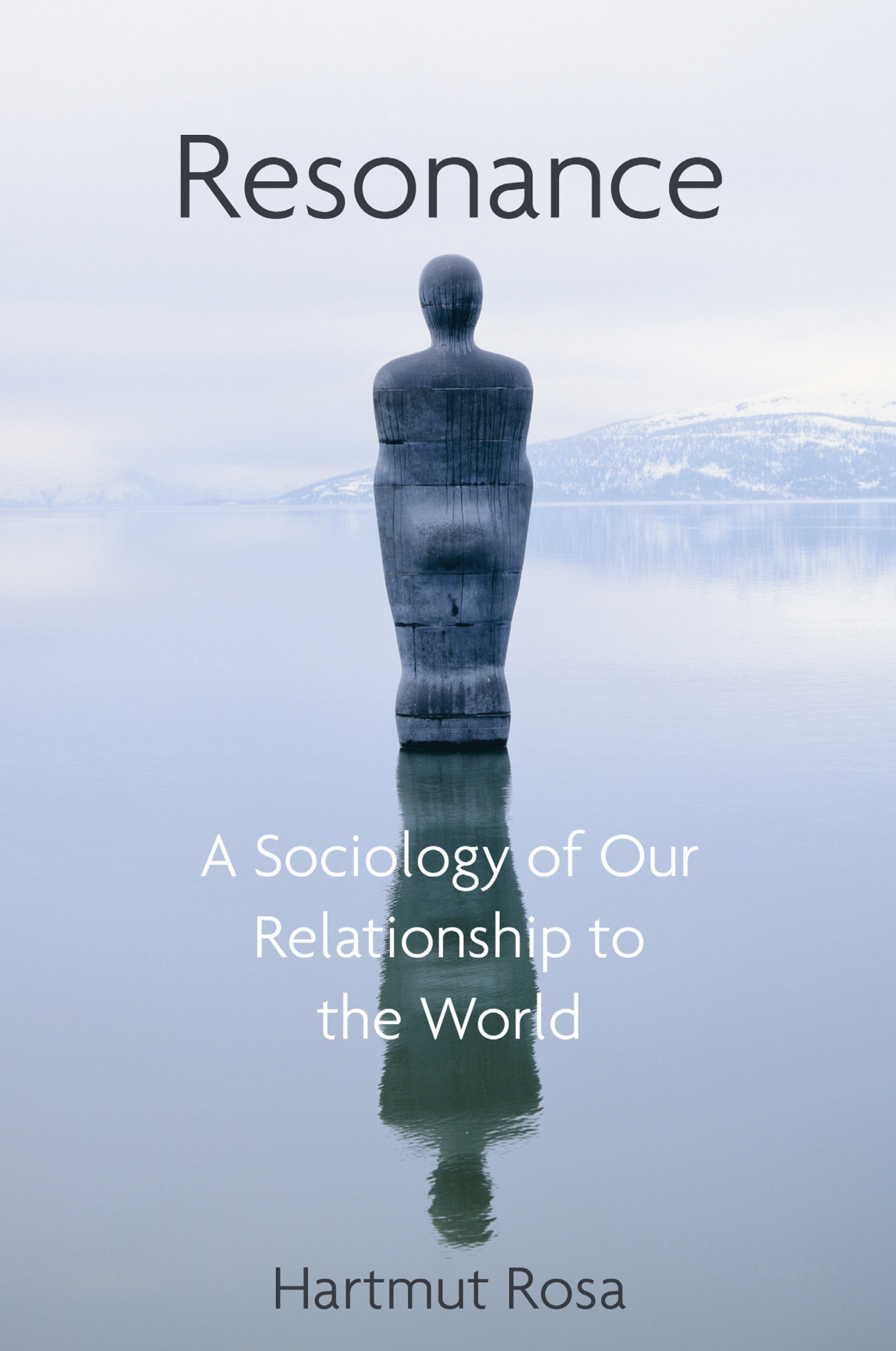
Resonance



A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World

Hartmut Rosa

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Translated by James C. Wagner

polity

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Contents

By the sea, by the dreary, darkening sea,
Stands a youthful man,
His heart all sorrowing, his head all doubting,
And with gloomy lips he questions the billows:
[. . .]
The billows are murmuring their murmur unceasing,
Wild blows the wind, the dark clouds are fleeting,
The stars are still gleaming, so calmly and cold,
And a fool waits for an answer.

