

## Toward an economy for common welfare and good living

I like to start with a surprise. Because it might be surprising for you that a philosophical reflection of political economy and the conceptual necessity to extend traditional *political economy* to a new *ethical economy* which is what I will outline – that for doing so, my starting point will be Immanuel Kant.

To start with Kant, however, I do not intend to discuss his philosophy and his well-known ethics of human autonomy. The Kantian idea of declaring human autonomy or freedom (which he rationalistically deduces from our capacity to free will) to be the highest value of the ›morally good‹ is beyond the topic of my talk. Nonetheless the moral *ideal of human autonomy* will remain constantly present in my considerations. Because this ideal constitutes the humanist background and the philosophical foundation of an ethical economy that services the good. So what I am going to do is to explain in some details what an ethical economy is and how it services our good life or human good living. (I prefer formulations like to ›live the good‹ or to ›do what is ethically good‹ or to ›practice the ethical good‹ instead of the classical term ›the good life‹ for reasons, which you will see.)

Although I decided to start with Immanuel Kant, I will *not* discuss his philosophy and his humanist theory of dignity and human autonomy out of a straight-forward reason and a moral intuition: The Kantian idealism lacks any occupation with the *economic reality* and *critical limits* that modern economy puts on possible human autonomy. Therefore, it was absolutely consecutive that the Kantian philosophy and also the Hegelian idealism were criticized by their successors who painfully experienced the negative impacts and obviously dehumanizing effects of the industrialization processes of modern capitalist economy. One philosopher, who eventually became the most famous among those post-Kantian and anti-Hegelian thinkers, made it very clear that he criticized Kant and Hegel – the ›German

idealism◁ of moral autonomy and human reason (Vernunft, Geist) – in favor of a more realistic humanism or ▷materialism◁, as he eventually called his way of thinking.

This philosopher was, of course, Karl Marx. Marx argued for the conceptual necessity that philosophy must include the economic reality as the ▷basis◁ of our social and moral being. When Marx chose to give his main book the subtitle ▷Critique of Political Economy◁, he explicitly related himself to Kant's ▷Critique of Pure Reason◁. He consciously intended to continue the Kantian enlightenment – however by stirring the philosophical focus from human ▷Reason◁ to the ▷Capital◁, from ethics to economics. Marx became a critic of capitalism and called himself ▷communist◁ only because he was a moral humanist. The reason was not at all that he personally (being and always remaining a bourgeois intellectual) liked to engage in street fights and revolutionary riots, and not out of any particular favor for political radicalism or for some questionable pleasure to be an anti-capitalist. None of that, quite the opposite: His philosophical motivation was ▷simply◁ his moral humanism.

Now, this *very* (▷Marxist◁) *humanism* which ultimately goes back to Kant's ideal of human autonomy or dignity as the highest morally good will be the starting point of my proposal combining the practice of a possible ethically good living with its economic reality. (A Marxist humanism or Kantianism – a philosophical ▷Marxism◁ – which places human autonomy in the center of modern society<sup>1</sup> differs fundamentally from the philosophical ▷liberalism◁ of Adam Smith and its neoliberal versions: As it is well-known, Smith declares the “common wealth of nations” to be the *moral justification of modern capitalist economy*.)

However, it is one thing to argue that we should re-appropriate Marx' philosophy ▷simply◁ as a critical application of Kantian humanism and freedom-thinking. But after the past 150 years of global history and globalization of capitalism to be ▷a Marxist◁ or to be ▷against Marxism◁ is hopelessly inadequate and beyond any philosophical thoughtfulness. The challenge for contemporary philosophy is, I think, to reconceptualize Marx's critique of political economy by developing the humanist ideal of ethical economy – an economy for the common good (Allgemeinwohl). An

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Oskar Negt, Kant und Marx — Ein Epochengespräch, Stuttgart 2004

economic reality that responds to the common will of a growing number of people (a ›critical mass‹ of humanists) throughout the world: Their desperate hope is certainly the realization of common welfare (der allgemeinen Wohlfahrt, eines Wohlergehens aller) and the good life of everyone (des guten Lebens eines jeden).

### **Crisis of contemporary capitalism**

While the current economic model in some cases creates prosperity, it also creates a number of serious problems: unemployment, depression, inequality, poverty, unfair distribution, hunger, obesity, environmental degradation, energy crisis, and climate change. Or take stock market speculations and the financial crisis: where ever we look we are confronted with a crisis of economic values and of the purpose of human life.<sup>2</sup> After centuries of modernization and globalization, the human development reached a critical – or ›historical‹ – point where the necessity of a new ›social contract‹ (›Gesellschaftsvertrag‹) seems to become the *ultima ratio* for the future of humanity.

All over the world business owners, politicians and ordinary citizens alike are realizing that today's economic regime is not for the common good and does not manage to ensure human well-being and a good life for all. Instead it supports profit-making, endless growth for growth's sake, along with competition and *homo economicus* egotism. According to a poll by a German Foundation (Bertelsmann) in 2012, 80% to 90% of Germans and Austrians want a ›new economic order‹. Not only in Germany and Austria a critical mass against capitalism is growing: In 2009, interviews were conducted in 24 countries around the world, the result showed that three out of four people speak out for a fundamental change of global economy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> My following arguments and thoughts refer implicitly — i.e. without explicit quotation — on the concept of Economy for the Common Good (ECG). For the main source of the Economy for the Common Good see: Christian Felber, *The Economy for the Common Good*, London 2014 (forthcoming), German original: Christian Felber, *Die Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie. Eine demokratische Alternative wächst*, Wien 2012. Instead of discussing the ECG approach in details, on this occasion I restrict myself to elaborate an ethics of good living as *philosophical framework* in which an economy for the common good is *holistically embedded*.

