Article

Towards a Holistic Approach to Sustainable Development: Inner Development as a Missing Link for Sustainability Transformation

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Abstract: The discourse on understanding and implementing sustainable development has so far focused primarily on the external aspects, neglecting the internal dimension of people. The main purpose of our paper is to contribute to addressing this research gap. Therefore, we intend to (1) substantiate existing aspects of the Inner Development Goals (IDGs), (2) complement them, and (3) link the concept of the IDGs to normative discourses in Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy. Our results show that the dimensions of Being, Relating, and Collaborating in the IDG Framework can be substantiated by the normative discourse on spirituality and by reference to the social principle of personality in Christian Social Ethics, as well as by the Indian Social Philosophical Perspective of Vimala Thakar which focuses on a value-based approach. This paper suggests that the concept of the IDGs will be strengthened by adding the dimension of Caring—understood as the concern and responsibility for the wholeness in the combining of the inner and outer dimensions. By linking the concept of the Inner Development Goals to the existing normative discourses in Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy, our research contributes to making the concept connectable and deepens the discussions on a practical and theoretical level.

Keywords: Holistic Sustainable Development; Inner Development; Sustainable Development Goals; Sustainability Transformation; Change of Consciousness; Inner Development Goals; Being; Caring; Christian Social Ethics; Social Philosophy

1. Introduction

We no longer encounter sustainable development only in academic debates but also in the daily news and on a variety of social media channels. Yet the understanding of what constitutes sustainable development is by no means uniform. At the global level, the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p. 41) provides an initial common foundation, as do the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (2015), which consist of 17 goals and 169 targets in the areas of people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. In business, Elkington's (1994) concept of the triple bottom line has established a framework for measuring success that includes environmental and social values alongside economic ones.

The discourse on understanding and implementing sustainable development has so far primarily focused on the external aspects of sustainability transformation, neglecting

the internal dimension of people in the form of a holistic view of sustainable development. These often-overlooked internal aspects are based on religious as well as non-religious perspectives and cover peoples' attitudes, values, and mindsets, which in turn influence their behavior.

The fact that a transition to a more sustainable way of life has not yet been realized shows that all the scientific reflections—although undoubtedly correct and important— simply do not touch people's hearts. Humans tend to enact half-hearted laws on environmental protection and the sustainable use of all resources but only comply with them reluctantly and usually under threat of punishment. This is why it is necessary to foster a holistic approach to sustainable development that brings together the internal and external dimensions of change. We want to look more closely at this in our contribution.

This discussion has so far only been taken up by a small research community (Rios Osorio et al. 2005; Wamsler et al. 2021; Artmann 2023; Walsh et al. 2020; Ives et al. 2023, p. 2778), in which both Social Philosophy and Christian Social Ethics are hardly represented.

In our paper, we want to address this research gap, and we argue for the thesis that sustainable development requires not just external material changes but also a simultaneous inner transformation, to which Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy, in particular, can make relevant normative contributions, as this touches the core of their activities. This is why we make connections to the current, as yet little known, research on the Inner Development Goals (Ankrah et al. 2023) and consciousness change, combined with the call for an SDG 18 (https://sdg18.de, accessed on 9 July 2024) that emphasizes the importance of simultaneous internal and external development.

Therefore, we first clarify the underlying understanding of the external dimension of sustainable development, then we explain the broader concept of transformation of consciousness in the context of the call for SDG 18, as well as the more elaborated concept of the Inner Development Goals. Subsequently, we (1) substantiate existing aspects of the Inner Development Goals from the perspective of Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy, (2) complement them, and (3) link the concept of the IDGs to normative discourses in Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy.

2. Sustainable Development from an External Perspective

Sustainability has taken its place in theological discourse in recent decades. While many still see it as "the new thing" in this field, it has a much longer and more varied history than is commonly assumed (and communicated). While some passages in the Bible (especially in the Gospels) can be understood as extremely unsustainable (Mt 6.25ff), there is also much evidence that life (even in the biblical context) has always been lived in a heavenly—and, therefore, long-term—perspective. In particular, the commandment to observe the Sabbath has received growing attention in contemporary society (including beyond Judaism) with the popularization of "gap" years or sabbatical years. Although life in the medieval monastery was dedicated to progress (White 1967), it was organized from an (admittedly human-centered) long-term perspective.

One important step in giving theological discourse a more sustainable orientation was the WCC (World Christian Council) position paper from 1974. In the communiqué "Sustainable and just society", this concept even made it to the headlines and thus underlined its new importance. The authors were committed to the idea that ecological limits had to be respected in order to create a society that was also economically sustainable over the long term. In the following year, 1975, the Nairobi conference adopted this paper as an important complement to the ecumenical and social thinking of the WCC. Vogt underlines, however, that the follow-up study, "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society", opposes economic

and theological concepts in a too fundamental way (Vogt 2009), while it has undoubtedly given room to theological reflections and justifications (see Köhrsen et al. 2022).

This was the first time Christian religious communication took up the term "sustainable" in a document that was potentially widely visible. Whereas its influence did not persist in parts of the Christian milieu due to its closeness to overpopulation and, therefore, to questions of contraception, sustainability has nonetheless continued to be reflected in theological perspectives since the publication of the Brundtland Report (1987) and the Rio Earth Summit (1992) (Bederna 2021; Deane-Drummond 2008; Deane-Drummond and Fuentes 2020; Keller 2018, 2021; McFague 2008).

At a global level, the WCED definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p. 41) provides an initial starting point for a common understanding of sustainable development. With the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, 17 goals and 169 targets in the areas of people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership were defined to concretize the meaning of sustainable development (UN 2015). But now, at the midpoint of the Agenda 2030, voices that are critical for an understanding of sustainable development based on the SDGs are getting louder. A central point of criticism of the SDGs is that some goals contradict each other (Hickel 2019). For example, SDG 8 promotes Economic Growth, while at the same time, it is precisely this model of growth and prosperity that has led to environmental and resource crises (Longman and Todd Ltd. DGVN 2019). Opposite to SDG 8, SDGs like Climate Change (SDG 13) or Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) are based on an awareness that the assumptions of the economic system have to change to achieve these goals. In a more general sense, the focus on economic growth is contradictory to sustainable resource use (Eisenmenger et al. 2020). From an environmental ethics perspective, the according of equal status to all the goals is also criticized (Bleyer and Blanc 2023). Against the background of a strong understanding of sustainability, in which ecological capital cannot be exchanged at will, the question arises as to whether priority should not be given to the ecological SDGs as a basis for social and economic activities (Ott 2020). There is also criticism of the commitment nature of the SDGs. Compared to human rights, from which clear moral positive and negative obligations can be derived, the status of the SDGs as recommendations is significantly weaker (Pogge 2023).

