Life Together in Diverse Societies
Philosophical and Theological Reflections on Conviviality Theory

Matthew Ryan Robinson

1   Introduction

> With its basis on respect, relationships and reciprocity, conviviality is very important in reflecting on living in diverse and diversifying societies and in developing appropriate practice. These characteristics open the church and diakonia to the many diverse 'life-worlds' for shared life together on the basis of trust and dialogue. (Lutheran World Federation)

The opening quotation is taken from the website of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and its presentation of conviviality as a leading concept for local diaconia. The page is taxonomized on the LWF website following the logic: "What We Do / Churches in Mission / Diakonia and Development / Conviviality." The motto for this core concept reads: "Diaconal life in diversity." There is certainly much approbatory in the statement, with its emphases on respect, trust, and open dialogue in the context of shared life together. At the same time, a certain ambivalence remains in the close association of "conviviality" with "diversity." In this essay, I would like to reflect on this ambivalence following two classical theorist-practitioners of conviviality as my guides, namely, Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Along the way, I also highlight the systematic-theological significance of conviviality as they understood it.

First, I identify interests in using conviviality to address challenges thematized under the terminology of "diversity," and I highlight the concern that too close a connection between conviviality theory and diversity-related discussions can become a way of reinscribing rather than addressing difference. Questioning this association raises the additional question of what problems conviviality theory is meant to solve.

Second, before turning to Freire and Illich directly, I will attempt to set the stage for that discussion by considering relevant historically antecedent developments, though limited to the history of the Latin West. Ranging from the concept's classical roots in Greek antiquity to its renaissance revaluation to the importance of convivial sociality in late Modernity, I will comment briefly on deeper socio-conceptual and theological back-

grounds of the convivial, highlighting the themes of communication and friendship as practices of the cultivation of freedom. These aspects of the convivial, as will be seen in this chapter, are central to both Freire's and Illich's approaches.

Finally, third, building on the question raised in part one concerning what problems conviviality theory is meant to solve, I will turn to the work of Paulo Freire and that of Ivan Illich. There is, of course, already a vast literature on both figures, and, concerning Illich in particular, anyone who discusses Illich also discusses conviviality. Within the scope of this essay, I will not be able to sort through the extensive secondary literature. I hope also to avoid simply repeating what others have already said and will attempt to do so by focusing on the question of the relation of conviviality to diversity in Freire's and Illich's work. In short, I want to argue that neither Freire nor Illich were interested in diversity *per se* but turned rather to language and practices of conviviality in their pursuit and practice of human social liberation.

As such, I hope with this chapter to contribute in some small way to studies in the history of social theory, with a focus on the mutual interplay of perceived societal challenges related to diversity, on the one hand, and the theo-logics (that is, logics interrelating God, self, and world) informing analysis of those challenges as well as the social form of conviviality as a proposal for attempting to address them, on the other hand.

2   Finding Orientation: Conviviality as a Theoretical Framework – but, for Relating to Diversity?

I begin with a brief, indeed, minimal reference to some recent literature in order to find orientation. More complete reviews of recent literature on conviviality are readily available (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014; Wise/Noble 2016). Nevertheless perhaps pointing out a few characteristic concerns of recent conviviality research might instill in the reader some navigational intuition for following the directions in which I proceed hereafter.

Even a quick glance at the large body of studies and projects focusing on conviviality in recent years impresses one with just how varied the scientific locations, disciplinary orientations, methods, and audiences of this work have been: research can be found in the fields of computer science, business, medicine, environmental science, economics, mathematics, and engineering among many others, and in the form of major research grants, conferences, field studies, and of course publications. Restricting the field to the humanities and social sciences, conviviality is engaged both as an empirical social form and an ideal societal goal. Some have set conviviality into critical conversation with cosmopolitan discourses (Gilroy 2017; Nowicka/Heil 2015; Hemmer/Frykman/Ristilammi 2020), while others have used the concept to ideologically outline a social ethics (Adloff/Leggewie 2014). Less ethically normative, but still in a constructive vein, conviviality has been used in discussions of urban space and community planning (Shaftoe 2008; Shedid/Henawy 2021) as well as in a variety of interrelated fields of business, information, sustainability, and technology studies ranging in topical focus from data security questions to community organizing projects (El Kateb et al. 2015; Carrigan et al. 2020). A common thread in many of these engagements is an interest in social cohesion and societal resilience. Still others have taken up the language of conviviality with a more

descriptive interest, seeking an analytic lens for describing social interactions in "superdiverse" societies (Vertovec 2023). In such societies, framings of "interculturality" and "multiculturalism" struggle to make sense of the complexity of multiple, partial, and overlapping social identities and belongings; conviviality, on the other hand, can be theorized in such a way as to preserve this complexity in the analysis of common life in the presence of shared difference (Gilroy 2006, 40). Most prominently, conviviality is a subject of considerable interest in religious, diaconic, and social work settings more broadly, very often with connection to migration and negotiation of cultural difference and diversity. To mention any one particular publication would be more or less random.

And there is a more fundamental point to thematize here besides, one which leads to the discussion to be developed in the remainder chapter. When it comes to thinking about how to think about conviviality at the intersections of society, church, and theological research today, we would do well to be very cautious about thinking about it fundamentally in terms of "difference" at all. This is, in fact, the first thing that stuck out to me in comparing recent literature to now classic treatments of convivial sociality such as those of Ivan Illich and, in a more terminologically indirect, but thematically explicit way, Paulo Freire. Or, reaching back further, Immanuel Kant's and Friedrich Schleiermacher's discussions of *Geselligkeit*. Or, further still, Plato and Aristotle. None of these thinkers in their various discussions and enactments of what we presently call "conviviality" were interested in diversity or difference *per se*. Or at least, diversity itself is not the real issue which classical discussions of conviviality have been keen to address. And conviviality might not be what scholars are interested in today either, at least some of the time, when discussing issues related to diversity.

