworks.<sup>65</sup> The ethical presupposition behind this aspired change is founded on an attitude of “caring,” with the meaning of cultivating a concern for the common good and a willingness to “take care” of both our environment and our fellow inhabitants of the planet. At its core, the principal challenge the Great Transition faces is providing individuals and societies with resources that will allow them to take better care of their living environments, their biological and cultural diversity, and people close to them and further afield.<sup>66</sup>

The anthropology on which the project is grounded moves on a double binary. First, it aims to reconceive the fundamental relation between human beings and the earth. Second, building on this relation between humanity and nature, it aims to reconceive the relations between persons.

On the first point, the theoretical framework formulates an important distinction between the “earth” and the “world.” While the earth is, simply put, our planet in its objective, independent existence, the “world” is what human societies have “produced” on Earth. This distinction is not merely functional; it serves a substantive purpose. While societies have excluded the “other,” either human, plant, or animal, from their “world,” the initiative invites us to develop a sense for a “shared” world.

To postulate the existence of a world shared between all inhabitants of the Earth is to oppose the current viewpoint, according to which we exhaust our resources, producing not a shared world, but an individualistic unequal and divided world. The shared world has not been given to us; it remains an aim for all the Earth’s inhabitants.<sup>67</sup>

The current relation between humanity and earth is described through the concept of the “Anthropocene.” This is a conception of our current world in which humanity has acquired the capacity to disrupt global dynamics at a fundamental level. This disruption operates on multiple levels: exploitation and consumption of natural resources, disruption of natural balance, alteration of climate cycles, etc. The disruptive nature of our current socio-economic framework affects not only our relations with the earth but also our relations with other human beings. In fact, while the gains of such exploitation are more and more concentrated into fewer hands, the consequences of such exploitation are unevenly pushed toward the weakened parts of our societies.<sup>68</sup> The final result, according to the authors, can be only one: an uninhabitable planet and an unlivable world, indicating both the physical impossibility of living on a disrupted earth and the social unsustainability of an unjust social system.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cécile Renouard, Rémi Beau, Christophe Goupil, and C Koenig, *Manuel De la Grande Transition* (Campus De La Transition, 2020). English translation by Josie Dyster, *The Great Transition Guide; Principles for a Transformative Education* (Campion Hall, Oxford: Campus de la Transition, Forges and Laudato Si’ Research Institute, 2021).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>69</sup> As the authors of the manual claim, “The world is becoming uninhabitable for a growing number of human beings. The availability of sufficient food, healthcare, mobility, and housing is no longer guaranteed for a significant part of the global population.” Ibid, 23.

To avoid the most destructive scenario, the CdT proposes a return to the concept of the “commons” extended to a global scale, i.e., a sense that there are some things on earth that “belong to everyone” and that should be subtracted from the exploitation of individual ownership. This sense of “shared resources” would require a new understanding of the concept of property, which should be defined as a bundle of user and governance rights that may be distributed among numerous people. Of course, such transformation would require enormous work to rethink and readapt not only social and political categories but also economic and legal ones.<sup>70</sup>

The second theoretical path, instead, reframes the relationship between persons within this “shared world.” Local and global environmental changes pose a risk to all human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Earth. In the face of these changes, we are discovering that we are “all vulnerable,” in a situation of general interdependence.<sup>71</sup> This interpretation takes inspiration from virtue ethics, which seeks to describe the character traits or dispositions for actions that individuals must cultivate if they wish to lead an ethical life. The authors thus describe the possibility of thinking about “ecological virtues.” These virtues might include discipline, an ability to cooperate with others, and a respect for nature.<sup>72</sup>

In the same light, since moral action is preeminently social action, to lead a good life for oneself, one must not forget those who are excluded by society and should refuse to take part in those social structures that operate the exclusion. The act of “caring” that, in the first point, was directed toward “the world” is now directed toward our fellows and toward ourselves. To care for the other, in a context of interdependence, also means to care for ourselves and vice-versa. We see here an anthropology of connection and interdependence derived from the ontology of the “shared world.” A shared world develops into a shared community sustained by interdependent persons.

