

# Introduction

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## A new dialogue on the good life

How to live a good life? Probably one of the most fundamental questions of humanity. If we go back in Western history, we can see its Socratic origins and its centrality in the practical philosophy of Aristotle (4<sup>th</sup> century B. C.), who, in his treatise *Politics*, points out to the good life as the end of all social formation, because with socialisation human beings position themselves above an existence reduced to instincts and the desire for survival. “A complete community constituted out of several villages, once it reaches the limit of total self-sufficiency, practically speaking, is a city-state. It comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living well” (Aristotle 1998, 1252b28-30). On the other side of the globe, when part of the continent of Abya Yala was being violently transformed into Latin America, Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala (1615), with a critical and denouncing attitude towards the abuses of the Andean natives during the Spanish colonial period, also sketches elements of a “good government” with the aim of re-establishing the good life for all in the midst of the catastrophe. Since then and up to the present day, the question of the good life has been widely debated in various disciplines of the social and human sciences: this book is an attempt to continue that debate. However, the following objection may be raised: why to bring up this old question once again? The immediate answer is that today we live in different times from those of Aristotle and Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, so the motivation to reconsider the issue of the good life comes from new visions and demands of our modern times. This book aims, then, to contribute to the reflection on the good life in the light of the current situation. Starting from that very ancient question, we try to look for new answers and paths that come from both the Global South and the Global North, which allow us to underline its relevance in different ways.

It is widely accepted that a cardinal problem of our time lies in the principles and presuppositions of modernity. Our current modern condition is marked, to a large extent, by an individualistic worldview. In many respects, our representation of a good life does not go beyond the individ-

ual satisfaction of human needs and we generally lose sight of the idea of a common good. It is striking that the question of the good life has been marginalised in today's academia or, at best, treated secondarily, as a personal or private matter, but not as a public and collective affair. The good life is often understood as an individual task over which we—members of a society—should have no say. In the West, as the famous sociologist Max Weber (2014) proclaimed more than a hundred years ago, this individualisation of the good life came with the capitalist socioeconomic system and the Protestant religious revolution and was institutionalised in the construction of the nation-state. However, there are problems in the globalised world of today that cannot be addressed from an ethics focused solely on individual life or an analysis limited to the socioeconomic sphere; for example, with climate change we have a situation in which the human world is complexly intertwined with the natural world, generating harmful effects that cannot be halted by measures derived from the modern way of understanding reality.

So, today we are at a point in history where we are trying to overcome this type of modernity, for which we urgently need alternatives that look out for the good life beyond worn-out schemes and concepts. In the face of the multiple social and natural crises of our times, we need to realise that we have to overcome the Anthropocene, the historical era in which humanity rules as a destructive force over the geological and biological environments, and specifically the Capitalocene, the current phase characterised by wealth inequalities, income gaps and polluting emissions. Going beyond this homogenising modern world-system, we state the need for a new way of thinking to address contemporary problems on a truly planetary level and thus arrive at a plural and productive way of living and interrelating in and with the world; something that Donna Haraway (2016), for example, defines as the age of the “Chthulucene.” In the same direction, Bruno Latour (1993) argues forcefully for overcoming the so-called “modern constitution” that separates nature and society into two distinct spheres. In this book we want to follow these calls and seek the good life beyond individual happiness and the typical representations of the lifestyle of the modern city. We want to continue the construction of new worlds, of more sustainable engagements with our environments, both human and non-human. We are therefore radically committed to a “re-collectivisation” of the issue of the good life, taking as the starting point both the approach of *Sumak Kawsay/Suma Qamaña* (‘living a good life’ in Quechua and Aymara languages) and the theory of resonance. We

bring these two proposals into dialogue because we consider it important to value alternatives to the modern world from both the Global South and the Global North. In today's academic environment, it is very important to visualise developments in this regard from the Global South, within an international scale, to a reading circle across Latin America but mainly also in Europe, where decolonial approaches are often not taken seriously and are relegated in favour of Western theories. Accordingly, this book is the product of a collective effort to interrelate activism and academia from the North and from the South. Thus, it seems fundamental to us to emphasise the local but also the global dimension of social theory, and to increase the visibility of peripheral theories of the South that historically have less circulation than those produced in the North.

