

Summary

“Unser tägliches Brot’...und was man noch zum Leben braucht.

Ethische Aufgaben der Ökonomie”

by Stefan Heuser

In this paper, the author takes the point of view of an ethics that not only orbits around rules, norms, conscience, attitudes, habits, virtues or responsibilities, but also around the question what people can do directly for others and together with others. He argues that much of economic ethics today runs the risk of either taking an external, moralizing or simply stabilizing perspective on the economy, or of allowing ethics to become an internal function of economic action. The author suggests a turn towards the discussion of ethical tasks of the economy to yield a framework for a critical and explorative evaluation of economic action and institutions. Drawing on ideas of Amartya Sen and of Hans G. Ulrich, the author suggests that one primary ethical task of the economy is to supply people with their “daily bread” – a metaphor for the material and immaterial goods that people need to lead bearable lives in the contexts they inhabit. The corresponding ethical question to the economy is whether it serves to produce and to provide such goods and really makes them arrive at those who are in need of them. The author contends that the limitation of anxiety and the provision of substantial freedom cannot be left to trickle-down effects or to the “invisible hand”, but needs to be regarded as the primary and direct ethical task of the economy. In this perspective on the economy, “cooperation” forms a paradigmatic practice by means of which people directly experience what it means to do something for others and to receive what happens for them. As one medium of the experience of what people live on, cooperation is described as a central ethical task of the economy. The author concludes that due to the conventional nature of goods his approach implies a political discourse about the question what counts as “daily bread” in specific contexts, and which ethical and institutional practices of distribution and of recognition accord to these goods.