According to the authors, modern thought (and contemporary democracy) has rested on the assumption of an unlimited world in which human action could unfold without limits, according to the will of the action. Today, this assumption has become untenable. At the same time, however, this stark realization may represent a challenge for democracies. Devoid of the myth of eternal abundance, humanity may simply fall into premodern, authoritarian forms of organization. What we need, instead, is a collective construction of ecologically and socially desirable structures. In this new environmental context, we can redefine ethics as the aim of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions, and with respect for ecological limits.<sup>73</sup>

This second path, revolving around the concept of a “shared oikos,” resonates strongly with the anthropological model of *homo florens*. As Nullens and Van Nes have argued, human beings are “religiously” concerned in any kind of socio-cultural setting—it does not require a verdict on the reality of god(s).<sup>74</sup> If we interpret the adjective “religiously” widely, then it becomes the orientation toward ultimate, primordial mysteries of our experiences, which, in the case of the shared oikos, may well be our connection with the nature that is both inside and around us. The *homo florens* model addresses how we can foster and encourage our inclination to do good. This calls for an observation of how human beings relate to their environment, which is understood not only socially or morally, but biologically as well, as behavioral developments involve adaptive exchanges with the environment around us,<sup>75</sup> opening the door to environmental concerns, albeit from the starting point of human flourishing. In this sense, the two models may have different starting points, but their focus on the thriving of human communities and the necessary consideration of adaptive exchanges that this thriving requires will allow them to meet in a middle ground: the common concern for human relationality, which is not only directed toward other human beings but also toward our environment as a whole.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 25-30.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 42-44

<sup>74</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 23

### **Civil Economy: The Italian-Catholic Tradition**

The Italian tradition in economics has been strongly influenced by Catholic social thought. In this white paper, we focus on two examples of economic thought developed within the Italian Catholic tradition and the so-called “civil economy” tradition: the “Economy of Francesco” and the “Scuola di Economia Civile.”

- The “Economy of Francesco” (EoF) was inspired by a letter written by Pope Francis in May 2019 and addressed to the “young economists and entrepreneurs of all the world,” in which the Pope invited his readers to “re-animate” the economy in a spiritual sense.<sup>76</sup> In just two years, the initiative has gathered support from members of universities, scholars of all ages and backgrounds, and entrepreneurs from all around the world, inspiring a network of more than 3,000 people. The initiative works primarily through the development of the EoF Academy and the EoF School, the first being a network of researchers and scholars working to develop the theoretical framework of the initiative, and the second being a training school for young entrepreneurs that aims to provide them with economic knowledge to run their own businesses. It also places a strong emphasis on ethics, encouraging students to integrate rigorous economic practices with humane approaches. The initiative also works through the development of videos, documentaries, and reports about economic realities and problems all around the world, gathering, in this way, support and know-how to address these problems and strengthen communities and relationships all around the world. The initiative has been enriched by the collaboration of important personalities from the academic, political, and scholarly worlds that have provided theoretical contributions and insights to the members of the network through lectures, meetings, and messages. Examples are Vandana Shiva (economist), Rodrigo Guerra (theologian and philosopher), Kate Raworth (economist and consultant to the Pope), and Jeffrey Sachs (economist). Today, the initiative strongly continues its activity and has just recently completed a trimester of its entrepreneurial school while being in the process of launching its 2022 edition of the EoF School.
- The “Scuola di Economia Civile” (School of Civil Economy, SEC) is an initiative born in 2012 out of the collaboration of scholars and professors and the funding of private and religious institutions, such as “BancaEtica” and the “Associazione Cristiana Lavoratori Italiani.” The school aims to influence public and private entrepreneurship toward an understanding of economy based on people, relations, and places. According to the foundational values of the school, economy should go beyond conflict and competition and focus on generative markets based on relationality and gratuity of action between people.<sup>77</sup> Among the foundational values of the school are, first, “trust,” understood as the foundation of any meaningful human relation, including economic ones. The second value is “reciprocity,” understood as the fundamental nature of human relations; any kind of human relation is based on some form of reciprocity, and economic relations exemplify this in a peculiar way. It also includes “relational goods,” understood as the goods produced by human relations based on voluntary sharing between human beings. The school aims to inspire a cultural and ethical transformation of our understanding of economics based on virtue, citizenship, and the common good. The activity of the school focuses mainly on the organization of yearly courses and summer schools of higher education and collaboration with schools and universities. The school is deeply involved with important personalities from academy and finance that regularly collaborate and teach the courses of the school, such as economists Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni. The theoretical

