

# Spirituality and Corporate Social Responsibility

Interpenetrating Worlds

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# Introduction

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## **Why Spirituality and Corporate Social Responsibility?**

Following decades in which spirituality in the workplace has been a taboo subject, a new interest in it has arisen in both academic and business circles (see Bolman and Deal, 2001; Conger, 1997; Defoore and Renesch, 1995; Fox, 1994; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; and Mitroff and Denton, 1999a, 1999b). In these writings spirituality is about something new; these authors use it in a markedly contemporary sense. Today's spirituality, Biberman and Whitty (1997) argue, brings a postmodern perspective on working life. This perspective is postmodern in that it goes beyond the modern suspicion of religion, but it also encompasses something broader than religion, even if it returns us to some familiar religious questions. The new spirituality raises questions informed by scholarship and by the desire to develop an understanding which can be integrated into other contemporary thinking.

Mainstream management discourse still dismisses the new interest in spirituality as swimming against the tide of the typically modern concerns of today's organizations, which, for the most part, not only remain disinterested in spirituality, but are also resistant to its inclusion in corporate life (Grant, O'Neil and Stephens, 2004; Gull and Doh, 2004; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004). This book challenges that exclusion.

## **The Religious Foundation of Secularism**

The exclusion of spirituality and moral sentiments from organizational life has a long history. Since the Industrial Revolution, numerous writers have raised questions about the impact of corporations on the quality of life and their tendency to create 'dark satanic mills', as opposed to what Schumacher (1973),

for instance, would see as an economic system geared to real human needs. The exclusion of the spiritual dimension from modern secular organizations goes to the heart of today's debate about the ultimate direction of capitalism. It may well be that present-day critics, in breaking the taboo against raising spiritual issues, constitute just one more protest against that direction. On the other hand, they may be something more significant – the first step towards a transformation. Either way, the writings in question raise central issues about the nature of the economic system.

The contemporary aversion towards things spiritual in corporate life can be traced back to early-modern religious ructions in European history, which appear to have motivated the rise of rationalistic secular society. Undoubtedly the present orthodoxy, which regards the separation of religion from public institutions as a prerequisite for both rational management and individual freedom, insists that religion now remain in the confines of the individual's private world and not invade the public realm of work and economy. The secular assumptions about religion implicit in neo-classical economics sprang from early liberal thinking about choice and freedom. The primary concern of liberal philosophers, according to Eisenach (1981), was not to insulate civil government from religious convictions; rather, it arose out of the Protestant impulse to banish religious hierarchies from public life and to limit their influence to guiding individual believers' private relationship with God. This cultural shift paved the way for religious tolerance through an expansion of private freedoms incorporating not only religion, but also freedom of speech, property and association.

The proponents of these private freedoms did not intend to exclude religion from cultural and institutional organizations, but to free privatized religious observance from institutional control. The later banishing of religious concerns from organizational life expresses the subsequent influence of the 'disenchanted' scientific world-view of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Social scientists also eschewed paradigms that invited spiritual questions as they struggled to gain legitimacy in an intellectual milieu dominated by the natural sciences. This disenchanted view moulded conceptions of 'rational' management. First, the former was seen as a prerequisite for dispensing with the bias and superstitions of religion; second, it accommodated rational legal structures which rewarded merit, not religious persuasion.

This shift coincided with the rise of Western European power, which diffused it well beyond that continent. Secularism is now an established part of

the culture of global capitalism and, as such, it surfaces in a variety of cultural contexts. Secularism manifests globally in shopping malls, workplaces, business and government organizations, and in many homes. In these milieux there is very little to suggest that there is more to life than a hedonic journey.

Together with religion's symptomatic absence from these key domains, we see how the modern period has maintained a parallel stream of thinkers who have pathologized religion and spirituality, notably Freud (religious belief as neurotic symptom), Marx (as a form of mass stupefaction) and, more recently, Richard Dawkins (2006) who has polemicized against theistic belief as 'the god delusion'. These critiques have presented formidable challenges, particularly to mainstream religions. Despite this, the resilience of religious adherence points to the limits of rationalism's power; the transformation of any major institution rarely results from outsiders attacking its core positions, particularly positions which its adherents feel obliged to defend. Change is certainly occurring in some contemporary religious institutions, but through far less adversarial means, while religiosity, as such, persists. As Berger (1998: 782) notes, '[m]ost of the world today is as religious as it ever was and, in a good many locales, more religious than ever'.

A simple explanation for why such attacks fail might be that they do not address the core questions and needs that draw people to religions in the first place. These core questions evoke the enduring conundrums of the human condition – ubiquitous ones that are collectively experienced and of public significance. People directly encounter recurring dilemmas in identifying and pursuing the good life; these dilemmas go to the heart of the new thinking about spirituality and have important implications for how we perceive the current direction of global capitalism. Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) explore the possibility of emancipation from instrumental rationality, the dominant ethos of corporate life that isolates individuals, creating tensions between how we live our lives in the private sphere, on the one hand, and in the organizational sphere on the other. They argue that these spheres *interpenetrate* and that we need to work towards a coherent relationship between the instrumental–technical and moral–practical dimensions of social life. This interpenetration also occurs, as David Whyte (2000: 15) suggests, because '[w]ork ... is not something we do, but a great pilgrimage of identity by which we discover larger and larger perspectives on our self and the world we inhabit'. Issues of work and identity attract the most fundamental and timeless questions, such as 'Who are we?' and 'Why are we all here?'.

The new openness to spiritual questions in management and organizational thinking, which announced itself in the late 1980s, follows changes in the way other disciplines began to think about these questions. Whilst some management authors attribute the shift to factors such as the changing age composition of the workforce, the loss of community, changes in religious institutions and the growth of interest in non-European religious ideas, these elements seem to divert attention from a deeper change, one that has been emerging for over a century and encompasses far more than the sphere of religious thinking. It reflects a shift in how we think about all human endeavours in the context of growing scepticism towards the assumptions of modernity.