<sup>3</sup> [www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar09/BBCEcon\\_Mar09\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar09/BBCEcon_Mar09_rpt.pdf).

The science of national economy (Nationalökonomie) split off from moral philosophy some 250 years ago. Long before Karl Marx, this splitting-off occurred in the (>schizophrenic<) thinking of Adam Smith<sup>4</sup>: Since then and by affirming Smith's economic liberalism we are used to separate economics from ethics. Similar to economists and philosophers who simply look at their own discipline without interfering each other, so do ordinary people and politicians believe that moral considerations and ethical values exclusively belong to academic moral theory or to our private sentiments – while the market economy has no morality. However, I think, if we face the global situation, which urges us each single day to realize that political economy must again become an essential component of practical philosophy and global ethics. Looking at the diverse crises of our current world, it is obviously necessary to free (>free market<) economics from the grip of globalizing neoliberal capitalism in which the mainstream of economists and politicians – but the majority of the population, too – is still trapped.

### **Money and Profit versus Cooperation and Benevolence (Benefit)**

If we ought to name one essential characteristic of capitalist economy this certainly would be the fact that it uses *monetary indicators* to measure economic values, business success, and economic growth. Those monetary indicators, however, tell us almost nothing about what is truly essential to the well-living of humanity and our natural environment. But of course to use money and its accumulation as normative measurement seems to be quite objective since money can be counted. Money or profit maximizing and competition are the driving forces in a capitalist society and are assumed to be the most important motivation for all economic activities. As a consequence, the globalization of >free market< economy inherently promotes egoism, social-darwinism and irresponsibility rather than cooperation, reciprocity, and responsibility – not out of bad will, but simply as its own >moral<.

For example, business-men can make money by forcing foreclosures of the homes of bankrupt families, but not by assisting and aiding them. A farmer can make

---

<sup>4</sup> About the “schizophrenic” splitting-off of ethics from economics in Smith's thinking see in more details: Harald Lemke, *Politik des Essens. Wovon die Welt von morgen lebt*, Bielefeld 2012, 158-162.

considerably more profit using pesticides and genetically modified food than by growing food organically. Persons who are economically successful are expected to look out for their own advantage and compete with everyone else.

These examples have a general logic in common: The prevailing neoliberal thinking encourages values and mentalities which prevent society from making the best use of its wealth and its economic achievements for the common good.

To be sure, Adam Smith – a professor of philosophy who we all know as the first national economist – invented the paradoxical idea that the good for all – the ›wealth of nations‹ as he put it – will come out of egoistic behavior of the individual. He argued and I quote the famous sentence: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” But is this really true or rather a strange logic? One might think that if everyone of us cares only for his or her own interest, this would ultimately *not* contribute to something good for all. Adam Smith, however, as the pioneer ideologist of the emerging modern economy tried to convince his fellows that an ›invisible hand‹ would mysteriously steer the egoism of the individuals finally to human well-being and good dinners for all.

Well, every day we have to see with our own eyes that this ›happy end‹ story of globalized capitalism does not work at all.

To be sure, Adam Smith – a professor of philosophy who we all know as the first national economist – invented the paradoxical idea that the good for all – the common “wealth of nations” as he put it – will come out of egoistic behavior of the individual. He argued: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” One might think that if everyone of us cares only for his or her own interest, this would ultimately *not* contribute to something good for all. Adam Smith, however, as the pioneer ideologist of the emerging modern economy tried to convince his fellows that an “invisible hand“ would mysteriously steer the egoism of the individuals to human well-being and good dinners for all. Well, every day we have to see with our own eyes that this ›happy end‹ story of globalized capitalism does not work at all.

When our main goal is to strive for our individual self-interest, we get used to take advantage of other people and we start to believe that this attitude is normal and desirable, although it is not at all normal nor desirable. Nevertheless, currently this social-darwinist thinking is stated in numerous laws, regulations and agreements of federal states, the European Union (EU) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The result is epidemic hostile behavior in economic life, a Hobbesian state of ›everyone against everyone‹ and an economic system that is based on egoistic self-interest and social competition.<sup>5</sup>

This neoliberal ideology has been strongly criticized in recent years by many political movements and social theoreticians. Opposed to it, a philosophy of the common good aims to conceptualize the historical necessity for a new “great transformation” – a famous term introduced by Karl Polanyi. What needs to be transformed is the relation between economy and society. Economic activities need to be “embedded” or reintegrated into society and our everyday life – and ultimately into people’s strive for a good life. The humanity of the future generations needs a post-capitalist economy, which is more ecological and sustainable, more deglobalized and locally based, more cooperative and democratic. Such an economy for the common good is based on an ethical infrastructure (of public welfare) that is resilient, subsidiary and more locally self-organized. An ethical economy places human dignity in the center and its main goal is that everyone has a right to participation and common self-determination.

---

<sup>5</sup> Let us look at the psychological effect of our capitalist economy: Someone can only be successful when others remain unsuccessful. Competition “motivates” mostly through fear. Therefore, fear is a widely experienced phenomenon in the capitalist free market. Many are afraid of losing their jobs and income, their status and their sense of belonging or acknowledgment in society. In competition for scarce goods there are many losers, and most are afraid to be one of them. There is a further motivation component of competition. While fear is pushing from behind, a certain desire is pulling from the front. But what kind of desire? We are talking about the drive to be a winner, to be better than someone else. When we look at this passion from a social psychological point of view, it is a very problematic motive. A more humane goal for our actions would be that we do what we do well, because we think it is meaningful and do it gladly, not that we are better than others. Whoever derives self-worth from “being better” than others is dependent upon the condition that others are “worse”. Psychologically, this is viewed as pathological narcissism. Whoever needs others to be worse in order to feel good is sick. What would be good for our well-being is to nourish our self-worth by doing things that we like to do, because we chose them freely and find meaning in doing them. When we concentrate on being (good) ourselves instead of being better than others, no one needs to suffer and there would be no need for losers. The best accomplishments are achieved not because there is a competitor, but because someone is fascinated with doing something that is energizing and fulfilling, which inspires commitment and total involvement. Competition is not needed to be productive or creative. If it is my goal to do something well, then I don’t have to compete for motivation at all. It is unimportant to me how others are doing in comparison.

