

A commitment to religious freedom entails a corollary commitment to protecting the coordinated religious actions of citizens, whether coordinated in a church or in a business. Edward David offers not only a worthy justification of the recognition of these corporate rights, but a philosophical approach that can aid policy-makers in navigating the sometimes difficult task of when and how to so recognize exemptions from secular law to protect this religious activity.

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MORALITY: RESTORING THE COMMON GOOD IN DIVIDED TIMES by Jonathan Sacks, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2020, pp.384, £20.00, hbk

There comes a point at which claims of universality for the principle of the common good are put to the test. Is the common good communicable or convincing without a shared understanding of morality? For the common good to live up to its name and become truly common as an endeavour, and ultimately as a lived reality, it must reach beyond the religious, intellectual, and cultural traditions in which ownership of the term is articulated.

Drawing on twenty-two years as Chief Rabbi in the United Kingdom (1991-2013), the now late Jonathan Sacks's recent volume is, as the title indicates, a restorative project that details a paradise (almost) lost, determined by a rejection of common morality through what he terms a 'cultural climate change' in the 'move from 'We' to 'I'' (p.12). Sacks's concern is not merely grammatical in describing a seismic shift towards the first person singular pronoun for his central thesis recognises three basic societal institutions of the economy, state, and morality. Within 'the fields of economics and politics' in these *Divided Times* the first person pronoun is rarely pluralised because these institutions are 'arenas of competition' (p.18). Paradise is to be regained, though, through cultures of cooperation and covenant which are proper to his comprehension of morality. In this way, Sacks carefully avoids the pitfalls of other texts that project the common good as a necessary pursuit since he is neither nostalgic, for a common good that may or may not have previously existed, nor despairing, declaring instead that '[t]his is not a work of cultural pessimism' (p.19).

Developing research for a BBC Radio series, *Morality in the 21st Century* (2018), Sacks returns to the theme of an ethics of responsibility explored in his earlier works, *The Great Partnership* (2012), *To Heal a Fractured World* (2006), and *Dignity of Difference* (2002). By 2020, his tone is different. Seemingly shook by the blazing trail of Brexit division in the United Kingdom and the aftermath of 2016's (and in preparation for 2020's) presidential election in the USA, Sacks regards politics as

'abrasive' and 'sometimes brutal' (p.198), in a way that demobilises and derails a common good in favour of a 'transactional, managerial' (p.100) *modus operandi*. Outlining such weaknesses in the political landscape affirms Sacks's position that politics cannot be the primary source of collective will and action towards the societal good because it is, by nature, oppositional and a party-political system leans towards the part rather than the whole.

More broadly, he observes four predominant phenomena that manifest the supposed change in personal pronouns as political division, lack of happiness, economic inequality, and assault on free speech, which is perhaps better termed unwillingness to reason. These areas are problematised not because they fall short of a historic standard or universal measure but precisely in view of a common good that is feasible, possible, and practical if the first person plural is not handed over completely to the state or market. Morality has a remit, and 'it begins with us. We do not need to wait for a great political leader, or an upturn in the economy, or a new mood in society, or an unexpected technological breakthrough, to begin to change the moral climate' (p.310).

Structured in five sections: 'The Solitary Self', 'Consequences: the Market and the State', 'Can We Still Reason Together?', 'Being Human', and 'The Way Forward', the first section makes for powerful reading as Sacks defines social isolation as 'an objective condition, usually defined as a lack of contact with family, friends, community and society' (p.30). Published on the 12 March 2020 as Northern Europe and the USA began to be swept into a Covid storm, Sacks's diagnosis of a societal epidemic in the form of loneliness and isolation takes on an unprecedented significance.

Without forcing an anachronistic reading, if morality begins with individual change '[t]o be concerned with the welfare of others... To give. To volunteer. To listen. To smile. To be sensitive, generous, caring' (p.323), perhaps the experience of multiple forms of lockdown has shown a hitherto hidden or unleashed common good within nations that the state has, to a certain extent, facilitated. Based upon *Morality*, however, fear for health and survival cannot be drivers of the common good even if a communal responsibility to protect health services and save lives has been articulated in political rhetoric during the pandemic. In a message released for Shavuot in May 2020 Sacks, addressing members of the British Jewish community, appeals to the value behind action that is motivated by *hesed* (loving kindness) by 'doing good for people in a way that they have no claim on you', which is different from action motivated by the demands of justice and the requirements of law. On Sacks's terms, such 'horizontal responsibility' is compelling with or without reference to a 'vertical responsibility'.

Pre-empting the inevitable question 'Which Morality?' to which he dedicates an entire chapter, Sacks is particularly insightful that facing four broad blocks known as a moral tradition, comprising 'civic ethics, the ethic of duty, codes of honour and the morality of love', the individual is either overwhelmed or perceives morality 'a matter of relative or subjective

choice' (p.283), whereby the common good is not even an afterthought. Perhaps too poetical for some, firmer footing is found using a linguistic analogy in which a 'We' is formulated within 'a community united' through shared language 'before there can be an expressive 'I' (p.284). An alternative logic is also found whereby politics functions at the level of 'freedom from' whereas morality 'gives us 'freedom to' – to dance the choreography of interpersonal grace and be part of the music of loving commitment to the lives of others' (p.283). The strength of this argument is that it finds expression even if it is not predicated upon a vertical responsibility.

Sacks's *Morality*, read in the light of his death, is a timely and poignant reminder of the need to continually develop a vision and vocabulary of the common good that is rooted in the reality it seeks to transform while reaching a general audience. His legacy is found in precisely that.

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