Magdalena Nowicka has closely collaborated with superdiversity theorist Steven Vertovec and has herself been using "conviviality" as a theoretical perspective for many years. Recently, she wrote:

> I notice that conviviality becomes particularly popular in the context of studies in settings which are shaped by international migration. While this was also a focus on our first contribution on conviviality (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014), owing to the empirical work we have been doing, I feel this does not meet the expectations I had for this term. I saw its potential rather in how conviviality could help us to reframe the debates on society, not on diversity. (Nowicka 2020)

The same can even be said of superdiversity itself as a theoretical lens. In its most simplified form, the concept of superdiversity as first articulated by Vertovec in 2007, and now most recently again in 2023, was prompted by the observation that, in an era of supercharged globalization, and with global communication flows that render the most geographically distant "here's" and "there's" closer than the distance between my apartment and the apartment next door, it is more and more difficult to say, really, when a social distinction refers to a meaningful "cultural" difference and which diversities have what meaning, when and to whom.

Noting that so much discussion of conviviality of late focuses on diversities and living with difference, and, it must be said, noting further that these discussions seem to be, by and large, taking place among scholars in Europe and North America (in contrast

to the first theorizations of *convivência*, which emerged in Latin America), it seems justified to caution against the gaze of what Homi Bhabha (2006) called the "purists of difference" (2004 [1994]: 158) and Sérgio Costa the "hypostatization of difference" (2016: 212). The point, for Bhabha as well as for Costa, is that the primary challenge in thinking about the encounter with and thematization of whatever "others" is not the challenge of overcoming power differentials. This is the case, firstly, because that does not necessarily alter the calculus of power interests (that is to refer implicitly to the dynamic that those who are oppressed want not only to overcome their oppression, but to mimic the oppressor) and, secondly, because it ignores the accidental and always hybrid, shifting, evolving nature of difference. Taken together, the dynamics of mimicry and hybridity challenge us to think about "life together" at a much more fundamental level than diversity and tolerance, let alone appreciation, of difference. The doors of conviviality call from across a more disturbing and transformative threshold that opens – beyond being *with* difference, beyond being *for* diversity – onto becoming another other altogether. But thinking about the re-formation of oneself with and as others stretches at the limits of the imagination. How might we proceed?

3   Antecedent Developments: Symposium, Convivium, and the Cultivation of Human Society

Before carrying the discussion forward, it will be helpful to go back and review a few relevant points in the history of the socio-conceptual development of "conviviality." As evident in the significant similarity of the words for "conviviality" in French, Spanish, Italian, German, and English, all share the common stem, coming from the Latin, *con + vivere*: "to live with [someone]." Life together. Related Latin forms include the *convivium*, referring on the one hand to a shared meal and on the other hand to the sociality at shared meals as well as to the guests themselves. When I *convivo*, I am living or eating together with others in *convictus*, that is, in sociable common life. From this etymological perspective, we can note that the convivial refers not only to the bare fact of shared life *but also* to sources of life such as food and company. Calling to mind the Latin root thus also directs the attention to the various senses and scenes of the convivial. The Latin *convivium* can be used to translate the Greek *symposion* (as is the case for the Latin translation of Plato's dialogue of the same name). In the former case, emphasis is placed on the pleasures of discourse and exploration in discussions of shared and divergent points of view aimed at new and greater shared understanding. There is a significant archaeological record and extensive literary tradition of the Greek *symposion* and Latin *convivium*, describing a variety of forms combining public, but more typically aristocratic, feasting and discussion (Becker 2019: 31). Sometimes the setting can be presented in serious terms (as in Plutarch's *Septum sapientium convivium* and the discussion of the state; Becker 2019), while other times the scene is a stage for comedy and pleasure (as in several poems of Catallus exploring benefits and obligations of friendship; Nappa 1998).

   Much later in the writing of the late medieval humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), these streams of friendship, discourse, feasting, and philosophizing are still identifiable and very much interwoven: Erasmus's *Colloquies* present stylized educational

dialogues exploring humanistic themes in a renaissance-classical key. A similar combination of focused, serious discussion and enriching fellowship is reflected in the "table talks" of the reformer Martin Luther. Focusing on Erasmus, included in the *Colloquies* are six *convivii*. Thus, we can observe by the late Middle Ages at the latest an interest in the educative potential of open-ended, free-flowing, exploratory social interactions. Among the more well-known of Eramsus's colloquies is the *Convivium Religiosum* (Eden 1998). In this feast dialogue, Erasmus thematizes the close interconnection between friendship and upbuilding conversation in the formation of a good society. In particular, Erasmus has his leading speakers present discourse as creating a kind of common space and shared holding in which co-inhabitants together pursue their common good.

Christian thinker as he was, Erasmus increases the significance of his *convivium* in another and theologically more profound way by investing the meal shared among friends with the sacred quality of the "*sancrosanti convivii*," that is, the Last Supper shared by Jesus with his disciples (Eden 1998: 417). The language of the *sacrum convivium* in reference to the sacrament finds prominent usage in a text attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) for the Office of Corpus Christi and still sung today in the Liturgy of the Hours (Gorevan 2009):

> O sacred banquet (O *sacrum convivium*)
> In which Christ is received
> The memory of his passion is renewed
> The mind is filled with grace
> And a pledge of future glory to us is given.
> Alleluia.