Coming from the field of business studies, Elkington's (1994) concept of the triple bottom line has established a framework for measuring success that includes environmental and social impacts alongside economic performance. This approach is today widely accepted across various disciplines.

Konrad Ott and his colleague Ralf Döring however question this understanding of sustainability, which assigns equal importance to the three areas—economic, social, and ecological—from a philosophical perspective. In their concept of strong sustainability, the ecological dimension should take precedence over the social and economic dimensions that are embedded in it. The concept of strong sustainability means that ecological capital cannot be replaced at will (Ott and Döring 2008). It is also crucial that Ott emphasizes the connections between ecosystem services, such as those provided by a forest ecosystem. The main weakness of the concept of strong sustainability consists of a lack of determining the critical mass and, specifically, measuring ecosystem services. The concept of planetary boundaries, which was developed by Rockström et al. in 2009 and has been updated twice in 2015 and 2023, attempts to do this. They define nine planetary boundaries: Biosphere Integrity, Climate Change, Novel Entities, Stratospheric Ozone Depletion, Atmospheric Aerosol Loading, Ocean Acidification, Biogeochemical Flows, Freshwater Use, and Land-system Change. According to their research, by 2009, we had already exceeded three of

these planetary boundaries, increasing to four by 2015 and six by 2023. Rockström et al., as well as Ott, have ensured that the ecosphere is given special weighting and priority in scientific approaches in order to guarantee the continuation of life on Earth in the long term with its social and economic activities. But at the same time, their concepts overlook people's basic needs.

The concept of sustainable development based on Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economy approach (Raworth 2017) addresses the challenges of successfully navigating between respecting planetary boundaries and meeting social needs. This approach views the economy and society as integrated into the Earth's ecological system and, therefore, enables an understanding of a strong sustainability concept, which can be measured through the nine planetary boundaries and considers, at the same, the basic needs of people, addressing the criticisms about the different single concepts (see Figure 1). That is why we base this paper on her concept as an understanding of sustainable development from an external perspective.
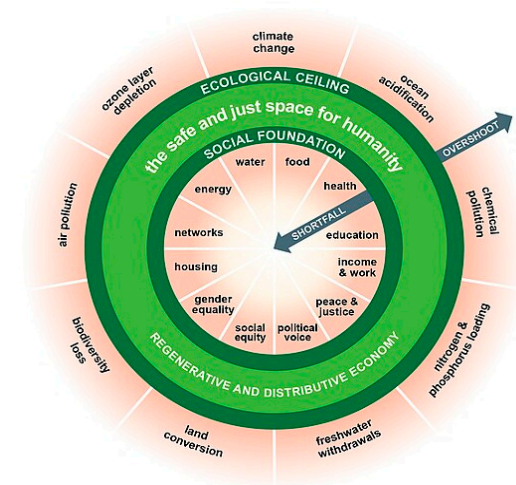

Figure 1. Doughnut Economy Framework, https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics (accessed on 1 July 2024).

The Doughnut Economy takes up the idea of planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009), such as climate change, land use change, and chemical pollution, as an environmental ceiling and combines it with a social foundation made up of topics also highlighted in the SDGs, such as gender equality, health, and education. Raworth's metaphorical "Doughnut" serves as a visual representation of this balance (Raworth 2017). The approach takes a normative stance and promotes a form of regenerative and distributive development that moves away from the take-make-use-dispose model of economic activity and towards a more sustainable and equitable economy that enriches the Earth's ecosystems and ensures a good life for all (Raworth 2017).

To address the urgent global challenges we are facing, a comprehensive approach is needed that brings together established concepts. Raworth's Doughnut Economy not only provides such a framework but also proposes a new way of thinking about economic growth. By balancing the needs of the planet and society, it aims to transform the extractive, degenerative, and divisive economy into a regenerative and distributive one. Applied to organizations, a regenerative business is one that embraces biosphere stewardship, reconnects to nature's cycles, and gives back to the living systems it belongs to. A distributive business is designed to distribute financial wealth and other value sources, including income, knowledge, time, and power, in an equitable way (Raworth 2017).

We refer to this model as "outer" sustainable development, as we want to draw attention to the fact that approaches to sustainable development have, up to now, focused primarily on an external understanding of change (see Figure 2).
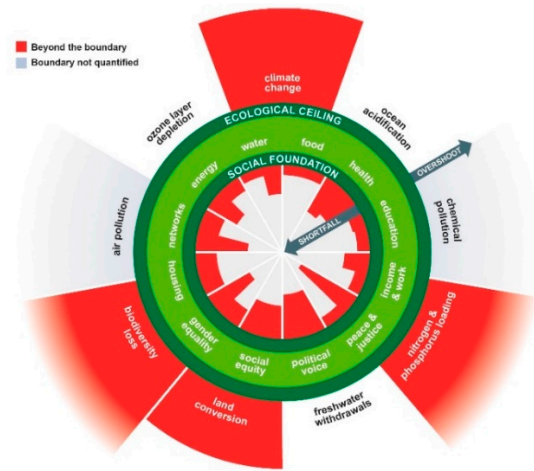

Figure 2. Boundaries on both sides of the doughnut (Raworth 2017, p. 51).

As of the time of writing, humanity has already crossed six out of the nine planetary boundaries, while none of the 12 basic social needs have been met on a global level (see Figure 3).
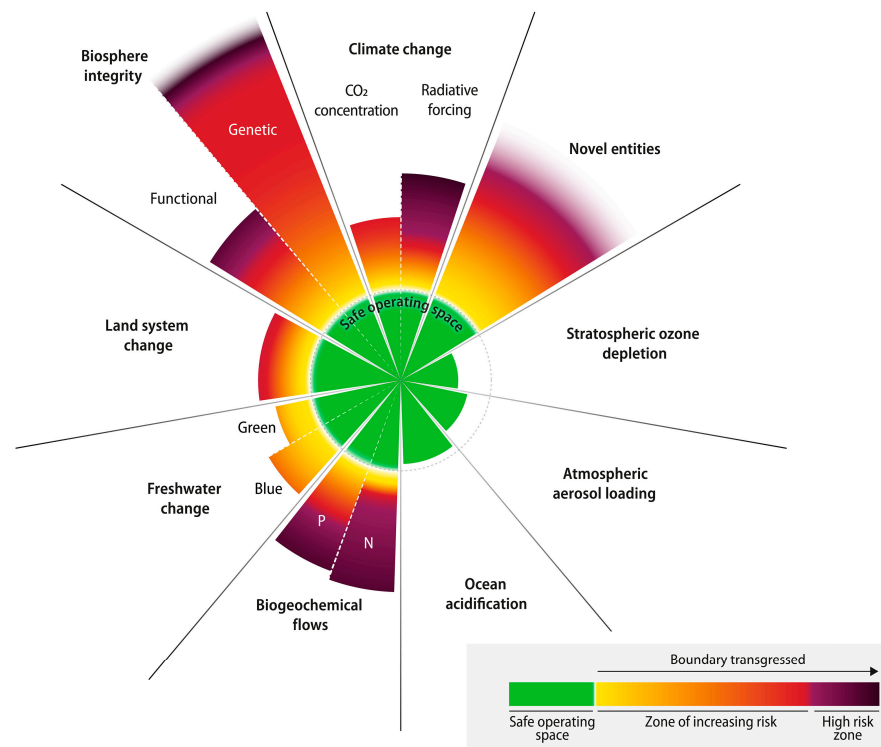
Figure 3. Current status of control variables for all nine planetary boundaries (Richardson et al. 2023, p. 4).

