C: What worldviews about humans tell you – and what they don’t

“Who am I – and what drives me?” This question sounds philosophical, but it is highly economic. Because how we see human beings determines how we organize the economy. Here are the 3½ most important human worldviews in economics – and why they reveal more about ideologies than about us.

1. Homo Oeconomicus: Mister Self-Interest

He is the classic: rational, calculating, egoistic. The Homo Oeconomicus thinks in numbers and advantages. He wants more for himself – (almost) always. In short: Mister Self-Interest.

The 19th century invented him – as the mascot of the property-owning bourgeoisie. And he remained because he fits capitalism perfectly: if humans are egoistic, the system may be as well.

Sure, we all have a bit of ego – it lies deep in our genes. In the Stone Age it was about survival, today it is about market share. But we now live in a world that needs cooperation instead of competition.

Conclusion: This image was useful a few centuries ago – but it is long outdated.

2. Homo Sustensis: the meaning-seeker

The Homo Sustensis wants more than money: meaning,

sustainability, community. He thinks socially, lives mindfully, strives for balance instead of bonuses.

Idealistic? Yes. But perhaps more realistic than we think – because the number of people who value meaning over status is growing.

3. Homo Reciprocans: the fair player

The Homo Reciprocans believes in fairness. He acts justly – as long as others do, too. Fouls are punished with purchase boycotts – even if that makes life more expensive.

The Homo Reciprocans thinks and lives cooperation not as an exception, but as the rule. Only: this requires a system that makes free-riding unattractive and rewards solidarity.

4. Homo Relationalis: the relationship-human

The Homo Relationalis is not a lone fighter, but a mirror of his environment. Friends, colleagues, culture – they shape his values.

And culture emerges from economy. Or, with Marx: Being shapes consciousness.

5. Homo Varius: the realistic model

None of these images fits completely. The egoist is too narrow, the idealist too utopian, the fair one too rigid, the relationship-human too flexible. Therefore we need version 5.0: the Homo Varius.

He unites reason and empathy, individuality and community. He

knows: his happiness does not depend on having, but on how he… Well, you will learn the details in the article about him. [Link]

Your TEC-Learnings:

- The Homo Oeconomicus is a distorted image – useful for markets, harmful for people
- A small amount of egoism is in all of us – but it must not be the basis of system design.
- New human worldviews show: We are more cooperative than classical economics wants us to believe.

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