Erasmus's treatment thus makes three substantial and deeply important contributions to the socio-conceptual history of conviviality. First, he makes *communitarian friendship* an integral characteristic of the mutually enriching discussions taking place around shared food in a convivium. Second, he animates this form of sociality with the redemptive presence of the completed work of Christ and hope for its final realization. Together – and this point is important as we look later into the modern period – these two contributions have the effect, third, of sacralizing the profane settings of joking, banal chit chat, story, and even banter, irony, and sarcasm that accompany and bear up ostensibly more serious themes as possessing or stimulating perhaps a kind of vitality that opens up relational access to human beings' most human self-expressions: things like laughter, grief, celebration, creative problem-solving ("brainstorming"), and imagination.

This instinct to identify in convivial exchange an elevation of the everyday into universal planes and even to find in the mundane the seeds of human redemption – these instincts might best be regarded not as peculiar to particular thinkers, but indicative of broader societal transformations and reflections on those changes in the Modern period. Among such changes the following stand out as holding particular relevance to the present discussion: Religious freedoms began to be extended slowly via edicts of toleration in the 16th-17th centuries. Complementing this, a growing number of writings emerged on the freedom of the conscience vis-à-vis the philosophy of human understanding and political theory. The *Ancien Régime* began breaking down as forms and op-

portunities for social participation in religious practice, education, and pursuit of economic interests across former barriers of estate increased. Notable examples illustrating this change might include the pietist conventicle, the expansion of schooling for children, and the growing power of merchant guilds. And then an awareness of other cultures and societies, as well as of the ways multiple cultures and societies were increasingly becoming interlocked in relationship with one another, led to revolutions in the political and economic structures negotiating and regulating those interactions, including actual revolutions and colonial expansionism.

In the later Enlightenment and early Romantic period, thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher tried to process some of these broadscale societal transformations in terms of human sociability or *Geselligkeit* by integrating theorizations of *Geselligkeit* with more fundamental philosophical reflections on cosmopolitanism, the common good, and what it means to be human. In §88 of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant takes the convivial setting of a dinner party, or *Tischgesellschaft*, as a kind of case study for reflecting on enjoyment, inclusion, and security in community as a basic human need. "The good living," writes Kant, "that still seems to harmonize best with true humanity is *a good meal in good company*" (Kant 2009 [1798]: 179). "Eating together," he continues a few lines later, is a sign of a "covenant of safety," while "eating alone (*solipsismus convictorii*) is unhealthy" (ibid: 180). This portion of the *Anthropology* might appear to cross the line into the territory of an advice column (and includes, for example, suggestions for the ideal number of guests at a dinner party and when and how to make jokes, handle awkward silences, and so on). But such a judgement fails to recognize these comments, and the section as a whole, as a reflection of Kant's understanding of human thought and action as fundamentally sociable. In the same place, he adds that:

> [...] the *savoring* human being [German: *der genießende Mensch*] who weakens himself in thought during his solitary meal gradually loses his sprightliness, which on the other hand, he would have gained if a table companion with alternative ideas had offered stimulation through new material which he himself had not been able to track down. (ibid: 181)

In this statement, Kant is illustrating the dynamics of what, in the fourth thesis of his essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" (1784) he calls "unsociable sociability." Kant presents unsociable sociability as a set of inseparable but conflicting drives naturally occurring in human beings: Human beings are sociable in the sense that they have "a propensity for living in society," for in living in community with others, the individual feels itself "to be more than the development of its natural capacities" (Kant 1983 [1784]: 32). Human beings are unsociable in the sense that individuals are also driven to satisfy their own wants, they expect the same of others, expect that not every individual wants the same thing, and therefore expect to meet with resistance. A good balance combining "the greatest freedom" with "a thoroughgoing antagonism" is necessary for all human development – individual as well as societal. Of particular interest for present purposes, Kant saw in this fundamentally convivial anthropology an arc toward a global, cosmopolitan *Staatskörper* reflecting in many ways the structuring and manners of the *Tischgesellschaft*.

In the same year in which Kant's *Anthropology* was published, Friedrich Schleiermacher published in two parts a sketch of a theory of human sociality, "Attempt at a Theory of Sociable Behavior" (Schleiermacher 2006 [1799]).[1] Schleiermacher modeled this theory on his experiences in the open houses or "salons" hosted by prominent figures in Berlin at that time like Rahel Varnhagen and Schleiermacher's own close friend Henriette Herz (Wagner 2019). In these settings, Schleiermacher experienced free-flowing conversation among a highly diverse set of individuals, including men and women, Christians and Jews, and non-religious persons, artists, philosophers, politicians, and people of business, with varying forms of education and class backgrounds. He opens the piece on sociability with the encomium that, "Free sociability *(freie Geselligkeit)*, neither fettered nor determined by any external end, is demanded vociferously by all cultivated human beings *(von allen gebildeten Menschen)* as one of their first and most noble needs" (Schleiermacher 2006 [1799]: 153). In contrast to the task- and goal-oriented settings of domestic and public life, free sociability:

