

ON THE QUESTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

On the Question of Corporate Social Responsibility

Stephen Brendan Dunne

This thesis raises the question of Corporate Social Responsibility: it asks what it is. This is done for the sake of attempting to come to terms with what seems to be Corporate Social Responsibility's contemporary prevalence. Today, Corporate Social Responsibility is largely approached as a pragmatic question. That is to say, Corporate Social Responsibility is largely approached as a concern for practitioners, rather than theorists. To raise the question of Corporate Social Responsibility today is to therefore raise it in the midst of a predominantly held anti-theoreticist pragmatic stance. This stance, for its part, is challenged here. Against the notion that so-called pragmatism is a natural, correct or even superior disposition to adopt towards the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, this investigation posits the need to raise the question again. It does this by accounting for the historical development of the pragmatic claim upon Corporate Social Responsibility, on the one hand, and by positing the reliance of this historically determined pragmatism upon a more general project of interrogating Corporate Social Responsibility, on the other. Addressing this dual task is shown to be a matter of attempting to approach the question in the right way, of demonstrating what it means to approach Corporate Social Responsibility as a question first and foremost. To do this is not to proceed in ignorance of the fact that this question has been both asked and answered many times before. It is rather to proceed precisely on the basis of how the question has been addressed so many times before. It is ultimately demonstrated that today's prevalent pragmatic priority stands, somewhat paradoxically, as the greatest barrier to Corporate Social Responsibility. It is ultimately argued, therefore, that to approach Corporate Social Responsibility as a question is to preserve its possibility, albeit without directly seeking to actualise it.

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Perhaps, then, it would be better to go without an acknowledgments section, to get rid of “Acknowledgments” in order to make acknowledgment possible, so to speak. Perhaps! But perhaps there is also something to be said for an “Acknowledgements” section, even if it does take something away from acknowledgment. For without including these “Acknowledgments”, those worthy of acknowledgment might well wonder what has come of that which they might have otherwise felt entitled towards. Probably best to include “Acknowledgments” then, at least for the sake of not giving the impression that I see little point in acknowledging the input of others. Best to have “Acknowledgments”, then, and to fortify these with further acknowledgment!

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Significant sections of Chapters Two and Six of this thesis have been published elsewhere but have been substantially rewritten here. The publications in question are 'What is Corporate Social Responsibility Now?', *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 7(2), 372-380, 2007 and 'Corporate Social Responsibility and the Value of Corporate Moral Pragmatism', *Culture and Organization*, 14(2), 135-149, 2008.

PREFACE

Around the same time that I was struggling to bring this very project to its eventual fruition, the majority of the Western world's inhabitants were seemingly in the midst of an entirely different sort of struggle. By no means was this generally perceived and gradually acknowledged struggle akin to the often culturally romanticised one which would eventually define the likes of *Fight Club's* Tyler Durdan's near on way less and want less 'middle children of history'. That is to say, this was not the struggle which a post pubescent, pre middle aged, reasonably well educated, relatively well to do white European, a figure bordering on the brink of nihilism thanks to the consumption of a little too much bargain basement existentialism, a figure pretty much like myself, in other words, continues to fretfully anticipate.

The struggle in question was one rather more of matter than of mind, of body than of spirit, of practices than of ideas. Within it, Westerners were again facing up to the inherent difficulties of managing the dynamics of their own collective household (οἶκος), or rather of having that collective household managed for them, along the guiding logic of the profit motive. Under overt negotiation, in other words, was the extent and significance of what was quite generally accepted as the day's global economic crisis. And under general agreement, the experts more and more frequently pronounced, was the notion that perhaps all was not as well as it could be within the modern world of industrialised capitalism. Proponents of 'the liberal creed', as Karl Polanyi (2001) called it, again seemed to be turning towards just the sorts of centrally orchestrated interventions which they otherwise so vehemently abhorred. And yes, the days' apparently exceptional concessions to state intervention were again done for the sake of curing what was reassuringly diagnosed as a *temporarily* ailing economy.

