MONEY IN POSTMODERNITY AND GLOBALISATION PROCESSES

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In today's plural world interdisciplinary and interreligous symposia on various topics (including money and religion!) understandably are not rare.1 If “homo oeconomicus” and “homo religiosus” are brought into a co–relationship, we are undoubtedly faced with the following question: “What kind of a co–relationship is it?”

History teaches us that many a happy or sad story has involved money, that money has permeated many unrealised dreams and human fates. It is a fact that historically money has often been the cause of tensions, conflicts and dilemmas. “Become rich. How?” — asks himself Mark Twain, and answers — “Dishonestly if we can, honestly if we must.” Wealth is in correlation with divinity. “Who is the one and only god?” — continues Twain. The answer is — “Money is god. Gold, dollars and shares — the father, the son and their spirit.”

1. Economics and Religion

Contrary to Adam Smith’s thesis2, in his study “Heiliges Geld”3 Bernard Laum demonstrates that the origine of money is in a cult, in a sacral sphere. Originally it meant sacrificial goods (and not, as Smith stated, an exchange of goods). Sacrifices were made (mainly animals) in order to earn the favour of gods. History testifies that sacrificial goods used to be next to temples (where

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1 The Catholic Academy in Bavaria organised a symposium a year ago under the title: New Deity — Money. Over the last several years several proceedings addressing the relationship of religion and money were published. See Ch. Gestrich, Gott, Geld und Gabe. Zur Geldfrömmigkeit des Denkens in Religion und Gesellschaft, Berlin 2004; Geld. Sammelband der Vorträge des Studium Generale der Ruprecht–Karls–Universität Heidelberg im Sommersemester 2001
3 B. Laum, Heiliges Geld, Tübingen 1924, p. 39 and similar
the animals for sacrificial offering could be bought).\textsuperscript{4} At about the same time as Laum, Max Weber demonstrated that the separation of religion and economics was a later development.\textsuperscript{5} It was a process by which the sacrificial offerings became symbols. Namely, for practical reasons live animals were gradually replaced by metal coins with animal figures painted on them. Those pieces of metal subsequently started to be used in everyday life, in human interactions.\textsuperscript{6}

We could say that religion and economics have a sisterly relation of a sort. They both desire for man’s happiness; economics for a temporary, and religion for an eternal happiness! Money is also linked to happiness. People will invest and pledge their souls for money (even today) — some their bodies, too. Some have enough to swim in it, while the others dream about it as a saving force. An ocean of money is what Disney’s duck is dreaming of as he swims in a pool full of coins. “I am very proud when I, just like a shark, jump in a pool full of money, crawl in it like a worm, throwing it in the air and having it rain down on my head.” Money is everywhere!

How to weaken the grip money has over us? The Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa pleads for an unusual, but logical solution. “The only method is to earn it, to earn it in the quantities that would make its influence unnoticeable.”\textsuperscript{7}

Money is often linked with gold. History teaches us about the fate of insatiable gold–diggers and gold–lovers. Story has it that between 1493 and 1690 the Spaniards had exported from Mexico — by extensive use of violence — 1230 tons of gold. The natives, for whom gold did not have any particular significance, poured the malten metal down the gold–diggers’ throats to reward their greed and violence. Cruel! Gold is, therefore, not only a precious metal, but also a cause for violence. Just like money.

1.1 Money and “Homo Oeconomicus”

What is money? Money is primarily an object of possession, an object of lust, a stimulant of greed, a servant of deceit; often the cause and cruel witness of poverty.\textsuperscript{8} For theoreticians of economics, it is a medium of a multifarious

\textsuperscript{5} See. M. Weber, Protestantstskta etika i duh kapitalizma, Sarajevo 1968
\textsuperscript{7} F. Pessoa, Ein anarchistischer Bankier, Berlin 1986
synthesis. In this respect, money is: 1. a means of exchange and an imaginary measure of value (particularly reserve) 2. a material expression of the purchasing power and a general guarantor of proprietorship. 3. a general means of payment.