<sup>76</sup> Francis, “Letter sent by the Holy Father for the Event ‘Economy of Francesco,’” The Holy See, 2019, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190501\\_giovani-imprenditori.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190501_giovani-imprenditori.html).

<sup>77</sup> “Scuola di Economia Civile,” last modified 2019, accessed November 9, 2021, <https://www.scuoladieconomicivile.it/>.

framework of the school is strongly based on Catholic theology and the work of Antonio Genovesi, a writer and economist who lived in the 18th century.

Both initiatives share a fundamental anthropology strongly rooted within the Catholic tradition. In the case of the EOC, the primary source for understanding this anthropology can be found in the letter of Pope Francis of May 1, 2019. In this letter, Pope Francis presents St. Francis of Assisi as the human model in which the new generation of economists and entrepreneurs should find inspiration for their social and ethical action. This message is further reinforced through another concept that is shared with the SEC theoretical framework: happiness, understood as the human dimension in which the single person is connected with other human beings and with their community. This understanding of the concept is evident in the encyclical letter “Fratelli tutti,” which is another document that inspired the EOC initiative.<sup>78</sup> In this letter, Pope Francis, following the model of St. Francis, encourages Christians to give up any desire for domination over the other and to strive to live in harmony with our fellow creatures and the earth.

A better understanding of the moral ground that inspired both initiatives can be obtained only by further investigating the common Catholic tradition that has inspired both. This tradition, beyond the moral claims of Catholicism, is founded on an anthropology that understands the human being as a connected being—connected with its community, its history, and its social/political environment.

As Bruni and Zamagni have affirmed in their *Dizionario di Economia Civile*, social scientists must take into account intersubjectivity within their own analysis.<sup>79</sup> They also make a distinction between “social relations” and “personal relations,” giving privilege to the second. The first are totally anonymous and can be abstracted by specific subjects; they can be “typified” and described in anonymous and impersonal forms. The second, instead, depend and rely on the individual subjectivity of the persons involved.

Economic relations are just another form of relations between persons. Therefore, an analysis should at least be aware of, if not able to analyze, the “unspoken” in said relations: emotions, beliefs, values, etc. In fact, according to the authors, reducing the complexity of motivations, drives, and interiority to merely the observable effects of the economic relation is a methodological fallacy.<sup>80</sup> The anthropology on which this understanding of economics is built aims to consider the human being as a multifaceted being that is not reduced to a one-dimensional aspect of existence (i.e., rational choice, desire, selfishness, etc.), as in mainstream economic interpretations. In this interpretation, the human person is influenced by a multitude of factors that can find realization only at the moment these motivations enter into a form of relations with the other. In this sense, an economics based on this kind of anthropology, according to the author, would also be able to analyze and evaluate other forms of relations that do not fit perfectly within economic action (like gratuitous action or the act of giving).<sup>81</sup>

This anthropology resonates with the Catholic moral tradition in its rejection of a purely instrumental understanding of human relations. This interpretation was already proposed by Bruni in his 2006 book *Civil Happiness*, in which he acknowledges that the market can be a place in which it is possible to experience genuine interpersonal relations. Mainstream political economy, according to Bruni, acknowledges interpersonal relations only as “externalities,” as an extra-

<sup>78</sup> Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*,” The Holy See, 03/10/2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

<sup>79</sup> Luigino Bruni, Stefano Zamagni, *Dizionario di Economia Civile* (Roma: Città Nuova Editore, 2009), 6.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 9.

economic matter,<sup>82</sup> and completely overlooks non-instrumental relations.<sup>83</sup> This overlooking of non-instrumental relations has reduced the principle of happiness in economics to a self-focusing, individualistic principle that has quickly been identified with the principle of pleasure, further restricting ethical reflection in economics. In this way, Bruni points out, within the theoretical framework of economics and the dichotomy between happiness and sociality, a concept of happiness based on genuine sociality is absent. The theoretical framework seems to have limited itself, so far, to considering happiness either as “eudaimonia” or as pleasure. The ethical and interpersonal dimension of happiness has, then, been overlooked by most academic economic reflection.