The contemporary interest in spirituality is just one of the fruits of this new sensibility, which many writers flag – *faute de mieux* – with the prefix ‘post’ attached to the name of an intellectual framework now under critical review. Terms such as ‘postmodernity’ and ‘post-structuralism’ signal a deepening suspicion that modernity can never deliver on its promise of liberation from suffering. Science and technology have already provided significant material benefits, and yet we remain far from fulfilled. Thus, despite many nations’ attaining relative affluence, as Hamilton (2003, 2005) points out, we find that this success has failed to deliver its promised emancipation; despite our apparent progress, we may be no happier than our ancestors.

The prospect at the beginning of the twenty-first century, although still full of possibilities, does not evoke the same optimism that earlier generations espoused. The present century contrasts with the last in that we now temper our commitment to technical progress with insights into its limits. It often only brings us fleeting satisfactions at the cost of terrifying risks (Beck, 1992). Contemporary science has not dispelled our ignorance, although it has revealed an even stranger universe – one in which old assumptions unravel and even greater mysteries replace them. This vastly enhanced knowledge *about* the world and the power that it bestows has left us far from secure; in fact, it has brought ‘an age of anxiety’ and ‘the risk society’ in its wake. ‘Modernity has developed alongside an extensive desacralisation of social life,’ Mellor and Schilling (1993: 411) point out, ‘yet has failed to replace religious certainties with scientific certainties.’ In recognizing increased risks associated with modernity, we no longer feel comforted by its assurances, particularly as security is one of its key emancipatory promises. In late modernity, life is increasingly fragmented and accelerating with consequent effects on our sense of self. According to Anthony Giddens (1990: 98):

*Ontological security and routine are intimately connected, via the pervasive influence of habit ... The predictability of the (apparently)*

*minor routines of day-to-day life is deeply involved with a sense of psychological security. When such routines are shattered – for whatever reason – anxieties come flooding in, and even very firmly founded aspects of the personality of the individual may become stripped away and altered.*

Thus, despite the benefits of a century of modernization, our hearts are not at rest, and collectively there remains a familiar spiritual longing, one expressed by the question: 'Is there not more to life than this?'

At the heart of this question lies a re-evaluation of the quest of modernity. Willmott (2000) suggests that the modern 'purchasing' of relief from existential anxiety through the practices and institutions of modernity has, to some extent, entailed a 'sequestration of experience'. This transaction, according to Giddens (1991: 156), enables modernity to be complicit in 'an exclusion of social life from fundamental existential issues which raise central moral dilemmas for human beings'. The desire to transcend these existential concerns is not new: the legend of the Buddha's life reflects the very same themes of transcending the human condition. After hearing a prophecy that his then infant son would either be a king or a saint, the Buddha's father expressed a very modern anxiety in his attempts to prevent his child taking an interest in spiritual things by shielding him from experiences of sickness, old age and death (Bubna-Litic, 2000). Despite his wealth and power, the Buddha's father failed to keep him from confronting these core existential questions, which visit every human life.

As Bauman (1998) points out, the modern pretence that life is amenable to sharp distinctions and definitional precision cannot be sustained, and so any attempt to sequester aspects of the human condition inevitably fails. It seems that new technology creates new problems (such as isolation, lack of exercise and obesity); we cannot escape the pain of inhabiting bodies. To take another example: as Palmer (2006) suggests in *Toxic Childhood*, modern life is having a negative influence on children's development. Once again, we must face dilemmas around rapid technological development and social adaptation to it.

In short, the renewed interest in spiritual questions is a response to these failures of modernity to transcend the human condition. Yet we need to be cautious about trading one promise for another. As Žižek (2001) reminds us, we need to be suspicious of all promises of transcendence. The spirituality of

transcendence may not differ in kind from today's antidepressant drugs which cultivate 'an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated progress [of late capitalism]' (Zizek, 2001: 13).

The various re-evaluations of modernity do not speak with one voice, and, according to Charlene Spretnak (1999), their antecedents lie in a number of social movements that date back to the eighteenth century. In the 1960s, however, many of these ideas resurfaced in a conglomeration of anti-modern sub-cultural movements which Theodore Roszak (1969) dubbed 'the counter culture'. This composite social movement comprised a variety of social experiments which sought radical alternatives to modern life. A significant theme was renewal of religious sentiment which, as Roszak (1972: xx) suggests, was:

*... not that of the churches; not the religion of Belief and Doctrine, which is, I think the last fitful flicker of the divine fire before it sinks into darkness. Rather, I mean religion in its perennial sense. The Old Gnosis. Vision born of transcendent knowledge. Mysticism, if you will – though this has become too flabby and unrefined a word to help us discriminate among those rhapsodic powers of the mind from which so many traditions of worship and philosophical reflection flow. My purpose is to discover how this, the essential religious impulse, was exiled from our culture, what effect this has had on the quality of our life and course of our politics and what part other energies of transcendence must now play in saving urban-industrial society from self-annihilation.*

Despite the obvious naivety of many of these efforts, valuable experience was gained which, according to Lattin (2003), has since continued to diffuse into mainstream society. These themes have now clearly surfaced in recent management literature on spirituality.

Despite Roof's (1999: 74) suggestion that '[w]e stand much too close in time to grasp fully this transition,' the general thrust of the change can be understood as one of perspective. Almost half a century after the 1960s we can see the change more clearly; and we have lived with modernity long enough to be more than suspicious of its pretensions. We know its game and are no longer seduced. The new sensibility carries a number of consequences, the first of which is precisely our distrust of modernity's promises, and now we hear growing demands for ameliorative action, not only from those it has marginalized, but also, by those much closer to its centre. The second consequence of the new sensibility is a renewed openness to critically re-examining premodern and even romantic solutions.