In broader terms, money is a medium of social synthesis. It individualises and socialises subjects. Namely, it is not only the language of money, but also its specific codes that contribute to the cohesion and integration of the society. We may say, therefore, that money brings the world together. It is a medium of ontosemiological synthesis and, as such, it demonstrates its poetic meaning.⁹

The understanding of money and the attitude to it are crucial in order to understand and comprehend the man of today. It paints the type of man we call today “homo oeconomicus.”¹⁰ “The last man is homo oeconomicus, a manager, who, together with a technician and a bureaucrat — the heroes of a functionalist mind — subjects the Earth to himself.”¹¹

“Homo oeconomicus” is a rational actor focused on possession, a man enchanted by money.¹² He knows very well that money can bee seen, heard, touched or smelled, even tasted. “Pecunia non olet” — the smell of money, as the Roman emperor Vespasian said, is repulsive to no–one. Freud famously begged to differ. Whether it smells good or bad, many do have a nose for it. The seductive smell of money is in its quantity: the more we have, the nicer the smell. Money can buy anything. Honour and clout, reputation and power.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that money is a medium that cannot make anyone happy or safe, and yet it makes it possible for everyone to be unhappy in a relatively pleasant way. With money, everything is relative. It (money) is the only absolute good, primarily because it does not arouse any need in concreto, but simply a need in abstracto. Money is similar to sea water, inasmuch as the more you drink of it, the stronger your thirst.

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We can say that as an expressive signal of “homo oeconomicus,” money is an imaginary passport to the capitalism–impregnated global world. Actually, globalisation is a product of the money phenomenon. And where money is in play, we do not think only of wealth, but also of poverty, social indifference and a rational, egotistical calculation. The present economisation of life is generally discussed as a triumph of capitalism, the free market and globalisation. This phenomenon is sometimes insufficiently interpreted as a consequence of the taking over of the power of economic systems. The spirit of the present times favours flexibility and mobility, and it is not simply a reflex to the manipulation created by capitalist relations. It is a reaction to the opinion of the modernity. Money marks our life, often to a greater extent than we would wish for. All areas of life today seem to be subject to the formula: price (cost) — benefit. Some would even value religion through the same prism. Thus Niklas Luhmann claims that today the omnipotence of God has been replaced by the omnipotence of money. He asks himself therefore whether it was possible to organise religion after the fashion of money.

2. Philosophy and Money

What do philosophers say about money? In the context of the standardised exchange of goods, philosophers thought about money in broader economic, as well as ethical relations. What is the relation between economics and philosophy?

According to the testimony of Aristotle, Thales was the first philosopher–economist in the present meaning of the word. When he was reproached (as Aristotle wrote) for poverty and uselessness of philosophy, “he — Aristotle writes — having learned with astronomy’s assistance that the year would yield a good crop of olives, used the little money he had had and already in the winter leased under very favourable terms every oil press in Miletus and Hio as no-one would offer a better price. When the moment was right, and suddenly and simultaneously there was a great demand for large numbers of

14 E. Bockelmann, Im Takt des Geldes. Zur Genese modernen Denkens, Springe 2004

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presses. Thales rented them out at the price of his own choosing, and thus, having earned a lot of money, demonstrated how easy it was for philosophers to become rich, when they chose to become so, even though it was not something they aspired to.17

Aristotle made a distinction between “economics” (management of the household) and “chremastics” (application).18 This is what he thinks about the relationship: “Every acquisition has two uses; they both belong to the thing in itself, but not similarly in themselves, because one is typical of the thing, and the other /use/ is not, as for instance a shoe may be used as a piece of footwear and as an object of trade. Because both represent possible uses of a shoe. Namely, if someone trades a shoe for money or food with a needy person, the shoe will be used as a shoe, but it will not be its typical use.”19 If the field of economics is good and useful means, philosophy is pointing to the right target.

The objective of man’s life is surely not the having, but the being, being happy. The property and wealth are only the means of living well and also of providing a good life to others. Money is, therefore, not the aim of life.20 “And it is meaningless to regard as wealth something that makes it possible for man to starve to death despite its abundance, for instance, the wealth of Midas, who, as the story has it, and because of his unsatisfied desire, turned to gold everything he touched.”21

While there are certain restrictions concerning the collection of the material foodstuffs, there are none where money is concerned. In this respect, Aristotle speaks of an illness called “pleonexia” (unsatiation), a disorder compelling men to always want more — i.e. unsatiability. As an illness, pleonexia enslaves man’s inherent independence, and once it multiplies, it threatens moreover the very foundations of the society, the community — the politics.

The visible sign of “pleonexia” according to Aristotle are the interest rates (tōkos).22 To Aristotle, just like to the Christian, Islamic and Jewish interpreters of his philosophy in the Middle Ages, they represent a “counter–natural” (immoral) practice.