It is not only in the history of the West that we find acute questioning of the modern condition, but also from the experiences and sociopolitical struggles of the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala the assumptions of modernity are constantly put into question. The *Sumak Kawsay/Suma Qamaña* perspective is an approach that emerges from the practices of Andean peoples, mainly in Bolivia and Ecuador, although similar visions are also shared by other communities in the region. In anthropological studies on Indigenous peoples in Latin America, the French anthropologist Philippe Descola (1994) pioneered the idea of *Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir* as harmonious coexistence with nature, based on the experiences of the Achuar people in Ecuador. Combined with these studies, the reflections and attempts to design postcolonial and plurinational states in Bolivia and Ecuador on the premises of the good life for all their inhabitants, both human and non-human, are inescapable references in this book. According to David Choquehuanca Céspedes (2022), current vice president of Bolivia, the good life implies the construction of a common good with Mother Earth, which is not represented in the territorial policies of nation-states. The implementation of the good life in state policy leads to an ethical and political consideration not only of human beings, but also of the Earth as a life-giving entity. Choquehuanca, therefore, calls for the replacement of geopolitics—where land is still seen as a material resource—with what he calls “geopolitics,” that is, a politics that are not focused on constantly shifting territorial and power disputes, but seeks the good that lies in the shared care of the Earth. Choquehuanca builds on similar attempts to politicise the question of the good life by Indigenous Andean intellectuals such as Simón Yampara (2012) and Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2010).

The first pillar of this book is constituted by these Andean ideas of the good life, discussing, for example, the extent to which the aforementioned environmentalist rhetorics are embodied in the actual policies of the current Plurinational State of Bolivia.

The second pillar of this book is the resonance theory developed by German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019). Rosa presents the concept of resonance as a critique of alienation and a potential solution to the problem of the acceleration in modernity. Resonance theory is developed as a new paradigm of critical theory and provides valuable tools to identify positive ways of relating to the world. Despite its strong inspiration in phenomenology, Rosa emphasises that his theory is not simply a “qualifier of experiences,” but a relational world engagement, which in our understanding makes it highly compatible with Andean cosmovisions where the singular relationship of human beings with nature is particularly pronounced. Rosa defines as “resonance” the moments that unite four simultaneous movements in the human experience: affect, emotion, transformation and uncontrollability. “Affect” means that something from the external world speaks to the individual, with “emotion,” the person reacts to that first call, the “transformation” is mutual, that is, both the person in resonance and their counterpart come out of the moment changed, and the double “uncontrollability” means that we cannot control neither the moment in which we feel resonance, nor the place where the experienced transformation takes us. The counterpart of the individual experiencing a moment of resonance can be found among other human beings (social axis), in something transcendent (vertical axis), or among things (diagonal axis). The “Other,” with which we experience a moment of resonance, must have a voice of its own, independent of our own, otherwise resonance would not develop, but an echo chamber where only the first voice reproduces. Thus, situations in which the communication between two entities is not bilateral and not of mutual understanding are never defined as resonant, even though they may provoke strong emotions in the participants. Rosa characterises, for example, meetings between fascists—such as the mega publicity events in Nazi Germany—as echo chambers, since there it is one voice that is reproduced by thousands, but no mutually transformative dialogue is established.

Both *Sumak Kawsay/ Suma Qamaña* and the resonance theory link the question of the good life to a relational ontology that goes beyond solely human participation. In both cases, the question of the good life refers to a form of life characterised by experiences of relationality between hu-

man beings, nature, the material world (things and environments) and the spiritual world. To date, a dialogue between these two perspectives has not been explicitly established. Therefore, in order to initiate and contribute to this dialogue, in the conference “The Good Life. Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Dialogues,” held virtually from June 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, colleagues from Europe and Latin America reflected on different aspects of the good life, which resulted in many of the chapters in this volume. Since the conference was very well received, we decided to compile this book with the papers and thus make the dialogue known and continue upon it.

### **Transculturality and interdisciplinarity in a bilingual conference**

The idea for the conference arose in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in October of 2021, in the context of an informal conversation between J. Fernando Galindo and Manuel Moser about the *Sumak Kawsay/Suma Qamaña* approach and the resonance theory. On that occasion, Fernando was pleased to learn that in German academia, and in connection with the well-known Frankfurt School, there was a perspective called resonance theory, also known as the sociology of the good life. This immediately sparked lively conversations about both perspectives and the possibilities for dialogue between them. In order to give a concrete expression to this concern to explore possible encounters between them, the idea of holding a conference and thus initiating a broader exchange was born within a few days. From Fernando’s perspective, the discussion on *Vivir Bien* in Bolivia had frozen after its capture by the *raison d’état* and one way to thaw it again was to open a dialogue in the academic sphere with other perspectives, specifically with the sociology of the good life. For his part, Manuel’s motivation was to contribute to the dissemination of resonance theory in the Bolivian and Latin American contexts.

