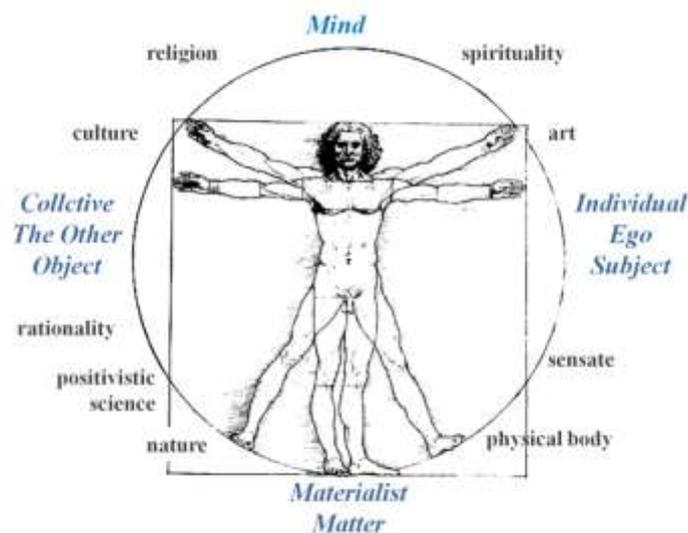


Homo Universalis; moral compass for a new European renaissance

The current social situation resembles a perfect storm in which several worrying developments get together. The climate is changing through human activity, migratory flows are increasing, the globalization of the economy has disadvantaged large groups of 'populists', the financial system is unstable and power is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few global players. To make matters worse, a broader shared moral framework is lacking. As a result, societal development is out of control.

The most urgent is the re-establishment of a sufficiently shared moral framework; it is the keel that must keep the ship upright in the storm. Philosophical suggestions to go back to Aristotle's virtue ethics, can be practically interpreted as a recurrence of the Renaissance (1350-1600), given the then renewed interest in Greek and Latin philosophy. Moreover, there are striking historical parallels between the Renaissance and our present time. By following the historical development since the Renaissance, we can understand how we ended up in our current precarious situation.

Via the universal Renaissance scholar John Dee, we come across William Shakespeare who, in a cryptic way, refers to Leonardo Da Vinci and the Homo Universalis as a prominent icon of the Renaissance. Herein the philosophies of both Plato and Aristotle are resumed. It allows the formulation of a general worldview and an associated integral view on human nature. Da Vinci's 'Vitruvian man' represents this view, of which the coordinates are given by two fundamental contrasts; in the vertical dimension the contrast between non-materialist/ mind and materialist/ matter orientations and in the horizontal between universal / collectivist and singular/ individualist orientations. The Vitruvian man primarily depicts the vertical dimension; man fits both within the square, which represents physical matter and in the circle, which is the metaphor of the non-physical / spiritual. It can be seen as the real 'Da Vinci -Code'. The resulting picture is the integral view on human nature; it is a blueprint of the human condition, the abilities of which can be valued and developed.



In a next step, history can be seen as a wander through this blueprint. Promoted by 'the spirit of the time', which exerts several societal and psychological centrifugal forces, specific one-sided parts of the general human nature are over-valuated and exaggerated into its corresponding caricatures. According to psychologist Jung, the centrifugal forces are explained by the need for identity. Man is so unaware of himself, that he attaches to anything in the periphery which can offer him some grip. Once certain positions of status, power and money are reached, there is a strong tendency to legitimize these on the basis of the one-sided part of the worldview. These caricatural one-sided values are obsessively realized at the cost of all the other values, both on the individual human and societal level.

The one-sided value orientations outside the circle have lost their cohesion with the remaining typically human values within the circle and herewith human dignity is lost. This finally results in fundamentalist value orientations which are synonym with overshoot, collapse and crisis.