Readers of Polanyi will have already sensed the imminent twist in this would-be teleological tale. The very belief in the eventual greatness of the future very frequently serves as a sort of vouchsafe for the various problems of just so many presents that have come and gone. Put otherwise: the liberal's present isn't that good at the moment quite simply because it isn't yet the liberal's future. All we, the currently disenfranchised of the world, need to do is wait! When times are good, Polanyi's liberal argues, it is because markets are sufficiently free. And conversely, when times are bad, the same proponents will predictably have it, it is because markets are not yet free enough. For Polanyi, it is ultimately through exhibiting too much faith in the eventual greatness of the future that proponents of the liberal creed become blind to the realities of the present as a matter of course. In so doing, they become accordingly unenlightened as to what it is that their self-professed beliefs in the goodness of market forces would have them do in the face of adversity.

So it is by their reactions, rather than by their actions, that Polanyi's liberals are to be judged: their creed, he argues, too often tends towards self-betrayal within times of crisis. Considering the barrage of evidence frequently evoked for the sake of demonstrating the reality of our own contemporary economic crisis, Polanyi's thesis seems immensely persuasive. The UK Government's rescue of the failed Northern Rock! The post US Sub Prime Mortgage Market's Collapse and the associated calls for tighter Financial Services Regulations! The burgeoning emphasis upon the necessity of emissions taxation! Currently widespread calls for more consciously planned food production policies in the face of what is becoming known as a Global Pricing Crisis! These and many other instances besides, what are they if they are not instances of free market liberalism evoking just so many exceptions to its own rules?

How then was I to account for the status of Corporate Social Responsibility in the midst of all of this? Didn't the very prevalence of Corporate Social Responsibility itself prove that free market co-ordination alone was not enough, that corporate representatives could not solely justify their decisions with an impatient nod towards the all-pervasive invisible hand? Or was it rather the case, as the Friedmanite might have had it, that a widely enacted but ultimately misguided subscription to the apparent necessity of Corporate Social Responsibility *itself* played its part in the paving of a way towards an economic downturn? Either way, I suspected that the existence of something like Corporate Social Responsibility was also the existence of the rhetoric of the free market's own lack of conviction and self-confidence.

That suspicion raised, however, I was also mindful of the fact that opportunistically premature wolf crying is hardly a strategy which the contemporary left shies away from as a matter of principle. For whatever else might be said of the works of Gross and Levitt (1998, see also Gross et. al. 1997), Sokal and Bricmont (1999) and Sokal (2008, 1996), they are not simply examples of conservative reactionism done selectively for the sake of galvanising a somewhat smug concept of scientific objectivity¹. But having said that, there is also *something* undeniable about two of the more generally consistent charges made across these pieces.

Firstly, that the truth of matters, economic or otherwise, is frequently bent for the sake of deceptively buttressing some revolutionary manifesto or other. *Secondly*, that a

¹ The introduction to the notorious *Intellectual Impostures*, for example, announces it:

is not a right-wing pamphlet against left-wing intellectuals, or an American imperialist attack against the Parisian intelligentsia, or a simple know-nothing appeal to 'common sense'... Our aim is, quite simply, to denounce intellectual posturing and dishonesty, from wherever they come (Sokal and Bricmont 1997: 14).

naïve but nonetheless self-confident tendency for would be revolutionaries to swim out of their conceptual and empirical depths for the sake of disingenuously achieving the revolution does indeed prevail. I would do well to bear these two precautions in mind, I thought.

Four core factors had made their presence felt. Firstly, a personal struggle (writing a dissertation thesis on Corporate Social Responsibility); secondly, a more general struggle (the global credit crunch and its various consequences); thirdly, a suspicion (that the two might be somehow related); and finally, a twin set of precautions concerning what it was possible for me to say of this relationship (mentioned above). The disentanglement of these factors seemed hugely important. Their subsequent coordination in the name of an investigation seemed nothing short of vital.

In as much as the business of knowingly kicking the liberal economy whilst it appeared to be down was appealing, it was just the sort of fight which the first precaution mentioned above warned me away from. I am not an economist. Within this investigation I have therefore resolved not to argue as if I was one. Similarly, in as much as the business of prescribing a particular code of corporate conduct was tempting, it was just the sort of behaviour which the second precaution disavowed. I am not a priest. Within this investigation I have endeavoured not to pretend to be one. And so, I resolved *not* to intentionally conceal the truth of matters within an elaborate veil of words for the sake of giving the impression that what I was actually engaged in was the business of revelation. I resolved not to lie, in other words. And I also resolved not to issue forth upon issues which were not mine to issue forth upon. In other words I resolved not to guess.