Transforming our societal relationships and the function of economy means foremost shifting from competition to cooperation, from own interest to common interest.

If the ›economy for the common good‹ would be the humanist ideal – the highest good – of our society, then ›economic growth‹ is no longer the political ultimatum. Instead all economic activities will serve the common good living: This is what I propose to call an *ethical economy* (for the common good). Why shouldn't we be able to imagine businesses whose purposes are not profit maximizing and endless growth (for the sake of growth): businesses and economic activities whose goals are *rather* the local production of sustainable goods, the availability of renewable energy and good food or fair income and good working conditions respectively democratic self-organization of employees and everything else we need for the good life of all?

### **Common Good Product – Gross Happiness Index**

Economic success must not at all consist of mere money-making and it should no longer be exclusively measured by monetary growth indicators. In an ethical economy success, profitable or beneficial businesses and economic activities will be measured *also and primarily* by non-monetary, ethical value indicators. At the macroeconomic level of national economies a great transformation goes along with the replacement of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GDP as the conventional indicator of economic growth will be replaced by the ›Common Good Product‹ or by the ›Good Living Welfare Index‹ similar to the concept of *Gross National Happiness* of Bhutan which recently attracts a lot of international attention.<sup>6</sup> The Common Good Product (CGP) or the Good Living Welfare Index (as I prefer to call it) will measure to what degree companies meet the ethical standards, which serve the common good. On the microeconomic level of private or public businesses, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Initiated by Bhutan the United Nations approved resolution 65/309, titled Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development (by July 19, 2011). It states that “happiness is fundamental human goal and universal aspiration; that GDP by its nature does not reflect the goal; that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption impede sustainable development; and that a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach is needed to promote sustainability, eradicate poverty, and enhance wellbeing and profound happiness.” Already in 2008, the so called “Stiglitz-Report” (with Joseph and Amartya Sen among other experts) came to the conclusion that measurements regarding wealth and economic development ought to integrate indicators which go beyond GDP to evaluate societal welfare (gesellschaftliche Wohlfahrt).

usual ›Financial Balance‹ will be substituted by the ›Common Good Balance‹. The *Economy for the Common Good* movement has recently developed such a comprehensive ›Common Good Balance‹ formula. It has already been applied by a number of companies and municipalities in Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain. I won't be able to discuss the Common Good Balance Sheet in details. You find those details among other informations regarding the Economy for the Common Good (ECG) initiative in hand-outs.) Certainly those details of the common good economy need further clarifications, which are already on their way.

Far the time being – and even more out of theoretical curiosity – let's say *we do agree* on the general idea of its ethics (!) in order to move on to see what the *next steps* would be. Surely, I know that the global validity and political acceptance of an ethical economy are heavily contested. But instead of continuing to puzzle about what a ›post-capitalist economy‹ might be and whether this might be desirable at all, I think it is much more interesting and challenging from a philosophical point of view to *anticipate* what would follow once ethical economy is everyday reality in our societies...

The question then becomes: How do we put the philosophical ideal of an economy for the common good into practice? What political instruments are necessary and efficient? And what makes us change the way we live (our capitalist lifestyle)? How can individuals take their part in the Great Transformation, in realizing a good life?

### **Governmental policies for the common good**

One instrument *on the level of governmental politics* would be to make use of taxation laws. For, tax-policy is certainly one of the most effective and yet liberal strategies to influence economic activities (production and consumption). State tax laws create economic incentives through a legal framework. A structuring framework which transforms and improves the general parameters for economic activities. The benefit in using the political instrument of taxation for transforming the current neoliberal economy to an ethical economy seems obvious:

*Legal advantages* will be granted for those businesses and companies that produce for the common good. Advantages like paying lower taxes and lower customs

duties, or receiving more favorable loans and less interest rates in case of bank credits. Good companies will get preferential treatment in public spending and contracts. Their market access thus becomes easier, and consequently fair, local and ecological products become cheaper and more affordable than unfair, globally transported, non-ethical, and environmentally harmful products. Companies will be financially rewarded for meeting good business practices in terms of local production local consumption, in terms of sustainability and best possible environmental protection, in terms of cooperation and co-determination of staff and other stakeholders, of justly distributed income, of food sovereignty, gender equality, and democratic participation etc.

Competition and profit-growth will still be possible, but it may be disadvantageous. In contrast, at present unethical behavior, irresponsibility and greed are systemically rewarded. This leads to the effect that unfairly traded, unsustainable and imported products are cheaper than organic, fairly traded, local food or energy and so on. On the contrary: To obtain the common good, economic activities have to *serve* everyone's autonomy and human dignity, ecological sustainability and regionality, social justice, and democracy simply because the ethical goal of global local economy is to supply with and to produce what is necessary for all to live well.