> enables an individual's sphere to be intersected as variously as possible so that each of one's own points of limitation will afford a view into a different and strange world so that *all appearances of humanity* will become known to him [sic] by and by, and the most foreign temperaments and relationships can also become familiar and similarly intimate to the individual. (Schleiermacher 2006 [1799]: 154)

In other words, free sociability provides education and practice in the pursuit of what it means to be human. This can only work under the conditions of a maximally diverse group of participants organized by full reciprocity and mutuality: That is, that those who come together do so voluntarily and that they commit themselves both to sharing with all others their thoughts, feelings, and experiences as well as to listening to the similar contributions of all others present. As Schleiermacher will later outline in his ethics, from these basic dynamics of convivial conversation can be distilled the ethical principles structuring societal formation: With their mutual, reciprocal communications, individuals both relate to one another and organize the group they constitute by symbolizing to one another who they are as individuals with a view toward what that particular group might be and become. In this way, both individual and social formation are co-occurring and co-conditioning processes. This philosophy is full of political and theological implications. On the one hand, it informs the understanding of a national "ethos" that Schleiermacher develops in his lectures on a theory of the state; on the other hand, it also is central to the understanding of common spirit or *Gemeingeist* that animates his pneumatology in his mature theological work, *The Christian Faith.* Perhaps the most significant presentation of the convivial from a theological perspective, although with a less direct connection to the explicit terminology of conviviality, is Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve Celebration* (Schleiermacher 2010 [1805]). In this piece, Schleiermacher uses the dramatic setting of a gathering of family and friends in a private home on Christmas Eve,

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1   I have discussed this essay at length in the context of its historical-cultural backgrounds and in relation to Schleiermacher's most important works, including *On Religion, Christmas Eve Celebration,* his philosophical ethics and *The Christian Faith,* in Robinson 2018.

along with their sharing in song, story-telling, and theological discussion, to present an incarnational picture of human life aimed at redemption.

All of this is helpful to note when approaching the language and practice of conviviality in the twentieth century. Several authors have commented that the terminology of "conviviality" (in various languages), before the constructive and more seriously theoretical turn in treatments of the concept in the 20th century, refers exclusively to the ephemeral society of the *bon vivant* – feasting, joke telling, games, and entertainment. And there is, indeed, an abundance of literature in which "conviviality" is treated in just this way. And yet at the same time, the component parts of conviviality – "conversation," "sociability," "the completion of humanity" – and, with them, convivial settings as such also receive significant attention over the course of the modern period as precisely non-ephemeral but constitutive to the formation of the good society. It may not be wholly irrelevant to note that a growing interest during and after the European Enlightenments in theorizing society in terms of and in relation to an increasing variety of social spaces coincides with what pioneers in the field of sociology, like Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, and still later social theorists, like Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, would theorize as a structural-functional differentiation of society. Habermas (2015 [1962]) and Luhmann (1980, 1981, 1989, 1995) in particular observe the emergence of various forms of informal public and private space – coffee houses, free associations, occasional friendship, among others – and note the significance of these spaces in the (trans-)formation of globalizing, industrializing, and urbanizing modern societies.

4   Learning Conviviality as the Praxis of Liberation with Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich

"Conviviality" and related terms gained social-theoretical importance in the 20th century as a result of an intentional, constructive effort on the part of a few prominent scholar-activists. It has been suggested that, prior to the 20th century, occurrences of the words conviviality, *convivencia*, *convivência*, *convivialidad*, *convivialité*, and *Konvivialität* are restricted to settings describing light-hearted social interactions involving the sharing of food and conversation, typically in an open-ended, non-functional setting. However, as discussed in the previous section, it is precisely for reason of its open-ended, non-functional, and exploratory nature that several thinkers have described convivial society and taken it up in practice again and again in the pursuit of authentic humanity.

It is nevertheless important to note that when the terminology is taken up in the work of scholars, educators, and activists in the 20th century, it is done with a much more programmatic, constructive, and, if not problem-solving, then at least problematizing intent than that which drove preceding treatments (with the possible exception of Schleiermacher's exploration of *Geselligkeit*). Some twentieth-century thinkers create concepts of "life together" and sets of practices that realize their visions in an explicit attempt to analyze and overcome the grave challenges that they perceived society to be facing in their day.

Perhaps among the most significant are the usages of the Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and the Austrian-American educator, philosopher, and Roman Catholic priest, Ivan Illich (1926–2002). Both appeal to *convivência* (Freire) and conviviality (Illich) in search of an integrated conceptual-communal model for life together as a pursuit and practice of human freedom. Strikingly, they make their convivial proposals in response, not to challenges of diversity, but to forms of societal exclusion, oppression, and structurally reinforced dehumanization, and they see convivial life together as a credible alternative to those challenges: The practice of the cultivation of the self-determining freedom of each in advancement of the common flourishing of all.

In the following sections, even though oversimplification is unavoidable, I want to draw attention to certain characteristic features of the articulation of conviviality in the work of Freire and Illich. These features illustrate, first, what I take to be *core concerns* they had about the societal situations in which they were working, second, their *theoretical analysis* of the problem, and third, the kind of social interaction they saw as a *strategy for overcoming* this problem.

4.1 Paulo Freire: *Convivência* as Solidarity, Comradeship, and Resurrection

Paulo Freire was a pioneering educator and educational philosopher from Brazil. He is most well-known for his development of literacy education methods for teaching poor, non-literate adults in Brazil to read and write, as well as for the educational philosophy that he formed based on this experience and presented most famously in the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2010 [1970]).

