3 Available, accessible, attainable

The mindset of growth and the resonance conception of the good life

Hartmut Rosa

One very curious but consistent fact about late modern life is that almost irrespective of their values, status and moral commitments, subjects feel notoriously short on time and tirelessly pressed to hurry (Gershuny 2003; Robinson/Godbey 2008; Wajcman 2014). Individuals from Rio to New York, from Los Angeles to Moscow and Tokio feel caught in a rat-race of daily routines. No matter how fast they run, they close their day as *subjects of guilt*: they almost never succeed in working off their *to-do lists*. Thus, even and especially if they have enough money and wealth, they are indebted temporally. This is what perhaps characterizes the everyday predicament of the overwhelming majority of subjects in Westernised capitalist societies most aptly: amidst monetary and technological affluence, they are close to temporal insolvency. We need more time to do our work properly; we need more time to improve our skills and knowledge, to renew our hardware and software; we need more time to care for our kids and elderly parents, more time for our friends and relatives, for our house or flat and for our body, and finally, we need more time to come to terms with ourselves, our minds or souls or psyche. The problem, in fact, is that in all of these respects (and probably many more), there are legitimate expectations directed towards us by ourselves or by others – expectations turning into obligations which we feel we really should meet, and the neglect of which will be held against us in one context or another (Rosa 2017). *Of course, I should have done it long ago, but I just did not find the time yet*, has become something like the default-perspective with which we move from context to context. Thus, just as a person who is indebted financially permanently seeks to gain, save or earn a little money to pay back his or her debts here and there, the modern subject who is temporally indebted constantly seeks to gain or save a little time or find some postponement to meet his or her obligations. Yet, as with the monetary debts, once we are too deeply indebted, there is no way out of the trap. Now surely, the temporal predicament is of utmost significance for all our attempts to live a good life, for how we (want to) live our lives is equivalent to how we (want to) spend our time. Hence, the vexing question is this: How did we get here? How is this logic of escalatory acceleration tied up with our conceptions of the good life? And, first and foremost: How can we find a way out?

Given that modern societies are characterised by the fact that they can only reproduce their institutional structures dynamically, i.e. in an escalatory mode of growth, acceleration and innovation (cf. the introduction to this volume), I want to

explore in this contribution the connection between this structural feature and the dominant conception of the good life that accompanies it. To this end, I will identify two corresponding cultural 'imperatives for growth' that provide the hamster-wheel of modern social life with motivational energy, or, put differently, that translate the structural requirement of growth, acceleration and innovation into a strategic necessity in our search for the good life. In a second step, I will show why this conception necessarily fails in a twofold way: It leads to the destruction rather than the control of nature – and to alienation rather than appropriation of the world. In the third and last step of this paper, I therefore want to present an alternative conception of the good life that might provide us with a cultural and motivational lever to counter those imperatives and collectively find a way out of the late-modern predicament.

Systemic requirements and ethical imperatives: the triple-A approach to the good life

If we accept that the escalatory logics of growth, acceleration and innovation implied in dynamic stabilisation are a systemic requirement and structural necessity of modern society, the core question that arises is how the resulting growth- and speed-imperatives are connected to, or translated into modern subjects' conceptions of the good life. For obviously, it would be highly implausible to suppose that individuals are merely the victims, or the passive receivers, of those requirements.

Surely, in the end, it is us humans who have to achieve growth, acceleration and innovation through incessant (self-) optimisation, and we play this escalatory game through the endless accumulation of economic, cultural, social and bodily capital. But in order to fully grasp the corresponding processes of translating the structural requirements into personal aspirations, we need to understand some peculiar features of the cultural predicament of modernity first.

The most important of these is ethical pluralism and what Alasair MacIntyre once called the *privatisation of the good* (MacIntyre 1990). For in parallel with the structural and institutional shift towards dynamic stabilisation, modern societies came to accept that they could not reach a binding consensus on the definition of the good life; that there is no way to rationally arbitrate between competing 'comprehensive conceptions of the good', as John Rawls termed it (Rawls 1993). Thus, ethical pluralism has become the basic cultural condition of modernity: whether one should abide by a religious belief, and if so, by which one; whether one should strive to develop political, artistic or intellectual capacities; whether one should marry and have kids or not, and all the other small and big questions about what kind of life one should lead, about leading a life as such – e.g. whether music should be important, whether literature should be a part of life, whether the town or the country is preferable, whether the local soccer team was important or not – were turned into strictly private questions. *You'll have to find out for yourself!* is the standard answer to all of them, and it is not just the pro-forma line taken in families and classrooms and even in the local pubs in order to ensure civility. In fact, that the question of the good should be an intimate, strictly private and individual matter is itself one of the founding and grounding ethical