Let me stop here and point out that taxation policies will not be the only governmental strategy of regulating economy for the common good. Likewise the economy for the common good does not claim to be the only possible economic model for the future. Other alternatives are certainly welcomed and needed. Just to mention, for example, those concepts which are based on the revival of ›the commons‹ (Gemeingüter), or those which attract a lot of international attention like so called ›community supported agriculture‹ or those which refer to new ideals like ›*Buen Vivir*‹ of Latin American origin.<sup>7</sup> In the past years we have seen the offspring of diverse new concepts and proposals to overcome the neoliberal era of

---

<sup>7</sup> Silke Helfrich and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (ed.), *Commons. Für eine Politik jenseits von Markt und Staat*, Bielefeld 2012; Elizabeth Henderson, *A visit to the home of Teikei. CSA and the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association*, 2003, URL: [www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org); Thomas Fathauer, *Buen Vivir. Eine kurze Einführung in Lateinamerikas neue Konzept zum guten Leben und zu den Rechten der Natur*, published by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Berlin 2011.

the last two decades. Any economic model that serves ›the good life of all‹ provides an alternative economy to both of the major historic narratives ›capitalism‹ and ›communism‹. Another crucial difference is that ethical economy - or ›commonism‹ if you like - is not a new fancy construct created by some lazy philosophers or self-enthroned revolutionary utopians. I consider the idea of a good economy which I roughly outlined here (by collaborating with the Economy of the Common Good) to be the philosophical attempt for *elaborating a coherent design and theory* for those essential arguments and reflections which are publicly discussed and agreed upon already by various kinds of socially active individuals and organizations.

After all, the long-term aim of this growing international movement should be a *global agreement on ›ethical economy‹*. Some years ago, the former president of the United Nations Kofi Anna suggested a ›Global Compact‹ for corporate social responsibility as it is called to make international economy and free trade more ecologically sustainable, more socially just and common-good oriented. Following this initiative, we might conceive of a future agreement among the member states of the United Nations declaring the global market to become a *Global Common Good Area*. This would transform the voluntary commitment to the Global Compact into a general obligation of people's right and international law so that values and ideals like cooperation, ecological sustainability, democratic participation, social justice of fair trade, gender equality, the good life of all won't be any longer nice but empty words.

### **Economics transcending ethics: Economy being only one part of our life**

A sound understanding of economics in general and of an economy for the common good in particular is however just the first and provisional step toward a *general philosophy of well-living*. The next step in embedding or reintegrating economic activities into human's strive for a good life is even more challenging. Because *in order to advance we must forget economy!* We need to transcend the usual economism altogether – including the philosophy of common good economy – which limits our focus exclusively to economics: economic growth, political economy, alternative economy and so on and so forth. Even if companies shift from

neoliberal values and capitalist goals to ethical economy, what becomes inevitable to advance in our thinking is an adequate and holistic understanding of the societal impact, which a new Great Transformation – the shift from capitalist society to a common good society – will have for our everyday life. And in return this better understanding of the ›common good‹, that goes beyond economics and which transcends strict economic thinking, makes it easier to know in what ways *only* an *ethical* economy serves the good life of all.

An ethical thinking that transcends economics draws a simple conclusion: If human's economic activities *serve* the pursuit of well-living, then the economy – be it a capitalist economy or any other economy – is *not the main* concern of their existence. It is not more and not less than a precondition, it produces *means* to other, *non-economic ends* of daily living. Despite of all its complexity and borderless globalization, economy is yet just *one* among many other realities and different human activities.

Accordingly, as a broad consensus among theories of ›the good life‹ you find that any economy is *only good insofar* as the amount of daily working hours leave *enough free life time* for doing other, non-economic things. Simply if our *working time* is (ethically) limited we are able to pursuit non-economic everyday life activities which we consider to be good. Those common good activities are the ethical goals and realities, which all our economic work should serve and ensure.

### **Limiting the working life: time for well-being**

So we need to add the general limitation of working time and part-time work to our philosophical definitions of the common good (and its economy policies). Consequently to measure to what degree governmental politics contribute to the common good (and to what degree it fails in doing so) it must be considered whether states and their welfare policies support the transition to a lifestyle, which allows everybody to work part-time.

The open question then, of course, becomes: How to determine *how much* daily work is necessary for realizing a good life?

If we consider what is being discussed and proposed in the past and at present

about this issue, it is again quiet interesting to realize that the various opinions and positions do not differ very much. The most frequently expressed suggestions oscillate between around 30 to 20 hours per week.<sup>8</sup> I personally like the rather poetic argument of Friedrich Nietzsche which would end up somewhere in the middle at 25 hours.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche argued that any working life which occupies more than a third of our short and precious life-time would degrade humans to mere working slaves. To prevent ourselves of remaining slaves for economic growth and capitalist money making, that is to say, for the sake of human dignity we should have at least *two third of our day time* for various non-economic, free activities.

To my mind the crucial philosophical point in this ›well-being and time ethics‹ is not so much to come up with an ultimate definition of temporal limits and hour accounts of our working life or being working slaves. What seems to be a lot more important is the essential that work should *not* demand most of our days and existentially dominate human being, exactly *because* of the social benefits that such a humane lifestyle implies. To explain those benefits I will mention five of them.

1. If the general workload is limited to 25 hours per week or something equivalent in terms of temporary engagements and job sharing options (including sabbaticals or alike), then this would certainly end the increasing unemployment we face at present in almost all national economies. One of the most severe and problematic economic crisis can be solved by limiting the legal maximum of working time to one third of the day. This will create enough jobs so that nobody needs to be excluded from the commonly shared working life. If we take into account the historical

---

<sup>8</sup> Vgl. Oskar Negt, *Arbeit und menschliche Würde*, Göttingen 2001; Ders., *Lebendige Arbeit, enteignete Zeit. Politische und kulturelle Dimensionen des Kampfes um die Arbeitszeit*, Frankfurt/M 1985; Andre Gorz, *Kritik der ökonomischen Vernunft. Sinnfragen am Ende der Arbeitsgesellschaft*, Berlin 1990; Ders., *Arbeit zwischen Misere und Utopie*, Frankfurt/M 2000; Harald Lemke, *Das gute Leben nach der Arbeitsgesellschaft. Marx' Philosophie der Praxis und die postkommunistische Utopie*. URL: <http://www.haraldlemke.de/texte/>