Against this turn, Bruni aims to investigate and re-propose alternative traditions that are closer to the spirit of civil economy. Particularly, he wishes to refer to the work of Antonio Genovesi, who, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the peak of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, aimed to develop a conception of economic life focused on urban life and the centrality of human relations for the civil life.<sup>84</sup> For Genovesi, happiness is “summum bonum,”<sup>85</sup> which comes from natural obligations between humans but also from the subsequent original pacts that establish the life of a community.<sup>86</sup> This interpretation of the human’s role in society rests on a “relational anthropology” that focuses on the human capacity of “forming relations.” In this sense, it resonates with the proposal of the *homo florens* to the extent that it aims to consider, within economic studies, the human capacity for reciprocity and the necessity of establishing authentic relations with other human persons. While the Catholic tradition in civil economy does not focus on analyzing specific virtues, as it focuses on the features of sociality and relationality itself, much like the concept of *homo florens*, it recognizes that a human being, while striving for his or her own happiness, can achieve this happiness only within the relations of a community. In this sense, the human being is a creature that is both eminently social and that expresses its own individuality fully only within a relation with the other. Happiness, then, can flourish only within genuine relations, not instrumental ones, that allow the human being to be “happy in a happy community.”<sup>87</sup>

There is clearly a resonance between the proposal of the *homo amans* paradigm and the relational anthropology proposed by the model of civil economy. However, while the model of civil economy restricts the field of analysis only to the human capacity to create relations, the *homo florens* model aims to go a step further and identify the core virtues and moral characters that allow for the creation of said relations.

### **Conclusion: A Relational Anthropology of Personhood for Contemporary Economics**

Given the contemporary challenges in society, this white paper aimed to increase awareness regarding anthropological assumptions in economic thinking. From questioning the accuracy of the *homo economicus* model, we have moved toward presenting alternative economic thinking that rests on different anthropological assumptions. The aim was to show that it is possible to think about a human person with different traits than just self-interest or desire and that this alternative human being can be thought as the subject of economic action that moves away from the simple maximization of profit and utility. However, as Kate Raworth asks, if we are to replace the paradigm of *homo economicus*, what should take its place? The fact is that it is not possible to point

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<sup>82</sup> Luigino Bruni, *Civil Happiness, Economics and Human Flourishing in Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-2, 18-20, 108-111.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-50.

<sup>85</sup> Antonio Genovesi, *Lezioni di commercio o sia di economia civile, Critical Edition*, ed. Maria L. Perna (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2005 [1765–1767]).

<sup>86</sup> L Bruni, *Civil Happiness*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68.



out just one identity of the human being (a social being, an altruistic being, etc.). We inhabit all of our identities, and all of our actions and inclinations belong to us.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, we should not consider the anthropologies examined in this white paper as exclusive options. They are all viable instruments of analysis whenever we wish to focus on one of the many economic and social problems we must face today.

For this reason, this white paper has presented the proposal of the model of *homo florens* as a positive step in this direction. It suggests that people are socially conditioned in their natural ability to search for meaning (“to believe”), to project their longings unto the future (“to hope”), and to relate meaningfully to others (“to love”).<sup>89</sup> Again, as an isolated concept, it may not serve its intended purpose. However, when taken within a theoretical framework that strives to consider human complexity in its totality, it possesses the transformative power necessary to approach a truly holistic methodology in economics. It grasps the fundamental qualities of our being human (our need for the other, our need for a future, and our need to love) that can be the foundation for a comprehensive anthropology that enables a new understanding in economics.

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<sup>88</sup> Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, 109-110.

<sup>89</sup> Van Nes, Nullens, and Van den Heuvel, *Relational Anthropology for Contemporary Economics*, 218.

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