
This volume brings together a vast array of thinkers from religious frameworks, politics, economics, and environmental studies, to critically reflect upon the development and progress of working toward the sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations member states in September 2015. In forty-four essays a distinguished group of scholars and practitioners reflect on virtue and visions of well-being, various religious traditions—east and west—of the common good, issues of poverty, peace, migration, business, education, climate justice, human trafficking, issues pertaining to indigenous peoples, corruption in geo-politics, and future possibilities for sustainable development. The contributions in this book arose from a series of ten meetings that convened under the auspices of *Ethics in Action* between 2016 and 2018 to discuss the challenges to meeting the SDGs.

The opening chapter, written by Jeffrey Sachs, charts the history and challenges of developing and failing to meet the SDGs. The three themes providing the primary impetus to the goals are economic rights, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability (p. 11—14). With the wealthiest nations limiting support to the poorest nations and our current emissions levels putting the globe on a trajectory for a 2.7-degree Celsius rise in temperatures (p. 21—22), Sachs argues that a multi-religious articulation of a renewed moral framework for the common good is an utmost necessity. With this mandate, the book contains chapters on Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Islamic approaches to the common good. These essays are practical and programmatic rather than experimental or exploratory. For example, Reverend Kyoichi Sugino’s chapter on Buddhism highlights the relational nature of Buddhist ethics and enlightenment, and since all beings might attain enlightenment, the ethic of compassion in the removal of suffering is applied to human relationships with other living beings (p. 112—115). Similarly, Daniel G. Groody’s chapter on Roman Catholicism emphasizes the Catholic Church’s social teaching and centers on solidarity with those who live in poverty. Notably, Groody’s essay neglects the foundational relationships with the nonhuman world in his account of the common good (p. 129—134).

The chapters dealing explicitly with climate draw attention to the multifaceted issues arising from the destructive industrial practices throughout the globe.
Veerabhadran Ramanathan argues for a shift in language from climate change to climate disruption and gleans insights from Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si* to advocate for an alliance between scientists, politicians, and religion. Such an alliance is necessary in his reading to find a common language and shared motivational path to move forward with the necessary changes to ward off the worst climate outcomes (p. 301—307). In a different way Emmanuel Adamakis claims that ‘climate change is a sign of spiritual blindness’ (p. 310) and requires a conversion, that is, a complete reversal of being that brings a change to self, community, and politics. These essays gesture toward the kind of existential shift needed to reorient human activity and hint at possibilities to explore. However, these essays are brief and the ideas somewhat underdeveloped. This may be an advantage, though, since the broad themes described will require local appropriation and application in highly divergent contexts. Given this reality, a gesture may be all that is possible in a book such as this, although the reader is left wanting for more detail.

The volume also recognizes challenges in meeting the SDGs in two chapters on corruption. Sean Hagan documents how corruption thrives where ‘an economy is dominated by the exploitation of natural resources’ and ‘when the government is so weak that it has been effectively “captured” by private interests’ (p. 393). These two situations provide a context where public offices are more likely to be abused for private gain. The effect of corruption is that a government can no longer fulfill its roles as responsible spender of public funds, as effective regulator, and in providing stability and security for all of its citizens. The problem is that corruption has a corrosive effect and removes the political will to reform, since that would require those with power divesting themselves of the personal benefits received from corruption. Jennifer Gross’s essay notes how the ‘outdated’ market economies of late-stage capitalism become ‘a breeding ground for indifference, selfishness, jealousy, and distrust’ (p. 167) in such a way that makes reform even more difficult.

The essays in this volume are clearly written and accessible and offer some insightful synergies and opportunities for cross-pollination between the different topics addressed in sustainable government and the role religion and religious communities might have. One notable lacunae in the work is that there is no discussion of how religious communities might themselves be barriers to the economic, environmental, and international aims of the SDGs. For example, in the United States the influence of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists in climate denial, movements hindering the migration of vulnerable populations, and the increasing role of Christian nationalism are left completely unaddressed. Such a gap leaves the work of the *Ethics in Action* group susceptible to a critique of being somewhat idealist in its outlook. However, despite this, the book’s pragmatic approach to policy and its comprehensive scope to relevant issues of sustainable development and their interconnections makes the book a valuable contribution. Its accessible style makes the work ideal for graduate, and even undergraduate, classrooms. If the proposals found in this book are heeded by those with the power for regulatory and governmental change, then the work will be worthwhile indeed.

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