

The Good Life Beyond Growth

Edited by Hartmut Rosa and Christoph Henning

The Good Life Beyond Growth (2017) edited by Hartmut Rosa, a German sociologist, is a collection of essays by various authors focusing on the problems of economic growth as a precondition for a functioning society and presenting alternative ideas and solutions for a post-growth era. Its aim is to challenge modern western ideas of what constitutes a 'good life'. The book is divided into 5 parts focusing on the good life, economics, social justice and well-being, changing practices, and politics.

The first part presents the evolution of the concept of happiness throughout history, from an immaterial and collective to the competitive, material and individualistic. It introduces Good Living, from the philosophy of life of multiple indigenous societies. It advocates for degrowth, decolonization and 'depatriarchalisation'. The authors claim that to counter the alienation caused by our focus on growth, resonance with self and the world is vital.

Part two provides criticism of neoclassical economics as it assumes that the world functions in repeating patterns and thinks of them as an objective truth. Moreover, it argues how the pursuit for productivity, as scarcity is assumed, justifies injustice such as dispossession and neocolonialism. Lastly, in contrast to the objective perspective of neoclassical economics, it is proposed to analyse current models from a "moral" perspective analyse why capitalism is unfair and unsustainable.

The third part argues that a 'good society' is a just society, where common goods are maximised to produce democratic forms of social wealth, and 'good work' (full-time, long-term, with benefits, insurance, and union representation) and a basic/universal income is available to all in order to solve poverty, unemployment and inequality and improve well-being.

The fourth part focuses on changing practices on a personal level. Researchers introduce voluntary work as a practice that contributes to the collective good and improves individual and communal happiness. It also questions love's role in the concept of the good life and proposes psychological tools for self-transformation towards sustainability.

The last part of the book proposes alternatives to the political dimension's conceptualizations, specifically the global perceptions of a good life from a national level, and the prospects for a post-growth society apart from the capitalistic model. There is no existing "good life" nationally worldwide without the negative regimes of modernization and extractivism, which are the reinforcing results of the capitalistic model's phenomena such as globalization and populism.

Strengths and weaknesses

The book fails to go into enough depth, as a wide range of thoughts are introduced but not deeply constructed. Moreover, Some of the essays offer a narrow perspective, or remain too theoretical and abstract. Although the book is critical from different angles to capitalism and offers alternatives, it does not provide a clear agenda of how things should be advanced.

Nevertheless, this ambiguity is also what we thought of as a valuable contribution; instead of a totalizing truth that should be spread (such as western ideals and capitalism), diversity, coexisting alternative ways of being, and multilevel solutions and perspectives, might be the path towards a good life.