Although these facts are well known, it has not yet been possible to achieve a turnaround, neither regarding the planetary boundaries nor the social foundation of the 12 basic needs. On the contrary, the so far achieved progress in a wholly sustainable context is regularly disrupted by developments in the classical/linear system. A popular saying widely attributed to Einstein emphasizes that we cannot solve a problem with the same

mindset that created it. For this very reason, the thesis underlying our paper is that only by complementing the concept of outer sustainable development with a concept of inner development can we move towards an understanding of holistic, sustainable development as the basis for sustainability transformation.

Therefore, in the next section, we will look at the concept of Change of Consciousness as expressed in the call for SDG 18 and at the concept of the Inner Development Goals, which have already proposed an approach to inner development.

3. Inner Development as the Missing Link in Sustainability Transformation

Firstly, we will introduce SDG 18: Change of Consciousness, which, in our opinion, can be considered as a summarizing SDG for the internal dimension. But, as the definition and content of SDG 18 is still very vague, we propose to concretize and define it with the IDG Framework. Thus, we argue in our paper that for holistic development, SDG 18: Change of Consciousness is needed and that it can be built upon the reflections that have led to the IDGs.

3.1. Change of Consciousness—The Call for SDG 18

There are currently several ongoing debates about topics that are not included within the SDGs calling for including topics like "Zero animal exploitation" (Beyound Cruelity Foundation 2024) (accessed on 12 September 2024), "Responsible communication" (Global Alliance 2024), or "Space environment" (Losch et al. 2024).

One of these gaps refers to the call for SDG 18: Change of Consciousness (https://sdg18.de/17-ziele-eins-fehlt/ (accessed on 9 July 2024)). This type of call is fundamentally different from the others as it doesn't refer to another external goal but to the inclusion of an internal dimension. The Change of Consciousness refers to a shift in a person's inner attitude towards themselves and their environment and can be considered as an elementary component of a successful transformation towards a sustainable future. Therefore, it involves an alert, self-conscious, individual examination of the motives and values that underlie one's own thoughts and actions.

The idea is that SDG 18 would make values such as compassion, care, connectedness, respect, and openness central to global decision-making criteria. That could motivate people towards self-empowerment, more wisdom, contentment in their being, and spiritual strength. Furthermore, it might lead to living in a loving and humble relationship with ourselves, with others, and with the resources of the Earth (https://sdg18.de/sdg-18-das-ist-drin/ (accessed on 9 July 2024)). It has to be kept in mind that SDG 18 is so far mainly formulated from an actor's perspective in a Christian context.

The symbol chosen to represent SDG 18 is the picture of an eye with a heart on a purple background, which stands for inner contemplation and spirituality in different contexts (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Symbol of SDG 18: Change of Consciousness, https://sdg18.de/ (accessed on 9 July 2024).

SDG 18 has a special focus on spirituality, which understands spirituality in the sense of a modern, cosmopolitan, everyday practice without dogmas. On a practical level, it is about recognizing one's own individual scope for action and experiencing self-efficacy. The intellectual dimension involves examining one's own thought patterns in relation to the various issues addressed by the existing SDGs. The aim here is to develop a conscious attitude, move towards new, individual patterns of action, and to take responsibility. The extended spiritual dimension includes confronting one's deep-seated belief patterns, becoming aware of old, destructive thought patterns and traumas, dissolving them, and finding the way back to a genuine connection with oneself, with others, and with all life. This modern form of spirituality is based on mature, reflective individuals who are aware of the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for them, according to the authors. Modern spirituality encompasses an individual practice that listens rather than judges, connects rather than divides, and expands the horizon for lived self-efficacy and the potential for individual development (https://sdg18.de/die-rolle-moderner-spiritualitaet/ (accessed on 9 July 2024)).

There are limitations to the concept due to the lack of an academic foundation and a more precise understanding of what inner development means. Thus, it can be understood at this stage more as a claim which still needs to be explored and explained in a more detailed way. Another point of critique that must be examined further is the "black box" of spirituality. This means that there is not yet a generally valid, standard definition of spirituality that is supported by the majority of those working in this field of research. As with the concept of religion, each school of thought seems to define spirituality in a way that suits it, with varying degrees of clarity, without devoting much energy to the neighboring, referenced, and sometimes quoted understandings of their peers.

3.2. Inner Development Goals

The framework of the Inner Development Goals (Ankrah et al. 2023; see Figure 5) can be understood as one possibility to deepen the understanding of the internal aspects of development. The current, as yet little known, research on the Inner Development Goals has laid out an understanding of the main aspects of inner development in order to achieve outer development: "Unlike conventional goals that focus solely on material gains, the IDGs delve into the realm of integrated development, encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being to better equip us for the unprecedented challenges we face today" (Ankrah et al. 2023, p. 82).

Inner Development is, here, presented in a broader way, referring to individual intro-spection and personal qualities, as well as the core values, principles, culture, and ethos of collectives and organizations (Ankrah et al. 2023, p. 86).

The five dimensions of Inner Development were developed using a stakeholder process that brought together practitioners, such as sustainability managers or leadership development trainers, as well as researchers from different disciplines, such as adult development and leadership (Jordan et al. 2021, p. 4). A special contribution from a theological and social-philosophical perspective is not mentioned.