<sup>9</sup> Bereits in der Philosophie von Karl Marx ist Zeitwohlstand ein zentraler Gedanken, etwa wenn es in seinen *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* heißt: „Auf Schaffen frei verfügbarer Zeit beruht die ganze Entwicklung des Reichtums.“ Zahlreiche weitere Stellen lassen sich anführen, etwa: „Wenn alle arbeiten [...und...] der Gegensatz von Überarbeiteten und Müßiggängern wegfällt [...], und außerdem die Entwicklung der Produktivkräfte, wie das Kapital sie hervorgebracht hat, in Betracht gezogen wird, so wird die Gesellschaft den nötigen Überfluss in 6 Stunden produzieren, mehr als jetzt in 12, und zugleich werden alle 6 Stunden ›Freizeit‹, den wahren Reichtum haben; Zeit, die nicht durch unmittelbar produktive Arbeit absorbiert wird, sondern zum Genuss, zur Muße, so dass sie zur freien Tätigkeit und Entwicklung Raum gibt.“ Karl Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, MEW 26.3, S. 252

tendency of economic production automatization, it is predictable that our civilization will be experiencing a general decline of necessary working time anyway. Therefore, the political agenda of limiting the maximal working hours to, let's say, 25 hours seems to be rather realistic.

I think this is nothing we should be scared of. Quiet the opposite: From its early beginning on it has always been a popular promise of the capitalist economy to lead humanity to a paradise-like future that will free us humans from the burden of unpleasant labor and a miserable life of being working slaves. In relating to the old and widely expressed *utopian hope* of a work-free life, I would like to suggest a small difference. I think working for a limited time of the day (if conditions are alright) might be something one could consider to be part of a good life – or at least an acceptable precondition of it. At least this becomes more likely especially in an economic system where those who work will get a reasonable salary, a fair share of the fruits of the common work, and where working only part-time will make enough money for a good living.<sup>10</sup> Numerous studies of social psychology confirm the fact that part-time work turns out to be more productive than conventional full-time work. Subsequently it pays off economically.<sup>11</sup>

This is to say: To pay fair salaries and to improve the working conditions and the organizational structure of the economy is a matter of economic rationality and efficiency, but nothing employers and companies need to be against to for the sake of their economic success. Co-operation and co-determination in decision-making are essential to an ethical economy that is not based on capitalist competition and hierarchical inequality among workers, employees and employers. The old-fashioned antagonism between few capitalist who command all and the working

---

<sup>10</sup> Richard Florida talks frequently about “good paid jobs” without quantifying how much this might be. See: Richard Florida, *The Great Reset. How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity*, New York 2010. Christian Felber argues for his concept of an economy for the common good: “The maximum salary could be capped at, for example, 10 times the minimum wage, individual wealth at 10 million euros. Inequalities in income and wealth will be limited through democratic discussion and decision. Capital transfer and inheritance can be permitted tax free up to 500,000 Euros and in the case of family-owned enterprises up to 10 million euros.”

<sup>11</sup> People feel much better and are much more motivated when their work is self-determined and they feel responsible if they can influence the results of what they do. Many examples of companies with a cooperative working climate and only small hierarchies in decision-making prove that the working output shows a higher productivity compared to conventional capitalist labor conditions. At the end, spending less time for work will make little difference to an inefficient arrangement as is now the usual situation of working places where employees are forced to be physically present full time.

masses, which do what they are told to do is an anachronistic obstacle for an ethical economy which serves the common good.

### **Work-free basic income as free market requirement**

When we reflect the diverse reasons why it is good to limit the working life of all, one far-reaching question and a hot topic of contemporary social theory and public policy emerges. Here I have in mind the fascinating (humanist) idea of a work-free *basic income* that will be paid to all citizens equally. The introduction of a basic Income promises to be a great leap in human development. (The fascinating about it is not so much the puzzling question whether this can be financed at all or not; fascinating is rather its practicality in principle.) However, we should avoid to discuss this important topic in a dualistic manner as to be ›for‹ or ›against‹ a basic (work-free) income:

To my mind the crucial point rather is the very combination of citizen money *and* good work. There will always be some work that needs to be done and that we like to do. This is going to be the case anyway, insofar basic income covers only the *minimum* of our living expenses and insofar fairly paid and personally satisfying work is available.

By combining basic income for every citizen with the right to good work, an economy for the common good reaches out to ethical idea of a ›free market‹. If we are not depending on a particular work which employers are offering to us, but if instead we are in the position to agree freely to work for money for someone else's business (or the public welfare services), then for the first time in history ›workers‹ and ›capitalists‹ will interact with each other freely as equal economic individuals (gleichberechtigte Wirtschaftssubjekte).<sup>12</sup> This setting of a true free market certainly changes the power relation radically, because now the employer, the capitalist, is forced to offer acceptable working conditions and good work including reasonable wage and cooperative organization. If the employer continues with the old capitalist attitude relying on an unfree and unfair market, he or she will

---

<sup>12</sup> “In the ECG people will (a) have more space to co-create and co-decide, as the roles between employers and employees will increasingly blur, they will (b) find more meaning in what they are doing, they will (c) be less stressed and overstrained, and there will (d) be less unemployment.” Christian Felber, *The Economy for the Common Good*, London 2014 (forthcoming)

inevitably fail and end up as ›unemployer‹ – someone who offers work that nobody is willing to do. This is why I think that the unique combination of basic (work-free) income and some extra-income through wage labor will ultimately erode the capitalist power monopoly and its inherent injustice.