Heinrich Heine, "Questioning" (from the *North Sea* cycle)

Nothing on earth and nothing in the empty heavens is to be saved by defending it. [. . .] Nothing can be saved unchanged, nothing that has not passed through the portal of its death. If rescue is the inmost impulse of any man's spirit, there is no hope but unreserved surrender: of that which is to be rescued as well as of the hopeful spirit. [. . .] The question whether metaphysics is still possible at all must reflect the negation of the finite which finiteness requires. Its enigma animates the world "intelligible." [. . .] The concept of the intelligible realm would be the concept of something which is not, and yet it is not a pure nonbeing. Under the rules of the sphere whose negation is the intelligible sphere, the intelligible one would have to be rejected without resistance, as imaginary. Nowhere else is truth so fragile. It may deteriorate into the hypostasis of something thought up for no reason, something in which thought means to possess what it has lost; and then again the effort to comprehend it is easy to confuse with things that are. If in our thinking we mistake thoughts for realities [. . .] our thinking is void. [. . .] But reflection is not cut short by the verdict on semblance. Once made conscious, the semblance is no longer the same. What finite beings say about transcendence is the semblance of transcendence; but as Kant well knew, it is a necessary semblance. Hence the incomparable metaphysical relevance of the rescue of semblance, the object of esthetics.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

Acknowledgments

This book was written over a very long period of more than ten years. It is the end result of a repeatedly renewed search for an answer to the crisis of the present age that I diagnosed in *Social Acceleration*, and at the same time is also the result of many intense conversations, discussions, and encounters going back many years. It is ultimately a product of dialogue, of an ongoing debate with my friends, students, colleagues, and many other people who have searched and pondered with me. I cannot possibly acknowledge all of them here. There are many more than I can even name, and so I must ask that all these others accept my apologies!

Resonance emerged in the context of the Center for the Study of "Post-Growth Societies" at the University of Jena, which my colleagues Klaus Dörre, Stephan Lessenich, and I founded together. It is my contribution to our mutual effort to conceive of a world beyond the blind compulsions of growth and acceleration. I owe great thanks to both Klaus and Stephan, to all of the colleagues, fellows, and guests of the Center, and of course to the German Research Foundation (DFG) as our financing institution. The Center also made possible the international workshop on the topic of resonance which I convened in May 2014 and from which I greatly profited. For this, I would like to thank all those who participated, among them Axel Honneth, Rahel Jaeggi, Eva Illouz, Hans Jürgen Scheurle, Dietmar Wetzel, Thomas Fuchs, and Charles Taylor. I consider it my great fortune that, over years of work on this project, Charles became a good friend who always inspired me with his enthusiasm and pushed me forward whenever I was seized with doubt. I also gleaned valuable insights from other colleagues and fellows at the Center, particularly Nancy Fraser, Barbara Muraca, Mathijs Peters, Dimitri Mader, and Johanna Sittel. The same can be said of my colleagues in the Department of Sociology at the University of Jena as well as the associates, fellows, and doctoral students of the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies

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This manuscript was intensively read, commented on, and critiqued by four women without whom this book never would have become what it is. Eva Gilmer from Suhrkamp Verlag took the text apart word by word, inspecting it with exceptional precision and meticulousness and improving it in countless ways. I am extremely grateful for her work, even if it occasionally drove me to great despair! Bettina Hollstein took a similar approach to my work in different respects, clearly and ruthlessly identifying every weakness, defect, and contradiction, and almost always with an appropriate suggestion for how to address any issue. For this, she is also owed great thanks! Elisabeth von Thadden had the greatest influence on this book as it was being written. Ultimately, the text offered here represents an ongoing dialogue with her that commenced at the beginning of my writing process and lasted until the very end (and continues to this day). Her own book resulting from our dialogue – *Die berührungslose Gesellschaft* (Munich: Beck, 2018) – has in the meantime also been published. I am grateful to her not only for countless individual insights and ideas, but also for much that contributed to the form of my argument as a whole. Lastly, Sigrid

Engelhardt took on the most intensive work with this text. It is still a mystery to me how she was always able to take a broad view, editing the text again and again and bringing it into its proper form, such that in the end both author and publisher were satisfied and the book itself met every demand and guideline. I simply do not know what I would have done without her!

In many respects, however, perhaps even in most, the thoughts and ideas that gave rise to my conception of resonance were also the result of private and intimate encounters. I pestered my family, friends, and acquaintances about the opposition between resonance and alienation almost monomaniacally for many years, at every appropriate occasion as well as at many inappropriate ones. They not only forgave me for this, but also helped to provide me with many new and often surprising insights. I can only hope to begin to repay them a little bit for this in the years to come!

Finally, in the two years since its German publication, I have discussed the basic ideas presented in this book with a vast number of students, colleagues, and ordinary people from nearly every segment of society and every corner of the world, from Wuhan and Shanghai to Delhi and Hyderabad, from Recife and São Paulo to Buenos Aires and Mexico City, and from the United Kingdom to the United States. I truly believe that engaging in vibrant conversations and discussions with "real people" across the social spectrum is the most efficient, authentic, and fruitful way of empirically grounding theoretical work. I cannot express enough my gratitude to all of them for helping me to further develop and refine my conception of resonance.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank John Thompson for bringing this book to Polity, Paul Young for managing the entire process of acquisition, translation, and editing with immense patience and competence, and James C. Wagner for his absolutely wonderful, stunning translation.

In Lieu of a Foreword: Sociology and the Story of Anna and Hannah

If acceleration is the problem, then resonance may well be the solution. This is the most concise formulation of the central thesis of this book, and it signals two important fundamental insights. First, the solution is not *deceleration*. Though the press has occasionally cast me in the role of a "deceleration guru"[1] (an image that I have perhaps unwittingly earned thanks to a few incautious media appearances), I have never actually proposed slowing down as either an individual or a societal solution to the problem of acceleration, but at most suggested it only as a "coping strategy" for dealing with tempo-induced problems in the course of everyday life. Essentially, I have never engaged with "deceleration" in a systematic way.