convictions of modernity. If a kid asks what to do with his or her life – questions such as: *Should I play soccer, or the flute? Should I be interested in politics? Should I believe in God? Whom should I marry? Where should I live*? – teachers, friends and family will be sure to offer their advice, but they will almost inevitably rush to add: *Just find out for yourself; listen to your heart; come to know your talents and your yearnings*. Thus, the good life has become the most intimately private matter of all things. It has become even more delicate by the fact that, by consequence of dynamic stabilisation, the background conditions of the life to be led are changing quickly: *You can never know what you will want, and what you will need, in the future. The world will change, and your own outlook on life will change, too*. Hence, the answer to 'what kind of life should I strive for'? has become very elusive, shrouded in uncertainty.

However, it is not that no ethical advice can be given at all. Quite to the contrary: modern society might not have an answer to what the good life is or what it consists in, but it has a very clear-cut answer to what the *preconditions* for living a good life are, and to what to do for meeting them: *Secure the resources you might need for living your dream (whatever that might be)!* has become the overruling rational imperative of modernity.

Harvard Philosopher John Rawls in his most remarkable *Theory of Justice* has outlined this predicament perhaps in the most straightforward way. There will be no agreement on the comprehensive doctrines of the good, he says, but there are a number of 'primary goods' of which to have *more* is clearly better than to have *less*, irrespective of what your conception of the good is. Such goods are, first and foremost, our freedoms and rights, but also our economic means, our cultural capacities and knowledge, our social networks, our social status and the recognition we earn, but also our health etc. (Rawls 1971). *No matter what the future might bring, it will help if you have money, rights, friends, health, knowledge*.

By consequence, the ethical imperative that guides modern subjects is not a particular or substantive definition of the good life, but is the aspiration to acquire the resources necessary or helpful for leading one. In a way, we moderns resemble a painter who is forever concerned about improving his materials – the colours and brushes, the air condition and lighting, the canvas and easel, etc. – but never really starts to paint.

Thus, when we consult the books in the self-help section of bookstores for happiness and the good life, we find that the increase in those 'primary goods' or resources more often than not is equated with an increase in the quality of life as such: the secrets to a good and happy life, we are assured, can be unraveled if we find out *how to get rich, how to be more healthy, or attractive, or have more friends*, or *how to acquire better skills, memory and knowledge etc*. In short, the aspirations and dreams, the strivings and yearnings, the fears and anxieties that have come to guide our actions and decisions are firmly fixed on our equipment with resources. Our libido is tied to the acquisition of economic and cultural, social and symbolic, and, increasingly, bodily capital (Bourdieu 1984).

This strategy, which seems thoroughly irrational at first glance, is made rational by the fact that the social allocation of resources is regulated through competition, while the allocation-game itself is increasingly dynamised, too.

Hence, the logic of competition installs the fear of losing out: as with Weber's capitalist entrepreneur (Weber 2001, 30), modern subjects find themselves unavoidably to be 'on their way down', like standing on a downward escalator or on a slipping slope, if they do not run uphill to improve their standings and keep track with the changes around them (Rosa 2016). Thus, we never simply 'have' the resources we need: if we do not increase, optimise and improve them, they are about to corrode, decay and dwindle. So, what is driving modern subjects to stay in the race, to a large extent, is their fear of virtual social death: sure, in most of the so-called developed countries, even if you lose too much ground, you will not starve, because the welfare systems provide you with the material necessities, but you will be excluded from the allocation-game, which is tied to employment. Without it, you cannot gain culturally legitimate resources, status, recognition or positions. You are given alms, but you do not have a legitimate, self-affirming place in the world that allows for a sense of self-efficacy.

As a result, the logic of incessant increase, the desire to grow, run and enhance is firmly anchored in the habitual structure of modern subjectivity. In fact, it is doubly entrenched in the modern character: as the *desire* to improve our resource base and as the *fear* of losing out, i.e. of losing the preconditions for a good life through erosion of this very base. Yet, the irresistible *desire* in this arrangement, the attractive cultural force of the escalatory logic, cannot fully be grasped by pointing to the resource aspect alone. (Economic) growth, (technological) acceleration and (sociocultural) innovation for modern subjects undeniably carry a genuine promise; they are tied to our conceptions of freedom and happiness.