For Freire, education was fundamentally about realization of the freedom to live a meaningfully self-determined life. Those who are familiar with Freire's work will also be familiar with his articulation of "conscientization" as the core of the liberating process. With the term conscientization, Freire means to refer to the development of an awareness among oppressed groups both of their oppressed situation and of their right and ability to act in history to change this situation. And indeed, it is in connection with conscientization that *convivência* in Freire must be understood.

Freire does not seem to have selected the language of *convivência* as a theoretical framing in order to analyze education as a practice of liberation (ibid: 81). Rather, in keeping with his philosophy, he sought to allow the context of his work to produce the concept. And in his case, he was working in the context of small groups of extremely poor workers in Brazil. These populations lacked education, income generating potential, both political representation and voice, and basic life securities such as good housing, access to health care, and so on. It strains the semantics of common usage to describe the situation of bare life in which so many of these communities subsisted as a condition of "freedom." And this is where Freire's analysis began.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire identifies any situation in which one party benefits from and exploits another party's "pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" as a situation of oppression and, more specifically, as a *relationship* – a particular form of life together – in which oppressors relate to oppressed (ibid: 55). It is often tempting, he observes from his experience, for the oppressed simply to want to become oppressors themselves. But this would be to understand freedom along the lines of becoming a "boss

over other workers" (ibid: 46), he says, which only serves to reproduce the structures of oppression and exploitation that limits the freedom of society. Instead, *a different kind of relationship* and a new form of community is needed.

In summary and transition, Freire's core concern has to do with the oppression and liberation of the poor, while his analysis identifies a lack of self-awareness of oneself as a historical actor with agency and ability to determine a life for oneself that is meaningful and valuable. What is his proposed strategy for cultivating this awareness? In some ways, one could answer the question in a single word: *convivência*.

It is in this context that Freire introduces the language of conviviality. Rather than making an attempt to relate the difference of two groups – oppressor and oppressed – for example, by means of charity, generosity, or goodwill of the former toward the latter, Freire deploys conviviality within the context of a single group: the illiterate and polit-ically marginalized poor in their pursuit of freedom and dignity. In fact, Freire sharply criticizes what he calls the unjustness of generosity, describing how so often "the gen-erosity" of those oppressors who wish to take the side of the oppressed "is nourished by an unjust order, which must be maintained in order to justify that generosity" (ibid: 60). Instead, Freire calls for *convivência*.

Interestingly, no form of the word stem "conviv-" is carried over into the English translation of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Given the relative obscurity of the term in English, his argument is perhaps rendered stronger as a result. But throughout the first Portuguese edition, Freire uses the Portuguese *convivência* and *convivir* in several places to describe a particular kind of in-group sociability both within the oppressed populations that he was working with as well as in the partnerships between oppressed communi-ties and those who would join them in the role of educator or, what he calls, "converted" oppressor, in the process of the communities' liberation. And these instances are trans-lated variously into English with the language of "comradeship," "communion," and "liv-ing with" the oppressed in "solidarity."

> Only through comradeship (*convivencia*) with the oppressed can the converts [to the people; MRR] understand their characteristic ways of living and behaving, which in diverse moments reflect the structure of domination. (ibid: 61)

> One must seek to live *with* (*convivir*) others in solidarity. (ibid: 76; emphasis orig-inal)

> We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion (*convivir*) liberate each other. (ibid: 133)

> The road to revolution involves openness to the people, not imperviousness to them; it involves communion (*convivencia*) with the people, not mistrust. And, as Lenin pointed out, the more a revolution requires theory, the more its leaders must be *with* the people in order to stand against the power of oppression. (ibid: 138)

So, conviviality for Freire is about solidarity, comradeship, and communion, and among the many things that ought to be said here, I limit myself to highlighting just two points:

First, conviviality for Freire has nothing to do with *coexistence* or diversity *itself* as an objective but has instead everything to do with those in a society who have been excluded from political, economic, epistemic, and embodied processes of life being able "to regain their humanity" (ibid: 44) in "the quest for human completion" (ibid: 47.75). Solidarity fosters "*simpatizar*" (ibid: 76–77), which, in turn, is cultivated in comradeship as individuals see themselves in pursuit, not of an objective for one or the other members of the group, but in pursuit of a common cause. Rather than diversity, if anything, Freire issues a call for a radical overcoming of division. Nor is the salvific tone of this process accidental: "There is only one way," Freire writes of the path toward overcoming the opposition of oppression, for both converted oppressors and newly emerging leaders alike, namely: "to achieve authenticity: they must 'die,' in order to be reborn through and with the oppressed" (ibid: 133).

Second, for Freire, the mechanism for fostering such solidary sympathy in common life is "communication." "Solidarity," he writes, "requires true communication" (ibid: 77). Why does he say this, and what does he mean by it? In fact, Freire does not limit the invitation to "die" and be "reborn" to leaders and former oppressors but extends this to the whole of an oppressed group. In an article published in 1973 on "Education, Liberation, and the Church," Freire explains that what he is really calling for is "to experience 'death' as an oppressed class and be born to liberation" (Freire 1973: 6). Such a death can be triggered by problematizing an oppressed situation in and with the oppressed in a way that generates awareness of a contradiction between what is and what could be, recognizing the former for its death-dealing and the latter as the possibility of new life. And this happens in communication. Communication is the structure both of thought and of new creation, for Freire. Convivial solidarity is essential for liberation because "authentic thinking" does not take place via a transfer of knowledge from a clerk-style educator to a recipient account, but rather in educators' and students' dialogical back-and-forth creation of knowledge for their particular situation (Freire 2010 [1970]: 75). "Liberating action," writes Freire, "is dialogical in nature" (ibid: 139). In dialogue and persistent communication, the oppressed can experience themselves as participants in communication and, in this way, can be recognized as communicators with agency to think and to act. Furthermore, communication requires being with people; it requires community.