The category Being refers to the relationship to self: "Cultivating our inner life and developing and deepening our thoughts, feelings, and body help us be present, intentional and non-reactive when we face complexity" (Jordan et al. 2021, p. 13). This category refers to five inner values, skills, and qualities: Inner Compass, Integrity and Authenticity, Openness and Learning Mindset, Self-awareness, and Presence. Inner Compass means that people develop a deeply felt sense of responsibility and commitment to values and purposes relating to the good of the whole. Integrity and Authenticity refer to the commitment and ability to act with sincerity, honesty, and integrity. The quality of Openness and Learning

Mindset highlights the importance of having a mindset of curiosity and a willingness to be vulnerable and embrace change and grow. Self-awareness refers to the ability to be in reflective contact with one's own thoughts, feelings, and desires, having a realistic self-image, and the ability to regulate oneself. Presence makes reference to the ability to be in the now and here without judgment and in a state of open-ended presence (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 13–15; Manguera et al. 2022).
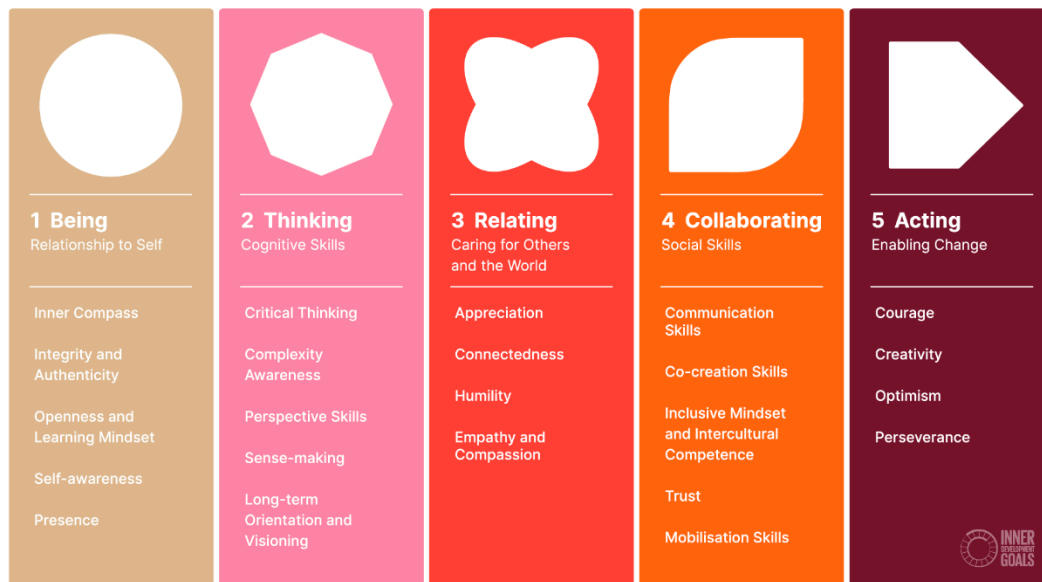

Figure 5. Framework for Inner Development Goals, https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org/framework/ (accessed on 12 July 2024).

The second category of the framework is Thinking, which refers to the development of our cognitive skills by taking different perspectives as "evaluating information and making sense of the world as a whole is essential for wise decision-making" (Jordan et al. 2021, p. 15). The first skill to be developed is Critical Thinking, which includes critically reviewing the validity of views, evidence, and plans. Complexity Awareness refers to the understanding of and skills in working with complex and systemic conditions and causalities. Perspective Skills relate to the development of skills in seeking out, understanding, and actively making use of insights from contrasting perspectives. The value of Sense-making refers to skills in seeing patterns, structuring the unknown, and being able to consciously create stories. The fifth quality, Long-term Orientation and Visioning, makes references to the ability to formulate and sustain a commitment to visions relating to the larger context (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 15–18).

Relating is the third category in the IDG Framework and refers to caring for others and the world: "Appreciating, caring for and feeling connected to others, such as neighbors, future generations or the biosphere helps us create more just and sustainable systems and societies for everyone." (IDG). This category encompasses four dimensions: Appreciation, Connectedness, Humility, and Empathy and Compassion. Appreciation means relating to others and to the world with a sense of gratitude and joy. Connectedness refers to a keen sense of being connected with and/or being part of a larger whole, such as a community, humanity, or global ecosystem. Humility is characterized by being able to act in accordance with the needs of a situation without concern for one's own importance. Empathy and Compassion refer to the ability to relate to others, oneself, and nature with kindness, empathy, and compassion and to address related suffering (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 18–20).

The category Collaborating refers to social skills and focuses on the need to develop our abilities to include, hold space for, and communicate with stakeholders with different

values, skills, and competencies in order to make progress on shared concerns. Communication Skills include the ability to really listen to others, to foster genuine dialogue, to advocate for one's own views skillfully, to manage conflicts constructively, and to adopt communication strategies that are appropriate for reaching diverse groups. Co-creation Skills refer to skills and motivation to build, develop, and facilitate cooperative relationships with diverse stakeholders, characterized by psychological safety and genuine co-creation. The quality of an Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence is characterized by the willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and collectives with different views and backgrounds. Trust means to develop the ability to show trust and to create and maintain trusting relationships, while Mobilization Skills refer to skills in inspiring and mobilizing others to engage in shared purpose (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 20–22).

Acting is the fifth category, which is characterized by the development of qualities such as courage and optimism, which help to acquire true agency, break old patterns, generate original ideas, and act with persistence in uncertain times. Courage refers to the ability to stand up for values, make decisions, take decisive action, and challenge and disrupt existing structures and views. The quality of Creativity focuses on the ability to generate and develop original ideas and to innovate, as well as being willing to disrupt conventional patterns. Optimism is seen as the ability to sustain and communicate a sense of hope, a positive attitude, and confidence in the possibility of meaningful change, while Perseverance refers to the ability to sustain engagement and remain determined and patient even when efforts take a long time to bear fruit (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 22–24).

This framework is also restricted by some limitations. In its present form, the IDG Framework is probably biased by the fact that the majority of the respondents were from Western societies, and many belonged to groups already interested in the theory and practice of leadership development or global sustainability issues. The initiators are keenly aware of this and hope to redress this bias in future work (Jordan et al. 2021, p. 2). There is also a lack of discussion on the status of the framework, whether it is seen as a theoretical approach or a teaching tool, and why it focuses on exactly these five dimensions and 23 skills. We have written this paper to contribute to this discussion and, in particular, to the more global focus of the original five, as shown below, better: SIX dimensions can be interrogated, as we will demonstrate in the following chapter.

We also propose to discuss the dimensions with a view to their potential further subdivision as conscious and unconscious actions are currently mixed up in the proposal. We consider most aspects in the areas of Being and Relating as unconscious, whereas the conscious decision to critically scrutinize the area of Thinking, for instance, undoubtedly has a different significance.