Why is 'having more and moving faster' attractive for most modern subjects? It is, I want to argue, because the escalatory logic of dynamic stabilisation is tied to the promise of increasing our individual and collective scope and reach. This triggers what I want to call the 'Triple-A Approach' to the good life: the modern way of acting and being-in-the world is geared towards making more and more of its qualities and quantities available, accessible and attainable. This is what science does, and what science promises: peering farther into the universe through our telescopes, looking deeper into the micro-structure of matter and life through our microscopes, etc. Making the world knowable, calculable, disposable. It is what economic wealth is about: the richer we are (individually and/or collectively), the more the world is made available, attainable and accessible to us. We can build and buy castles and cathedrals, rockets and spaceships, yachts and hotels, etc. In fact, making the world available, accessible and attainable explains the lure of technology writ large: for a young kid, the first bike brings his or her friends on the other side of the village within the horizon of availability; the first moped enlarges this circle to the neighboring village, while the car expands the horizon of the world which is accessible on a regular basis to the larger cities around, and the airplane, finally, brings New York, Rio, Tokyo within reach. Similarly, the telephone and the radio make faraway places accessible acoustically, while the TV makes them visually available. The smartphone, finally, brings all of our friends, and all of the digitalised knowledge and images of the earth, straight into our pockets.

The power of the Triple-A Approach to the good life can be felt also in the attractivity of cities for modern subjects: almost universally across the modern

world, the majority of people, and certainly of young people, want to live in large cities rather than in small villages. Ask them why: because in the city, you have the mall, the cinema, the theater, the zoo, the museum, the big stadiums, all within your everyday reach, within the horizon of availability. And it explains, in part, why knowledge and education are attractive even beyond their use as a resource base: *learn English, or Chinese, and you discover a whole new world of literature and art, culture and shopping*; the whole universe of that language becomes available for you, for example. In this way, the world is turned into a disposable place, with money, education and technology supplying the charms for incessantly increasing our reach and scope. Hence, culturally as well as structurally, modern society entrenches and even enforces a very particular stance and attitude towards the world, a stance that is defined by the logic of increase, control and augmentation.[1]

Alienation and pollution – or: what is wrong with the Triple-A Approach?

So far, I have tried to sketch out that we are driven by the desire to expand our horizon of the available, attainable and accessible. Our conception of the good life is rooted in the idea that we can 'gain' the world, that we can unlock it, make it 'legible' (Blumenberg 1979) and get its treasures and secrets to speak to us. Yet, most unfortunately, when we look at our current sociocultural predicament, this strategy seems to have failed thoroughly, and in a twofold way. First, of course, there is a widespread and growing sense across the world that we do not so much gain and dispose of the world than destroy and endanger it. This sense is most vivid in environmental concerns that in the mode of dynamic stabilisation, through incessant growth and acceleration, we damage and destroy, impoverish and reduce, pollute and poison our natural surroundings. In our late modern world, 'nature' has, quite paradoxically, become synonymous with the unattainable, non-available 'other' on the one hand, and with something we are guilty of destroying on the other. This, in turn, leads to the backlash of an unleashed nature striking out in tsunamis and typhoons, avalanches and droughts, viruses and bacteria resistant to antibiotics. The natural world, instead of being made available, attainable and accessible, in many respects appears to become endangered and dangerous instead. This relationship with what modern subjects still perceive to be their living and breathing, responsive, natural surrounding certainly does not correspond to the way of being-in-the-world that the strategy of increasing our reach and scope was aiming at.

