

## **Homo Economicus**

**Unpublished opinion article (unreviewed)**

**Richard Hill © 2008**

Human Beings as a commodity is not new. For centuries people have used other people for their own advantage, usually with great disadvantage to those being used.

We have developed a number of names to describe the domination of other people and the methods used:

Slavery; racism; tribalism; caste systems; class systems; conscription; press gangs; holocaust etc.

The price paid for being the dominated group was harsh, often permanent and often fatal. Quality of life was severely diminished including things like health care, education and basic human rights. Disturbingly, these various methods of domination have a high level of success – up to a point.

The point is where the ‘down trodden’ rebel and fight back in revolution: France and Russia to name the most famous national revolutions. There have been many sectional revolutions, too. The struggle for equal rights of African Americans and also women are major (and ongoing) examples.

The trouble with making people poor and downtrodden, creating the proletariat, is that they have nothing to lose. When life is so bad that it is worth risking then there can be a lot of trouble.

The smart thing to do would be to create a situation where people could still be dominated, but make sure they had something to lose if they ‘bucked the system’. Enter Homo Economicus.

If we can give them the opportunity of money, great lifestyle and freedom, but like a carrot on a stick, then we remove the possibility of rebellion from the equation. In fact, it is even worthwhile to let some of them actually achieve the riches required to get out of the system as an incentive. But the majority need to be kept ‘only half way there’. That way, they can’t afford to stop for fear of losing the half they have already struggled to achieve.

So where does all the money come from? Simple, you invent it. You devise an ‘economy’ that allows for growth and expansion that allows most people to have some and still have enough for some people to have most. The wealth must still remain amongst the few or there would be no reason to continue the struggle to achieve more. The ‘economy’ is predicated on the principle that you must always make/have/need/want more.

By making sure that only some people have nothing, then you don’t have enough people with nothing to lose to mount a rebellion or revolution. And, if you can keep those with nothing in isolated areas or at least away from the rest, they will only be able to fight among themselves because they don’t have the wherewithal to transport their battles.

So now we can have a new kind of slave – the wealthy slave – with just enough to find it wiser to choose to struggle for greater wealth and then ‘freedom’ than revolution and risk losing whatever wealth is owned or is supplied by the lifestyle of the culture. Homo Economicus is chained by the throat to its own success and the ongoing need to maintain the ‘economy’.

The world needed 2 major things in order to get this expansive 'economy off the drawing board: the ability to utilise and develop natural resources and an inexpensive source of energy to power this expansion. When the newly developed resources and the energy source become dynamically looped they become a self driven system that only requires management and maintenance. In short – workers and consumers. Amazingly, both of these resources can be found in the one element – Homo Sapiens. Put these humans in the loop and they become instantly mutated to Homo Economicus.

The sharp rise in inventive use of natural resources came first. In fact, very early in the piece, right back to stone tools, but the second component was much longer coming. Wind, pulleys, springs, water, steam, electricity all took leaps forward, but the whole world changed with the discovery of mass supplies of oil.

Oil is basically liquefied sunlight. It can be broken down to a number of parts that can be used in various ways. The dynamic loop began to form when electricity made kerosene based street lighting obsolete overnight and with the invention of the combustion engine.

The various elements of oil, that may once have been thought of as waste products, now became dynamic motivators for invention and economic expansion. Plastics and the many and varied synthetic products emerged that were cheaper and easier and could give the consumer an affordable, luxurious life. Henry Ford invented the 'production line' to manage the new pressure for more manufacturing. Within a matter of decades all the elements that were required for the 'economy' to reign supreme were in place.

In the space of just 200 years the percentage of people who were living hand to mouth reversed from just 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the

world's population being comfortable of their survival to being 5/6<sup>ths</sup> of the world's population. With only 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the population desperate there is a complete and unparalleled shift in the needs and wants of the people. Homo Economicus became the dominant species and, all in all, Homo Economicus was happy – or so they thought.

Now there is something going wrong with the system. There is a new type of imbalance, a new form of danger. For the first time in 100 years of progress, development, expansion and prosperity there seems to be some things being lost. There seems to be a price paid for all this good fortune. It seems that it hasn't come for free after all and it isn't going to be an eternal golden age.

It was thought that there the desperate and rebellious would be constrained to their immediate surroundings, but they have had access to money and the advancements of the modern age. Access to arms, cheap and fast travel and global communication has made it possible for even a small group of well financed people to wage revolutionary war against whomever they believe to be their oppressors.

The oil that took several million years to store from sunlight and carbon is retuning the earth to the atmospheric conditions of that earlier time. The atmosphere is warming.

The products that are required to keep Homo Economicus busy making and then eagerly consuming have been designed to maximise consumerism without proper consideration of how this would affect Homo Sapiens. And affect us it has. For the first time in 100 years the life expectancy age of human beings is about to be lowered. We have been introducing toxins into the environment, chemical enhancements into our food and using sugary foods to induce us to consume

more. We have increased the amount of sedentary behaviour both at work and at play. We have also sponsored a competitive atmosphere to drive the desire for success and created a mental state that is depressing vast numbers who expected that they should be happy – especially with the abundant wealth and prosperity.

We have a dramatic increase in the ‘inflammatory’ diseases: diabetes, arthritis, cardiovascular heart disease and cancer just to name the most obvious and scary.

Ooops.

So, can we use the changes to the way we deal with money and the benefits of a more vibrant world to make change for the better? Of course we can! But will we?

Who will be the first US food manufacturer to reduce the sugar in its food for the better health of the public? By this, I don’t mean a minor change, but a major shift in processing and manufacture. Well, of course, this is very difficult because sugar is one of the main components that creates a sense of hunger or at least need for more food. We don’t have an obesity epidemic because people are eating the right foods and getting good levels of exercise. The balance has been changed. Healthy diets and well exercised people will reduce consumption and this is not good for the ‘economy’.

Why don’t the public just take control and do what is good for them? Well, we’ve known that smoking will literally kill you, shorten your life and/or diminish your quality of life and it took strong government legislation and nearly 2 decades to push the consumption of cigarettes down. The good thing for the manufacturers is that there is a great swag of Homo Economicus’ coming online. China and India alone will provide the numbers of consumers that dwarf the numbers of the last 200 years. There’s

plenty more people to enslave before they realise what is being done to them. The first to get a shock will be the expected 40 million Chinese who will have diabetes II in the next decade. Boy, are they going to be surprised! Will their better house, car and business opportunity be thought of as worth the price? I really don’t know and I’m looking forward to the research when we ask them sometime in the future, but it is a very morbid anticipation.

Still, we now need to turn to our own health and wellbeing. As Gandhi says “Be the change you want in the world.” So we’ll start at the individual and the small group and the local community and let the change spread. There is a lot to be done, but there is a lot that can be done and none of it is very difficult. We must start with knowledge.