'Romanticism' denotes a broad, long-lived strand of opposition to disembodied scientific knowledge. It embraces a distinctive revision of the central human project in which typically modern knowing – predictive and thus controlling – is seen as incomplete. The romantic sensibility proposes that there are other ways of knowing, particularly knowing as a way of being in the world and embracing the mysterious nature of life. Recent romantic approaches emphasize that the experience of our embodiment brings with it a presence that is a 'given' in our sense of being, which David Abram (1997: 65) suggests is no isolated being, but 'inter-being' with nature:

*[W]e gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating web-work of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies – supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granitic slopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen, imperturbable wind.*

This way of flesh and shell is linked to the romantic contention that the modalities of understanding the world offered by modernity fail to *touch* us, and they are unlikely ever to do so. The late Douglas Adams (1995) cleverly dramatizes this limitation in his science fiction fantasy *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, in which he imagines that a race of highly intelligent beings in another world have built a super-computer of unparalleled power in the history of the galaxy. The computer, called 'deep thought', can be seen as a teleological end or ultimate artefact of scientific achievement. One day its owners ask it to answer a human question, *the big question* 'about life, the universe, and everything'. After several thousand years of processing, the intelligent inhabitants of the galaxy eagerly assemble to hear the computer reluctantly pronounce that the answer is ... 42. The assembly is hugely disappointed with this answer, and whilst we can laugh at the absurdity of such a meaningless answer there is a powerful allegorical dimension regarding the impotence of *any* scientific answer to satisfy the embodied human desire for meaning. For the very objective nature of scientific explanations is fundamentally separate from the experiential and embodied reality of being human.

Philosophers have not overlooked this limitation, as a similar problem arises with art. As Gadamer (2000: xxii–xxiii) explains,

*... scholarly research pursued by the 'science of art' is aware from the start that it can neither replace nor surpass the experience of art. The*



*fact [is] that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way.*

This critical reexamination of romanticism, however, is very different from the old adversarial and rejecting stance of modernity. Critics doubt the overenthusiastic promises of romanticism, just as they voice similar concerns about the emancipatory promises of modernity. This does not necessarily entail cynicism, but rather, as Charlene Spretnak (1999: 1) suggests, ‘fresh perceptions and creative alternatives ... where previously deadlock and despair held sway’. My own research on Buddhist insight suggests that spiritual experiences are rarely complete in themselves, but require a significant amount of reflection and a foundation in everyday practice. Through constant revisitation, a growing confidence arises, and from this confidence comes the wisdom we associate with mature spirituality.

Modernity’s sequestration of human experience forecloses alternative ways of knowing – ways that offer new sources of wisdom. In this context, a new perspective on spirituality offers a fresh approach to central existential questions, and, for this reason, there is a philosophical parallel in the status of personal and private knowledge as contrasted with the public, objective kind. Michael Polyani (1962) recognized the importance of personal participation in objective knowledge, but for spirituality this distinction is something of a misnomer; as David Chalmers (1996) points out, fundamental questions about the nature of our personal private experience – the phenomenon of consciousness – and its relationship to the physical brain remain unanswered.

What we understand to be ‘spiritual’ arises from the ordinary experiences of our lives. It could be in the form of nagging doubts, which might wake us at night and perplex us with the seeming meaninglessness of life. Spiritual questions might arise from an unbidden event, one which changes our lives in ways outside our control. This may happen without warning, perhaps with a screech of brakes or with an unexpected phone call that disturbs the stillness of the night. Such events remind us of the possibility that at any time, no matter who we are, our lives are subject to an existential uncertainty, which we can neither conceive of in advance nor plan against. Whether it be an accidental death, a cancer diagnosis or a masked assailant, suddenly everything that was once taken for granted is no longer possible.

Catalysing events are not the only source of such questions; some people find spiritual questions arise unexpectedly, apparently for no reason, leaving

them touched by life in a way they are at a loss to explain. Overcome with tears of joy, a completely new vista opens before them, for which they find poetry more useful than philosophy. Such experiences are mysterious; for instance, the poet Elisabeth Bishop, then aged seven, was reading a magazine in a dentist's waiting room when she suddenly experienced a profound intimacy with life which set her life on an entirely new course. As she puts it in her poem, 'The Waiting Room', for her 'nothing stranger had ever happened ... nothing stranger could ever happen' (Bishop, 1979).

Whatever brings these questions to the surface, they are alien to modern conceptions of corporate life in which questions of life and death and the sacred are banished. Following his heart attack, Burkard Sievers (1990) describes how he was personally confronted by how his experience was 'diabolized' – in the original Graeco-Roman sense of being split off or dissociated – from his work life. Mellor and Shilling (1993: 419) suggest that a consequence of modernity is 'a general privatisation of meaning and experience, leaving individuals alone to construct and maintain values to guide them through life and death, a situation prone to reality-threatening ontological and existential anxieties'.

For people faced with this isolation and collective division, spiritual questions hold great potential for nourishing and rewarding relationships. It is through spiritual encounters that some people learn there are solutions. The term 'self-actualization', coined by Abraham Maslow (1971), arose out of his interview material and implied 'seeing sacredness in all things'. For him, this process amounted to the actualization of the highest human potential. In the form of peak experiences available through cultivation, however, self-actualization did not necessarily create people who were well suited to modern institutional life.

The sudden surge of writers interested in revisiting spirituality in corporate life does not always reflect an understanding of a broader historical context, such as the one I have been attempting here. Similarly, critical reviewers of the literature, according to Biberman and Coetzer (2005), point to a number of ways in which spirituality can be misused. These critiques pick up on some old themes. The first is that spirituality is a form of delusion and functions in a psychological sense to avoid or deny reality. As Marx observed, 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people' (Marx and Engels, 1982: 42).

The second criticism of spirituality in work life is that organizations may use their power to impose spiritual or religious beliefs on employees. The third concern is that spirituality could be used as another form of control by which management might manipulate employees. In this context the latter are understood as exemplifying Foucault's (1994) formally sovereign and normatively self-disciplining subjects who, on the basis of internalized 'truths', become motivated and compliant self-managing employees.

There is no doubt that spirituality is susceptible to such abuses, but that does not refute the key message of the new literature, that we might find new ways of working with our vital existential questions in the context of our working lives. As much as we need to be aware of the pitfalls, workplace spirituality can prove emancipatory and enable individuals to explore a new relationship with work.