4. How Can a Christian Social Ethics and a Social Philosophical Perspective Contribute to an Understanding of Holistic Sustainable Development?

The call for SDG 18 and the Inner Development Goals both currently lack a foundation for their terminology and links to existing normative discourses. With our contribution, we intend (1) to substantiate existing aspects of the Inner Development Goals from the perspective of academic Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy, (2) to complement them, and (3) to link the concept of the IDGs to normative discourses in Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy.

In our paper, we focus on the dimensions of Being, Relating, and Collaborating, as they are the ones that have been explored the least. They also qualify due to our proposed subdivision of the five dimensions of the goals based on their conscious and non-conscious aspects. While Acting can be also considered as an external dimension, Thinking is the

dimension that is the most prominent in academic discourses, where up to now, the logic has been that critical thinking can lead to new insights and recognitions, which in turn prompt behavior change. But, as it is also discussed under the term the "Mind Behaviour Gap" (Heidbrink 2014, p. 3), researchers are still exploring what the barriers and keys might be to overcome this gap. While educating the intellect and thought structures have traditionally been the focus of education, less attention has been paid to emotional and psychological structures (Thakar 1984, p. 60). Furthermore, we want to remove "Caring" from pillar 3, Relating, and establish it as a further dimension/pillar of inner development. In our understanding, Relating describes any kind of relationship, not necessarily focused only on the caring aspect but more related to the interconnected living of all.

The aim of the debate and supplementation of the IDGs in this context is the more prominent recognition of the importance of a holistic perspective on (sustainable) development.

4.1. Contribution from a Christian Social Ethics

From a Christian theological perspective, it is assumed that the separation of inner and outer development was overcome with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The introduction "and the Word became flesh" from the Gospel of John fundamentally refutes all tendencies to value the body less than the soul/spirit because even the spark of God has joined with it. Furthermore, and this brings us closer to the bridge to Social Philosophy, every human being—whose flesh will always be embodied—is granted free will. This positive interconnectedness, however, did not persist.

Over the centuries, various attempts have been made to interrupt the "et-et" of body and soul, flesh and spirit, as well as inner and outer world. One might think of the Cathars (also Albingensians) who taught a strict dualism during the 12th to 14th centuries. Although the doctrine and its underlying ideas were condemned, the issue of the body remained a recurring theme throughout the centuries. Shaped by the doctrine of original sin, the majority of Christian theologies have struggled to find a balanced middle way in the field between dualism and materialism. Vivid evidence of this is provided, for example, by the prudery of the 19th century, as well as the moral teaching of the church(es), which are still struggling with an adequate assessment of (inter)human sexuality (Lintner 2023).

The five categories of the IDGs presented above can be justified theologically. Here, it is important to note how Christian Social Ethics wants to be understood in the postmodern context. It is no longer a question of producing ultimate truths but of making offers in a marketplace of possibilities, similar to an agora. Christian Social Ethics, thus, offers one or more patterns of reasoning among many. This postmodern approach takes the post-secular vision of the world into account without neglecting the fact that today, 80 percent of the world's population still consider themselves as "believers" (Pew Research Center 2015).

The question of which aspect of sustainability has to be prioritized was addressed by Karl Bopp, among others. Several years before the formulation of the SDGs, he outlined the non-negotiability of prioritizing ecological aspects (Bopp 2009, 2010, 2022). This prioritization, or "fundamentalization", might be linked to the longstanding ecclesial understanding of a forum internum and a forum externum. In the Catholic understanding, the forum internum covers, e.g., conscience formation, spiritual counseling, and confession (none of which are ever documented or treated in a public setting). The forum externum, in contrast, is enregistered in official documents and might as well be an issue for public discussion and documentation.

Even if these two spheres are traditionally not the same as inner and outer sustainable development, parallels can be drawn. Both spheres have an impact on the eventual output of an action or the outer development. The forum externum can also be measured and reviewed, whereas inner development's influence on an action is as hard to quantify as the

forum internum's. It is, however, remarkable that "The form of witnessing related to the extra-church sphere unfolds in the proclamation of the Creator God, in the diaconia of the threatened creation, i.e., in environmental protection measures, or in prophetic deeds and words against the destruction of creation in the context of civil society" (Ostheimer 2023). In other words, care for creation (that is, ecological sustainability in an applied sense) is care for God, as well as care for fellow humans. And therefore, it is absolutely not limited to the potentially much more visible outer sustainability. Its main essence is to be seen in the diaconia-based dialogue with creation.

The Inner Development Goals (see Section 3 above) include Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting. These dimensions also have their raison d'être in a theological context. Above all, the (social) principle of personhood, which is fundamental to Christian Social Ethics, as well as social ethics in general, can be used for this purpose. Every person in every situation in life—regardless of their current competencies—is to be seen as the potential of what they could be. Regardless of how they currently fulfill these requirements, they are and will always remain fully human and fully a person. These reflections might be linked to the overall debate on human rights in the Catholic Church—a long-lasting struggle that has not yet been fully solved (Gabiel 2023; Hilpert 1991; Kirchschläger 2023).

Being, however, goes deeper into the individual space than rights (that are attributed from outside) can ever go. The recently rediscovered topic of IDGs, which (can) also include spirituality, is a revealing indication of the beginning of overcoming the decades-long bypassing of this very topic. This turn can be seen in theological-philosophical perspectives (Zatonyi 2017, 2022) as well as in systematic approaches (Trawöger 2019). Isabella Bruckner deals with the question of the lost corporeal in Christianity due to the ascension of Jesus with recourse to Michel de Certeau (Bruckner 2023). A trait that is present in this state is, therefore, characterized by the fact that it is inherent to the person and belongs to them without any effort. In biblical-theological terms, this being-there could be compared to Mary of Bethany, who, in contrast to her sister, is completely absorbed in the presence of Jesus. Other authors emphasize the importance of spirituality.

The social principle of personality offers a basis on which the characteristics of Relating and Collaborating can be referred to. They are key aspects of human beings in their social interconnectedness, as Wilhelm Korff already expressed in the 1980s under the name of "Soziale Perichorese" (social perichoresis). He focused on the mutual entanglement and interaction of different behavioral drives that consistently determine people's social interactions. Humans are beings of need, competitors, and carers at the same time. Therefore, wherever interactions are monocausal, this must inevitably be at the expense of their humane rationality. Nevertheless, the individual act of interaction only receives its particular orientation when one of the three components (needing, competing, and caring) is assigned the dominant goal-determining function. This is without prejudice to the fact that it is ultimately the rules and norms that unfold and mediate as specific cultural facts by no means independently of the logic of perichoresis. These are the "faits sociaux" as "faits moraux" in Émile Durkheim's sense (Durkheim [1894] 1967), from which the respective act of interaction ultimately gains its own binding form that also operates supra-individually (Korff 1973, [1978] 1993, 2001; Vogt 2015).