But you see: Even a post-capitalist economy – an ethical economy as I like to call it – is based on the existence of free market mechanisms and (part-time) work that people do for making money. However, up to this point of understanding we still stick to (the realm of) economics. And if we do not manage to go beyond economic thinking and beyond the concerns and affairs of our economic life, we are still trapped in *economism* and we will never reach the realm of ethics, of the good life.

## PART II

### **Social responsibility of practical philosophy: Knowing ›Six Great‹ activities of good living**

At this point, I think, practical philosophy and philosophical ethics gain a very important role and should take their social responsibility. Philosophy can and should supply us with the necessary and simple knowledge that we will find the real good life and its everyday activities only beyond our economic life (and the good work it may offer).

As it is possible to outline the values and goals of ethical economy and its policies, likewise it also seems doable to define a good life for all and its common activities. Now, the questionable fact that we do not relate ourselves to an ethics of good living might be explained not because it is practically impossible or theoretically inconceivable. I think we should resign from the convenient belief that philosophy ought to be neutral or that philosophers are not competent in this matter. To have no clear understanding and no coherent navigation regarding the common good – such a philosophical incompetence (Unvermögen) perfectly feeds the interests and the power of neoliberal ideology, which loves to sell its own truths and lifestyle. Because the mainstream of modern (›liberal‹) philosophy – especially of social (›political‹) philosophy ! – feels itself not to be responsible both for elaborating

constructions of the good life or for empowering a common sense for the common good, it has no heart. Worse than that: The fact that philosophy does not care for the good life is one simply but sad ›reason‹ for the inhuman heartlessness of capitalist society.

Let's be serious and knowledgeable about those systematic and solid reasons that show why an ethics of good living is – at least – *thinkable*. A common sense method for tentatively approaching such a philosophical concept is to relate to those activities, which we find commonly shared in most ethical theories, moral teachings and humanist thinking throughout history. To be sure: My approach only specifies a *minima moralia* of the most common good. There are of course more things and realities we might think of regarding societal welfare and human well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Deliberately alluding to Adorno's famous formulation and to his ambivalent position regarding practical ethics, I propose the *minimal moralia of Six Great (non-economic) activities of good living* which are based on an empirically and normatively sufficient universality (or commonality, *Allgemeinheit*) – ethical activities whose daily praxis would at least make our daily life worthy of human dignity and happiness and at the minimum could fulfill our well-being and common autonomy.

## 1. Friendship

What is most commonly referred to to be something good and worthy are reliable and satisfying social relationships. Those ethical and beneficial relationships where we mutually (freely and equally) care for the well-being of each other to share our daily social life with (some) others we personally like, can be considered to be a common good.<sup>14</sup> The ideal of considering and appreciating good friendships and

---

<sup>13</sup> At least three issues of an ethical life I will not discuss here: They relate to the question of (1) how we consume (ethical consumption); (2) how we “transport” ourselves (ethical mobility and transportation); (3) how we dwell and house (ethical dwelling and housing).

<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact Christian Felber, for instance, choose to argue that the same values that nurture interpersonal relationships should become the new ethical principles and the legal guidelines for economic behavior like cooperation, participation, solidarity, equality, etc. I would argue somewhat differently: The common good becomes practically realized in different and specific activities, goals, and principles of good living according to good friendship, good work, good food, etc.

social relationships (with family as one prime possibility among them) as a constitutive part and praxis of a good life is expressed in various ethics starting in ancient times with, for instance, Aristotle and Epicure, to continue all the way up to modern times and contemporary philosophy like Nietzsche, Gadamer and Derrida. Here I will not be able to explain in more details the various reasons why participating in friendship and friendly social living is maybe the most important non-economic, free ethical activity to practice good living.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Food

Instead, I like to go on in talking briefly about the second good activity of an ethical life. An activity, which we find to be referred to as a common good is ›good food‹ – in terms of the convivial (among friends commonly shared) enjoyment of culinary pleasures and of eating tasteful high-quality-food. In any culture throughout human history you find the appreciation of ›good food‹ to be a capital component of common good living and even as a synonym for ›good life‹. Food is not only one of the most important activities of our everyday life; food is simultaneously one of the biggest industries and political issues in human world. Over the last years, facing the global food crisis we are presently confronted with, I tried to attract more attention to this rather philosophically and politically neglected matter by elaborating the numerous (cultural, environmental, political, economic, dietetic, aesthetic, etc.) reasons, why it would be better for all of us if our current civilization develops a new gastrosophical ethics of good food and ways of eating. Changing the currently predominant fast food habits – the ›Western diet‹ (Michel Pollan) – will have a huge impact on global economy (the agricultural food production and the culinary culture) and its ethical transformation toward the common good living.

(If we start renewing philosophy and its various topics like political economy, ethics, aesthetics, and so on, from a gastrosophical point of view, it will not be difficult to verify: Differed to what Adam Smith once thought, we can certainly expect our dinner from the own interest of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker – not from their regard of individual egoism and mutual competition, but from their

---

<sup>15</sup> See for my point of view regarding an ethics of good friendship: Harald Lemke, *Freundschaft. Ein philosophischer Essay*, Darmstadt 2000.

common good and benevolence: their production of good food (for a fair price) that is good not only for them (their income and working), but also good for others (those culinary wealth) and good for all others (the wealth of animals and plants, environment, cultural practices, etc.) which are involved in this food life.)