Second, if deceleration is not the solution, this also means that the problem must be defined more precisely. Modern societies are characterized by systematic changes in temporal structures for which *acceleration* may serve as a blanket term. I defined acceleration in my previous book, *Social Acceleration*, as *growth in quantity per unit of time*, which makes clear that we are dealing here with comprehensive processes of increase. As I will show in the final part of this book, acceleration can also be understood as an irrevocable *tendency toward escalation* rooted in the fact that the social formation of modernity cannot stabilize itself except dynamically. This means that modern capitalist society, in order to culturally and structurally reproduce itself, to maintain its formative status quo, must forever be expanding, growing and innovating, increasing production and consumption as well as options and opportunities for connection – in short: it must always be dynamically accelerating. This systematic tendency toward escalation changes how people are *situated in the world*, the ways in which human beings relate to the world. Dynamization in this sense means a fundamental transformation of our relationship to time and space, to other people, to the objects around us, and ultimately to ourselves, to our body and our mental dispositions.

This is the point at which acceleration becomes a problem. An aimless, endless compulsion toward escalation ultimately leads to problematic, even dysfunctional or pathological, relationships to the world on the part of both subjects and society as a whole. This dysfunction can be observed in the three great crises of the present day: the environmental crisis, the crisis of democracy, and the psychological crisis (as manifested, for example, in ever-growing rates of burnout). The first indicates a disturbance in the relation between human beings and our non-human environment or nature, the second a disturbance in our relationship to the social world, and the third a pathological disorder in our subjective relation to the self.

What is more, problematic relationships to the world are not only a *consequence* of acceleration and the compulsion to escalate in modern societies, but also their *cause*, so that we are dealing here with a self-reinforcing circular problem. This connection can be described as a problem or potential pathology simply because success or failure in life depends on how human beings relate to the world. This is what I would like to examine and to show in this book, thereby making good on the yet unfulfilled promise, announced in my previous book on social acceleration, to contribute to the elaboration of a *sociology of the good life*. I will return at the end of my analysis to the above-mentioned crises, their causes, and possible ways of overcoming them. There is a long road to travel before then, however, which will demand of my readers a certain amount of stamina and perseverance. Best perhaps if we begin with a story.

Gustav and Vincent, two talented young artists, have signed up for a painting competition. They have two weeks to paint a picture on a subject of their choice and submit it to the jury. Gustav takes the assignment very seriously. He knows what is needed to paint and how to create a superior painting. He first procures a sturdy easel and the proper lighting, then heads out to find a high-quality canvas. This done, he sets about expanding his arsenal of brushes – there are still a few he needs for both the finer lines and the broad strokes. Finally, he requires the proper paints: vibrant and muted, flat and glossy, and those he can use to adjust the different shades as he likes. Now he has everything he needs. He quickly rehearses the most important painting techniques he intends to deploy, then sets out to find the proper subject. What does he believe in? What excites him? What will strike a chord without being hackneyed or trite? The sun is already setting on the last day before the deadline when he finally begins to paint. Vincent's story is shorter: He tears a piece of paper from his drawing pad, grabs his watercolors, sharpens his pencils, puts on his favorite album, and gets started. Though at first he has no clear idea of *what it is he's painting*, gradually a world of forms and colors emerges that seems to him coherent. Who is more likely to have won the contest?

The point of this story should be obvious. Gustav is resource-oriented, if not resource-fixated. He knows what ingredients are required to produce lasting art: what subjects, techniques, paints, canvas, etc. Yet possessing – or being able to obtain – resources does not on its own constitute good art. Gustav's one-sided fixation on augmenting his resources is precisely what prevents him from creating a work of art; indeed, his behavior, as described somewhat exaggeratedly above, appears downright foolish. Vincent, meanwhile, is hardly concerned at all with his level of resources. He is driven by his desire to express himself, presumably procuring the necessary instruments and materials only as the creative process demands them. This of course does not guarantee that he will produce great art. That requires talent and what in the Romantic tradition is called inspiration. But Vincent's chances definitely appear to be greater than Gustav's.

Can we learn anything from this with regard to the question of the good life? The analogy seems to be obvious. Being well equipped with resources no more guarantees or in and of itself produces great art than it ensures a successful life. And just as being fixated solely on one's resources hinders the successful creation of a work of art, so too does it hinder success in life. Yet popular self-help guides on happiness, political doctrines of prosperity, and dominant sociological definitions of "well-being" and "quality of life" are often no less fixated on resources than Gustav is. Health, money, and community (or stable social relationships), often along with education and recognition, are considered the most important resources for a good life – a topic I will return to in the introductory chapter – and what is more, they have come to *epitomize the good life itself*. How to get richer, how to be healthier, how to become more attractive, how to win more friends, how to enhance one's social and cultural capital: these are not only the subjects of "guides to happiness," but also the prevailing indicators of one's quality of life.