At the end of October 2021 the call for papers was officially launched, containing a wide range of topics to generate interdisciplinary and transcultural dialogues, including philosophies of living well/the good life, self-world relations, more-than-human entanglements, indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, degrowth and non-capitalist economies, socio-political utopias (especially in postcolonial contexts), anthropology and ethnography of religion and cosmovisions, new materialisms, and ethics. At the end of January 2022, we received news that Hartmut Rosa was willing to present his theory of resonance at the conference. We continued to write

to potential keynote speakers to present their vision of the Andean good life and received positive responses from Eduardo Gudynas and Eija Ranta, the former a Uruguayan academic activist aligned with the ecological vision of *Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir* and the latter, a Finnish academic with ethnographic experience in the study of the Bolivian state and its links to *Vivir Bien*. With these positive responses we began to put together the programme for the event: The conference was taking shape!

In April and May 2022 we were in charge of organising the logistics, providing information and answering questions from participants who submitted abstracts, as well as making some adjustments to the programme, combining criteria such as time availability and thematic linkage of presentations. Since the abstracts submitted were in both Spanish and English, the challenge arose to have simultaneous interpretation during the conference. And as the conference was to be held virtually, another challenge was to have adequate technological support, an aspect in which we received support both from colleagues in Erfurt and the Centro Interdisciplinario PROEIB Andes. In this respect, we are grateful to Martín Colque, researcher of the PROEIB, for all the support he provided. We were also finalising the programme with the above mentioned criteria, requesting or making translations of the abstracts received from Spanish to English and vice versa in order to have a programme in both languages: We were ready for the conference!

The month of June finally arrived, and from Monday the 13<sup>th</sup> to Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup> the conference took place. A total of twenty regular presentations and three keynote presentations were offered, the latter by Eduardo Gudynas, Hartmut Rosa and Eija Ranta, who set the tone of the discussions of the sessions they initiated. The participants came from different disciplines: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political studies, history, religious studies, theology and education, all also coming from different countries in Europe and Latin America (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Finland). The presentations alternated between English and Spanish, with the assistance of an interpreter for the comments and questions exchanges. The first two days, the emphasis of the presentations was focused on various aspects of the perspective of Andean good life (*Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir*), headed by the keynote speeches of Gudynas and Ranta. The third and fourth day there was a greater balance in the presentations referring to both perspectives, also due to Rosa's keynote speech. However, despite the greater number of

presentations on the Andean *Vivir Bien* approach, during the conference these were “intertwined”—as one of the participants indicated at the end of the event—with the theory of resonance, as an expression of the search and openness to possible connections between both perspectives. At the end of the session on the last day, an exchange was generated between participants about what could follow up to the conference, emerging these ideas: publishing a book in Spanish and English with articles based on the presentations, the possibility of a future conference on the link between “aesthetics and the good life,” sharing documents on both perspectives, as well as the possibility of establishing a new working group on the good life.

Although the organisation and development of the conference was carried out as a duo, with the support of our respective institutions, the Centro Interdisciplinario PROEIB Andes of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón and the Max-Weber-Kolleg of the Universität Erfurt, the task of editing the book was a triumvirate work project, with the active inclusion of Werther Gonzales León, who at the time was doing a research stay at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin. The editing work was done remotely, through videoconferences that connected Cochabamba, Erfurt and Berlin, or some other place where the editors were located. For several months from June 2022 to October 2023, our meetings took place on Friday mornings in Bolivia and in the afternoons in Germany to raise this *wawa* or academic baby.

### **About the structure of this book**

The contributions to the good life gathered here come from different disciplines and regions. The heterogeneity of the contributions is manifested not only in the texts as a whole, but also in each of them individually. This means that many times the reader will notice that in the same chapter the topic is addressed not from the rigidity of a single scheme, but from the flexibility that the ethical category of the good life requires for its approach. Aware of this and in order to guide the reading in some way, we have considered it convenient to organise the chapters of this book into three sections, each of which represents a dialogic way of approaching the question of the good life.

