

Review of the paper “A multi-religious consensus on the ethics of sustainable development: reflections of the Ethics in Action initiative” submitted as a discussion paper to “Economics”.

I consider the paper to be an opinion piece rather than a science paper that touches upon many important issues. Given the focus of the Special Issue, the manuscript could enrich the debate on the SDGs. However, this requires that the authors make clear that their contribution is a commentary (e.g. change the title to “Commentary: A multi-religious consensus ...”) and address the aspects mentioned below. I recommend “revise and resubmit” based on the following general aspects (in more detail see comments below):

1. References/sources should be provided for key statement, quotes and numbers presented.
2. References to the ethics literature and established principles should be included.
3. General statements and policy recommendations should be specified to the extent possible.
4. Given the papers title, one would expect that, first, some ethical principles are identified and, second, it is argued that these are contained in or supported by the world’s (main?) religions. As this hardly happens, the focus of the paper should be shifted (and the title changed) or such an argument/discussion should be included.

I also suggest revising the following minor aspects:

p.2, first paragraph: Fighting poverty is one means to promote justice rather than being something different as the enumeration suggests.

p. 2, first para.: The second sentence is no justification for the first.

p. 2, first para.: Climate change and biodiv. loss already take place and cannot be prevented anymore. In that sense, “we” already “failed to save the planet” (whatever that may mean, precisely). The statement should therefore be qualified.

p. 2, first para.: In what way does the human spirit determine our success? Perhaps you can be more specific.

p. 2, first para.: A source for the numbers in second sentence and for the quote from pope would be good.

p. 2, third para.: The first sentence is a rather bold statement. Seeking profits is not the same as greed. Although these may coincide, they also may not. Many people seek profits that are not greedy.

p. 2, third para.: I suggest replacing the term “brazen crook”.

p. 2, third para.: The cases mentioned towards the bottom of the paragraph are cases of immoral, even illegal, practices, and mostly not problematic outcomes of market interactions (or, if they are, make the connection explicit). I propose providing examples of market failure, e.g. certain pharmaceuticals that are needed but not developed due to lack of a market to sell them (because potential buyers are poor), instead.

p. 2, fourth para.: This is a rather vague definition of SD. What do you have in mind when referring to environmentally sustainable? Perhaps something like the planetary boundaries concept (Rockström et al.)?

p. 3, first para.: Kant already showed that the golden rule does not work as a general moral norm. I suggest, first, being more specific as to what the vision of shared well-being entails; second, stressing the equal moral worth of every human being; and, third, making reference to some established principles, such as the categorical imperative (Kant), maximin rule (maximize the position of the worst off), greatest happiness for the greatest number (utilitarian principle), the ten commands etc. On global ethical consensus conceptions see also Abdullahi An-Na'im (for a religious perspective) and Charles Taylor (for a secular perspective).

p. 3, third para: What is the source of the statement?

p. 3, fifth para.: "This aspect is insufficiently appreciated...". Is that true? I read this quite often.

p. 3, fifth+sixth para.: Please specify what you mean by "moral capital" and how "E20" would help with that. How about saying that certain moral principles (e.g. those referred to above) are as needed as financial and technological capital?

p. 4, second para.: On the reference to "transfer of resources" and "investment": Depending on how one understands the former, these are two very different things. Transfers give resources to others. Investments are made to yield returns. Given the possibly very critical view of making profits (expressed on page 2), referring to transfers rather than investments seems more coherent.

p. 4, table 1: Providing sources for the numbers (some seem very optimistic) and rephrasing imprecise wording would be good:

- "... meeting the basic needs of all" ...human beings?
- "... save additional five million children's ..." additional to what?
- "Money in tax havens: \$20-\$30 trillion (estimate)" ... "Annual profits from modern slavery: \$150 billion (estimate)" all numbers in the table seem to be estimates. Perhaps "speculative" are some the like makes more sense.

p. 4, bullet point list: Many funds already exist. Will it improve the lot of the poor to establish just another (multilateral) fund? Where will the funding come from? The text would benefit from saying less on (new) funds and more on fundraising; e.g. on how to divert the military spending. Also, how about carbon tax?

p. 5, second para.: I missed the first area of practical ethical concern. Perhaps highlight it more.

p. 5, first bullet point list: These points are very general. I think it would be worthwhile to identify more specific policy measures.

p. 5, second bullet point list: "pro-social values" and "ethical responsibility" are very general; can you be more specific or provide some examples? Also, why just supporting religious movements; and how about the many religious movements that have no interest in sustainability (isis, to name an extreme example) or actively promote goals that undermine sustainability (for example in the USA)?