This creates a fundamental problem for empirical research on happiness. Ask people if they are happy or satisfied with their lives, and they will generally answer by referring to their level of resources. *I'm healthy, have a nice income, three good kids, a house, a boat, lots of friends and acquaintances, a good reputation. Yes, I'm happy.* And research on inequality has its motivational anchor precisely here – in the assumption that those social classes with more resources enjoy a better life than those without. Overall, this leads to a culture in which the ultimate goal in life is to optimize one's resources: to advance one's career; increase one's income; become more fit, more healthy, and more attractive; enhance one's knowledge and abilities; expand and stabilize one's social network; gain recognition, etc. But when do we paint? When do we *live*?

I do not mean to deny that such resources are important for a

good life. One can't paint a picture without a canvas or paints. It nonetheless seems problematic that the optimization process itself has no end, and that we judge our own level of resources relationally, i.e. in comparison to other members of society who are also involved in this game of escalation.

Interestingly, the notion of a proper *work–life balance* has established itself as a benchmark both in sociological research and in political debates and self-help guides. The implication is that *life* is something other than *work*, and here we can understand "work" in a broader sense as the *pursuit of resources*. This in fact shows that most working people have trouble achieving such a balance. It is impossible during the *rush hour* of life, those middle decades dominated by the demands of escalation, by the never-finished *to-do lists* that I have gone on about at length elsewhere. "Life," shortchanged and overlooked, is instead postponed until retirement: *Right now I'm nearly being devoured by the demands and responsibilities raining down on me, but at some point I'll leave all that behind and finally live a* good *life*. This is the predominant self-perception of the middle and often also the upper class, and it seems to me that here we can see why the idea of raising the retirement age, against all demographic and economic reason, has met with such bitter resistance. Culturally, it is seen as a literal theft of *life time*. The search for work–life balance is no longer synchronic, but diachronic. Age is now supposed to deliver what we missed out on earlier. Yet it remains doubtful whether we can successfully lead a good life if a fixation on resources has been inscribed into our life orientation and attitude toward the world over many decades. Here we indeed resemble Gustav more than Vincent.

But wait, the attentive reader will surely cry, can we really draw this sort of analogy between art and life? What is the analogue in life of the work of art? What substance does it have beyond what I have denounced here as mere resources? Is it not inevitably esoteric or, just as bad, paternalistic to attempt to in any way define the form or content of a successful life? Or, if it is possible to avoid this trap and to accept the ethical pluralism of modernity, do we not then reduce the good life to a mere *feeling of subjective well-being,* as nothing substantial remains?

The first thesis of this book is that the privatization of the question of the good life has made this question all but taboo in social discourse. *Everyone must decide for themselves what a good life is*, so goes the platitude that has become a guiding maxim even in schools, and this taboo brings with it two problems. First, the lives of modern subjects, both in an everyday sense and in the long term, are increasingly oriented toward securing and augmenting one's resources, and particularly toward expanding one's horizon of possibilities. At the root of the above-mentioned deferral of life

is the assumption, however justified, that having more resources is in any case better than having fewer, regardless of what picture we ultimately want to paint or what kind of life we want to lead. Like Gustav, we end up overlooking the "artwork of life" – we're too busy working on our to-do lists. If we neglect them, if we reject the multidimensional demands of optimization, our starting position will de facto worsen, not only compared to others, but in absolute terms, as the distribution of resources and opportunities follows the law of competition. Here we arrive at the second consequence: with no example of a successful life anywhere in sight, individually or culturally, we lack the tools that would help us determine what sort of social contexts and conditions might undermine our ability to realize such a life – and it is here that acceleration comes back into play. For, as I have noted elsewhere, there are good reasons to suppose that, while the competition- and acceleration-oriented logic of escalation, along with the attitude toward the world which accompanies it in modern societies, is indeed capable of improving individual and especially collective resource levels (i.e. first and foremost, of expanding our horizon of possibilities), this logic also structurally undermines the conditions necessary to live a good life (*to paint the picture*). At the same time, this hypothesis can be seriously corroborated using the means of contemporary sociology *only if we can say something more about a successful life than that it feels good*. And I am firmly convinced that we can indeed say something more about this, something substantial and systematic, without leaving the solid ground of the empirical social sciences and drifting off into the realm of speculation, of pure philosophy, esotericism, or religion, and, moreover, without circumventing the historical fact of ethical pluralism, which assumes an ineluctable diversity of equally valid lifestyles.

My thesis is that life is a matter of the quality of one's *relationship to the world*, i.e. the ways in which one experiences and positions oneself with respect to the world, the quality of one's *appropriation of the world*. Because the ways in which subjects experience and appropriate the world are never simply individually defined, but rather are always socioeconomically and socioculturally mediated, I call the project that I have undertaken in this book a *sociology of our relationship to the world*. The central question of what distinguishes a good life from a less good life can then be translated as the question of what distinguishes successful and unsuccessful relationships to the world. When can we say a life is successful, when it is a failure, if we do not wish to measure it according to resources and opportunities? I would like to first approach this question intuitively, or rather illustratively. Let us return to the realm of stories.