These precautionary priorities predominating, it seemed that the suspicion concerning the economy, and the manner in which it might be redeemed, would have to get in line. The present investigation seemed duty bound to err on the side of caution, in other words. And yet I could not fully allow it to do so. Something unavoidable seemed to be happening within the modern economy, dejectedness and conceitedness notwithstanding. And the modern economy's current predicament, for its part, seemed to bear directly upon the investigation's more immediate concerns with Corporate Social Responsibility. The proper co-ordination of the various initial elements of the investigation's lot became all the more important.

Originally immersed within my own struggle for a secure foothold into the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility, then, the emergent reality of the more widespread talk of economic struggle began to intrude, to distract and to ultimately redirect. On the one hand, I found myself questioning whether and to what extent it even makes sense to write about something like Corporate Social Responsibility without considering how the dynamics of the worlds' seemingly unstable economy might loom somehow in the background. And on the other hand I also became increasingly sceptical over the possibility of accurately discussing the dynamics of contemporary corporate behaviour in the midst of critical economic conditions *apart from* a consideration of how the former behaviour so often becomes justified in terms of the latter's apparent reality. In any case, the notion that my own struggle could be undertaken apart from a consideration of the economic struggle no longer held true. And so a more precise problem emerged for me which, much like an M. C. Escher piece, did not offer its points of entry, lines of continuity and avenues for departure up front.

Posed one way: should the so-called economic crisis be considered as the ontological background, the primary cause, for the existence of something like Corporate Social Responsibility? Or, posed the other way around, should our widely touted economic crisis instead be fore-grounded as that which frequently necessitates a generalised falling back upon more seemingly primordial forms of value?

Considering the first option, I soon came towards the realisation that the very existence of Corporate Social Responsibility can of course be understood as embedded within, and hence as a reaction to, a historically specific political economic context. In other words, it can of course be said that Corporate Social Responsibility happens because corporations so frequently fail to deliver upon the economic promise made on their behalf by liberal rhetoric and that they therefore need to create a mechanism through which alternative compensation can be nonetheless effected. All of this can then ultimately be interpreted as a means towards the end of profit.

But similarly, upon considering the second option, the option which reversed the pieces of the puzzle, it again quickly dawned upon me that whatever is called Corporate Social Responsibility can be plausibly understood as that which is fallen back upon during times of crisis; a sort of creative font which pre-exists the ordered pattern of economically governed social relations. This would mean that there might actually be something extra-fiduciary, even deontological, to Corporate Social Responsibility.

Each arrangement of the puzzle seemed equally plausible. And therein the initial seeds of the investigation's most fundamental problem lay.

The very attempt to merge ‘the economic’ with Corporate Social Responsibility came with its own host of structural problems. If it was true to say that each preliminary arrangement of the pieces of the problem was equally plausible, then it was surely also true to say that each such arrangement was equally flawed. How then, if at all, was I to commence the substantive articulation of this investigation in a non-arbitrary fashion? How was I, the economically aware non-economist, to forge a unique and reliable path towards Corporate Social Responsibility, in the midst of pervasively adverse economic conditions, without succumbing to naïveté and/or deceit? The increasingly general concern with the economy, and with its health, threatened to render any non-economically sensitive investigation into the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility irrelevant. And yet it was not for me to simply assume the role of the economist as if this were a task overcome by the merest voluntarism. A decision had to be made. But any old decision simply would not do.

This was not the predicament of the absolute empiricist with all the data in the world but no theory to organise it by. Nor was it the predicament of the absolute idealist who, having all the theories in the world, has nothing at all to support them with. There was no data, nor was there lack of data. There was no theory of Corporate Social Responsibility, nor was there a lack of just such a theory. The problem was of a much more primordial, much more fundamental, dare I say it, much more hermeneutical nature. What I lacked was a problem which could be identified, probed, tested and examined. What I lacked, therefore, was a guiding question towards which a definitive answer could be produced, or not, through a tried and tested programme of research. I had the contours of a problem but not its’ content. I had the makings of a research programme but no object.

How was Corporate Social Responsibility to be approached in light of a widely acknowledged economic downturn that could not but be related to it? How was research into the question of Corporate Social Responsibility to be conducted?