Yet, when we look at the cultural history of modernity, there is a second, even more disturbing sense in which this very strategy turns out to be paradoxical. For ever since the 18th century, when the shift to the mode of dynamic stabilisation occurred, modernity has been haunted by the fear, and by the manifest experience, that the world seems to recede in parallel with the increase of our hold over it. In a phenomenological perspective, we appear to lose the world as we make it available. In cultural self-observations of modernity as well as in social theory and philosophy, this process has been observed from many different angles: Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, for example, experienced it when he disputed the gains allegedly made through progress and when he interpreted them as a genuine loss in the quality of our being-in-the-world, testified in the shift from *amour-de-soi* to *amour propre* (Rousseau 2012); Karl Marx identified it as a fivefold process of *alienation* from work, from the products of work, from nature, from our fellow human beings and, in the end, from ourselves, and he took it as the starting point for his philosophy (Marx/Engels 1988), which later on inspired the diagnoses of alienation and the corresponding forms of reification by Adorno, Fromm, or Marcuse, as well as by Georg Lukacs and, more recently, by Axel Honneth (2012) and Rahel Jaeggi (2014). In all of these conceptions, there looms the shadow of a world turned shallow and silent, mute and deaf through our very attempt to control and commodify it. Alienation has come to serve as the keyword for a world which has become cold and grey, harsh and non-responding, experienced by a subject that inwardly feels deaf, mute, cold, and empty, too. We find this sense of a serious loss of the world, of its slipping away from us, in other traditions of social philosophy, too: in Durkheim's conception of anomia (and his notions of anomic and egoistic forms of suicide; Durkheim 1997), in Georg Simmel's identification of a blasé attitude towards the things and events that surround us and a 'latent' aversion against our fellow human beings, which he deemed characteristic of the modern habitus (Simmel 1997), in Max Weber's notion of 'disenchantment' as the flipside of the longstanding process of 'rationalisation' (which he defines as the process which makes the world calculable and controllable), or in Albert Camus' definition of the 'absurd', which is born, he says, from the sense that we cannot but shout and yell at a world which never answers because it is, in its innermost core, cold and indifferent or even hostile to us (Camus 1991). Finally, for Hannah Arendt (1958), human subjects lose the world if they lose their capacity for joint, creative political action – irrespective of how successful they might be economically and technologically.

This failure of the triple-A strategy towards the good life is felt most vividly in the psychological state of 'burnout', which has become the iconic fear and disease of late-modernity (Ehrenberg 2010). People who suffer a thorough burnout – however problematic its exact medical definition may be – experience exactly that: a world which has turned hard and cold, grey or black, dead and deaf for them, while they inwardly feel empty and drained, too. *Burnout* thus is the most radical form of alienation in the sense of a complete loss or lack of a responsive, 'warm' connection with life and with the world. If my diagnosis of the receding of the world as the flipside of our making it available, accessible and attainable is correct, it is small wonder that 'burnout' has become the dominant cultural fear precisely in those social contexts where the triple-A strategy has been most successful and where there is an abundance of resources.

So the question arises: what has gone wrong? Why did modernity betray our hopes and fail to deliver its promise? In order to answer this, we have to go back one more time and ask: why was bringing the world within reach and scope so attractive for us moderns in the first place? What *was* the promise by which we were led in this strategy? To put it straightforwardly: I believe that at the heart of it, we are driven by the idea that through increasing scope and reach we can

improve the quality of our relating to the world. The desire to increase our physical, material and social range is driven by the hope that we can find the *right* place for us, that we meet the people we *really* want to live with, the job that *actually* satisfies us, the religion or worldview which is *truly ours*, the books that actually *talk to us* and the music that *speaks to us*, etc. Thus, in the end, we hope, we will arrive at a form of life that turns the world into a living, breathing, speaking, responsive, 'enchanted' world. Alas, as I have tried to point out, instead of arriving there, we end up turning the business of increasing our scope and horizon of the available, attainable and accessible, and collecting resources into an end in itself, into an endless, escalatory cycle which permanently erodes its own basis and thus leads nowhere.

Let me try one small, idiosyncratic example: think of the way we relate to books and to music. For many modern subjects, literature and music have become central 'axes' or elements of a good life, crucial albeit somewhat luxurious indicators for the quality of life: a sphere in which they seek and find moments of happiness. For decades, it has become a cultural routine for many people (certainly not just academics and intellectuals) to gradually build up collections of records, or CDs, and a private library. As time has become an increasingly scarce commodity, while music and books have become more and more easily attainable and affordable, very often the books and CDs or records thus collected are never really or fully read or heard: they are stored away in shelves and cases for possible future use. They are acquired as mere potential, but they are not, or not fully, *appropriated* in the true sense of 'consumption'. For to consume a book or a record does not mean to *buy* them but to read or to listen to them. When we read a book or listen to a piece of music in the full sense of it, we have a chance of being drawn in, being touched and affected by it, and to some extent even of being *transformed* by it: very often, people refer to their most intense and rewarding experiences of reading or listening by claiming that the book or music in question actually 'changed their life'. Now, obviously, increasing the reach and scope of permanently available and accessible books and music through acquisition does not necessarily or directly translate into an increase in the quality and/or quantity of intense cultural experiences of this latter sort. In fact, there might even be a *negative* correlation that parallels the macro-story I just told in the section before: as we find less and less time to delve into a book or a piece of music, we seem to develop an increasing appetite to acquire more of them. This appears to be an almost 'natural' side-effect of dynamic stabilisation: literature and music as commodities become progressively cheaper, while the time taken to read a book or actually listen to an opera gets comparatively more 'expensive'.[2] Thus, instead of listening to the 170 CDs comprised in *The Complete Mozart* (or in the complete Pink Floyd recordings), which takes ages to do, acquiring the complete Beethoven (or Stones) collection as well for just 49 pounds, dollars or euros becomes an increasingly attractive alternative. Yet, the likelihood that none of those 170 CDs actually speaks to us increases as well.