This time around, let's say we're dealing with two women in what is known as the *prime of life*. We'll call them Anna and Hannah.

Their goal is not to paint, but to live, and they want to live well. Let us accompany them over the course of a typical day.

It is 7:00 a.m. Anna sits down to breakfast. Next to her is her husband. Her adolescent son and nearly adult daughter join them almost immediately. Her children beam at her, and she beams back. My God, she thinks, how I love them. These moments together before starting out on our days are everything to me.

8:00 a.m. Anna is now on her way to work. The sun is shining. She takes pleasure in the warmth and enjoys a good stretch. She looks forward to seeing her co-workers; she has some stories to tell them. She quickens her pace at the thought of the flowers someone left on her desk yesterday. She's ready to get down to business. She loves her work.

6:00 p.m at the gym. Anna is glad to finally be able to get some exercise. She enjoys the playful, at times aesthetic, often surprising and competitive aspects of playing volleyball with her local group. The people, the game, and the exercise do her good, regardless of whether she wins or loses.

Hannah's experience is very different.

7:00 a.m. Hannah sits down to breakfast. Next to her is her husband. Her adolescent son and nearly adult daughter join them almost immediately. Her bad mood is readily apparent. Everyone at the table looks at each other sullenly, if at all. My God, Hannah thinks, how I hate this. What do I have to do with these people? What ties me to them, other than the fact that I have to provide for them?

8:00 a.m. The sun is shining on Hannah's way to work. Hannah hates the harsh light. She's afraid of getting sunburned. She thinks glumly about the work that lies ahead. It's bad enough to have to see the gloomy faces of my co-workers every day and put up with their constant patter.

6:00 p.m at the gym. Hannah asks herself what she's doing here. She needs exercise, sure, but does she really have to keep slaving away after work? She can't stand how the gym smells. She doesn't hit the ball right; she's irritated because her teammates are too ambitious. In the end, she's glad that it's over.

No bold interpretation is necessary to come to the conclusion that Anna has had a successful day and Hannah an unsuccessful day, though the factual sequence of events is the same for both. If the difference between their two days proves to be a regular, recurring, persistent pattern, do we not then have good reason to say that Anna has a good life and Hannah only a modest life, although their available options and resources may be exactly the same?

What I am driving at here is not cheap moralizing to the effect that one ought simply to be happy with *what one has* – nor do I want to write any sort of self-help book preaching self-sufficiency. Rather, as a social scientist, I wish only to soberly inquire what can

be determined about the social conditions that make Anna's life happy and Hannah's life unhappy, as it seems to me unlikely that genes or hormones alone are responsible for the difference, although they surely do play some role. What is striking is rather that all three situations sketched here are *social situations*, inasmuch as they are constituted or at least framed by social relationships.

At the phenomenal level, Anna's life is probably characterized by laughing and singing, and perhaps also dancing, while Hannah's can be described as withdrawn, perhaps even bitter. Her relationship to the world is marked by mistrust, resistance, and an aspect of rigidity. There exist countless literary and poetic descriptions, metaphors and personifications that illustrate this difference in relationships to the world, perhaps most coherently depicted in Hermann Hesse's novel *Narcissus and Goldmund* (which at the same time also makes clear how complex and multidimensional human beings' lives and relationships to the world are, as Narcissus develops his own ways of successfully appropriating world, while Goldmund experiences phases of intense alienation from the world as well as from himself).

What does sociology have to say about this kind of difference? What do we know about the subjective and objective conditions that define or are associated with one or the other way of relating to the world? At the moment nothing, or at least not much, despite any number of interesting studies of people's attitudes and mentalities. As I have already suggested, sociology operates with concepts such as wealth, education, status, and distribution of resources in order to assess quality of life. The tacit assumption here is that Anna's day is more representative of the "upper" classes with greater resources, whereas Hannah's day can be considered symptomatic of the resource-poor "lower" classes – which, as I intend to demonstrate in the course of my argument, is not entirely implausible, but as a sweeping generalization is both presumptuous and paternalistic. In this generalization, we can see the implicit paternalism of a social science that believes it must avoid not only saying anything about the good life, but also in any way analyzing successful and unsuccessful relationships to the world, and that thus falls prey to a kind of resource fetishism hardly inferior to that of our would-be painter Gustav.

To avoid any misunderstandings at this point: I am not writing this book in order to justify the actually existing, ever-increasing inequality in the worldwide societal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital. Quite the opposite. I would instead like to show that this (capitalistic) distribution scheme can be considered justifiable only in a society which has made itself deaf and blind to the question of the good life, and which believes that the limitless increase and private accumulation of resources itself represents the epitome of well-being. Such a society considers Gustav the "winner,"

Vincent the "loser" in our competition – or in the game of life – and a sociology of inequality fixated solely on resources becomes its unwitting accomplice by reinforcing this view.