It could be said, then, that in Freire's pedagogy of liberation conviviality is both the pre- and post-condition, the means and the end of liberation aimed at full humanity.

4.2 Ivan Illich: Conviviality as Self-Restraint, Friendship, and Incarnation

Ivan Illich was an Austrian Roman Catholic priest, educator, social philosopher, and social activist who energetically and fiercely criticized the dehumanizing outcomes of industrial capitalism. He lived for significant periods in the United States as well as Mexico and other places throughout Latin America. Not least as a result of his 1973 manifesto *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich is easily the most well-known and arguably most significant founding figure for contemporary conviviality theory. As with Freire, so also with Illich, it is impossible within the confines of the present chapter to do justice to the complexity

and rigor of his analysis and proposal for a "convivial society." Instead, I would like simply to highlight the motifs of friendship and the twin incarnational-prophetic power of his theory.

Ivan Illich presented the core concern, out of which his proposals for the pursuit of a "conviviality society" develop, in a book he published in 1970, the same year that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in English. I am referring to Illich's radiative decimation of industrial society, *Deschooling Society* (Illich 2002 [1970]). In the preface to the book, Illich in fact expresses his appreciation to Freire, who, Illich says, will recognize his ideas in Illich's. But Illich was less specifically concerned than was Freire about the class-structure dialectics of oppressor and oppressed. At the same time, he shares with Freire a fundamental concern about a loss of humanity. Also, like Freire, Illich's project is one of liberation. But Illich fixes his gaze, not at the liberation of oppressed classes alone, but toward the liberation of humanity as a whole.

In *Deschooling Society*, Illich diagnoses the rise and institutionalization of expansion, growth, and consumption as the sole values driving the modern industrialized societies of his day, in both their capitalistic and communistic formations. He argues that industrial societies' defining institutions, such as medicine and the hospital, schooling and schools, currency and markets have all evolved in such a way that they are now organized by the same values. In result, treatments become more important than health or quality of life, degrees and qualifications become more important than education, and having things to buy and buying them become more important than need, use, or even enjoyment. Perhaps most perverse in all of this is the way such institutions acquire a "monopoly over the social imagination" (Illich 2002 [1970], 3). Longer life, greater specialization, more information, increased profit, decreased human labor – who could object to these things? And yet, Illich argues, in result people no longer trust themselves or one another, but instead only institutions, while, in a vertiginously ironic twist, everyday face-to-face sociability comes to be seen in such a society as the expression *par excellence* of the *asozial*: People view "doctoring oneself as irresponsible, learning on one's own as unreliable, and community organization, when not paid for by those in authority, as a form of aggression or subversion"[2] (ibid: 3). Schools, degrees, certifications, hospitals, medicine, treatments, shopping, currency, products – all of these things make the members of modern societies "believe that you need the society as it is" (ibid: 113).

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2   Illich did not harbor luddite attitudes toward technology or science. He advocated, rather, for a more "convivial" relationship to learning, cultivating well-being, organizing the common good. Describing "two watersheds" in the development of modern societal institutions, Illich perceives that "at first, new knowledge is applied to the solution of a clearly stated problem and scientific measuring sticks are applied to account for the new efficiency" (Illich 2009 [1973] 7). So far, so good. The problem arises, however, when, at a second point, the progress demonstrated in a previous achievement is used as a rationale for the exploitation of society as a whole in the service of a value which is determined and constantly revised by one element of a society, by one of its self-certifying professional élites (ibid: 7).

The end result, however, is an overall loss of the knowledge needed for knowing how to go about in the world and live well.[3] "Growth mania," writes Illich in *Tools for Conviviality*, the 1973 follow-up to *Deschooling Society* (Illich 2009 [1973]: 8), "extinguishes the free use of the natural abilities of society's members, [. . .] isolates people from each other," and "undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarization" (Illich 2009 [1973]: xi). *Tools for Conviviality* is Illich's proposal for "degrowth": the cultivation of more sustainable relationships between human beings and their environments and, in the course of this recovery, the restoration of individuals' and of communities' senses of themselves as agents capable of meaningful, effective action in conducting their lives. And it is for this purpose that Illich introduces the terminology of "conviviality."

"I choose the term 'conviviality' to designate the opposite of industrial productivity," writes Illich (ibid: 11). In pursuit of a definition, Illich elaborates "I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment"; conviviality is "individual freedom realized in personal interdependence" (ibid: 11). A "convivial society" then, "would be the result of social arrangements that guarantee for each member the most ample and free access to the tools of the community and limit this freedom only in favor of another member's equal freedom" (ibid: 12). These definitions chart two vectors for industrial degrowth and liberating renewal: fair distribution of resources and opportunities and meaningful participation in the production, management, and use of the same.