The literature also attracts the criticism that it lacks clarity around the meaning of spirituality, which can seem so broad as to be almost useless (Brown, 2003). This criticism fails to recognize that the term is not being used to denote something, but rather to name a dialogic space (see Hattam, 2004). A dialogic space is not simply a dyadic encounter, but rather a space inhabited by different voices and different languages (Bakhtin, 1981). In this sense, the dialogic space of spirituality sets its disparate concepts in a conversation with modernity to form something new, which is informed by a dialogic interaction between the corresponding disciplines. It is through this process that spirituality is undergoing a metamorphosis to something which will unfold in time. Yet we can already discern that it is no longer synonymous with religion, or some perennial truth, but rather invokes a new openness to our interiority. This openness invites in religion too, in that it reframes it as just one contribution to how we think about fundamental issues that confront human existence in general. It allows us to meld modern critical analysis with personal experience to produce, for example, a 'critical subjectivity' (Reason and Rowan, 1981). This perspective honours our capacity to reflect critically on our experiences and engages with the hermeneutics of how we interpret our experiences. Hermeneutics has long problematized the interpretation and meaning of texts and arguably can be applied to narrative accounts of experience as well.

The 'spiritual' dimension, understood as a new openness, is a novel artefact of contemporary challenges to modernity. But it is also born out of modernity's relationship with religion, as modernity has been defined *inter alia* as *other* to the premodern world of religion – particularly Christianity. The

openness of present-day spirituality rejects this old family feud and proposes forms of reconciliation. For example, Biberman and Coetzer (2005) suggest the appreciative-inquiry approach for it. However, reconciliation will not occur unless both sides are prepared to give up some ground. As Foucault (1970, 1972) pointed out, different bodies of knowledge do not simply posit the real existence of the objects they purport to describe and theorize, but also prescribe the system of rules and practices which circumscribe what is studied and how it is studied. The suspicion that Foucault and others express is that all discourse thereby intrinsically sets up relations of power. Yet power relations not only inhere in practices of normalization; they also manifest in the practices of *liberation* (Foucault, 1988).

In this sense we can acknowledge that the worlds of work and of the spirit interpenetrate and that the future of the most powerful is bound up with the future of the weak. The groundswell for change comes from the increasing recognition of interpenetration – inter-being – which leads both sides to pose the central ethical question, ‘What is it good to be?’. The new ethos thus has deep implications for how we live, work and organize; it implies a new order of things in ways that few have imagined.

## Corporate Social Responsibility

‘The movement of the [sacred]<sup>1</sup> is full of power,’ declares the Chinese classic, the *I Ching* (the *Book of Changes*) (Wilhelm and Baynes, 1951: 6). This power arises from ‘the primal depths of the universe’ and reaches its potential only when it accords with ‘what is right’. These observations about the nature of human affairs, written millennia ago, refer to the creative energy that can arise when people touch on the sacred or spiritual. Some corporate managers have not overlooked this potential, according to Mitroff and Denton (1999b: 83) who ‘believed strongly that organizations must harness the immense spiritual energy within each person in order to produce world-class products and services’. History is full of examples of changes wrought because a sense of what was right moved people to action. Yet there is no definition of the sacred or specification of what is right in the *I Ching*, which leaves its readers to discover what spirituality means through dialogic reflection on their own lives in the light of the text. What is right for any reader depends on the context of his or her own life. The longevity of this Chinese classic may rest on its avoidance of

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1 Wilhelm Baynes’s translation uses the word ‘heaven’ here, but ‘sacred’ better captures the intention of the work.

rigid principles – its acknowledgement that individuals' lives are complex and that their actions mesh with collective processes in subtle ways. Harmony is a key trope in the *I Ching*; it recommends that we realize it in all the complexities of our lives.

Corporate social responsibility – now the subject of a burgeoning literature – also rests on a sense of doing what is right, which no set of rules can express. As Zeller (2006) reminds us, for instance, carefully crafted ethical principles in force at Enron amounted to very little in practice. Many people seek their understanding of what is right through deep inquiry into questions concerning the sacred or spirituality. Spiritual inquiry, at its best, goes beyond the creation of a set of rules for living by and challenges us to meet the open-ended question 'What is it good to be?'. This meeting occurs at the most fundamental level, the level of being. As Charles Taylor (1989) has argued, selfhood and moral action are 'inextricably intertwined themes'.

This relationship informs the pursuit of corporate social responsibility, which contradicts the neo-classical economic claim, exemplified by Milton Friedman's work, that the sole purpose of a corporation is to serve the financial interests of its owners. In pointing to the lack of rigour in discussions about the 'social responsibilities of business', Friedman criticizes the tendency to reify the corporation as something separate from its constituent parts. For most legal purposes a corporation is an artificial person, but it differs from a human person in every other way; it cannot be said to have responsibilities, even in this vague sense, he argues. Yet Friedman assumes that corporate success arises from idealized arms-length transactions – the stuff of neo-classical economics – between these various parts. This way of looking at the social world also sees a corporation as created through a nexus of contracts (Williamson, 1990), one negotiated around established property rights – a central plank of liberal philosophy since John Locke that neo-classical economics relies on. An economy and society based on contract are in themselves democratic, neo-classicals argue, since they support the sovereignty of the individual consumer. However, the doctrine (to say nothing of policy based on it) reinforces the distance between individuals and obscures the degree to which individual consciousness is part of social consciousness. As Naomi Klein suggests in her recent book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), any social system fails when human relations break down, and a successful economic system depends on the integrity of its actors. A successful market system requires the ethical and responsible operation of markets, and that this ethos informs corporate organization.

Nowadays managers are coming to see the unrealism inherent in the neo-classical view of the firm. Corporations operate in an economic environment characterized by complex, multiple linkages which affect value creation and thus profit. Very little commerce is based on the simple market transactions that informed early economic thinking, before mass advertising and the consumer society. These days consumer choices are known to involve far more complex interactions, including participation in marketer-created symbolic fantasies, rather than rational evaluation of a product's worth.