In any case, however, we can easily imagine Anna as a simple dockworker and Hannah as a successful career woman. The obvious objection that it is easy to love one's work if it is exciting, demanding, and prestigious, but not when it is tedious and low-paying to boot, appears to me at the least overly simplistic, if not simply mistaken. As Georg Simmel correctly surmised in *The Philosophy of Money*, and as Richard Sennett has extensively elaborated in his recent books *The Culture of the New Capitalism* and *The Craftsman*, human beings perform activities happily and joyfully when said activities contain within themselves the ultimate objective that defines them. Baking bread or chopping wood can in this sense be immensely satisfying experiences. The love, the joy, and the identification that even and especially "simple" laborers persistently reveal in carrying out their work is thus far less surprising to me than the surprise so often expressed by the sociologists who have repeatedly verified this phenomenon. By contrast, *preparing for a meeting to explore the possibility of submitting a joint grant application to finance a social project* – no matter how demanding it may be – will elicit hardly any intrinsic joy whatsoever. The ultimate objectives are too far out of sight; the chain of intermediate aims has grown too long. This fits with findings from the field of happiness research – which similarly are surprising only at first glance (and dramatically contradict more resource-focused sociology) – that the more a person's social status and resources increase, the less time they are able to spend on activities that make them happy.[2] This of course does not contradict the fact that more demanding occupations are associated with greater recognition and better pay, or that one can draw something like a *secondary* satisfaction from successfully mastering them, as they then enhance one's relative social position, feeling of self-worth, and "share of the world." More on this later.

As the case of Anna would seem to teach us, however, life is good not (or at least not necessarily) when we are rich in resources and opportunities, but rather, however banal and even tautological this may at first sound, *when we love it*. When we have almost a libidinal connection to it – *it* here meaning the people, places, tasks, ideas, objects, and implements that we encounter and with which we interact.

When we love these things, there emerges something like a *vibrating wire* between us and the world. This wire is formed, on the one hand, by what social psychologists call *intrinsic interests*. Anna *loves* her family, her work, and playing volleyball; she has an interest in these things for their own sake. Hannah, meanwhile, works in order to make money. She needs her family so as not to be alone.

She plays volleyball to stay fit. At the same time, Anna's wire to the world vibrates because she believes in her own *self-efficacy*. She feels that she has a *connection* with her family, co-workers and volleyball teammates, and that she can *attain* or *affect* something in each of these spheres. She therefore feels that she herself can also be affected, can be *touched*. She allows herself to be touched, moved, gripped, not only by other people, but also by plants and mountains, by music and stories, by challenges. The development of intrinsic interests and self-efficacy beliefs, moreover, correlates with the experience of social recognition, and herein lies an obvious bridge to our resonance-based approach. Without love, respect, and esteem, our wires to the world – our axes of resonance – remain rigid and mute. All in all, Anna's life can be described as being shaped by a responsive, elastic, fluid, one might even say cuddly relationship to the world, whereas Hannah's relationship to the world appears mute, rigid, even cold. Anna encounters the world as a field of exciting challenges and alluring possibilities, while Hannah experiences life as a series of imponderable dangers and vexing disturbances. In short, Anna feels herself borne up and sustained by the world, while Hannah sees herself as having been thrown into the world and at its mercy.

We can imagine the various manifestations and consequences of this difference in any number of other contexts. Let's say that Anna and Hannah go on a hike in the mountains. Hannah is afflicted by the rough terrain. She struggles through the ascent and is annoyed by the other hikers, who inconsiderately push past her and leave their trash along the trail. She finds the prices at the chalets grotesque. Anna, meanwhile, can hardly believe the glorious views over peaks and valleys. She feels her lungs and soul expand, her very self expand, becoming at once both heavier and lighter. She inhales the fresh mountain air in deep breaths, delights in the beautiful tanned bodies of her fellow hikers, and even enjoys the sense of her own growing fatigue. Or: Anna and Hannah are at a concert, or the movie theater. They attend a religious service. They run into each other at a family celebration. The willing reader will have little trouble imagining for themselves the stereotypically exaggerated differences between them.

To an unhappy or, in extreme cases, depressive person, the world appears bleak, drab, hostile, and empty. Such a person at the same time experiences their own self as cold, rigid, dead, numb. *The axes of resonance between self and world here lie mute*. Does this not also imply, conversely, that a successful life is characterized by open, vibrating, breathing axes of resonance that fill the world with color and sound and allow the self to be moved, to be sensitive and rich? To be sure, these axes differ from person to person and culture to culture. One need not love playing volleyball, nor even start a

family, in order to have a good life. To a polar explorer, the ice is a living, breathing, responsive thing. Even the drone of a Formula 1 race car or heavy-metal guitar may spark a libidinal relationship to the world. But the fact that a successful life is characterized by axes of resonance in good working order, an unsuccessful life by the absence or muting of said axes – can this seriously be disputed?

One goal of this book is to investigate the nature of such axes of resonance and to define them more precisely beyond the realm of literary-seeming metaphors. This includes clarifying the relationship between individual moments of happiness (or *flow*, to use the term popularized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi[3]) and one's broader relationship to the world as developed over the course of one's life.