In history the upper-left value orientation was dominating during the ecclesiastical inquisition, which originated from the idea that there was a single universal truth of which the church was the keeper of it. In the subsequent Renaissance a value pattern dominated in which all human qualities are valued more or less equally, in accordance with the Renaissance ideal of the homo universalis. But after a final and dramatic attempt to save the universal (which means Catholic) Church, the role of the church is taken over after 1648 by the state and the science. During the subsequent period of the Enlightenment the values of the lower left quadrant dominate, in particular rationality. This provokes the resurgence of the more 'feeling'-oriented values of the opposing upper right quadrant (19th century Romanticism). During the 20th century the domination of the materialistic orientation at the lower part of the picture become even stronger, with the ecological (climate) crisis as a result. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the individualistic and egocentric values in the lower right quadrant have become dominant, with implications for the economy and especially the financial system which collapsed in 2008 as a result of its own caricatural development in the preceding decades. Since then, there is a diversity of value orientations to the right-hand side which represents the singular or individualistic values of the view on human nature. At the same time, the values of the upper left quadrant start to resurge due to the advent of immigrants from Islamic countries. Here too, the development has partly become its own caricature, resulting in religious fundamentalism and terrorism.

These historical developments to malignant one-sidedness, collapse and the subsequent loss of the ability to sustain civilized societal structures, confirm Aristotle's virtue ethics, in which the good is the mean in between two opposing evils in the periphery. This moral framework is not only at the core of religions, numerous myths, legends and fairy tales, but also the central theme in many of the great masterpieces of European literature and music. Experiencing the border-line between good and evil in the wandering quest along the circle boundary, both individual man and society start to suspect the human destiny to be in the centre, where truth, goodness and beauty coincide. Among many others, in particular the works of Shakespeare, Mozart and Wagner are the testimony of this magnificent coincidence.

If the course of the moral compass were to be sailed, one-sided individualism and collectivism are deliberately discouraged, as well as one-sided orientations on the materialist or the non-materialist ('spiritual') values. Rationality and efficiency could be tempered from their current obsessive over-valuation to normal proportions. It is about restoring the balance between the private and the public, the own and the other, rationality and feeling, ecology and economics, financial and real economy, the masculine and the feminine, material prosperity and sustainability. There would be room for other human qualities such as art and culture and more attention for the human dimension in education and healthcare. More specifically, the following implications are to be mentioned:

- In view of the historical development the historical separation of church and state is to be followed by the complete *separation of state and (globalized) economy*.
- The moral compass prompts to restore the *balance between public and private values* and to recalibrate the relationship between public and private property; not everything can be appropriated.
- The current combination of the one-sided private 'everything is for sale' ideology and a financial system that creates money 'out of nothing' according to its self-interest, transfers huge public interests into the hands of a small private elite. By definition this creates a feudal society. On the global scale, it undermines the *sovereignty* of communities. Against this background, the choice is made for lower levels of globalization in order to preserve the sovereignty of the local / national communities (states) and democracy.

- Apart from this choice, restoring the principle of public-private balance and *monetary reform* has the highest priority. It is practically unthinkable that the transition to a more sustainable economy, energy and food supply can be realized with the current financial system. That system inherently strengthens the instability of the economy. The creation of money is the fundamental right of the community and thus of the State, not of private banks. If that right were to be restored, the economy would become stable and for example the Dutch government could and should spend an annual amount in the order of 20 billion to 50 billion € into circulation. That 'debt-free' money, which is created without the creation of debt, can be devoted to social goals, for example the energy transition.
- In the case of economically driven *immigration*, not everyone automatically has the right to accede to an existing community of values. In the contrasting case of war refugees, entrants have the moral obligation to connect with these values wherever possible and to respect them.
- At the same time, conversely, there is an equally great moral obligation to warrant the sovereignty of 'the others' elsewhere. This means that not everything is for sale, that after the abolition of slavery, the appropriation of the primary livelihoods of those others elsewhere, their land, their raw materials and their food must be abolished.
- Effective *climate policy*; a *circular economy* and a *food system* in which cycles are closed, can ultimately only be realized at the supra-national scale level. For example, a form of *European Coalition* is indispensable for this. This means that at least it must be worked towards a European region as a sovereign unit. To this end, countries like the Netherlands will have to seek a dynamic connection to a north-west European 'coalition of the willing', as proposed by French President Macron in 2017 and recently reiterated. Within a coalition of France, Germany and the Benelux countries, there would already be sufficient economic and cultural support to be able to pursue effective policies in the various areas.
- "To survive, Europe must have heart and soul," said former EU President Jacques Delors. From European history, philosophy and culture since the Renaissance, we have been able to explain that "Heart and Soul" must lie somewhere in the middle of the integral view on human nature. It is the human dimension of the *Homo Universalis*.

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See also www.klaasvanegmond.nl