And it was here, immersed deep within this quagmire of confusion, that a possibility presented itself. Perhaps, rather than my having to know something of its nature in advance, Corporate Social Responsibility could instead be approached as *a question first and foremost*. This would mean that research could be conducted into Corporate Social Responsibility without the necessity of first of all designating the precise nature of its relationship to the economy. It would mean reversing the conventional priority of the object and that for which it is an object, of that towards which the programme strives and the programme, of the questioned and the question. Instead of taking clues from just so many so-called experiences and accounts of Corporate Social Responsibility, could I not rather take my clues *from* the question? Instead of targeting Corporate Social Responsibility armed only with a question, could I not first of all learn what the weapon *itself* is actually capable of? Could I not, in other words, first of all learn from my question as a means of subsequently learning about what it is that it questions?

This was how I began. This is also where I ended up. The question of Corporate Social Responsibility is not a question that lends itself towards easy answers: these prefatory remarks alone should suggest as much. And the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is not one whose intention can be instantly made apparent: the remainder of this thesis insists upon such. What I have attempted to give an account of within these pages is the question-worthiness of Corporate Social Responsibility.

This does not mean that Corporate Social Responsibility is necessarily a morally/ethically/politically/economically questionable phenomenon. It rather means that Corporate Social Responsibility is something that requires questioning as to what it is *even before* proclamations can be made as to how, or even whether, it should be. This means, in turn, that an investigation such as this one necessarily prefigures many of the contemporary debates taking place in and around the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Both of these assertions will be supported throughout. For now let it be said, finally, that the current study offers reticence and patience in the midst of the almost maniacal rush towards the supposedly redemptive qualities of Corporate Social Responsibility. It is not for nothing, after all, that Nietzsche's preface to *Daybreak* espoused the virtue of slow and careful deliberation.

INTRODUCTION

On the Question of Corporate Social Responsibility

In what follows we shall be *questioning*... Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is one of thinking. All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary.

Martin Heidegger (2004b: 311)

The Question and the Fate of Specialisation

This thesis is guided by a single question: What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

Now why *this question*, of all questions? As the reader will be no doubt well aware, this is by no means the first time this particular question has been asked. Indeed the answer to it, or rather many answers to it, already exist, ready made, within a variety of distinct and separate contexts. Handbooks (e.g. Crane et. al 2008, Hoskins 2008, Hennigfeld et. al. 2006), readers (e.g. May et. al. 2007, Burchell 2007, Crowther and Rayman-Bacchus 2004), anthologies (e.g. Crane and Matten 2007), A-Zs (e.g. Visser et. al. 2007), even critiques (e.g. Blowfield and Murray 2008, Banerjee 2007) abound. The nature of Corporate Social Responsibility is further determined within just so many marketing communications and public relations campaigns. State-bodies, think tanks, lobbying groups and NGOs are also coming to play their presentational roles. Every where one looks for Corporate Social Responsibility, it seems, it will be found. The thesis's guiding question is hence surely a question that has already had more than its fair share of airing.

A potential shortcoming of the investigation therefore interrupts its very inauguration. How, in all seriousness, can this particular question be posed with the end of making

an original contribution to knowledge? What originality can possibly come from the intentional repetition of a project that has already been completed many times before? Why, in other words, seek to re-do that which might well be said to have been already over-done? Besieged by such questions, this seemingly dubious investigation has *already* been consigned to emerge out of the deteriorating soil of an overproducing question. And yet it need not be so – there is still time for a new beginning. It is still possible to forget that which is expressed within the preceding sentences, still time to once again start all over again.

So then, should I not indeed uproot and begin again elsewhere? Would I not be well advised to instead nurture a seed that is *yet* to generate yield? Or to till the soil of a lesser sown field? What, after all, can possibly be gained from the asking of this particular question, at this particular point in time, especially after it has already been asked and answered, even *ad nauseum*? The burden bequeathed to Sisyphus teaches the futility of a repetition that is doomed to occur for its own sake alone. Is the author of this particular investigation not now also doomed, and no less than by his very own volition, to somewhat mimic that old tricksters' essentially banal predicament? Much like Sisyphus, is the last joke not going to end up being on me?