While the subtitle of the dimension of Relating in the IDG proposal mentioned above says, "Caring for others and the word", we would argue that the different dimensions mentioned below focus on various kinds of relations. What is more, connection and relationship do not lead undoubtedly to a caring dimension. That is why we argue, first, to better use the subtitle "Living interconnected" for this pillar, as we think this is what the dimension wants to refer to. Secondly, we would like to add the subdimension "transcendental openness" to the pillar of Relating. This subdimension gains importance as

soon as the global fact that more than 80% of the world population consider themselves "spiritual beings" (Pew Research Center 2015) is brought into thought. Third, we argue for an individual pillar that takes into account the whole field of Caring, as further explained in Section 4.3.

The environmental encyclical *Laudato si* (Francis 2015) can be used to derive various interpretative aids and keys for the understanding of the IDGs. As it falls in the category of social encyclicals, it gives a deeper socio-ethical justification of the IDGs while always keeping in mind the anchorage in social teaching. Being is—from a Christian point of view— the primal ground of human existence. A person has value even without accomplishing anything. Francis never gets tired of emphasizing this and certainly does not want it to be forgotten while reading his first social encyclical. Nevertheless, it is important to take the next step, as only Relating makes life in society possible and differentiates us from the atypical lifeform of a monad. The added value of the *Laudato si* is that, for the first time, relationships on the level of an encyclical letter are no longer limited to relationships between people and between people and God. Rather, for the first time in the social proclamation of the modern church, this document stresses an environment that had previously been viewed purely objectively as a relationship partner. Thus, humanity is meant to Care for it. This care is stressed by its inclusion in the (sub)title, but it also finds a deeper explanation within the Latin-American concept of buen vivir (Contreras Baspineiro 2021; Lantigua 2023).

4.2. Contribution from the Indian Philosophical Perspective of Vimala Thakar

Vimala Thakar developed a holistic approach combining spirituality and social change. Her argumentation and consideration of the importance of a holistic perspective on outer engagement for social change and inner transformation can be adapted to the claim for a holistic sustainability approach. She states:

> The fact is that life is a wholeness, an indivisible, non-fragmentable wholeness in which every element affects every other, and nothing can be pushed aside as irrelevant. But we don't like to face the consequences of our essential relatedness. We are attached to a worldview which asserts that divisions among people as friend or enemy are unquestionably real, that boundaries forming nations are accepted actualities, the superiority of human beings to all other creatures is authoritatively factual. We have forced ourselves into tiny little compartments with all our prejudices and preferences and wonder why we cannot live in harmony, in peace. (Thakar 1984, p. 5)

Up to now, separate discourses on sustainability transformation and awareness and the focus on personal growth have not led to social and ecological transformation (Thakar 1984). Based on the assumption that inner development influences outer development and vice versa, successfully bringing about sustainable transformation requires a focus on both at the same time.

In the following, the dimensions of Being, Relating, and Collaborating in the Inner Development Goals Framework are going to be substantiated and connected to the Indian philosophical approach of Vimala Thakar, with references to Gandhi, leading to a deeper and more precise understanding of them, as well as to open up discussion on them. Furthermore, in Section 4.3, we add the dimension of Caring as having central significance for inner development.

4.2.1. Being

Inner compass means that people develop a deeply felt sense of responsibility and commitment to values and purposes relating to the good of the whole. Integrity and

Authenticity refer to the commitment and ability to act with sincerity, honesty, and integrity (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 13–15).

Therefore, the following questions arise: what kind of values do we need that are related to the good of the whole? And how can people act with sincerity, honesty, and integrity?

Vimala Thakar identifies values such as truth and goodness as central. She argues that in families all over the world, values are similar, and she highlights that we have been taught that we, as families, are a unit and that values like love, affection, and concern for one another are important. Furthermore, she identifies that in the private sphere, like in families or home life, values such as affection, care, concern, cooperation, and sacrifice can be considered as prevalent (Thakar 1984, pp. 87–88).

She also states that, by contrast, when people "leave home on the way to the office, or to the factory, our values change. We have learned that now the values of cooperation, sacrifice, care, concern are no longer relevant" (Thakar 1984, p. 88). In these contexts, it is "not sacrifice, but ambition, not cooperation but competition, not helping one another to get rid of weaknesses, but exploiting the weaknesses of others are dominant values. Now self-centeredness, ambition, aggressiveness, exploitation become admired economic values"(Thakar 1984, p. 88).

Beyond economics, a different set of values like anger, aggressiveness, or violence are considered respectable in politics and are sanctified in the name of a country, religion, or ideology. Thakar wants to draw attention to the way that these different sets of values are mutually incompatible codes of conduct, which inevitably leads to the fact that we become divided within ourselves:

> "Please do see how badly we are fragmented. Political life is different from economic life and economic life from family life. We have different bases for evaluating, different orders of priorities, different codes of conduct for ourselves. We go to a temple, church or mosque and say, 'Oh God, You are almighty. You are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. I surrender myself to you.' We surrender ourselves in the temple and assert ourselves in offices and factories. We are loving and cooperative at home and violent and dishonest in politics. [...] When we owe loyalty to incompatible sets of values [...] we become hypocrites. Today, we are nations of hypocrites." (Thakar 1984, pp. 89–90)

It is not only that we as persons have become divided, but these divisions also have created a world in which countries and governments talk of peace and international brotherhood while they engage in arms races. Although science and technology are bringing us closer together, we are divided by mistrust.

To overcome this fragmentation and mistrust, it is therefore of great importance in Thakar's perspective to adopt a holistic approach and to recognize that life is one and non-fragmentable and that, therefore, there cannot be different sets of values and separate codes of conduct for different fields of action (Thakar 1984, p. 90).

4.2.2. Relating

As we argued in Section 4.1, to rename the subtitle of the dimension of Relating to "Living interconnected" and to add the subdimension of a transcendental relationship, which refers to the connection to the divine from Thakar, this argumentation can be deepened.

Thakar claims, referring to Bertrand Russell, that people have learned to swim and to fly but haven't learned how to live peacefully with each other (Thakar 1984, p. 5). In her view, the main point of relating to others is to accept that we are all connected.

Referring to Gandhi, Thakar points out that people have to learn his dynamics for relationships, in which trust in each other, truth, decency, and peacefulness play a central role (Thakar 1984, pp. 111–12): "The human race would, Gandhi insisted, need to live

together, applying in daily life the spiritual values of truth, love and non-violence." (Thakar 1984, p. 123).