The close link between products and identity is not new; back in the 1950s, Levy (1959) recognized the symbolic importance of consumption. Recent research (Capra, 2002) shows how complex the vital linkages between elemental activities in the economy are, which is hardly surprising given the dynamic, interactive and multifaceted nature of social life today. Recognition of this complexity reveals a dimension which extends Porter's (1980, 1985) notion of strategy based on an isolated value-chain. Porter (1980, 1985), in focusing on competitive advantage, narrowed the complexity of the strategy process, overlooking the potential for a multidimensional *matrix* view of value-adding activities. Linkages may not only occur vertically, but also horizontally and diagonally across a multiplicity of value-chains. In this new conception, string-like linkages can create value for a corporation in unpredictable ways. This cooperative perspective suggests that the locus of control does not lie entirely with management, but in networks of relationships. These networks explain the impact of relatively small non-government organizations such as Greenpeace on large multinational corporations and how its strategic and symbolic actions can have an immense impact on public perceptions.

This complex systems-view of the firm does not fit easily with neo-classical assumptions about rational decision-making, in which individual agents manifest as independent entities guided by an economic calculus in turn designed to maximize their wealth in a conceptually simple context. Rather, we now see organizational outcomes emerging out of a dynamic interplay in a complex and interdependent system. From the social responsibility perspective, the interests of shareholders cannot be neatly divided off from those of other stakeholders; all these interests co-arise in a complex, dynamic process. This process-based paradigm refutes the essentialization of the individual by highlighting interdependence in a network of hidden connections, which Capra (2002) suggests link even the most primitive cells to the global economy. The spiritual thus interpenetrates the consciousness of corporations, whose survival depends on a vast web of circumstances and whose existence arises

not only from financial capital, but also natural, social and symbolic 'capital'. These new categories of capital in today's managerial thought represent attempts to grapple with the several aspects of the multilayered context which now confronts corporate management.

At its heart, a multidimensional perspective challenges proponents of corporate social responsibility to develop new ways of thinking about what is right, by moving from what it is good to do, to what it is good to be. Corporate social responsibility thus demands an open inquiry into spiritual questions. Clearly, such an inquiry problematizes the secular divide as it uncovers the shared underlying assumptions of the traditionally secular and religious realms respectively – assumptions on which the authority of traditional religious institutions once rested, but which have also legitimated a secular and impersonal society that encourages the pursuit of material wealth at the expense of human well-being and nature.

The new wave of questioning suggests that many of the old conceptual divisions are false, that human consciousness does not transcend the body, but is shaped critically by our physical nature and our bodily experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). The new spiritual questioning reopens the possibility of transcendence by questioning the assumed limits on what it means to be human. We are now free to draw on the wisdom that runs through almost all religions – a wisdom that counsels humility in the face of the mystery of life and an acknowledgement of our deep interconnection with the universe.

Technology has merely extended the shoreline of knowledge. For many astronauts, the direct seeing into the immensity of the universe at first hand obliged them to speak about the spiritual. Ultimately, the recognition of how deeply we are immersed in this mystery prepares us for far less pretentious projects than those spawned by the European Enlightenment – ones that embrace a more practical, 'make-do' approach, are more humble in their aims and are more communitarian. The new approach recognizes that our individual or group worlds are not independent, but interpenetrating. In this interpenetrating world, the old divide between self and other no longer convinces.

The essays collected here set out to renegotiate the political divide that secularization sets up in the culture of global capitalism. They do not call for a return to premodern political structures, but seek to examine spirituality and corporate social responsibility through the metaphor of interpenetration.

The various chapters seek to explore the interrelationship and interplay of what have previously been treated as isolated spheres. Today's exploration of spirituality is not ready for sharp definitions, and so, like the *I Ching*, I choose to leave spirituality itself underspecified, allowing its content to unfold in what follows. This decision emanates from my own long experience of spiritual practice and reflection, and an understanding that modernity's pretensions to precision, while appropriate in some contexts, do not always apply in the social sciences.

We are still engaged in a multidiscursive struggle that is beginning to recognize that corporate social responsibility interconnects with our spirituality and vice versa. The essays in this book draw upon important contemporary insights with roots in a variety of traditions.

## About This Book

Much academic work goes beyond the call of duty, and the contributions to this volume in particular bear a gift. Almost every contributor to it has followed 'the road less travelled', giving something more of themselves than academic life usually requires. The essays collected here offer more than intellectual reflections; they have come about through each contributor's personal inquiry and practice. Inspired by contrasting traditions including Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism as well as non-religious ones such as humanism, each essay grapples with truth which, Alain Badiou (2003) suggests, is where something happens which does not fit with our knowledge. For many of the contributors to this book, their understanding comes from such an encounter – an encounter that precipitated a foundational shift in themselves; the authors represent a growing international fellowship which has found that the human experience of inter-being, interiority and sacredness does not fit within modern science. Each contribution reflects a positive scepticism about the shibboleths of modern academic thinking.

## ISSUES

Part I of this book consists of chapters which explore the broader issues of spirituality, organizational life and corporate social responsibility.

In Chapter 1 Pankaj Mishra contrasts the modern ideals and training of secular intellectuals with the spectacular mishaps their elite has wrought in



American foreign policy. Mishra wonders if there is not something awry in the logocentric preoccupations of Western intellectuals who, despite their erudition and professional dedication, signally lack wisdom. Their unwisdom points to the distortions of the culture of modernity, with all its rationalistic pretensions, and leads to an instrumental view of humanity. This culture fosters arrogance towards history and other cultural points of view; it assumes that the rational human will can and should shape the lives of others. Mishra reminds us how alien this attitude has been to the great spiritual intellectuals who have changed the course of history. These intellectuals have wrought positive social changes through their courage, sacrifice and adherence to what they believed was right. Their political *modus operandi*, Mishra argues, has respected human interdependence, to which their own spirituality has borne witness. The greatness of leaders like Mandela and Gandhi arose from how they themselves manifested in the world. Their presence, awareness and humility won the day, not political calculations and smart strategies.

