

Without Community, Ideals like Freedom, Equality, and Justice are out of reach

Arjo Klamer

*Emeritus professor of cultural economics (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and
visiting professor of human economics (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)*

The values of freedom and equality dominate economic and political discussions. For some economists freedom is the highest value to strive for, for others equality. The third value of the French revolution, brotherhood, has been mostly ignored. The recent upheavals in the political landscape suggest a re-evaluation of the importance of brotherhood, or community. The polarization indicates that this re-evaluation is controversial.

This paper interprets the values of freedom, equality, and community from the perspective of the human economies. Critical in this perspective is a model of 6 spheres in which we humans valorize our values. Each sphere engenders a different interpretation of each value. It will turn out that the presence of a community, or the active participation in common practices, is critical for the realization of freedom and equality. We will also learn that the various interpretations account for conflicts and misunderstandings.

The analysis draws from a book that is nearing its completion and is entitled *The Human Economy*. This book is a follow up of *Doing the Right Thing: a Value Based Economy* (2017), The book extends the standard economic perspective that focuses on and highlights the market and governmental economies with the inclusion of the 6 spheres indicated above and a redefinition of economics. Going back to the Lionel Robbins 1932 article that defines economics, using the Robinson Crusoe story, as the discipline that studies choice in conditions of scarcity. Using the same story, the proposed redefinition will redefine economics as the discipline that studies the realization of values (all that is important to people). The market and organizational economies are merely instrumental.

The other spheres and their economies are substantive in the sense that it in those that people engender substantive goods and practices. In the cultural sphere they engage in knowledge, faith, artistic, scientific, and technological practices. This sphere is all about sense making. In the *oikonomia* people realize their home, a substantive good, and the practices that make a home (lots of activities that people get paid for in the organizational and market economies but do without pay or compensation in the *oikonomia*). The logics are different. That also applies to the practices in the social, societal, natural, and personal economies.

The paper subsequently deals with several encyclics and briefs that churches put out on the economy. To what extent do they recognize the human economies. And how do the values of freedom, equality and community fare in them. This will be a critical analysis from a different humane perspective.

Might theologians still need to face up to the perspective of the human economy? Are they still too wedded to the frame that highlights markets and governments?

I expect to come to the conclusion do better embracing the human economic perspective and take issue with a recent book by Deirdre McCloskey who insists on looking at the world through the frame of markets.