

## **Preface: *Buen Vivir*. Towards a Shared Vision of a Better World?**

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In today's world, there is a growing feeling in all of the continents that leaving the question of the good life—of what makes life worth living—strictly to the private realm might have been a mistake. Over the course of the twentieth century, there was widespread agreement in capitalist (and to some extent even socialist) areas of the world that the state and politics should first of all provide the basic resources (goods as well as freedoms of choice) for individuals who would then decide on how to lead their lives privately. One version of this conception can be found in John Rawls' influential (and indeed brilliant!) *Theory of Justice* (1971), where he defines primary goods as those which should be provided and distributed by the state and of which to have more is always preferable to having less—for any human being. Thus, for example, having more money or better health is preferable to having less money and less health irrespective of whether one wants to be a pianist, a terrorist, or Mother Theresa.

This “privatization of the good,” however, has led to a social fabric which is geared towards incessant (economic) growth, (technological) acceleration and (cultural) innovation such that it cannot reproduce its socio-economic structures and maintain its institutional status quo without steady increase in those three domains. By consequence, this mode of “dynamic stabilization” causes a number of effects that massively infringe with everybody's version of the good life. In short, because of its operational mode of competition and the ensuing pressures of optimization, it has led to a mode of “aggression” on all three levels of human existence: Firstly, aggression against nature on the macro-level, which we can see in the realm of extractive industries, environmental pollution, climate change and the ever accelerating extinction of species. Secondly, aggression on the meso-level of human existence, i.e. in the realm of social interaction: Political culture in almost all areas of the world has deteriorated to a point where political opponents are once again ready to silence or kill each other by violent means—even within long-established democratic societies. Aggression here has intensified to a point where even “Western elites” con-

sider war to be an acceptable means of political conduct. Becoming ready for war, for example, is a most significant, well-defined and shared goal of the present left-liberal German coalition government. Finally, aggression on the micro-level takes the form of individual auto-aggression: In their striving for self-optimization, subjects increasingly turn against themselves. They attack their bodies with means of cosmetic surgery and their minds with psychotropic drugs—and pay the price for this with record-levels of burnout and stress-related diseases; and perhaps even with rising rates of auto-immune deficiencies.

Hence, by the twenty-first century, it has become pretty clear that the basic question of the good life is not just a private matter. It needs to be brought back on the social and political agenda on a local, national and even global level. Yet, the obstinate fact of ethical pluralism, of course, does not go away and should not go away. Human conceptions of the good will remain culturally diverse. So, what to do in such a conundrum? One way to go about it is the attempt to define the good life in a way that is compatible with a plurality of ethical conceptions. My own attempt to do this has led me to the elaboration of the concept of “resonance” (Rosa 2019): Resonance is defined as a mode of relationship. Its basic structure is built on the dynamics of listening and responding as opposed to the dominant mode of commanding, controlling, and possessing. To cut a long story short, in my view, people will have a good life when they manage to establish and maintain relationships of resonance along the social axis (i.e. with other human beings in love, friendship or politics), along the material axis (i.e. with things, artefacts or material domains), along the vertical or existential axis (i.e. with some ultimate, encompassing reality perceived as nature, cosmos, life or God), and finally along the self-axis (i.e. between body and mind, memory, biography). Since relationships always and necessarily form and extend between subjects and the world, they can never be just private: What kinds of relationships individuals develop, and what mode of interaction (with themselves, with others, with nature and with the spiritual realm) they establish, depends on the cultural and institutional fabric they live in. Hence, resonance inevitably and always is a social and political issue, too.

However, if we accept that what is dearly needed in today’s world is a paradigm-change in the dominant mode of relating to things, to people, to nature, even to ourselves—where do we find the social imaginaries and visions that can inspire us, the economic conceptions and institutions in

which to enact this alternative mode, the cultural practices which are capable of paving the way towards this different form of being in and to the world? The contributions assembled in this book most impressively give us a hint about where to look: In so far as resonance describes a mode of interaction and a form of experience, it certainly is not new, and even less is it European. It might well be true that since the dominant Eurocentric mode of being in and acting towards the world is the mode of control and domination, of expanding the horizon of availability, attainability, and accessibility,<sup>1</sup> ideas and practices of resonance are hard to find in the “old West.” European languages often even lack the vocabulary to articulate such relationships and experiences, and the currently dominant social imaginary in Europe and “the Global North” is one of war (against Russia, against drugs, against climate crisis) rather than resonance. However, if we turn to Latin America, we find an astonishing wealth of conceptions and practices, and even economies, which can serve as inspiration and motivation for yet-to-be-built future worlds, too: Conceptions of *Buen Vivir*, *Sumak Kawsay* or *Suma Qamaña* provide routes towards cultural traditions, institutions and practices which reveal a wealth of forms of resonance—resonance within communities, with animals and plants, but also with spirits and ancestors, with nature and cosmos. In fact, if we consider the “axes” of resonance identified above, this book provides us with illuminating examples and ideas of resonant relationships along all four of them.

Of course, as the contributions to this book also point out, we should not be misled to think of resonance as pure harmony and unity. Resonance is a mode of “listening-and-responding” that involves disagreement, conflict, struggle, too. And if our goal as critical theorists is a thorough critique of the conditions of resonance, we will realize that in traditional forms of (indigenous) life, there are many instances of “mute” or repressive relationships as well. Hence, the purpose of this book, as I read it, is not to simply go for one version or the other of *Buen Vivir*, but to bring Latin American and in particular Andean voices, conceptions and experiences in dialogue with critical European perspectives. From such a dialogue, this is our hope, might spring the first, albeit still feeble, vision of a new form of shared life which will be able to finally overcome the shadows of colonialization, exploitation, environmental destruction and individual burn-out—a vision of a resonant future world.

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1 I have called this the “Triple-A-Conception of the Good Life,” see: Rosa (2017).

## References

- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
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