

**Beverly Parsons, Lovely Dhillon, and  
Matt Keene (Eds.). (2020). *Visionary Evaluation  
for a Sustainable, Equitable Future*. Charlotte,  
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**Reviewed by Brian Case, Carleton University**

In stark contrast to the imminent dystopia often depicted in today's media, *Visionary Evaluation for a Sustainable, Equitable Future* brings the reader some much-needed optimism. Through engaging, Socratic dialogue, readers are ushered into 2030, a year the authors have designated the *Anthropocene*, where anthropogenic ecological and climate change have nearly reached a point of no return on Earth. Coincidentally, this benchmark coincides with the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) conclusion, in which collective learning, knowledge sharing, and capacity building are expected to contribute to stronger evaluation systems and practices. This alignment is reflected in introductory chapters (Chapters 1–3) which set the stage using self-reflective interchange, in an attempt to find solutions to the world's most difficult challenges. Challenges such as the trend toward mass extinction, technological advancement and artificial intelligence, and environmental sustainability and equity are explored in detail, using collaborative evaluation and transnational partnership as potential means to overcome these obstacles for the planet and its peoples in this new epoch.

Contributing authors begin their chapters by illustrating detailed, critical accounts of real-world challenges in our present day (2020), investigating social protection, environmental justice, law, business (corporate responsibility), health, financial investing, transportation, education, and design. Using the flexibility of the fictional 2030 setting, the authors artfully walk the reader through their prospective stories of reconciliation and address possible shortcomings, operationalizing evaluation and cross-discipline partnership as catalysts to overcome associated challenges.

To demonstrate what visionary evaluation could look like, the authors use familiar contemporary events to situate their story in the 2030 storyline. In the example of corporate social responsibility (Chapter 7, by Eric Barela and Bob Willard), real-life examples are drawn upon to lay the foundation for their 2030 vision, where corporations see the value in achieving the “triple bottom line . . . profit, planet, and people” (p. 130). Each chapter closes with a summary of where the world stands in 2030 should the trajectory proposed by the author(s) be followed, essentially offering readers of this decade their take on a theory of change for each respective sector, offering a roadmap to positive change. While the chances of such chains of events becoming realized may seem slim at present, the authors

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are sanguine about the prospects of a bright future, recognizing and embracing inevitable shifts in technology and social norms throughout the journey.

The authors hail mainly from the United States, and the research and resources used to frame their visions are typically from American sources and tend to reflect the desire for a paradigm shift in that country, subsuming such themes as a shift away from the US military-industrial complex using such examples as the deployment of field hospitals for regions in crisis (Chapter 4, by Lateefah Simon et al.) and the replacement of “justice and truth” with “power and money” within the legal system (Chapter 6, by Ellen Lawton and Joe Scantlebury). These themes are certainly applicable in the Canadian and international contexts. Canada has struggled with the reality of its diminishing status as a nation of “peacekeepers” with its entrance into the war in Afghanistan, and political power struggles have continuously led to inaction in the areas of justice and truth (e.g., reconciliation with Indigenous communities, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the Canadian Forces [see [Deschamps, 2015](#); [Senate Canada, 2019](#)], violence against Indigenous women and girls). Multinational corporations could take valuable lessons from the approach to corporate social responsibility, environmental justice (Chapter 5, by Kent H. Redford et al.) and legal justice in holding oil and gas firms, manufacturing firms, and other destructive industries to account, while offering guidance to regulators, corporate executives, and evaluators alike to increase social and environmental welfare and retain significant profit while doing so. Mexico’s Quintana Roo government’s purchasing of reef insurance, to be shortly followed by a non-profit doubling down on this reef protection, is an intriguing approach to a public-philanthropic, cross-sector vision to maximizing environmental protection, while safeguarding one of the more vital industries to their economy—tourism ([Reuters, 2021](#)). *Visionary Evaluation* opens the reader’s mind to the possibilities for change through evaluation and transnational partnerships.

Especially notable is the inclusion of a vision for the design sector (Chapter 12, by Cameron Norman). The author promotes design not only as an area of creative practice (e.g., digital design, system design, automobile design) but also as a form of evaluative inquiry (e.g., the design of a public program). Critical to the process of visionary evaluation is the consideration of people and the planet throughout the design process, and how rethinking design can lead to more sustainable and equitable programs and products. Among the many topics pondered in this brave new world, the idea of integrating design into all areas of inquiry—especially evaluation—shows the desire and trend toward developing creative solutions to the many challenges we face today. This chapter on design emphasizes the need for creative, out-of-the-box thinking when approaching questions of this magnitude that have persisted, unanswered, for centuries—a fitting notion given the creative approach to visionary evaluative thinking presented in this book.

*Visionary Evaluation* goes beyond developing narratives of the ideal situations by producing a “checklist”—a series of *yes-no* questions that can be woven into one’s evaluation framework to ensure the evaluation is aligned with the visionary evaluation principles detailed in the closing chapter (Chapter 15, by the

volume editors). The questions demand self-reflection as one designs, executes, or analyzes an evaluation, while leaving the reader with a useful tool to add to their evaluation arsenal and, perhaps more importantly, a much-needed sense of hope.

The biggest takeaway from this book is the necessity for evaluators to self-reflect and look for collaborative methods to overcome challenges. This means developing the ability to recognize one's values and assumptions, question their equitability and sustainability in the face of opportunity for evidence-based change, and seek to develop a global, holistic approach to change.

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