Charles Birch's and David Paul's essay (Chapter 2) builds on the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr and Charles Hartshorne, who have explored different perspectives on Christianity. Birch and Paul question the mechanistic conception of reality at the heart of modern science. Drawing on Whitehead's realization that in order to understand any specific phenomenon we need to understand the whole context, they propose an alternative view of science which seeks understanding in relationship to the whole. If we want to understand lips, we need to widen our research to the physiological structure of the face. If we were to stop at the face, however, our understanding would be incomplete, as a more complete understanding would need to continue on to higher levels of the system, including the nature of gender relations, as lips are not only used for eating, but also for expressing emotion verbally and non-verbally through facial expressions, and, of course, for kissing, all of which might explain aspects of their physiology. We might then ask how these various uses developed over human evolutionary history. As we extend an inquiry in this way, we see into the interconnection that links all parts of the system. Birch and Paul explain this interconnection as dynamic: humans are constantly in a process of becoming. To be human is to be forever in a process of becoming something different, just as lips change with how they are used, how they are decorated and how we, as their owners and witnesses, feel. Ultimately, we humans can never fully understand ourselves in isolation from our myriad interconnections with the universe we inhabit. This has consequences for management, which Birch and Paul explore, including the need to create meaningful work, to work towards ecological sustainability and to welcome creative adventures.

Birch's and Paul's essay contributes to our understanding of how spirituality can enrich our understanding of corporate social responsibility. By linking our subjective experience to the great web of interconnection, our perspective on corporate affairs shifts from a mechanistic view to an organic one. From a theistic standpoint, they argue, this interconnection connects us to the universal (God) – a view which resonates with many other spiritual traditions.

Winton Higgins has contributed two valuable chapters to this book. In the first of them (Chapter 3), he takes up the relationship between business and society, which has presently become a pressing issue following the large scale government economic interventions across the world. What social conditions make private enterprise possible? The theory of civil society sets forth these preconditions, which are often assumed as the normal context of capitalism. But this relationship must not be left on automatic pilot, and certainly not to the mercies of 'business fundamentalists' who cannot see it and do not respect it. For Higgins, Western society rests on moral values embodied in the institutions of civil society and democracy. If corporations evade their social responsibilities, they threaten the social conditions of their own existence. In this way, the agenda of corporate social responsibility sensitizes us to a vital form of social embeddedness that must now move to centre-stage in managerial thinking. Civil society requires engagement with organized action, and the quality of this engagement has more to do with how we manage negative behaviours, which create misery in others. In this regard, Higgins sees dangers in economics' dismal view of social relations as founded upon an acceptance of such behaviours as natural. For most spiritual traditions, these behaviours are the least highly regarded, and, in contrast, spiritual development occurs through the cultivation of other more positive natural tendencies, such as love, generosity and compassion.

Nicholas Capaldi opens his essay (Chapter 4) with an historical discussion of 'the technological project' – how civilization seeks to control nature through technology. René Descartes, in particular, significantly shaped this project; he pointed to a 'hidden structure' that undergirds the physical world. Descartes assumed that the human mind (or more importantly, the soul) is outside the physical structures of the world. This framework sets up a foundational problem, which is that the quest for control assumes that we, as humans, are outside nature's domain and therefore a special case. Transposed to human affairs, 'the technological project' sought to create an optimal society based on rational management. The project rode on the assumptions of the Enlightenment with

its disregard for religion. Capaldi explores how the collapse of Enlightenment thinking opens up new doors for the sacred and reveals a new place for Christian revelation. Revelation permeates the experience of human beings who open themselves to its possibility by learning to listen deeply. This listening is something that need not be confined to Abrahamic religious traditions; many other traditions encourage the requisite openness as well. Capaldi explores its implications for organizational life in the conviction that the technological project still beckons and that its current reconceptualization offers a new direction for management.

In Chapter 5 Buddhist philosopher and academic David Loy confronts us with certain contemporary social trends, including what he calls the 'religion of the market', which pervades the global economy promising 'salvation through consumerism'. He demonstrates the way in which the pervasive causes of human suffering that Buddhism identifies have become institutionalized in late modernity. Much of our conduct in the world springs from a deep sense of incompleteness – a pervasive experience of not being quite 'OK'. This sense of not being fulfilled drives people to actions which go far beyond their basic needs, since we create an identity out of the things we consume and display.

Loy extends his argument to collective selves, which are manifest in the form of institutions, and even nation-states, suggesting that these are also established to ameliorate the experience of lack. Just as we identify with our own stories, we also identify with collective stories about gender, race, ethnicity, nation and so on. Loy demonstrates how the nature of these collective institutions arises out of the same dysfunctional motives that infect us at the individual level: greed, ill-will and delusion. Yet he takes a new slant in which individual remedial actions are not enough; rather, we need to work towards a society which encourages generosity and compassion, virtues grounded in a wisdom that recognizes our interconnectedness.

In Chapter 6, Julie Nelson continues the theme of interconnectedness, drawing on Buddhist and feminist thinking to challenge the conventional view of the firm as an independent entity. Traditional rationalistic modes of thinking about the firm assume that its characteristics derive from what is 'inside' it – its assets, human resources and managerial skills. By contrast, the alternative way of seeing the firm highlights its relational existence, presenting it not so much as a separate entity but as a process that cannot be separated from its environment. Critics of capitalism also fall into the trap of understanding firms as non-relational and fixed in their nature. A relational view of the firm sees the

potential for firms to reflect different relations both inside *and* outside the firm. The burgeoning area of stakeholder thinking illustrates how relationships and mutuality can moderate firm behaviour.

## PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Part II of this collection explores ways in which openness to the interpenetrating nature of self and nature, self and the world can find expression in action in the workplace.

In Chapter 7 Ian Mitroff, Terri Egan, Murat Alpaslan and Sandy Green suggest that managers and management academics can glean much from the discipline of animal ‘whispering’ as they pursue their goal of producing healthy people and integrated organizations. Human interiority, while distinct from that of animals, nonetheless contains remnants from our evolutionary development, which today allows us to sustain a high level of communication (‘whispering’) with domesticated animals. We can learn a lot about our own social interactions from learning how to interact with horses and dogs in particular. If we enter into the discipline of animal whispering, we discover that animals also thrive when all their emotional and social needs are appropriately met. Whispering sets up a two-way relationship and requires close human attention to all aspects of the animal in training.