Empathy and Compassion refer to the ability to relate to others, oneself, and nature with kindness, empathy, and compassion and address related suffering (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 18–20). One source of compassion, Thakar argues, is the value of the realm of silence: "Silence is a natural dimension of living, not an escape. Silence and sound, action and non-action are like exhaling and inhaling" (Thakar 1984, p. 75). But while we are guided to be responsive to sounds from an early stage, we have not been educated at all about silence, and silence has no affirmation in society. It is quite the opposite as silence is considered "inaction, a waste of time, an expression of irresponsible laziness, an invitation to evils of all sorts. Society will not offer its rewards to the inquirer who wants to step out of the game, the race, to explore another dimension of consciousness. So it is not to please others, society, that we explore silence, but it is awareness that we are related to silence as essentially as we are related to sound" (Thakar 1984, p. 72).

But, as Thakar highlights, silence enables us to merge into wholeness: "In wholeness, in the isness of communion, we belong to nothing and to all. The exclusive loyalties, attachments disappear and compassion for all being is born in the heart" (Thakar 1984, p. 75). Following this logic, if we want to cultivate compassion, one way would be to give silence and education about silence more attention in our society.

Connectedness refers to a keen sense of being connected with and/or being part of a larger whole, such as a community, humanity, or the global ecosystem. Humility is characterized by being able to act in accordance with the needs of a situation without concern for one's own importance (Jordan et al. 2021, pp. 15–18). Thakar highlights the importance of relating to nature: "Relationship involves the rhythms of receptivity and choiceless responsiveness: true relationship transcends any consideration of doing something for another. When the heartbeat of the earth is as intimate to us as the heartbeat of the body, we will act spontaneously to preserve the earth just as we do to protect the body. When the earth is in danger, we will respond immediately without any sense of doing something special, providing some extraordinary service, just as we now do when the body is in danger" (Thakar 1984, p. 167).

Living in communion with nature and remaining in a vital relationship with one's surroundings requires awareness of all the artificial barriers that modern society has created (Thakar 1984, p. 169).

But as we argue, connection is not limited to another human being, nature, and the gobal ecosystem, but it also refers to the transcendental connection in the meaning of the divine. Thakar explains this by referring to Gandhi's understanding of the divine:

> "Gandhi always referred to the whole universe as divine, including the mountains, ·the rivers, the oceans, the stars, and all space. Engrossed in our daily problems, confronted with many challenges, we are hardly aware there is a world beyond the societies that we have created, beyond the social, econanic, political structures. But there is a vast universe which is not our creation. Faith in the divine means realization that beyond the structures of society that we have created, beyond the concepts, knowledge, experience, a vast universe exists not created by us, not run by us." (Thakar 1984, p. 112)

4.2.3. Collaborating

Gandhi developed the idea of villages that were self-sufficient in regard to primary needs like food, clothing, and shelter, which enabled the people in the villages to live with dignity and love. He was a strong supporter of the elimination of notions of superiority and inferiority in regard to women and to castes, permitting villages to function like loving

families. This harmonious atmosphere would permit other changes, like a cooperative relationship between villages and cities in India based on mutual support (Thakar 1984, p. 117).

Gandhi followed a vision of self-reliance for each human being and for the villages as a whole, not as a narrow, aggressive self-reliance that would motivate people to take care of themselves at the expense of their neighbors, but rather as a cooperative, communal self-reliance. While individuals could not provide completely for their own basic needs, each person could, after doing everything possible to provide for their individual basic needs, work cooperatively with other members of the community to produce whatever else was required (Thakar 1984, p. 123).

4.3. Complementing the IDGs by Adding the Dimension Caring

Following the idea of the above-introduced social perichoresis that states that any human being is at any moment a being of need, competition, and care, we think that the aspect of Care should be included in the very first level of any formulation of Inner Development Goals. That is why we would like to include Caring as a pillar on its own in the list of Inner Development Goals (see Figure 6). As a dimension between Relating and Collaborating, it is understood as a permanent concern and responsibility for the wholeness in the meaning of combining the inner and outer dimensions. The subdimensions, therefore, are practical engagement, perpetual with-thinking of others, altruistic concerns, and caring for the wholeness.

Figure 6. Framework for the Inner Development Goals complemented by the dimension Caring and adapted for different aspects of Relating.

From a theological or social-ethical point of view, this aspect might also be considered under the aspect of Care Ethics, which is widely received in the discourse of Christian Social Ethics (Lob-Hüdepohl and Lesch 2007; Heimbach-Steins and Krause 2016).

Care Ethics became, during the last decade, a central part of scientific theology and theological (social) ethics (Nistelrooij et al. 2022) as it opposes and challenges the idea of the nowadays omnipresent "faster, better, further" and takes into consideration the various connections people and other (living) beings have with their peers and others. It challenges ideas, such as the "homo oeconomicus", that have proven to not help the population thrive as a whole. Following the idea of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si*, "On Care for our Common Home" (2015), care is not limited to fellow humans but includes self-care, as well as care for the wider circle of animate and inanimate nature. This care is not limited to

punctual action but has to be seen in the bigger context of the perpetual with-thinking of the wholeness as an altruistic concern. Spirituality might be seen in relation to self-care. It might, however, also be seen in the acceptance of oneself as one who is cared for by something external beyond one's own availability.

Caring for the wholeness following the argumentation of Thakar, the inner dimension of consciousness and the outer dimension of structures and systems are intertwined in wholeness: "The structures and systems condition the inner consciousness and the conditiongs of the consciousness create the structures and systems." (Thakar 1984, p. 9). A Caring dimension for the wholeness gives importance to taking care of inner transformation and outer transformation in a holistic way.

Caring for the wholeness means, on the one hand, learning to look at our minds and inner psychological lives as social issues. As Thakar points out: "The mind is a result of collective human effort. [...] The values, the norms, the criteria are patterns of behavior organized by collective groups" (Thakar 1984, p. 13). Our minds go and repeat these patterns. To become aware of these patterns, to get to know them better, and to question and change them, attentiveness is required.