A second, no less ambitious goal is to study the social conditions that either facilitate or hinder the development of such axes of resonance. The above-mentioned findings regarding the potential difference in experiences of happiness among various occupations offer the first evidence that there are contextual, institutional, structural, and/or cultural reasons why a person's life comes to resemble that of either Anna or Hannah, which I would also like to first pursue in the form of a final illustrative story of contrasts. This time, let us imagine twin brothers – we'll call them Adrian and Dorian – who are identical in background, socialization, and level of resources, but who operate in different contexts and positions in the world and thus have developed different strategies for appropriating world.

Adrian and Dorian grow up in a small town. They attend the same school and are maybe even in the same class. After graduation, Adrian goes on to study law and becomes a prosecutor. He goes to the gym once a week to stay fit and healthy and as a counterbalance to his demanding work. Adrian is a committed atheist. He does not wish to evade the harsh realities of life by way of metaphysical consolations. He prefers to accept his own mortality and finds the scientific explanation of the world to be ultimately the most convincing. In his free time, he follows the stock market. He is fascinated by the rising and falling of share prices, the fact that the markets react within seconds to changes and events, that they are entirely rational and neutral and yet unpredictable. He even engages in a bit of modest speculation himself and tries to build up his fortune. When he travels on vacation, he prefers cities and educational excursions. He counts on efficiency and reliability in his everyday life. If he has the option, he chooses the self-checkout machine at the supermarket, orders his books online, and rides conductorless trains.

Dorian, meanwhile, took quite a while after graduating high school to find something that suited him. He ultimately ended up studying art, history, and German literature and became a teacher. His passions include playing soccer, which he does to the point of exhaustion. He is also a practicing Catholic, although a few of his

colleagues and teammates tease him about it, and in his free time he works as a volunteer for a local theater group. He prefers to spend his vacations taking long hikes in the mountains, though he also loves the sea and even the desert. Unlike Adrian, in his daily life he instinctively opts for personal interaction at the supermarket checkout, visits his local bank branch, and buys his books at the small shop on the corner.

In this story – again stereotypically exaggerated, of course – our two protagonists differ not (or not primarily) in their experience of the world, as Anna and Hannah do, but rather in how they actively respond to the world, the ways in which they appropriate world or *adapt* it to themselves. In all of the various aspects of life listed above, we can presume that Adrian pursues (and must pursue) a strategy of *expanding his reach* and (instrumentally and/or rationally) *mastering the world*, whereas Dorian appears to seek out those segments of world geared toward creative, reciprocal interactions and the establishment of social as well as extra-social connections. The point here is that Adrian and Dorian have established different relationships and developed different relations to the world; that they differ in their practical, emotional, physical/habitual, and mental *responses* to the world.

A number of distinct factors are responsible for the development and particularly the quasi-autopoietic heightening of the biographical differences described above. First, there are *institutional* factors. A courtroom is perhaps the quintessential "resonance-free" zone. Here there is no room for empathy or compassion, understanding or accommodation; the aim is only to ensure that one's own position and claims (whether civil or criminal) prevail over those of the opposing side. The parties involved operate strategically, manipulatively, and instrumentally; whoever is unable or unwilling to do this will lose – or avoid this place altogether. The stock market works much the same way. The fluctuating prices flickering across the screens are the epitome of resonance-free incorruptibility, as they follow a "cold," purely economic rationality. Educational processes, on the other hand, if they are to be successful, require *encounter*, genuine sympathy and concern, and the ability to both touch and be touched. The nature of the interactions in a classroom is categorically different from that of those in a courtroom, and in my view the key distinction is precisely this. In both cases, the room may at critical moments begin to "crackle," but the nature of this "crackling" is not the same.

By contrast, there is rarely any "crackling" at the gym. The primary aim here is the purposeful, instrumental, quantifiable optimization of individual movements, muscles, and other parts of the body producing measurable values and results. Playing soccer, on the other hand, can produce a relationship to the world which includes moments of aestheticism, playfulness, communality, and

shared experience that are at best secondary, if not entirely absent in the context of the individualized fitness center. Those magic moments exclusive to the pitch are unquantifiable, and they have a different quality about them compared to the satisfaction derived from working out at the gym, even taking into account the intense physical experiences and *bodily resonances* (a topic to which I will return in Chapter III.3) attained via systematic training on various exercise machines.

Second, cultural factors, in the sense of cognitive/emotional representations of the world (or *worldviews*), obviously also contribute to the difference in how Adrian and Dorian relate to the world. Catholics and atheists, we can assume, differ in their basic *feeling for the world*, which necessarily precedes their consciously formulated and articulated beliefs. William James offers perhaps the clearest expression of this in his book on the varieties of religious experience:

> Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life [. . .]. Total reactions are different from casual reactions, and total attitudes are different from usual or professional attitudes. To get at them you must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence, intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious, which in some degree every one possesses. This sense of the world's presence, appealing as it does to our peculiar individual temperament, makes us either strenuous or careless, devout or blasphemous, gloomy or exultant, about life at large; and our reaction, involuntary and inarticulate and often half unconscious as it is, is the completest of all our answers to the question, "What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?"[4]

Here we must of course leave open (at least for now) the question of the extent to which cognitive and cosmological/theological differences in how Catholics and atheists (or different Protestant sects, or the various world religions) relate to the world are the *cause* and to what extent they are the *result* of emotional or existential differences in how these groups are "situated" in the world. "If we compare stoic with Christian ejaculations we see much more than a difference of doctrine; rather is it a difference of emotional mood that parts them."[5] If, on the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that one's belief (whether in a benevolent God or the law of karma or a Darwinist universe) can fundamentally influence and shape how one experiences and appropriates world, on the other hand there are equally good reasons to suppose that the emotional foundation of our relationship to the world, which remains inaccessible to us, is itself responsible for what beliefs appear reasonable to us. I will return to this topic, too.