### 3. Do-it-yourself

As a third activity, which is recently increasingly appreciated to be something good in itself we find do-it-yourself-activities (Eigenarbeit). When people work less they can spend more time for doing things by themselves. Like repairing old or broken household utilities, or making furnisher, clothing, or any sort of simply manageable maintaining works. Currently people, especially in urban environments, start to grow their own food in their local garden or together with others citizens in community gardens. Another popular trend, which should to be mentioned here are so called creative Fab labs – self-organized local fabrication laboratories.<sup>16</sup> The more we do by yourselves, of course, as less money we need to have in order to pay others for doing the work instead of us. Therefore do-it-yourself-activities balances not only a part-time working life but also helps us to reduce the necessity of making money with a paid job.<sup>17</sup>

### 4. Culture

A fourth ethical activity, which is often called a common good is a free ›cultural life‹. To freely express, communicate and develop thoughts, feelings, judgments, opinions, knowledge and experiences in all artistic and scientific activities, including philosophical or spiritual (religious or alike) and similar cultural practices – that is to say: the free life of human mind (geistige Freiheit) and its different cultural expressions is certainly one of the highest good in any liberal society.<sup>18</sup> In creatively contributing to cultural achievements and practices or just be taking part in learning by and exchanging of creative commons we all a give deeper meaning to human life and we create human wealth that is beyond mere economic

---

<sup>16</sup> Neef / Burmeister / Krempf, Vom Personal Computer zum Personal Fabricator — Points of Fab, Fabbing Society, Homo Fabber, Hamburg 2005; [www.fablab-hamburg.org](http://www.fablab-hamburg.org); [www.fabfoundation.org](http://www.fabfoundation.org)

<sup>17</sup> Holm Friebe / Thomas Ramge, Marke Eigenbau — Der Aufstand der Massen gegen die Massenproduktion, München 2008

<sup>18</sup> See for some more details for my argumentation: Harald Lemke, Zu einer Philosophie der Kunst jenseits der traditionellen Ästhetik, URL: <http://www.haraldlemke.de/texte/>

wealth and materialist consumerism.

## 5. Democracy

The related fifth ethical activity which is widely regarded to be a common good is ›democracy‹ — in terms of people's political autonomy and sovereign self-organization of their commonly shared affairs. In the past decades we experienced a dangerous erosion of democracy under the pressure of neoliberalism. Multinational corporations, banks and investment funds became so powerful that they can successfully make parliaments and governments serve their corporate special interests instead of the common good. If the common good becomes the main goal and highest value of our democratic societies, then representative democracy needs to be strengthened by participatory democracy.<sup>19</sup>

Political participation will be — and is already for an increasing mass of active citizens in many democracies worldwide — a daily activity of engaging in manifold organizations of civil society.<sup>20</sup> The ethical appreciation of democratic participation as an everyday praxis of good living (not as a politician but as a common citizen) is most prominently articulated by Hannah Arendt's concept of the *vita activa*.<sup>21</sup> The *vita activa* of democratic governance (political autonomy or commoning) is based on the ability to spend most time of the day or at least a substantial part of our time for political activities concerning the common good (and its welfare policies).

## 6. Body-wellness

The sixth ethical end-in-itself which is often referred to as a common good we find health — a healthy life. Most of human history physically exhausting work ruined people's bodies. In our post-industrial and convenient societies the average population now needs to care for their body for preventing obesity and unfitness.

---

<sup>19</sup> We, the people, the democratic sovereign should be legally entitled and democratically able to influence our representatives, to initiate and to pass laws, to change the constitution, and to control important economic domains (public services) of the common good — such as education, health care, railways, energy providers, or banks.

<sup>20</sup> Public welfare services will be reorganized as common goods (Gemeingüter) or democratic commons (demokratische Allmende): “These include businesses that provide good services in the sectors of education and science, culture and arts, health, social welfare, mobility, energy, communication, and banking. They are common property. This means it is not the government, but the people, who exercise authority over these public goods.” Christan Felber, *Economy for the Common Good*, London 2014 (forthcoming)

<sup>21</sup> For my interpretation of Arendt's philosophy of political praxis see: Harald Lemke, *Praxis der Freiheit. Zur Bedeutung von Hannah Arendts Theorie des politischen Handelns für eine kritische Gesellschaftstheorie*, Maastricht 1995, URL: [www.haraldlemke.de](http://www.haraldlemke.de)

More and more of us mind the wellness of their ›body-self‹ – or an ›active corporality‹ as one might say. It is rather complicated to find a catchy term. One suggestion might be to borrow Martin Heidegger's term ›leiben‹ which he used according to his concept of ›thinging things‹: The wellness of our body is its free bodying, its energetic activity. Be it any sports like jogging, football playing or body-building, or be it yoga or meditation and wellness or something else – people like to move and feel their bodies, people like to have time for ›bodying‹.

To practice these ›Six Great‹ activities in our daily life is the basic meaning of living an ethically ›good life‹. Those six activities or virtues of living the good are all more or less related to good work and to the principles that constitute ethical economy. But to avoid a popular misconception: Everyone (who is willing to live that way) has to find his or her own individual ways to combine and balanced these good activities. Philosophy can not say anything in particular about how each of us individually lives (the) good and what ›the good life‹ for someone will look like. However, to spend most of the life time apart from a satisfying and decently paid work together with friends and family, for political or community related activities, for producing and enjoying well-tasting food, for being creative or busy and lazy with cultural concerns and for doing some sports or for indulge idleness – this lifestyle seems to be good for everyone and not only for me or for some who happen to personally prefer these types of activities.

No doubt, there are other values, activities and lifestyles, which people choose out of personal preferences, customs or whatsoever. My point is simply: If all or most of us choose to live those Six Great non-economic activities everyday, this will greatly transform the capitalist society and its economy – for the common good.

