

Abstract zum Vortrag von

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"The Good Life: German Eggs, Guatemalan Coffee, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing"

We might all agree that the ends of the economy, as well as politics, should be provisioning the good life for people as they themselves conceive it. The rub is that, while we may all want to live the good life, we differ widely on just what that entails. This talk looks at case studies from middle class German supermarket shoppers and impoverished Maya farmers in Guatemala to uncover how people around the world use the market in pursuit of the good life.

In these cases, the good life implies more than mere happiness: it implies wellbeing, fulfillment, the meaningful existence Aristotle termed *eudaimonia*. An adequate income is absolutely necessary, but alone is insufficient, for overall wellbeing. Health and physical security, family bonds and social relations are also important. My research points to the importance of several other less measured elements of the good life:

* **Aspiration and Opportunity:** Aspiration, a view of the future based on ideas about the good life, gives direction to agency, the power to act and to control one's destiny. The will-aspiration-is alone not enough; there must also be a way, a set of structures (social, economic, legal), that provide real opportunities to realize one's aspirations.

* **Dignity and Fairness:** The exact contours of "fairness" vary across cultures, but everywhere wellbeing depends on how one is treated in relation to others, socially as well as economically, and this is tied to a sense of dignity .

* **Commitment to a Larger Purpose:** Having a purpose that is larger than one's self provides a crucial sense of meaning to life; being a part of such larger projects is fundamental to wellbeing and the good life.

To understand what the good life could be calls for empirical study of how the world works (the "is"), but also a critical analysis of how things got that way and moral reflection about how the world might be different (the "ought"). I conclude by suggesting a "positive anthropology" that works between the " is" and the "ought", documenting the ways people around the world conceive of and work toward wellbeing to glean practical as well as theoretical lessons for approaching the good life.