By comparison, the question of whether one favors the silent self-checkout or a personal interaction with the cashier, online ordering or brick-and-mortar retail, would seem to be a simple matter of one's preferred individual action strategy. In the first case, one probably optimizes the efficient use of one's time and financial resources; in the second case, one values personal encounter. We can likewise assume that a similar calculus underlies the decision to devote one's free time either to the stock market or to volunteering at the theater. These differences can also be modeled using the methods of rational choice theory. What this approach cannot account for, however (at least not in and of itself), are the resulting differences in the *relationship between subject and world*.

This relationship is further influenced by other factors, including, for example, the landscape or the weather. Standing on a mountain peak or by the seashore, modern human beings in particular are *situated in the world* differently than they are in a large city. How one relates to the world probably also varies by climate zone. The world literally feels different along the Mediterranean than in the tundra or in a subtropical environment. Yet the decision as to what physical surroundings we seek out and prefer (not only on vacation or in our free time, but also as a place to live) appears to be both cause and consequence of our *primary* relationship to the world. The relationships to the world that we develop beyond this, however, are of course not permanently fixed, but changeable in the course of our life, at least within certain limits, and are also dependent on specific contextual factors. We establish a different relationship to the world in a strange and unfamiliar social environment than we do in a more familiar atmosphere.

If we wish to systematically reduce the difference in Adrian and Dorian's fundamental responses to the world and the strategies of appropriation based on them to a single denominator, then we might say, drawing on Herbert Marcuse, that Adrian's relationship to the world is shaped by Western *Logos*, Dorian's by *Eros*.[6] Adrian's stance toward the world is characterized by an antagonistic confrontation between subject and object in which "the images of the objective world appear as 'symbols for points of *aggression*'; action appears as domination, and reality *per se* as 'resistance.'"[7] His disposition toward individual segments of world is marked by an attitude of determination, domination, transformation, and conquest. His strategy in life is oriented toward expanding his own knowledge and grasp, his options and range of action, whether in the courtroom, on the stock market, at the gym, or while shopping. Dorian's basic response to the world, on the other hand, seems to be geared more toward creative receptivity, successful interactions, *adapting* the world to himself rather than *mastering* it. It is easy enough to imagine how this difference in Dorian and Adrian's active relation

to the world would manifest itself in their respective approaches to their own bodies (e.g. when they are ill) or their children, in their choice of reading, in how they perform the same activity (gardening, say, or even attending a party or soccer game), and even in the most common everyday actions. Adrian is likely to be one of those people who is constantly and excitedly working on improving the sound and overall quality of his stereo system and 3-D home theater, while Dorian presumably spends his time actually listening to music and watching DVDs. In fact, as I hope to show, a fully developed sociology of human relationships to the world should be capable of identifying the difference between two people's attitudes toward the world even in physical acts such as breathing and laughing, walking and speaking, sleeping and dancing.

It might seem obvious here to associate Dorian, as an "artist of resonance," with Anna, and to describe Adrian's experience of the world as instrumental and "cold" like Hannah's. Yet this would be premature – and it is at this point that elaborating a sociology of human relationships to the world becomes a challenge. In Anna and Hannah, we have two different ways of *experiencing the world*, in Adrian and Dorian two different ways of *appropriating world*. The relationship between them, however, seems to be complex, potentially changing over the course of history, and varying among individuals. Contrary to first impressions, we can well imagine Dorian's relationship to the world as mute and without resonance, Adrian's as marked by enduring resonant experiences. Maybe Dorian walks into the classroom every day to find that his students dislike him, that he is not reaching them, and that they are ultimately indifferent to him. Maybe his Catholicism has become an ossified ritual, a desperate means of distinguishing himself from his brother. Maybe he only plays soccer because his teammates are his only friends. And maybe Adrian feels himself in harmony with the strict, immaculate order of the universe every time he steps into the courtroom. Maybe he experiences the mutual struggle over the law as a thrilling, dynamic exercise in establishing social justice, or at the gym finds himself experiencing an almost mystical harmony with his own body, his fellow gym members, and the music coming from his headphones. Maybe the flickering of stock prices across his computer screen is to him a sublime, world-spanning symphony. Adrian's resources – his income, level of education, health and fitness, relationship network, social status, recognition, and esteem – are clearly better than Dorian's, and this might well result in higher expectations of self-efficacy and greater intrinsic interest in the activities with which he occupies himself. In any case, it is evident that our relations and relationships to the world are to a large extent collective social relationships, evolving in the context of various social practices and institutions and deeply rooted in prevailing modes of being, thought,