Before responding, I should further concede that the initially apparent shortcomings of this investigation by no means cease on the topic of its suspicious innovativeness. In addition to this investigation being driven by what seems to be a profoundly un-original question, it is also an investigation that does not seek to compensate for its banal commonality with recourse to its apparent utility. The question 'What is Corporate Social Responsibility?' is not being asked here *for the sake of* achieving

something ‘useful’ or ‘applicable’ on behalf of the many constellations of individuals interested in *doing* Corporate Social Responsibility. ‘Principles’, ‘Guidelines’, ‘Blueprints’, ‘Road-maps’ and ‘Tool-boxes’: these are what concern me perhaps least of all, at least within the present context. The question, and therefore the entire investigation that it will eventually initiate, is not to be understood as a journey which I am taking along the road of investigation towards the destinations of advice and guidance. What Corporate Social Responsibility is: that alone is what compels me here...although that isn’t *quite* right.

The various difficulties that arise out of the prolonged attempt to discover what Corporate Social Responsibility is will eventually lead me *towards* a questioning of the utility of Corporate Social Responsibility *itself*. For those that do not share the belief in the utility of conscientious questioning, a belief that will be espoused and furthermore supported across these pages, the investigation might still be deemed useful on the basis of this eventual questioning of the value of Corporate Social Responsibility. But this particular critical discussion, for its part, cannot be had or even rehearsed now, at such an early stage in the proceedings. Nothing has yet been secured which would legitimise the utterance of such talk. For reasons that will become clearer and clearer, the utility of Corporate Social Responsibility, or otherwise, is not up for discussion until it has been first of all asked what Corporate Social Responsibility actually is. The question therefore comes first, of necessity.

So let us then turn away from the supposed problem of uselessness, for now, as a means of turning back towards the more immediate problem of pointlessness. This turn is taken now only because the investigation cannot yet be deemed useless, at least

not until one has first of all familiarised oneself with what it is that it investigates. 'It' cannot be known to be useless without our first of all knowing what 'it' actually is. So to 'it' then!

As already mentioned, this thesis proposes to ask what it is that Corporate Social Responsibility is. The problem with such a proposed investigation, questionable utility apart, is that it seems to have already been undertaken many times before. The contribution to knowledge problem, therefore, is one of my having to guarantee a particular originality to the present investigation within a questioning tradition that has already given so much to knowledge. The potential gains that are at stake then, it seems, are either distinctly doubtful, or else distinctly minimal. Either I am doomed to say something that has already been said before, perhaps many times over. That, or else I am doomed, as Max Weber (1991) would have insisted, to say something of such a specialised nature that nobody, with the possible exception of my closest scholarly peers, could possibly understand, or even care to understand it. The former option is unthinkable to the extent that this thesis must be called my own. I cannot, therefore, strive to repeat the already said in the name of originality. Yet the latter option seems similarly undesirable, at least to me, to the extent that I still entertain notions of my work being read by people whom I do not know!

Such vain aspirations, what of these! Weber would certainly not flinch in dismissing them to the bin of spuriousness. His social scientist, after all, is neither a poet nor a prophet. If the question 'What is Corporate Social Responsibility?' is indeed to be the question serving as the groundswell for this entire investigation then a decision seems to be required from me upon this particular issue. And this decision is not really a

decision to the extent that it has *already* been made by very virtue of this work's being a socially scientific dissertation first and foremost. The investigation is doomed to the fate of specialisation, of necessity. And in the light of such a fate, the would-be audience for this work is most likely condemned to the consequential fate of single digit sub-mediocrity. So be it!

The reader will no doubt have detected a sense of disgruntled resentment in all of this, a sort of begrudged acceptance of the particular stone which is undeniably mine to bear. And yet, the reader who knows his or her Weber will have also detected the possibility of affirming what I have needlessly constituted as an altogether down heartening predicament. For after all, would it not be better, or in any case entirely more Weberian, to say that this project will become all the better for its having become all the narrower? Might I not then, in the spirit of Weber, assign a sense of higher purpose to this work by the very virtue of its having to become so significantly specialised? Indeed, might this not be part of what marks this project off as worthwhile, precisely that it turned away from the allure of popularity, turning instead towards the calling of science. Isn't good social science precisely that which turns away from the evaluative aspects of the fleeting concerns of the day and towards the cold, hard, determinable facts thereof? Perhaps it is. Weber, for his part, would probably also say that our own feelings on this matter count for very little, that we should just roll up our sleeves, get on with the work and be done with the ceremony. Perhaps he is right.

