



**University of
Zurich^{UZH}**

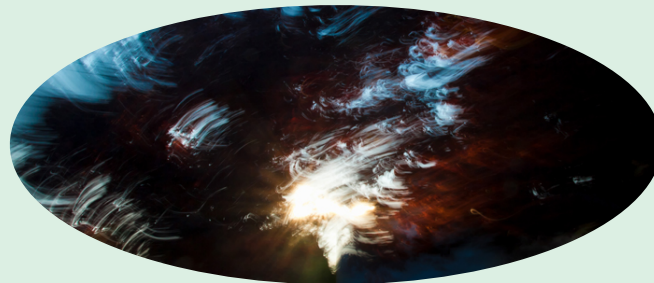
ISEK – Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft

Public Keynote

On the Prospects for a Comparative Study of the Good: Beyond the Bad and the Ugly in Anthropological Relativism

Prof. Joel Robbins, University of Cambridge, Department of Social Anthropology

6th September 2019, 17.00



*Everyone is cordially
invited to participate!*

Registration: Please register with Rivana Cerullo rivanacelina.cerullo@uzh.ch, by August 15

Venue: Villa Hatt, Seminarraum, Freudenbergstrasse 112, 8044 Zürich

Abstract

In her influential recent article on “Dark Anthropology,” Sherry Ortner questions the critical potential of anthropological studies of ethics, and particularly of research focused on studying people’s perceptions of and efforts to achieve the good. Instead, she suggests that anthropological efforts are best directed at examining how people critique the darkness that besets their lives. In this paper, I argue that the ethnographic study of critique is significantly handicapped by posing itself in opposition to the study of the good. I develop this argument both through a consideration of recent work in critical theory and by means of reconsidering the critical potential of anthropological relativism, which I suggest has itself been too long in thrall to what anthropologists see as the dark sides of various cultural formations. In response, I argue for a relativism of the good. In developing this position, I illustrate my claims in part by considering recent work on what even now, long after the mainstreaming of the anthropology of Christianity, scholars continue to consider to be somewhat repugnant forms of the Christian faith.