17 Aristotel, Politika, 1259a, p. 10.
18 See Aristotel, Nikomahova etika, 1133b; Politika 1256 b.
19 Aristotel, Politika, 1257a, p. 5.
21 Aristotel, Politika, 1257b, 15; and Ovid in “Metamorfoze”, XI, describe King Midas who suffers a trauma because his wish that everything he touched turned to gold came true.
22 See Aristotel, Politika, 1258 b.
If Aristotle had placed economics within the frame of ethics, St. Augustine directed the thoughts on money towards the proper relation to religion. Namely, he pointed to the difference between, on one hand, the pagan image—worshippers who gave to their supreme god Jupiter the nickname “pecunia”, money, in order to divinise their love for money, and on the other hand Christians who, because of their love for God, use money for noble purposes of love and justice.\textsuperscript{23}

As a means, money presupposes ethics. In this respect, Thomas Aquinas warns that an image of “Moneta”—the goddess of money — holding the scales in her hands, was often pressed on ancient Roman coins. The scales signify “aequitas” (equality), while her sister is the goddess “Justitia” (justice). Thus we are warned by moneta (money) to pay attention to equality and not to commit fraudulent acts.\textsuperscript{24} A similar thought was painted by Giotto in the 14th century on a painting in Padua depicting a Judgement Day scene: he depicted “caritas” (unified love for God and one’s neighbour) as standing on a bag of money, and “invidia” (envy), as jealously guarding her purse.\textsuperscript{25}

A great step in expansion of economics and money (separated from ethics, religion and aforementioned virtues!) was made in Europe, particularly England, at the turn of the 18th century.\textsuperscript{26} In England, D. Hume and A. Smith joined in the theoretical debate raging on this subject; in Germany I. Kant did the same.\textsuperscript{27} As we very well know, Kant differentiated between price, value and dignity. “Anything that has a price can (...) compete against some other commodity that in turn has its own price. And if a price is being determined, first of all an assessment has to be made. When something is being paid for, a sum of cash is being used, in other words, we are using the sum in order to determine value. Anything that has a price has value of its own, although this value may equally be measured by, and identified with, the value of something else. For that which dignity possesses, however, there is no equivalent. Its value cannot be measured by or identified with anything else.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{23} See Augustin, De civitate Dei, VII. 12
\textsuperscript{25} B. Kettern, “Geld regiert die Welt. Überlegungen zur ethischen Dimension des Geldes”, in: Die neue Ordnung 2 (2000), pp. 84–97, here p. 86
\textsuperscript{27} See W. Weimer, Geschichte des Geldes, Frankfurt 1992
\textsuperscript{28} I. Kant, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, BA 78; See Metafizika ćudoreda, Zagreb 1999, pp. 79; H. Brinkmann, Moral und Geld. Vom Untergang der Moral durch das Geld. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch, Darmstadt 1994, pp. 374 and similar
The industrial revolution of the 19th century brought about, among other, a transformation of human labour into a commodity. In a way, man thus lost of his dignity, and money, as an abstract quantity of a particular kind, undercut the reality. It was a process of abstraction with fatal consequences. Money increasingly aroused passions, primarily greed and insatiability. It prompted Marx to write: “Money is the source of lust, slowly igniting madness, until it is lust no more, but an illness... Money is a matter full of metaphysical sensitivity and theological whims.”

Such interpretation and view of money becomes the key for promotion of revolution and critique of religion.

Despite Marx’s revolutionary cries, money has remained a moving force of the social and economic development, as Nietzsche said, “Brecheisen der Macht” (the leverage of power). German sociologist and philosopher G. Simmel, with M. Weber and E. Durkheim considered as the father of modern sociology, thought about it 100 years ago.

In 1900, after 12 years of preparation, Simmel published a book titled “Philosophie des Geldes” (The Philosophy of Money). Differentiating between the theory of knowledge and metaphysics, Simmel divided the aforementioned work into two parts: the first, analytical or theory of knowledge, examining the logical, psychological, sociological and axiological preconditions of money as well as its inner importance and practical significance. The second, synthetical or metaphysical part examines the impact of money and finance on the modernist spirit and culture. In this context, Simmel observed that three ideas were linked to money: 1. the primacy of calculus; 2. the figure of a medium in a radical form; 3. depersonalisation as an introduction to the cultural category type of “homo economicus.”

The central theme of Simmel’s cultural anthropology is determination of man as a “trading animal” (“tauschendes Tier”). The exchange stimulated by money always presupposes a “between.” It is not about two added processes — giving and taking — but about something new, a third element in which the two processes are equated as both cause and effect — it is about culture. The modernist culture is so thoroughly imbued with money that,
in Simmel’s words, it actually became “Geldkultur” (the culture of money). Where does the culture of money begin? Wherever man is building a world of symbols.

In today’s cultural type of “homo oeconomicus”, money is an omnipresent fluid mass, an indifferent lubricant of the society and societal processes. It simply makes the life go round, the wheel of life spin. With money, therefore, the strict rules and norms of activity come loose, and soft economic forms and rituals emerge. 33 Monetisation of the economy works because it has an esthetic and imaginary, quasi-religious meaning. While the pre–modernist money had been linked to tangible gold, the postmodernist money used by the “homo oeconomicus” type of man has more to do with art and airiness, in fact with the promotion of the postmodernist relativism.