Caring for the wholeness can be considered, on the other hand, as a preliminary phase of acting, referring to our responsibility and concern for ourselves, others, and ecological systems. In the words of Thakar, it can be considered as referring to the ability to create a more mature and sane quality of life (Thakar 1984, p. 60). Everyone is responsible for contributing as fully as they are able to. We start by paying more attention to and caring more about the rhythms of the body and the rhythms of nature (Thakar 1984, p. 59). We continue by giving more attention to the value of love. Thakar states that all the carelessness of which humans are capable leads to the annihilation of love (Thakar 1984, p. 3). Strengthening caring can, therefore, based on her argumentation, be seen as a reinforcement of love. Love, here, is understood not in the commercial sense of modern society but in a deeper sense of the fundamental value of human living. Love, in this sense, means "sharing the earth, the joys, the sorrows, the beauty, the ugliness, in easy communion without trying to manipulate others in any way at all" (Thakar 1984, p. 77). Caring, in this way, signifies being responsive to the sincere needs of others but without binding the other person in a net of psychological attachments. As Thakar states, in affluent countries, the abundance of material goods, the dependence on technical machines, and the depersonalization of the economic structure have practically driven love out, with the result that people are starving for affection (Thakar 1984, p. 78). Affection, again, is fundamental for developing human kindness towards others and a caring mindset. As the developing countries are following the Western model, a focus on caring can be considered of high importance for holistic development.

Wholeness, as stated by Vimala Thakar, has to be seen in different dimensions. On the one hand, it covers a wide range, from thinking about somebody or something else before actively thinking about them on the one extreme up to the point where this consideration turns into doing something for them. On the other hand, it ranges from self-care to the care for others without looking for recompense or expecting anything in return (altruistic concern) up to a point where every person can also experience themselves as a recipient of help, support, and care, be this in an inner world dimension or beyond.

5. Discussion

Following Thakar, we can concretize and add to the dimension of Being in the IDG Framework and, at the same time, question which values we really need for a holistic, sustainable transformation. Based on her approach, it is crucial to unite the different, fragmented sets of values and separated codes of conduct that pertain to different fields

of action so that values like truth, goodness, affection, care, concern, and cooperation can guide interactions between human beings in the spheres of economics and politics and are not limited to the private sphere. They might enable wholeness and trust in each other. Yet, we have to consider that the set of values Thakar highlights and names as a set of values within families doesn't count for all families the whole time—there are also fractions within families that can go far beyond challenges. Thus, it is possible to reframe her set of values as one that would be worthwhile to achieve in all forms of being. Nevertheless, it is of great importance to focus on the way that people become divided if they have to act based on contrary and contradictory values. Korff and his idea of social perichoresis might give a solution to this dilemma. The human being always lives in the overlap of need, care, and competition. Whenever one (or two) are no longer present in their Being, Relating, Caring, Collaborating, Thinking, or Acting, the loss of balance, and thus, a loss of personality, is imminent.

This might add to the discourse on how to redesign our economic structure, as the Doughnut Economics concept has already started to do.

Concerning the dimension of Relating, we argue for the subtitle "Living interconnected" as we think this is what the dimension wants to refer to. We also add the subdimension of a transcendental relation. This dimension highlights the connection to the divine—an aspect often ignored in the Western European context on the global level. However, this point is of extreme importance, as research in the field of environmental engagement can prove (Koehrsen et al. 2022).

We furthermore concretize the aspect of Empathy and Compassion with Thakar's argumentation by focusing on the realm of silence. In her analysis, it is essential, first, to reconsider silence as a part of society like sound and, second, that people are educated in silence and not only guided to be responsive to sound. Silence makes it possible to merge into wholeness, and by feeling part of the whole, compassion for all beings appears in the heart. The aspect of Connectedness can be grounded and complemented by Thakar's vision of relating to nature. This form of relating, she highlights, is based on rhythms of reciprocity and responsiveness, and it transcends the utilitarian perspective that everything has to lead to a benefit.

To the dimension of Collaborating, we can add, with Thakar and her reference to Gandhi, the aspect of "cooperative communal self-reliance".

With our suggestion of an additional dimension, Caring is understood as the concern and responsibility for the wholeness in the meaning of combining the inner and outer dimensions; we want to deepen the idea of a holistic approach. Just as the structures and systems condition, the inner consciousness and the conditioning of the consciousness create the structures of the system, and a Caring dimension needs to focus on both of them in wholeness.

For all these dimensions, it is of crucial importance not to consider them as another new tool or way of optimizing human life to become even more efficient, competitive, and productive. As Thakar puts it, "Silence is a dimension in which judgments have no meaning, have no significance at all. Silence is isness, and to be good at silence or poor at silence is utter nonsense" (Thakar 1984, p. 73). The point is to find or rediscover the way of being, relating, collaborating, and caring, and by doing so, change occurs. With this focus on isness, the circle closes also with and in regard to the Christian message of God's love for all people (1 John 4:19), in which everyone is accepted by God just as they are, without having to constantly expose themselves to competitions and comparisons. The goal of genuine—also Christian—spirituality is to be with oneself, and through this consciousness the wholeness can be considered.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy are potential discussion partners when looking for a deeper and broader—one might also say different—approach to sustainability that goes beyond what is immediately visible. We highlighted that a more global or holistic approach would not only be beneficial for the implementation of sustainable development policies but is necessary to bring about real change. All the targets that have been set and the limitations that have been identified have not meaningfully changed anything. On the contrary, the world's situation is worse than before (as, for example, is shown by the three updates to the planetary boundaries concept, each showing worsening transgressions). We, therefore, contribute to the discussion by bringing Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy into the game as potential interlocutors. Their potential usefulness lies in their long-term experience in dealing with people's fears, hopes, and beliefs, and thus, the basis of the inner development goals further discussed here, which need to be addressed for a more holistic approach. It is no longer enough to see sustainability as an economic goal and understand it intellectually. In fact, as we have shown in our paper, it is of high importance to consider sustainability as a holistic approach, including the inner development by a Change of Consciousness, like SDG 18 claims, which in our argumentation can be/needs to be concretized and defined by the Inner Development Goals. We intend to substantiate the dimensions of Being, Relating, and Collaborating with the normative discourse on spirituality and with reference to the social principle of personality in Christian Social Ethics, as well as by the Indian Social Philosophical Perspective of Vimala Thakar, which focuses on a value-based approach. The paper suggested that the concept of the IDGs will be strengthened by adding the dimension of Caring—understood as the concern and responsibility for the wholeness in the combining of the inner and outer dimensions. As explained above, we think that a stronger focus on the fact that some IDGs are more conscious and some are less could be helpful and a topic for further research. We also think that a broader discussion about the IDGs in general would be beneficial.

By linking the concept of the Inner Development Goals to the existing normative discourses in Christian Social Ethics and Social Philosophy, our research opens up the possibility for a normative substantiation and a deepening of the discussion for the further development of the IDGs and the possibility of including them within discourses of Christian Social Ethics, as well as Social Philosophy.

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