The first section, “Perspectives on the good life. Dialogue for a critical theory of society,” aims to establish a bilateral theoretical discussion between proposals from the Global South and the Global North. Here we can see how the theory of resonance enters into dialogue with the Andean *Vivir*

*Bien* in the sense that both perspectives share decisive starting and ending points: the critical attitude towards the dominant modern paradigm, proposals to think again and alternatively the ancient notion of a good life, and the need to look for resonant and non-alienating elements in our relationship with the world, among others. The second section, “Economies of the good life. Dialogue for an alternative to development,” explores different options to think critically about the concept of development that predominates in the structuring of the economic systems of the modern globalised world. The contributions in this section are based on diverse approaches such as, for example, an indigenist ecology, psychosociology, the ethics of human needs and capacities, the critical theory of resonance and a mode of Andean economic decentralisation; all this in order to question the prevailing developmental models in the different facets of our existence. The third section, “Practices of the good life. Dialogue to rethink the human and the non-human,” pays attention to social practices, usual and unusual, in the broad scope of Andean *Vivir Bien* and how in them any type of classic anthropocentric worldview is relativised. The link between the human and the non-human for a good life can be revealed in different ways: in the festivals in honour of nature that come from ancient times and remain valid to this day, in the devotion of miraculous souls that bring with them a feeling of protection for members of the community, in dealing with means of transportation that have currently become necessary extensions of our own corporality, in contact with the natural environment during childhood education. The three parts of the book want to contribute, therefore, to the issue of the good life in a constant discussion with critical proposals of modernity.

In the first section, J. Fernando Galindo (PROEIB Andes, Cochabamba) inaugurates the dialogue between the Latin American proposal of Andean *Vivir Bien* and Hartmut Rosa’s resonance theory or sociology of world relations. Galindo’s objective is to reawaken interest, both on a theoretical and practical level, in the proposal of *Vivir Bien* and, to this end, he presents in parallel different meeting points between the Andean approach and Rosa’s theory. These points focus on the common reference of both perspectives to the social dimension of a good life, a critical stance against the anthropocentric paradigm, a commitment to alternative social utopias and the urgency of complementing theory with an exploration of the concrete praxis of living well. In the second chapter, Alexis Gros (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) reflects on the ethical notion of a good life and, to this end, relies on two specific approaches: contemporary critical theory,



especially the position of Hartmut Rosa, and the Latin American discourses on *Buen Vivir*. After showing the centrality of the question about the good life in contemporary critical theory, Gros systematically reconstructs the general guidelines of the concept of resonance in Rosa's thought and opens a dialogue of mutual illumination between the proposal of the *Buen Vivir* and the theory of the resonance. In the third chapter, Lukas Meisner (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt) radically goes back to the assumptions of critical theory from which the theory of resonance is established. In this chapter, the author perceives with some scepticism the theoretical scope of Rosa's proposal and similar approaches that come from critical theory of the Frankfurt School. In contrast to this, Meisner is committed to a reconsideration of the idea of political autonomy since its formulation in the work of Immanuel Kant and his argument ranges from a critique of capitalism to a call for revolution. In the fourth chapter, Philipp Altmann and Timmo Krüger (Universidad Central del Ecuador and Bauhaus-Universität Weimar) address the reception of the Andean notion of *Buen Vivir* in German social movements for degrowth and climate justice. After describing the evolution of this notion in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian contexts, the authors show its inspirational importance for these movements, not without failing to mention that its integration with German ideas and political demands was never completely carried out. More than the origins of Andean knowledge, this chapter wants to show its circulation and reception, since the theoretical dialogue must take into account that at a praxiological level, knowledge flows in the globalised world and is appropriated by people from very diverse social environments. In the last chapter of this section, Rickard Lalander, Bartira Silva Fortes and Magnus Lembke (Södertörns högskola and Stockholms universitet) demonstrate the trans-cultural circulation of Andean *Vivir Bien* from a decolonial paradigm. The contribution of the three Swedish authors is argumentatively based on two images: *tinkuy* (confrontation, fight) and the 'flying river.' The first image serves to reclaim a dimension of the good life that has been displaced by the constant emphasis on the ethnic or cultural and ecological dimensions, namely, the dimension of class and social justice. The second image allows the authors to explain how the notion of *Vivir Bien* has spread globally and how it itself would have a floating and plural character that fully corresponds to the aspect that comes from *tinkuy*.