In his critique of J. Rifkin 34, one of the more prominent advocates of postmodernism J. Derrida observes that money encourages the effect of postpone- ment and neglect of value. Money does not admit for any permanent value or absolute measure. If in 1748 Benjamin Franklin advised a young business- man: “Remember that time is money,” 35 J. Derrida (in 1992) believed that the aforementioned sentence should be reversed to state: Money is time (“L’argent, c’est du temps”).

Indeed, money is primarily time today. In his comments, Derrida correctly observed that in the mathematical economic theory of the last century, the notion of value was radically replaced by the notion of price, i.e., that in the economic theory of today the notion of value had no role at all. 36 Price and value (like sense and meaning) are not linked to any absolute measure. It is not so in philosophy and religion. These two disciplines gave a refuge to the discourse on value. Perhaps that is why economics (or capitalism) is in conflict with both religion and ethics.

Moreover, in his work titled “Capitalism as a Religion”, 37 W. Benjamin advocates the thesis that money (capitalism!) is a pathological religion that


35 See M. Weber, Protenstantska etika i duh kapitalizma, Sarajevo 1968, pp. 21 and similiar
37 W. Benjamin, Kapitalismus als Religion (Gesammelte Schriften Bd. VI), Frankfurt 1991
needs its prophets, priests and gurus. Similarly, despite having marked capitalism as a welcome money market, the great theoretician of economics J. M. Keynes also called it the mental pathology of “homo oeconomicus.” Capitalism, namely, denies the free flow of money. Keynes recognises there three psychological motives: the motive of profit, the motive of caution, and the motive of speculation.

How economics (in fact, capitalism with multilateral pathological growths) colonised the life is the subject addressed by, among other, the cult German philosopher J. Habermas. He has observed that in the present times all areas of life are reached by calculations of the price (cost) and benefit ratio. In this context, money, as some sort of a visible sign of invisible forces, has become the sacrament of the bourgeois society. It decides on justice and injustice, wealth and poverty, fortune and misfortune, a life with or without sense and purpose. Through money, the life of “homo oeconomicus” is promoted to the “consumer manifest” guided by the imperative of the “growth and multiplication of capital.”

The relations between capitalism and religion recently provoked even reactions from theologians. Thus for a German theologian of the younger generation Thomas Ruster “homo oeconomicus” with his focus on the capital becomes an image of a methodical and real individualism which in the end is the cause of much evil and suffering. God and money are confronted like justice and injustice, truth and lie.

3. “Homo oeconomicus” versus “homo religiosus”

Religion and economics have a similar relationship. What occurs in money is a profanation of economics, secularisation of religion and suffocation of

40 B. Lietaer, Das Geld der Zukunft, München 1999; From the same author, Mysterium Geld, München 2000
41 See N. Bolz, Das konsumistische Manifest, München 2002
43 C. Amery, Global Exit: Die Kirchen und der totale Markt, München 2002
morals. Ruster, for instance, concludes that money, and not God, solidarity or humanist values, rules the world. Money destroys. It moves the world abstractly and without emotions. It transforms itself in anything but reverence and humility. It is abstract and obsessively void of any emotion. It is not merciful and therefore knows much less about man than religion. Religion, on the other hand, is by far more concrete in these terms. Primarily because it does not neglect the poor, and because it points to the fact that economics cannot be merely free — that it has to be social, too!

This old–new link between religion and economics in terms of the critique of the “homo oeconomicus” theory has been highlighted by the Church in its social encyclical letters, as well as by a number of philosophers. Already in the 19th century, the famous theoretician of American democracy Alexis de Tocqueville realised that religious orientation elevates man above animal, suppresses his natural instincts, thus contributing to the distribution of goods. Since man can rise above the needs of his body, even scorn his own life, which is something animals cannot even represent to themselves, he can demonstrate solidarity by giving up and distributing the goods. Man is, therefore, not only a trading creature (“homo oeconomicus”), but also a creature of justice and solidarity, morality and religion. That is why we can say that only man’s morality and religious substance enable promising and prosperous economics. Wherever economics (in its expressive medium — money!) becomes religion, however, and man’s desires, true to the model of “homo oeconomicus,” are callously directed only to tangible goods, calculated benefit and cold profit, there is a constant danger that man himself would become an animal — or worse than it.

46 A. Tocqueville, Über die Demokratie in Amerika, 2. Teil, Zürich 1987, p. 219