To say that a route of specialisation must be taken throughout this investigation is not to do enough to dispel the lingering suspicion that it is detrimentally overburdened

with precedent. The specifics of the proposed specialisation must themselves be specified so that a case for the apparent originality of the investigation might *then* be made. Emotional detachment and intellectual specialisation, it seems, are two sides of the same coin, the very same coin that puts bread and water upon the table of the professional social scientist.

Whatever else stands as indisputable, then, this investigation simply must take cognizance of the results of its predecessors. The proposed act of questioning is best initiated on *their* basis. This basic question (what is Corporate Social Responsibility?) should not be posed naïvely and as if for the first time. Instead, I should exercise prudence, review the manner in which this question has been asked, and *then* find a place to assert the originality of my contribution. What, after all, is the sense in re-doing that which many others have, in a way, already done before? Not much sense in going over old ground, it seems. Much better to focus upon that which is not yet known, where the contributions are yet to be made, where the gaps are yet to be filled.

Given the nature of this investigation's guiding question, I am duty bound to turn towards the results of my predecessors in order to take cognizance of these. Indeed in a certain way, I will do *nothing but* turn towards this already existing tradition. That said, however, as will become gradually clearer, the very manner of this turning-towards-and-taking-cognizance-of is *itself* a fundamental concern here. It is not for me to dogmatically take over the specialisation rubric as a means of eventually calling myself a specialist. It is rather for me to consider how something like a *specialised* turning towards the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is something that is actually possible in the first place, *at all*.

Questioning Specialisation

The guiding question is, of course, a somewhat general question. Perhaps it is much too broad a question with which to launch an entire investigation. Perhaps, but let us nonetheless ask what it is, in particular, which this general question asks after. The question asks after Corporate Social Responsibility, for sure. But what is it, this Corporate Social Responsibility, after which this question asks? What is it, in particular, that holds Corporate Social Responsibility out against both nothing *and* the many other things that it must not be taken to be in order for it to be itself? What is it, in other words, that makes Corporate Social Responsibility Corporate Social Responsibility? Or, to state the question yet another way still: What, if anything, is the Corporate Social Responsibility-ness of Corporate Social Responsibility? This is the one question which will be asked here, throughout, though across a variety of inflections.

Central to the making of my overall argument is the recognition that whilst the question being asked here has been asked and answered many times over, there remains no compelling reason for discriminating between the valid and the vapid engagements therewith. So much, it seems, is left to the whims of ‘opinion’, ‘perspective’, ‘belief’ and ‘stance’. One cannot help but wonder how it has been possible for anybody to say anything about Corporate Social Responsibility with any sort of assured certainty. Granted, this is a somewhat sceptical, not to mention severely hasty diagnosis. I should therefore say that it was not simply breathed into me within a moment of inspiration, or suchlike².

² For a discussion which weaves the ‘pneumatic’ concept of inspiration with Heidegger’s philosophy and du Gay’s Weberian inspired *In Praise of Bureaucracy* (2000), amongst many other things, see Kaulingfreks and ten Bos (2006)

This characterisation was rather reached on the basis of the present investigation itself, one which is still only being introduced, that is to say characterised prospectively and therefore somewhat externally, at the moment. Depending upon where one looks, as will be shown, Corporate Social Responsibility is made to mean many different things, summoned into existence along a variety of often-times wholly inconsistent trajectories. Without any authoritative account of the matter at hand and without any solid mechanism that might form a consistent basis for the establishment of just such a requisite authority, much too much is left to the whim of the would-be definer. Such a scenario cannot but contaminate the task of the would-be researcher.

The existence of many often-contradictory accounts of Corporate Social Responsibility serves only to confuse matters. Nothing of merit can possibly come from compounding a set of contradictions with more contradictions still. And yet this is precisely the rationale along which so much presentation of what Corporate Social Responsibility is tends to proceed. Part of the achievement of this investigation, indeed a quite central part, will be to therefore demonstrate how and to what extent this really is the case. Yes indeed - there *are* many engagements with the question ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ *That* is precisely an aspect of the problem I will attempt to deal with here, within and throughout this entire investigation!

The investigation cannot, however, be understood simply and exclusively as a merest exercise in conceptual flaw finding. The question ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ is asked here precisely because it is a question that is worth asking, even whilst the asking of it has tended to result in contradiction. Many contradictory accounts of Corporate Social Responsibility do indeed exist. This is something

awaiting demonstration. Such a demonstration, however, in no way demonstrates the inherently contradictory nature of Corporate Social Responsibility *itself*. In as much as this investigation undoubtedly demonstrates hostility towards conceptual ambiguity, it does not simultaneously strive towards a trivialisation of the existence of that which is seen or said to be contradictory. All because the existence of a contradiction is nonetheless the existence of something!