The second section begins with the chapter by Eija Ranta and Pabel López-Flores (Helsinki University and Universidad Mayor de San Andrés),

who investigate the rhetorical function of the discourse of *Vivir Bien* in the state policies of a Bolivia that is trying to get out of the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a series of interviews with public officials, the authors highlight the growing tension between developmental economic projects and the search for an indigenous or indigenist ecology; a tension that is resolved in the subordination of the protection of biodiversity to the ideas of extractivist developmentalism. The section continues with the chapter by José Manuel Rocha Balboa (Cochabamba, Bolivia), in which he attempts to find an answer to the question of the contradictions generated around the concept of *Vivir Bien* at the time of its political application by the Bolivian State. Rocha Balboa understands the failure of the state application of *Vivir Bien* in recent years from a diagnosis of collective trauma that is at the basis of the very idea of the Andean good life. This trauma is a generator of identity, heuristics and search for meanings, it also drives the idea of an “us against them” and the desire for a life in harmony that can be seen from an ideological perspective or from a kind of collective anxiety. The following article contains research also located in Bolivia: Gabriela Canedo Vásquez (Universidad Mayor de San Simón) focuses here on *Vivir Bien* from the perspective of the concept of development. To do this, at first she presents the diversity and complications that exist when talking about development and then she proposes that sustainable development can be understood following the so-called model of human needs and capabilities. The author calls for a strengthening of the Andean social fabric and the position of nature in Bolivian policies, thus advocating a paradigm shift: from a still-current anthropocentrism to a future biocentrism. In the fourth chapter, Samantha Samez (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) applies basic concepts of Hartmut Rosa’s resonance theory to analyse the experience of alienation in the suburb of La Tela in Córdoba, Argentina. The author presents the concepts of alienation and resonance as coexisting forms of a relationship with the world, as well as the concept of a precarious society, in which the community in question is located. The description of this is followed by the analysis of the specific situation through the five dimensions of Rosa’s concept of alienation, also identifying elements of resonance in some of the dimensions. Finally, this section closes with the chapter by Kirsten Mahlke (Universität Konstanz), who studies the role of irrigation infrastructures as the material basis of the good life in the work of Guamán Poma de Ayala. For Mahlke, these infrastructures paradigmatically represent a decentralised economy of common

good, since they are built and used autonomously by the ayllus and remain outside any type of focused higher power. The article explores the large temporal and cultural scale of hydraulic infrastructures, their good use by the natives and their abuse by the conquerors. Furthermore, it shows how this contributes in a concrete way to the achievement of a good life for the first and the accumulation of wealth for the second.

In the first chapter of the third section, Werther Gonzales León (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) reflects on festive symbols and rituals linked to Andean *Vivir Bien* and argues in favour of a decolonial aesthetic as a legitimate alternative to the so-called “other epistemologies.” Its objective is to establish a relationship between human beings and nature different from that inherited from modernity and thus initiate an environmental ethic from a transcultural perspective. As an exemplary case of his proposal, the author refers to the Pachamama Festival celebrated in the first days of August in different communities of the Andean region. The second chapter of this section, written by Adolfo Suárez Muñoz (Gothenburg, Sweden) starts from the question of how the good life is transmitted from generation to generation through educational practices. In order to find a possible answer, the author analyses and compares the educational systems of his country of origin, Bolivia, taking the Warisata school as an example, with his current country of residence, Sweden, focusing here on Waldorf pedagogy. The third chapter by Lourdes Irma Saavedra Berbetty (Universidad Mayor de San Simón) focuses on the connection of living humans and deceased humans in the region of Cochabamba. The author deals with three cases of *almitas milagrosas* (miraculous souls), that is, mortal cases whose memory and devotion seek to restore in some way the feeling of protection of the citizens. The argument therefore contrasts the facts of a bad death with the policies and beliefs of a good life. The research is carried out with a qualitative ethnographic methodology and shows, in all three cases, a peculiar sense of urban appropriation. Continuing with the fourth chapter, Manuel Moser (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt) focuses on the relationships between human beings and non-human objects/environments (artefacts) in the modern Andean world. Moser’s research shows that the relationship with the automobile is a basic component of understanding the good life in such a world: It is about a good life that does not contradict traditional Andean models. Unlike studies on *Vivir Bien* focused on the relationship between human and nature, this article starts from the relationship between human and artificiality for the conceptual

examination and critical proposal. This chapter is complemented by the next one, in which Kilian Jörg (Freie Universität Berlin) seeks to expand new-materialist approaches to (post)modernity in order to investigate the role of high-speed transportation in the construction of modern mentalities and the perceptions of nature. Automobility as a necessary prosthesis to achieve a good modern life reproduces, according to Jörg, one of the central modern philosophical concepts, that of nature. The issue not only lies in the fact that automobility is presented as a problem for the natural environment, it also produces and reproduces an attitude towards it that constitutes it as a merely external nature.

Hartmut Rosa (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) raises in the prologue, the idea of the good life from European critical theory, while Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (La Paz, Bolivia) develops, in the epilogue, a model of the good life from the Aymara perspective.

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