Now, interestingly, as the reader certainly will have noticed a while ago, we have already taken the next step in the logic of increasing our range and scope

of cultural accessibility: younger people tend to no longer buy books and CDs or DVDs – they buy mere *access* instead. For just a few bucks a month, they get *unlimited* access to millions of books, albums and/or movies! This seems like the ultimate realisation of modernity's dream. Yet, more often than not, we find ourselves sitting in face of this limitless horizon of availability and feel attracted to none of the options. A very similar story can be told about the history of private photography: for decades, many people used to take photographs in order to enable them to relate in an intense and intimate way to past experiences. The images were carefully selected when taken and then individually stored in physical albums. With the advent of fast and cheap digital imaging, pictures have become abundantly available and accessible: we can make, multiply and store hundreds and thousands of them, and we do so with the hope that they will release their true relational potential some time in the future. But in fact, more often than not, their time never comes. Increasing the scope of attainability appears to have significantly reduced the experiential and relational quality. This is precisely where cultural grey out or individual burnout actually loom large.

Thus, to sum up my argument so far, we have good reasons to assume that the good life in its essence is *not* a matter of scope (in money, wealth, options or capabilities), but a particular way of relating to the world – to places and people, to ideas and bodies, to time and to nature, to self and others. Increasing the scope is only a means and a strategy to enable or facilitate the latter – it becomes detrimental if it is structurally turned into an end in itself and thus culturally leads to alienation from the world (and to the destruction of nature on top of it).

The resonance conception of the good life

Now, if the two claims just formulated are plausible – i.e., that a) the good life is a matter of the way in which we are relating with and to the world, of our being in the world, and that b) dynamic stabilisation and the triple-A strategy lead to increasing alienation as a *failed* way of being and relating – then the question that remains to be answered is this: what is the opposite of alienation? What is a 'good' or fulfilling way of relating to places, people, time, things, and self? What is alienation's other? Let me start answering this question by defining alienation in a more precise way. Alienation, I want to claim, is a particular mode of relating to the world of things, of people and of one's self in which there is no *responsivity*, i.e. no meaningful inner connection. It is, to use Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) term, a relationship without (true) relation. As we have seen, in this mode, there certainly are causal and instrumental connections and interactions, but the world (in all its qualities) cannot be appropriated by the subject; it cannot be made to 'speak'; it appears to be without sound and colour. Alienation thus is a relationship which is marked by the absence of a true, vibrant exchange and connection: between a silent and grey world and a 'dry' subject there is no life; both appear to be either 'frozen' or genuinely chaotic and mutually aversive. Hence, in the state of alienation, self and world appear to be related in an utterly indifferent or even hostile way.[3]

But the true sense of alienation as I want to use it here only becomes comprehensible when we start to think of its alternative. Alienation's other is a mode of

relating to the world in which the subject feels touched, moved or addressed by the people, places, objects, etc. he or she encounters. Phenomenologically speaking, we all know what it means to be touched by someone's glance or voice, by a piece of music we listen to, by a book we read, a place we visit, etc. Thus, the capacity to feel affected by something, and in turn to develop intrinsic interest in the part of the world which affects us, is a core element of any positive way of relating to the world. And as we know from psychologists and psychiatrists, its marked absence is a central element of most forms of depression and burnout (Fuchs 2008, Rosa 2016). Yet, it is not enough to overcome alienation. What is additionally required is the capacity to 'answer' the call: in fact, when we feel touched in the way described above, we often tend to give a physical response by developing goose bumps, an increased rate of heartbeat, a changed blood pressure or skin resistance (Massumi 2002). Resonance, as I want to call this dual movement of af←fection (something touches us from the outside) and e→motion (we answer by giving a response and thus by establishing a connection) thus always and inevitably has a bodily basis. But the response we give, of course, has a psychological, social and cognitive side to it, too: it is based on the experience that we can reach out and answer the call, that we can establish connection through our own inner or outer reaction. It is by this reaction that the process of appropriation is brought about. This kind of resonance we experience, for example, in relationships of love or friendship, but also in genuine dialogue, when we play a musical instrument or in sports, but also very often at the workplace. The receptive as well as active connection brings about a process of progressive self- and world transformation.