In closing, I like to point out *at least some* systematic foundations that confirm why the outlined concept of good living is in accordance with the most elaborate theory

of ›good life‹ that the philosophical tradition offers: which is, as has been pointed up by many thinkers again and again, the Aristotelian ethics.<sup>22</sup>

A) Aristotle found out that something is considered and can be generally defined to be ›good‹ if we want it for its own sake, as an end-in-itself. In contrast, if something is only a means for other ends, if it owes its being to something else that it itself is not, then we won't consider it to be something good that we appreciate for its own sake. To use a special terminology for philosophical conceptualization Aristotle called those phenomenon which have (or better: which inhere) their end in themselves *entelos (sg.) or enteleoi (pl.)*, from the Greek *telos* = goal, end. The enteleology of the good becomes clear if we look at ethical activities like friendship, slow food or democracy. We do not practice friendship for the sake of something else, but exactly because we like to be good friends to each other. We do not eat tasty food because we hope to achieve something else by doing so, but exactly because we enjoy eating in this (›good‹) way. And we believe democracy to be good for its own sake, because there exists no other form of governing where everyone has the equal right to participate in the organization of our common affairs and our political life.

B) Aristotle correctly observed the philosophical ethics of good-living is not based on feelings or wishes (good will, wishful thinking). To live a good life is realized through day-by-day activities of practicing. This is why one of the most important phenomenological discoveries of the Aristotelian philosophy is to know that ›good-living‹ is a *praxis*: an activity. By the way, ›activity‹ (actualitas) is the Latin translation of the Greek term ›praxis‹. Good living has thus a verbal meaning: we practice or do (ergon) the good for its own sake, for being active in this way (en-ergon, energieia): ›the good life‹ is ›something‹ which *is actually real* only insofar as *one acts accordingly* (according the good).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Using and recycling Aristotle, recently Martha Nussbaum in collaboration with nobel-prize economist Amartya Sen has suggested a philosophy of the good life that tries to overcome the ethical neutralism of neoliberal moral philosophy (especially John Rawls'). I will not follow this proposal because my interest is not to make use of Aristotelian ethics to authorize my own theory like Nussbaum does. I rather take up those important insights, which help explaining the praxological understanding of the common good.

<sup>23</sup> When we talk about renewable energies or when the ECG-movement calls its local initiatives Energiefelder we are usually not aware of the philosophical origin of the term: Regarding their enteleological and their praxological being, *ethical activities* like all end-in-itself-praxis are human ›energies‹. To live or to do the ethical good, is to activate good energy.

We should note that the ›life‹-philosophical meaning of the term ›good life‹ is misleading. The ›life‹ we are thinking of here is not the biological life, not our given personal existence with all its occurrences. Aristotle knew that we need to think of the verb (Tätigkeitswort) to live: to live the good – to do / to practice / to be active in the good – is the correct, philosophical meaning of ›good life‹. For what needs to be understood is that ›the good life‹ or ›good-living‹ is nothing but to practice certain ethical activities on a day-by-day base giving form to our daily life. Insofar as the good life is a praxis, an acting, this implies: we have to try to practice these activities best possible. ›Good living‹ means performing the ethical good as good as possible.

If we understand the praxological meaning of ›the good life‹ or ›good living‹, then it becomes much easier to comprehend that living the good (to practice good activities) inevitably takes the form of different ›good life‹ practises – being practiced in different components of everyday life: economic life, cultural life, political life, culinary life, social life, body life, work life. To live ›a good life‹ or doing ›good living‹ means to practice good activities like being a good friend, preparing and enjoying good food, engaging in common affairs, doing sports, and so on.

B) There is a further observation of Aristotle, which contributes to a praxological understanding of the good life. From the fact that our ethical life consists of the everyday praxis of good activities, the Aristotelian theory draws the following conclusion: Good living depends on the good happening (gute Gelingen, eupraxia) of those activities. The happiness (eudaimonia) of living good, therefore, is different to other sorts of good luck (euthysia). While we can be lucky without doing anything for that matter; however, our acting must be happy (glücken) to achieve the ethical good. Being happy in practicing the good at least “makes ourselves worthy of happiness” as I like to formulate with Kant. And yet, an ethically ›happy life‹ has a tragic being: there is no guarantee at all for the happiness of the good or well-being – plus the circumstance that the everyday praxis of good activities depends on numerous fragile (economic, political, cultural, personal, psychological, etc.) preconditions and uncertainties.

The tragedy and fragility of goodness, here I agree with Martha Nussbaum, maybe the most irritating and frustrating fact for our modern rationality with its poetological self-confidence that humans have the power of making and achieving everything they like to do. But as a matter of fact – and common fate: Even though we do our best to realize the good, our pursuit of happiness might remain unhappy in realization. More than that: Paradoxically, ›a happy good life‹ does not necessarily result in feeling happy and positively nor does it automatically make us enthusiastic and constantly smiling. Also it is possible that we are unhappy in our attempt to live well: unfortunately ›shit‹ – as an unhappy good life – happens! Nonetheless does it promise the happening of having good friends, the enjoyment and pleasure of good food, the excitement of cooperating, the wellness of bodying, the delight of being creative, the fun of doing-it-yourself, the satisfaction of making good work.

Let me close with some remarks on the banality of the good. Our life will be fulfilling and meaningful, if we after finishing work spend some time with our friends and family, some time for preparing and enjoying food, for doing something ourselves, for exercising some sports, for engaging in commoning activities and for being creative, and so forth: Nonetheless good living is not our entire life. Let's put it this way: ›The good life‹ does not exist and no human being is able to realized it. By the same token: Opposed to other opinions and aspirations, I think it is impossible for us humans to be morally ›good persons‹. Yet we are capable of doing the good and its contrary, but most of our personality and our life will always be made out of actions and circumstances that are not ethical and beyond good. Our good life with its everyday fulfillments or adventures will never be more than the shaky happi-ness of a small life boat amidst the harsh ocean of survival, of permanent contingencies, unexpected events and undesirable adversities.