The combination of these two things leads to his focus on "tools for conviviality." "Tools" for Illich includes not only "simple hardware," but also "productive institutions such as factories that produce tangible commodities like corn flakes and electric current" as well as "productive systems for intangible commodities such as those which produce 'education,' 'health,' 'knowledge,' or 'decisions.'" The essence of "tools" then, in Illich's analysis, is any "rationally designed" device (ibid: 20). As such, "tools are intrinsic to social relationships" (ibid: 21). Indeed, it is an expression of industrial depravity that tools have come to be thought of as non-social, inanimate objects. But Illich calls attention to the "structure of tools" and the way human beings and societies relate to tools, with a critical eye toward the "public perversion of tools into purposes" that extend the power of the tool to regimentation, dependence, exploitation, compulsion of use, and impotence (ibid: 16.18.20). When this threshold is crossed, reality is experienced upside down, as "man (sic) must seek his satisfaction by submitting to the logic of his tools" rather than the other way around (ibid: 46). The relevance of this analysis for discussion of contemporary issues such as algorithmic determinism and artificial intelligence is palpable.

If Illich's core concern is the loss of human freedom in the post-industrialization era, and if his analysis of this situation settles on the loss of "convivial" relationships among human beings and between human beings and their environments, then what is his proposed strategy for responding to the situation? The emphasis on conviviality for Freire lay on living in community, fostering equality among all in the community, and sharing

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3   Illich even prophetically and disconcertingly raised the alarm – in 1970! – that over the course of the age of feverish industrialization, production, and consumption "the limits of the Earth's (sic) resources have become evident" (ibid: 2002 [1970]: 112).

common resources and aims. This served to counteract the opposition between oppressor and oppressed. Illich places the emphasis in his description of the implementation or realization of the convivial society on "greater happiness at lower affluence" (ibid: 68) via cultivation of self-restraint. On the societal and institutional level, this means developing measures for guaranteeing distributive participation not only in pursuit of outputs but also in decisions about inputs, that is, about what is produced, when, how, and why. It means cutting back, for example, on "luxuriant overproduction" (ibid: 68). For such overproduction is only made possible by extreme degrees of regimentation and exploitation of human and natural resources as well as concentration of the means of production in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of ultra-affluent actors, while the result is not greater wealth for all but "new types of demeaning poverty" for most (ibid: 69).

But perhaps more profoundly than on the societal and institutional level is the way that Illich described and practiced his call to self-restraint on the individual level. Illich drops an arresting hint at the end of his introduction to *Tools for Conviviality* when he writes that in contrast to usual associations in English of conviviality with "tipsy jollyness" (sic)," he has in mind "the austere meaning of modern 'eutrapelia'" (ibid: xii). If choosing to work with the uncommon language of the "convivial" were not strange enough, Illich risks distancing his reader even further with the then, as now, quite unpopular word "austerity"! But it is the next sentences in the text that prove most tantalizing, where Illich insists that, although the word may hold for modern readers "a bitter taste," nevertheless "for Aristotle or Aquinas it marked the foundation of friendship."

> In the *Summa Theologica*, II, II, in the 186th question, article 5,[4] Thomas deals with disciplined and creative playfulness. In his third response, he defines "austerity as a virtue which does not exclude all enjoyments, but only those which are distracting from or destructive of personal relatedness." For Thomas, "austerity" is a complementary part of a more embracing virtue, which he calls friendship or joyfulness. (ibid: xiii)

The key insight to be highlighted here is this: In *Tools for Conviviality* Illich is arguing for a vision of justice "in which liberty for one person is constrained only by the demands created by equal liberty for another" (ibid: 41). But regulating consumption with top-down policies does not cultivate the kind of individual participation and goodwill that Illich also thinks is needed for an effective "retooling". Instead, spaces and practices are needed which contextualize the self-restraint that justice requires in an atmosphere of pleasantness, wittiness, mutual interest, rest, play, imagination, experimentation, and non-purposive exploration. In a word: "eutrapelia" is the "virtue" of attentive play. Such spaces are "austere" in the sense that they exercise a kind doubled self-restraint that includes oneself in and by means of making space for others: they remain spaces protected against the dehumanizing bondage of industrialization by virtue of being regulated only by the twin, self-imposed laws of voluntarily coming together (any who wish) and showing mutual interest.

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4   The correct reference is to the Summa Theologica II, II, Question 168, not 186.

All of which roots Illich's theory of a convivial society on the humble ground of convivial exchange in its more street-level, ordinary sense of table-fellowship, after all: meeting, eating, drinking, laughing and arguing with one another. In contemporary (American) English, one might call this something like "hanging out" with friends. "Illich regarded friendship as the Christian virtue par excellence" (Cayley 2021: 424) and, in fact, it could be argued that "friendship" is a fitting stand-in for Illich's whole project. As he wrote in later years, "The ethics that developed around the circle of my friends arose as a result of our search for friendship, and our practice of it. [. . .] For me friendship has been the source, condition, and context for the possible coming about of commitment and like-mindedness" (Illich 2005: 147). Illich was well-known for his preference to relocate the lecture hall in the living and dining room. Illich regarded the true spirit of the university to have been lost and become irrecoverable over generations of specialization and disciplinary exclusivity. He writes, "I have tried to challenge them to put friendship above this prejudice [that is, of knowledge production via disciplinary exclusivism]" (ibid: 149). Nor can civic society produce from its own structures the foundations of the convivial society. "The challenge," he says, "rests on the conviction that things which are finally important must be capable of being shared with others whom I love first and then want to talk to. And this conviction will have a considerable impact on the way in which I assess and express my own insights" (ibid: 149).