Thus, resonance is not just built on the experience of being touched or affected, but also on the perception of what we can call self-efficacy.[4] In the social dimension, self-efficacy is experienced when we realise that we are capable of actually reaching out to and affecting others, that they truly listen and connect to us and answer in turn. But self-efficacy, of course, can also be experienced when we play soccer or the piano, when we write a text we struggle with (and which inevitably speaks its own voice), and even when we stand at the shoreline of the ocean and 'connect' with the rolling waves, the water and the wind. Only in such a mode of receptive affection and responsive self-efficacy are self and world related in an appropriative way: the encounter transforms both sides, the subject and the world experienced.[5] That resonances of this sort are vital elements of any identity-formation can be read from the fact that claims such as *after reading that book*, or *after hearing that music* or *meeting that group* or *climbing that mountain*, *I was a different person*, are standard ingredients of almost all (auto-)biographical accounts given, for example, in interviews. It is important to notice here that the transformative effects of resonance are beyond the control of the subject: when something really touches us, we can never know or predict in advance what we will become as a result of this.

To sum up, resonance as alienation's other, then, is defined by four crucial elements: First, by af←fection in the sense of the experience of being truly touched or moved, second by e→motion as the experience of responsive (as opposed to purely instrumental) self-efficacy, third by its transformative quality, and fourth by an intrinsic moment of elusiveness, i.e. of non-controllability or non-disposability.

We can never simply establish resonance instrumentally or bring it about at will; it always remains elusive. Put differently: whether or not we 'hear the call' is beyond our will and control. This in part is due to the fact that resonance is not an *echo*: it does not mean to hear oneself amplified or to simply feel re-assured, but it involves encounter with some real 'other' that remains beyond our control, that speaks in its own voice or key different from ours and therefore remains 'alien' to us. Even more than this, this 'other' needs to be experienced as a source of 'strong evaluation' in the sense of Charles Taylor: only when we feel that this other (which can be a person, but also a piece of music, a mountain, or a historical event, for example) has something important to tell or teach, irrespectively of whether we like to hear it or not, can we truly feel 'grasped' and touched (Taylor 1989, 3–109, see his paper in this book). Resonance, therefore, inevitably requires a moment of self-transcendence (Joas 2001). It does not require, however, that we have a clear cognitive concept or previous experience of this other. We can all of a sudden be touched and shaken by something that appears to be alien altogether. Therefore, resonance certainly is not just consonance or harmony; quite to the opposite: it *requires difference* and sometimes *opposition* and *contradiction* in order to enable real encounter. Thus, in a completely harmonious or consonant world, there would be no resonance at all, for we would be incapable of discerning the voice of an 'other' – and by consequence, to develop and discern our own voice. Yet, a world in which there is *only* dissonance and conflict would not allow for experiences of resonance either: such a world would be experienced as merely repulsive. In short, resonance requires difference that allows for the possibility of appropriation: of a responsive relationship that entails progressive, mutual transformation and adaptation. Resonance, then, is a condition between consonance and irrevocable dissonance. Because of this, I am convinced the concept can provide a key to overcome the traditional stand-off between theories and philosophies based on identity and conceptions centered on difference. Resonance does not require identity, but the transformative appropriation of difference.

In light of this definition of resonance, it becomes clear that resonance cannot be stored or accumulated, and there cannot be a struggle for resonance either.[6] Therefore, resonance provides us with a conception of the good life that contradicts the logics of increase and the triple-A approach. We immediately understand this when we think of what happens when we try to play our favorite piece of music ten times in a row, or every day: we do not increase our experience of resonance, but we lose it. Similarly, the increase in our database of available music to millions of titles ready at hand does not, at least not necessarily, increase the likelihood of musical resonance.

