The Economy Of Francesco And The Macau Institute: A Double Manifesto For Gratuitousness And Virtue Ethics In Economics

圣方济各经济的启示与澳门利氏学社：经济学中的无偿性和美德伦理的双重宣言

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ABSTRACT

November 2020 saw the elaboration and publication of two important documents: the *Final Statement* (2020) of the young participants in the Economy of Francesco (EoF) and the *Macau Manifesto* (2020) written by participants in the Macau Ricci Institute Symposium at the University of Saint Joseph. These two research groups converge on many substantial points and, most significantly, on a common methodological understanding: rather than reforming or revolutionising the current economic system, it is necessary to transform it. This means not destroying and changing all its principles, nor accepting them all, but rather adding what is missing from the current picture. What is it that is missing? Both the EoF and the *Macau Manifesto* understand that a reconsideration of the economy as a practice directed toward virtue and common good is needed.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that a happy life is a life lived according to virtue; virtues are traits of human nature that express excellence (Annas 1993, 2006; Nussbaum 2001). The Greek word for virtue is *aretè* (ἀρετή), which shares a root with the word aristocracy, which means the rule of the best. However, a virtuous life does not simply 'happen,' as the pre-Socratic meaning of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and the contemporary word 'happiness' (from 'to happen') imply. Virtue is a habit that must be cultivated through constant exercise and practice. The Latin word for habit is *habitus*, from the Greek word *héxis*, which means a disposition acquired through constant and intentional action, so virtues do not depend on our individual tastes or desires: they are traits that express the excellence of our nature. This is a perspective very distant from the theory of utility functions (and its implicit idea of happiness as utility) that rules economic theory. Once developed, virtues help individuals achieve good through their actions, which will bring them to a state of *eudaimonia*. This also suggests the importance of caring for others (e.g., family, friends) and for the common good of society (e.g., politics, economics); read through the lens of virtue ethics, caring for individuals and society are two sides of the same coin.

Beyond utilitarian ethics and, implicitly, beyond Kantian ethics, economics today must deal with the question of virtue ethics, "How can I become a good person?". We should therefore ask whether different cultures, religions, and societies of the world share a common concept of the excellence of human nature or human nature in general. Aristotle said that *eudaimonia* comprises different ingredients and that sciences, including ethics, cannot deal with it with mathematical precision. Still, Aristotle endorsed a precise conception of human nature; he believed we all are made of *ergon*, or potentialities, which we should cultivate to reach happiness. What if someone disagrees regarding their *ergon*? Should we exclude such dissidents from society?

To promote virtue ethics among citizens, society (which includes education, institutions, and politics) must be built in a way that promotes virtuous practices. Not by chance, virtue ethics emerged mostly within the strict boundaries of ancient city-states (*poleis*). Is it realistic to think that our pluralistic societies can be rebuilt on the basis of shared virtue ethics? How can we design a policy that balances people who support virtue ethics and those who endorse other perspectives? In terms of economics, if *eudaimonia* is to replace utility as the goal to be maximized, what would we do with people who have utilitarian or libertarian views? Should we exclude them from the design of our societies and markets? These are difficult questions that would require long answers. In this paper, I will sketch out an answer that, in my view, is a possible synthesis of the *Macau Manifesto* and the EoF.

There is a tie between the *Macau Manifesto*'s idea of the common good and the perfect joy (*Perfecta Laetitia*) of St Francis of Assisi: gratuitousness. Luigino Bruni, the scientific director of the EoF, noted an old wisdom saying from the Bible that the happiness of our children is more important than our happiness (Bruni et al. 2021). Today, we express this concept when talking about sustainability and our duty to future generations. The gratuitousness that leads us to promote the good of others, the good of society, and the good of the environment is inexorably related to our own happiness and flourishing. To me, gratuitousness is exactly the element needed to transform the current economic system.

I believe we should restore gratuitousness as the centrepiece of debate in economics currently. Since it is diametrically opposed to the instrumental logic of market relations, it has found little space in economics. We should not be afraid to imagine an economy built on gratuitousness, which is not necessarily reducible to self-sacrifice or altruism. To the contrary, gratuitousness can involve interacting and vivifying market relations based on mutual advantage (Bruni and Sugden

2008). We should also recognise and emphasise how great a role gratuitousness already plays in our societies, from firms to markets and from families to civil societies.

Aristotle would have agreed with this reasoning. His most important book is entitled *Nicomachean Ethics* (2019), ethics for his son Nicomachus. For Aristotle, ethics was akin to a father advising his son on how to live a good life. Moreover, in Aristotle's view, there is a mysterious and beautiful paradox regarding virtues and *eudaimonia*: if you seek virtue as a means to reach *eudaimonia*, you will not reach it. However, if you cultivate virtues as ends in themselves, seeking no other ends through them, you will reach *eudaimonia* (Nussbaum 2001). This attitude of considering virtues as ends rather than means—which resembles the ideas of considering other people as ends rather than means—is very closely related to gratuitousness. Gratuitousness is the silent protagonist of our reflections and lives. Perhaps part of its beauty lies in its silence, but I believe that we, like the EoF ambassadors, should speak about gratuitousness more often because we can do it authentically: that is, *together*. EoF, jointly with our colleagues at the Macau Ricci Institute, can and should, imagine a virtue ethics for the 21st century.

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