That conviction is more difficult to practice, however, than the idea of hanging out with friends might lead one to think. For this is not a love that arises out of already knowing and liking the friend, but moves, rather, in the opposite direction: The friendship love of which Illich speaks is a getting to know and learning to care for one another – a becoming friends – that arises out of a spirit of love for the unknown Other. How is this possible? Again, it is certainly not "an outgrowth of civic virtue" (ibid: 151). For Illich, it seems to have been grounded, ultimately, theologically in the logic of the incarnation. It is worth quoting him at length here:

> On the table, as you have noticed over the years, there is always a candle. Why? Because the text that shaped my understanding was *De Spirituali Amicitia*, a treatise on spiritual friendship by the 12th century Scottish abbot Aelred of Rievaulx. His father and his grandfather had been abbotts of Rievaulx before him. His marvelous booklet on friendship is in the form of a dialogue with a brother monk, and it begins with the words "Here we are, you and I, and, I hope, also a third, who is Christ." If you consider his meaning carefully, you would understand that it could be Christ in the form of Brother Michael. In other words, our conversation should always go on with the certainty that there is somebody else who will knock at the door, and the candle stands for him or her. (ibid: 150)

Now, in *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich points out that his vision of a "pluralism of limited tools and of convivial commonweals" resists notions that "one specific form of government would be more fitting than another" as well as the "progressive homogenization of personalities and personal relationships" (Illich 2009 [1973]: 15.17). And therefore "diversity of lifestyles" is to be expected and, indeed, affirmed. This is because he envisions human freedom as the context-specific development of each and all, of both their indi-

viduality and their interdependence. And yet, Illich's pursuit of a convivial society cannot be said to be about negotiation or celebration of diversity *per se*. For, *in the context of a given instance of "personal relatedness"* – that is, once people do find themselves as, in fact, in the presence of others – then *that* coming together is to be seen as "truly a plural 'I', a 'we' that is arbitrary, that is unique, that slowly emerges" (Illich 2005: 148).

Perhaps what Illich's thinking on conviviality challenges us to do today is to consider how the social systems that structure the common spaces we co-inhabit (for example, immigration systems that offer "toleration" extensions for asylum seekers but without permission to seek work or pursue education; schooling systems that deterministically sort children at an extremely young age – disproportionately children with minority ethnic heritages – out of educational tracks leading to university study; or church and other faith community systems that enjoy privileged status in tax collection or university research) might tolerate diversity (a good thing in Illich's view) but in ways that re-produce difference and separation, even, from those with whom we live in situations of more and less direct personal relatedness (a very bad thing in Illich's view). How can we, instead, envision a new "plural I"? "The only chance now lies in our taking this vocation as that of the friend. This is the way in which hope for a new society can spread. And the practice of it is not really through words but through little acts of foolish renunciation." (Ivan Illich as quoted in Cayley 2021: 424)

5   Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to draw attention to understandings of "conviviality" that find, in the seemingly banal acts of sharing in food and communication, much more fundamental significance for basic human social needs and drives, the practice of honing and training these in freedom, and directing them toward the development of robust societal structures promoting the well-being of all. At the outset of my research, I was intrigued by the idea of developing the convivial into theorizations, and this in turn led me to wonder about prior attempts and gave me the welcome opportunity to return to the work of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. Ivan Illich is of course cited widely in recent literature as an important point of reference. Paulo Freire is less cited as a theorist of conviviality in English-language scholarship on the topic, but he must be seen nevertheless as one of the pioneering figures. Not only is the notion of the convivial as a revolutionary social form well-known in Latin American contexts, Illich himself docks his own theory directly onto Freire. So, Freire and Illich are the ones, really, to set the stage for theorization of the convivial in the twentieth century.

Two points of contrast between recent research on conviviality theory and the proposals of Illich and Freire stand out. The first is their lack of interest in diversity as a social problem to be solved or even negotiated. That does not appear to be one of the tasks that conviviality theory in their renderings undertakes. Diversity is an aspect of the convivial on their accounts, but only insofar as diversity is tributary to overcoming the opposition between oppressor and oppressed and fostering inclusion in what Illich called a new "plural I." More specifically, conviviality in the work of Paulo Freire and Ivan

Illich is about the emancipatory social struggle for justice and equality in and by means of revolutionary friendship.

A second aspect of Freire's and Illich's proposals that stands out is the rich theological framing of conviviality that each uses in his own way. For Illich there was a strong incarnational potential present in the convivial encounter, as each opens oneself up to the mystery of an unknown other. For Freire, the convivial calls for self-sacrifice of privilege and for life lived in solidarity, but precisely this crucifixion of status reveals the promise of resurrection and new life.

Both of these points, observed in the theorization of convivial as a revolutionarily driven social theory in a theological key, invite a deeper retracing of historical steps into the socio-cultural and theological development of the convivial in the Christian West. Conceptual soundings could only be developed selectively; nevertheless, I hope to have done so in a way that is not only not misleading but rather offers useful guideposts for further inquiries branching off in different directions. On a philosophical level, from Greek and Roman symposia, to early Modern table-talks and *convivii*, to the Enlightenment and Romantic philosophical anthropologies, the form of convivial gathering, of communitarian friendship, of self-restraint and making space for the other, of discussion and debate in the context of sharing bread and wine – these social forms are seen to hold tremendous significance for the possibility of the formation of virtue as for the production of knowledge and ultimately the envisioning of a cosmopolitan future. Finally, as for Illich, so also in the thought of earlier Christian thinkers like Erasmus and Schleiermacher, convivial formation is seen to hold within it the mystery of the incarnation and the promise of redemption.

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