But the elusiveness and moment-like character of resonance does not mean that it is completely random and contingent. For while the actual experience can never be completely controlled and predicted (in fact, just as we expect it to happen most strongly, it is very likely that we will be disappointed – Christmas Eve in family life might be a good case in point), there are two elements involved here which depend on social conditions and which therefore turn resonance into a concept that can be used as a tool for social criticism. First, subjects individually and collectively experience resonance typically along particular 'axes' of resonance.

Thus, for some, music provides such an axis: Whenever they go to the concert hall, or to the opera, or the festival arena, they have a good chance of making that experience. For others, it will be the museum, the library, or the church, the forest or the shoreline. More than that, we also foster social relationships that provide something like a reliable axis of resonance: we can expect moments of resonance when we are with our lovers, with our kids or with our friends – even though we all know that very often, our respective encounters remain indifferent or even repulsive. And just as much, as we know from evidence provided by the sociology of labor (most instructive for this, Sennett 2009), most people, or at least very many people, develop intense relationships of resonance with their work, not just with their colleagues at the workplace, but also with the materials and tasks they are working and struggling with. Thus, the dough 'responds' to the baker as does the haircut to the barber, the wood to the carpenter, the plant to the gardener, the truck to the trucker, the body to the doctor or the text to the writer. In each of these cases, we find a true two-way relationship which involves experiences of self-efficacy, resistance or contradiction and appropriation as well as mutual transformation (Rosa 2016, 393–401).

When we scrutinise these axes more closely, we find that we can systematically distinguish three different dimensions of resonance. I want to call them the social, material and existential dimensions of resonance. *Social* axes are those that connect us with, and relate us to, other human beings. In modern, Western-type societies since the romantic period, love, friendship, but also democratic citizenship are conceptualised as 'resonant' relationships of this type. *Material* axes are those we establish with certain objects – natural or artefacts, pieces of art, or amulets or tools and materials we work with or we use for sports. Thus, the skis for the skier or the board for the surfer can very well become 'responsive' counterparts. Yet, I believe with philosophers like Karl Jaspers (2001), William James (1982), Martin Buber (1971) or Friedrich Schleiermacher (1988) that human subjects also seek and find 'axes of resonance' that connect them with and relate them to life, or existence, or the universe as such. As those authors tried to show quite convincingly, this is what brings about religious experiences, and what makes religion plausible in the first place. To me, the central element of the bible, or the Koran, is the idea that at the root of our existence, at the heart of our being, there is not a silent, indifferent or repulsive universe, dead matter or blind mechanisms, but a process of resonance and response: someone who hears us and sees us, and who finds ways and means to touch us and to respond, who breathes life into us in the first place. The very practice of prayer for the believer opens up such an 'axis' which connects his innermost core with outermost reality. The praying person turns inward and outward at the same time. However, of course, modernity has found other axes of existential resonance that do not depend on religious ideas. Nature, in particular, is experienced as an ultimate, comprehensive as well as responsive reality. To listen to the voice of nature has become a central idea not just in idealistic philosophy, but even more so in many everyday routines and practices. Thus, many people regularly claim that they need to take to the forest, or the mountains, or the oceans or deserts to find and feel themselves. They believe they can only 'hear themselves' when listening to the silence (or the music) 'out

there'. Just as in the case of prayer, they experience something like a thread that connects their innermost nature to outer reality. In a strikingly similar way, music itself opens up an analogous axis for the listener: when we close our eyes to experience a piece of music, we turn inward and outward simultaneously. And something very similar happens in the case of other aesthetic experiences in the museum, the cinema or when reading a book, too. *Art*, therefore, alongside *nature* has evolved into a central existential axis of resonance for modern subjects. That resonance does not need to be a pleasant, harmonious experience, but can develop essentially disturbing aspects, can be learnt from experiences we might have with *history* as a powerful reality running through us, which connects us with those who came before and those who will come after us, a reality we cannot control or command but which nevertheless responds to our actions such that we can feel a certain sense of self-efficacy. Thus, it appears to be a not so infrequent experience that young people, when visiting a former Nazi concentration camp, feel existentially struck and addressed; they feel a 'call' to respond to the inhumanity of such a site which actually does change their lives (see Rosa 2016, 500–514).