Like animals, people in organizations can lose touch with their own instinctual compass and emotional needs. When organizing people we need to recognize how to work with both sides of the relationship. Managers intent on building effective organizations need to be able to understand and respect their own interiority before they can deal with relationships at work, and this process calls on them to go beyond ‘the games people play’ and enter into genuine two-way communication. Ian Mitroff and his colleagues unfurl the various dimensions of organizational relationships, including the spiritual dimension – an experiential contact which reveals a deep interconnection between animal and human.

Dexter Dunphy’s essay (Chapter 8) relates his own attempts to engage with the spiritual questions of his life in the context of his work as a tertiary educator and management consultant. This wonderful essay reveals an engaged spiritual practice. It shows how our spirituality comes to us, bit by bit, like the strange things we find on the beach as we walk beside the great mysterious ocean. A close friend of mine creates marvellous works of art out of things she picks up

from the beach, and then she gives them to her friends. In like manner, Dunphy passes on what he finds 'on the beach', now worked into highly evocative poetry. It expresses an interiority all the more impressive for its authenticity. We are entering a period in which a new world-view is needed, he suggests – one that precisely acknowledges our deep interconnections. Competition cannot be the dominant aspect of work life, because life, as such, expresses itself through love, caring and compassion. These emotions invoke our subjective experience as a whole and demand our embodied engagement with others, including the others with whom we enter into relationship in our work. Dunphy calls on us to experience how disengagement – typically in the form of fear and greed – fails us. Hence his deeply personal poetry has important ramifications for organizational life.

In Chapter 9 Ana Maria Davila Gomez and David Crowther bring an important practical dimension to the discussion by tackling the transformative potential of management education. The latter needs to develop the whole person in a way that raises the spiritual issues which an authentic engagement with life poses – something that makes some practices central to a number of religions relevant to management education. My own research into the experience of senior Buddhist meditation teachers revealed that spiritual insights arise not just in formal meditation practices, but also from using their benefits to more fully engage with other aspects of life (Bubna-Litic, 2007). Drawing on the long tradition of humanistic education, Gomez and Crowther criticize the current narrow thrust of management development, which closes minds rather than opening them up to the human potential.

In Chapter 10 Winton Higgins discusses the ongoing project to standardize corporate social responsibility currently being undertaken by the world's premier standards body, the International Organization of Standardization (ISO). Modern standardization, a form of rule-making, evolved in the context of physical production and construction, but from the late 1980s it has broadened out to address more and more aspects of organizational life. ISO's interventions into organizational life began when it published its quality management standards (ISO 9000) in 1987, but its development of a standard for social responsibility (ISO 26000, due for publication in 2009) marks a qualitatively higher level of ambition, one with an obvious relevance to the focus of this book. Can social responsibility be reduced to a single written standard? And, if so, can it contribute to a global economic culture with real leverage into boardrooms, and thus make sustainable development more feasible? Higgins's chapter poses the fundamental question

about whether corporations are capable of generating a moral view and course of action internally, as a number of the contributors to this volume suggest, or whether social responsibility must depend on external institutional and cultural constraints powerful enough to mould corporate management's forms of calculation. In short, is social responsibility something that needs to be imposed? Standards development itself depends on a dialogic process, and the large international meetings involved in the drawn-out process of crystallizing the future standard for corporate social responsibility illustrates just how much dialogue must take place to produce a workable and authoritative standard in this new area.

## **Interpenetrating Worlds**

Collectively, these contributions reflect the growing perception that a new sensibility around spiritual questions is emerging. Some observers, such as Gordon Lynch (2007: 1) see this as being 'one of the most significant religious transitions for centuries'; however, as he expands, how we view this change depends on our perspective. Although the contributors to this book represent a variety of different spiritual perspectives there are some recurring ideas and general themes. The growing perspective on the ideas and assumptions of modernity which have had time to unfold over the past two centuries has allowed the contributors to question the value of modernity's vision in relation to spirituality from the vantage-point of hindsight. Mostly, they have engaged in the debate by questioning the governing assumptions that both explicitly and implicitly drive our modern system, which is a refreshing shift from debates on postmodernity that remain within modernity's governing assumptions – a common source of misunderstanding.

In the context of spirituality, several distinctive themes can be identified. Most prominent is the theme of interconnectedness. In the spiritual context, I prefer the term 'interpenetration' because it speaks to the experiential dimension – as a felt sense of oneness. Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993) have argued that contemporary consciousness studies need to enlarge their horizon to encompass lived human experience, which is an idea that has since gained considerable momentum. Similarly, spirituality ultimately rests in the experienced world. Poets and mystics often describe their view of the world as oneness, something the Buddhist teacher Thích Nhất Hạnh calls inter-being, from the perspective of lived experience.

The experiential sense of interpenetration puts us in touch with the world in a profound way – a way that is more easily conveyed by poetry, than logic. Blake

(1977: 128), for example, expresses this sense of how our lives interpenetrate with the world:

*I wander through each chartered street,  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.  
In every cry of every man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear.  
How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every blackening church appals;  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.  
But most through midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse  
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.*

Blake's passionate sense of social responsibility has two levels: the first speaks to an objective point of view and how our concepts and rationalities blind us to our interconnectedness, and how the plight of others inevitably has an effect on ourselves. This could not be more poignantly exemplified than by the Australian prime minister's recent apology for laws and policies which had 'inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow [indigenous] Australians'. In acknowledging the pain and suffering, Mr Rudd also declared that the apology was being made to 'remove a great stain on the soul of the nation'. Although this statement provokes some very interesting questions about what he meant by the 'soul' of the nation, the speech made it clear that Australians, despite their efforts to bury the past, have come to recognize that their future well-being is interdependent with that of the indigenous people. Rudd's use of the word 'soul' points to a more subtle level of this interconnection, one that reflects the experience of an inside-outside view, where one's sense of self is diffused into the world. This view sees human beings not as disconnected individuals, but as deeply interpenetrated by all things, including trees and stones. The fourteenth-century Islamic poet Mahmud Shabestari expresses such a perspective:

*Every particle of the world is a mirror,  
In each atom lies the blazing light  
of a thousand suns.*

*Cleave the heart of a rain-drop,  
a hundred pure oceans will flow forth ...  
Though the inner chamber of the heart is small,  
the Lord of both worlds  
gladly makes [a] home there.*

*(Trans. Harvey, 1997)*

Both aspects of interpenetration suggest a different perspective from that which has predominated in modernity since Descartes. If the modern approach to understanding the sovereign individual is suspect, this implies a shift at the very centre of our thinking. The scientific study of consciousness has yet to solve the hard problems of consciousness; however, there is growing sense that the mind can no longer be conceived independently, but rather must be viewed as a biological system rooted in bodily experience and interconnected with bodily action and interaction with other individuals (Garbarini and Adenzato, 2004). Thomas Metzinger (2003) goes further to suggest that what we understand as the self is simply a cognitive construction and is not a thing, but an ongoing process. If the notion of sovereign individual is under review, then so is modernity's promise of increasing control over life through scientific knowledge and rational management.

Mishra regards this presumption of control as a form of hubris in Western secular thinking and contrasts the sense of control of Western secular intellectuals to the humble stance of spiritual leaders, who, despite their modesty, elicit enormous popular enthusiasm for change. Mishra argues that the belief that personal attributes, such as humility and wisdom of the heart, have no distinctive advantages over expertise is one that pervades Western thinking. This assumption belies the power that elemental human drives, such as greed and hatred, have on reason. These inclinations too easily delude people into a sense of self-righteousness and control, which are ways of responding that inevitably lead to destructive consequences. We find this theme arising again with Loy's concern that avarice and antipathy have become inculcated over time into the culture of modern institutions. Underlying this challenge is the second aspect of interpenetration, and Loy suggests that the focus on the individual in modernity carries through to personal spiritual practices. Buddhist liberation is a challenge to the notion of the individual self and is based on awakening to one's sense of being a self that is *not* separate from others and the world. The cognitive default of an 'I' is a mental contrivance that, once recognized as such, no longer has the same hold over us. Loy suggests that full liberation brings forth a deep compassion that goes beyond an individual sense of self. From



this viewpoint, the theme of interpenetration and interconnection expands to include collectively created institutions which create unnecessary suffering. A further implication of Loy's writing is a challenge to modern assumptions about a private relationship with the sacred. For Loy, spiritual development is not simply a private affair, because our own well-being is integrally connected to society's institutions, and thus we must work together to free ourselves. This relational nature between the organized corporate world and the selfless love and compassion that can be experienced through most spiritual practices highlights the interpenetration of spirituality and corporate life.

Nelson takes up a different aspect of the interpenetration theme, examining the business firm from this perspective and finding links to feminist discourse. Contemporary discussions on gender recognize that, to make progress in gender relations, a truly relational understanding between men and women needs to be achieved. A key obstacle to this understanding is that the neat distinctions between men and women – like 'us and them' – are unstable narrative categories. In recognizing interpenetration and interconnection, feminist discourse has begun to open up deep ontological questions. Nelson draws on the Buddhist concept of co-dependent origination to re-examine the notion of the individual. From this viewpoint, an individual is neither a unique, robust and separate self nor a socially constituted one. The implications challenge views of corporate social responsibility based on deliberative rationality as found in economic thinking about organizations, and reorientates us to a mutual view of the business firm as an entity interpenetrated by its social milieu and vice versa. Thus, social responsibility is an appreciation that our personal well-being and that of our business institutions are fundamentally interconnected to society. This interconnected view is also present in Birch's and Paul's Christian discussion of process thinking and its implications for management.

Higgins similarly asks whether the locus of corporate social responsibility lies outside the political culture of the society, challenging modernity's tendency to individualize corporate decision-makers. The theme of interpenetration and interdependence runs through his chapters at the level of the corporation, and he argues that corporate social responsibility depends on a proactive interrelationship with society. As modern technology advances, as it magnifies the impacts of the global economy and exposes humanity to ever-greater risks of destruction, it becomes increasingly obvious that environmental destruction does not respect human borders. Each actor in the economy must recognize his or her power and responsibility to work

towards a sustainable future. Spiritual maturity calls upon us to recognize that our responsibility to protect the world interpenetrates with our being, that who we are is a reflection of this world, and that how we maintain the world is deeply interconnected with our own consciousness. In the practice of everyday life we can engage in spiritual practices to expand our horizons and develop our awareness.

The contributions in Part II, 'Pathways for Change', provide some specific maps in which spirituality and corporate social responsibility can be brought together. One theme that arises, as Davila Gomez and Crowther suggest, is the need to take action in light of a sense of our interconnection. They argue that contemporary management education fails us in the sense that it orients students to think instrumentally rather than reflect on the relationship of their actions to society and on their whole person. This applies not only to the content but also to the very process of educating, since how an individual is treated throughout their education is crucial to their development as a person. This sub-theme recognizes that the modern preoccupation with rational instrumental action is a limited view that ignores other important aspects of life, including our spiritual development.

The long evolutionary interconnection between humans and animals may provide important clues as to how people can draw on more abilities than just their reason to lead and manage organizations. Mitroff et al. have found that animals have an uncanny ability to attune to our interiority, and skilled trainers use this shared understanding to work with their animals. This 'felt sense' also forms the basis of many somatic therapy techniques which rely on the therapist using awareness of their own interiority to mirror that of their clients. In their exploration of horse-whispering, Mitroff et al. found that the skills people use in this highly effective training of animals can also be applied to human relationships. These findings highlight the psychological interpenetration of humans and animals and implicitly question the modern distrust of human interiority. This is not a rejection of reason, however; as Mitroff et al. demonstrate, the careful observation of working with animals can provide many valuable insights into human organization and leadership. At a deeper level, our interiority speaks of an interpenetrating sense of being one with the mystery of all creation. Dunphy's poetic reflections bring us back to this important theme and its many dimensions, with which the contributors to this book have fruitfully engaged. Dunphy celebrates his sense of this shifting awareness and suggests that a shift towards an appreciation of interpenetration may be necessary for a sustainable future.

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