Now, while I take it that such concrete axes of resonance are not anthropologically given but rather culturally and historically constructed, the establishment of some such axes is nevertheless indispensable for a good life, for they provide contexts in which subjects dispositionally open up to experiences of resonance. To shift into a mode of resonance requires that we take the risk to make ourselves vulnerable. It conceptually requires that we let ourselves be touched, and even transformed, in a non-predictable and non-controllable way. Thus, in contexts where we are full of fear, or in stress, or in a fight-mode, or concentrated on bringing about a certain result, we do not seek or allow for resonance; quite to the contrary, doing so would be dangerous and harmful. Given this, it becomes obvious that it would be foolish to require that we should always be in a mode of dispositional resonance. The capacity to leave this mode, to distance oneself from the world, to take a cold, instrumental, analytical stance towards it, very obviously is a cultural achievement that is indispensable not just for keeping up the business of modern science and technology, but to actually provide and safeguard a form of life that allows for human resonance in the three dimensions mentioned.

Towards a social critique of the conditions of resonance

With this conception in our toolkit, I believe that we can start to use resonance as a yardstick to do the job of social philosophy in the sense of a critique of the prevailing social conditions. Its starting point is the idea that a good life requires the existence of reliable and viable axes of resonance in all three dimensions. A subject will have a good life, I claim, if he or she finds and preserves social, material and existential axes of resonance which allow for iterative and periodic reassurance of 'existential resonance', i.e. of a resonant mode of being. The possibility of such a good life, then, is endangered if the conditions for these axes and for the dispositional mode of resonance on the side of the subjects are structurally or systematically undermined. The institutional mode of dynamic stabilisation, so my argument goes, does display the tendency and the potential for such a systematic

undermining. For it forces subjects into a mode of 'dispositional alienation': they are forced into a reifying, instrumental mode of relating to objects and subjects in order to increase and secure their resources, to speed-up and to optimise their equipment. The pervasive logic of competition in particular undermines the possibility to get into a mode or resonance: if we have to outpace someone, we cannot resonate with him or her at the same time. We cannot compete and resonate simultaneously.[7] Furthermore, as we know from research on empathy and from neurological studies (Bauer 2006), time-pressure actually works as a sure preventer of resonance. If we are short on time, we try to be as goal-directed and focused as possible; we cannot afford being touched and transformed. The same is true, of course, if we are driven by *fear*. Fear forces us to erect barriers and to close down our minds, it shifts us to a mode in which we precisely try *not* to be touched by 'the world'. Therefore, the conditions of resonance are such that they require contexts of mutual *trust* and fearlessness; and these contexts in turn require time and stability as background conditions. Finally, the pervasive bureaucratic attempts to completely control processes and outcomes in order to ensure their efficiency and transparency, which define late-modern workplace conditions, are equally problematic for relationships of resonance, because they are incompatible with the latter's elusiveness and transformative potential.

I do not have the space to develop a fine-grained analysis of contemporary, late-modern conditions of resonance here (see Rosa 2016, Part IV), but I am confident that the reader will find it a plausible claim that the escalatory logics of dynamic stabilisation and the corresponding Triple-A Approach to the good life are rather detrimental to the establishment and preservation of the three-dimensional axes of resonance, and that a critique of the conditions of resonance, therefore, is a worthwhile undertaking.

Notes

1 Of course, this argument is strikingly similar to the conceptions of the first generation of critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of instrumental reason (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002) or Marcuse's identification of the 'promethean' stance of modern man in *Eros and Civilization* (Marcuse 1974).

2 This argument was brilliantly developed by the Swedish economist Staffan B. Linder as far back as 1970.

3 I have developed this notion of alienation as well as the corresponding conception of resonance at great length and in a much more precise way in Rosa 2016.

4 On the notion of self-efficacy see Bandura 1993.

5 Of course, the notorious problem with this claim is that it immediately provokes the objection that while the *subject* might well be transformed by the interaction with the violin or the ocean, the latter hardly change. But while this argument in fact depends on a perhaps not-so-innocent epistemology in which the only things capable of responding are human beings, i.e. on an 'asymmetrical anthropology' (Latour 1993, cf Descola 2013), it cannot be disputed that the *experienced* world *is* affected by such encounters: What the violin and the ocean are *for us* changes progressively, and what they are as 'things-in-themselves' we will never know.

6 This is one of the reasons why resonance is different from recognition; for a systematic discussion of this, see Rosa 2016, 331–340.

7 The only exception to this rule is, of course, the context of game and play and thus of sports, where a sphere of resonance very often provides the grounds for competition.

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