Even if Corporate Social Responsibility can be rightly said to be fundamentally contradictory (and at this early stage we should not really be supposing that it either can or cannot be), this is not to say that it does not or should not exist in part or at all. Even if Corporate Social Responsibility turns out to be nothing other than a series of contradictions, it remains something that exists somehow, however contradictorily. Even if Corporate Social Responsibility is an archetypal oxymoron, as it is often said to be, we are still within our rights to ask what this contradiction in terms itself is. Things need not make sense in order for them to be the case³.

This movement away from a policy of outright refutation, for its part, need not result in a movement towards a policy of outright irrationalism. Indeed, the principle of engaging the apparently senseless holds immense *methodological* significance within the present investigation – as will be illustrated within the chapter after next, and again within the conclusion.

³ Whilst there is undoubtedly much to be commended about the work of van Oosterhout and Heugens (2008) I think that in the final analysis it fails to face up to the challenge of considering *why* it is that writings on Corporate Social Responsibility persevere *despite* their many demonstrable conceptual contradictions.

Why Questioning?

To ask ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ is to constitute ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ as the kind of thing about which questions can be asked. The question is fundamentally inseparable from that which it questions. Indeed, the question itself is largely responsible for constituting that which it questions, even whilst it questions it. The question is not posed naïvely, at the beginning of the world, in an instant before things have become what they are. The question is instead entirely engaged, entirely complicit and entirely involved with that which it questions. This is not to say that questioning creates the world of things. It is only to say that questioning necessarily assigns to that which it questions an existence of sorts for the questioner.

Let me demonstrate this point with recourse to an example. It follows from the above that to ask ‘What is Erewhon?’ is to give to Erewhon an existence of sorts. Erewhon exists *as* something *for* us who question *it*. By the very fact of a question which we now know to exist, we now know Erewhon to have taken on the positive characteristic of something which can be questioned. This is what questions already presuppose. By our having questioned it, Erewhon has become something for us. But don’t we already know something about Erewhon even before we question it? Erewhon is, after all, also the title of a novel written by Samuel Butler, a fictitious place inhabited by fictitious characters, an anagram on the word nowhere, a peculiar word inscribed from within the Roman alphabet, the name of the prison in the Hollywood blockbuster film *Face Off*, something about which one might not have any particular notion, an arrangement of abstract symbols, a word, and perhaps many other things besides. In what sense does it really make sense to put questioning in the driver’s seat on the road towards these Erewhons, this Erewhon?

Let me be clear here: questioning does not, can not, create anything which in a certain sense is not already. Questioning rather interrogates that which already exists; it seeks to bring it further out into the open, so to speak. Questioning goes towards the unveiling of that which remains hidden to us, we questioners. That which is hidden is somehow there. The hidden is there precisely in its hidden-ness. The question ‘What is Erewhon?’ does not of itself constitute Erewhon. It rather seeks to further unveil more of the something which Erewhon somehow is. And it is in this sense there we can initially say that there *is* something which has been called Corporate Social Responsibility. This investigation, for its part, attempts to ask what that something is.

The Structure of the Investigation

The widespread tendency is for the investigation’s guiding question, as well as the apparent need for it, to be obliterated within the rhetoric of self-evidence. Corporate Social Responsibility need not be thought of in any abstract or complex terms: its general meaning is generally comprehensible. ‘Its just common sense’ - everybody more or less knows what Corporate Social Responsibility is⁴. Corporate Social Responsibility exists ‘out there’, ‘in the real world’, ‘in practice’. On this count, investigations like this one serve only to complicate matters, to wrench them from their inherent straightforwardness and to make them complicated for the sheer sake of making them complicated.

⁴ On the notion of common sense insofar as it applies to a philosophically informed notion of contemporary organisational issues see Spoelstra (2007).

Within this anti-inquisitive rhetoric of self-evidence, itself secured only on the basis of having attributed certain definitive characteristics to Corporate Social Responsibility, characteristics that are by no means justified in advance, Corporate Social Responsibility is made present easily, straightforwardly and without very much effort on the part of the presenter. Maybe that is the way things are. If so, a question can still be raised for the sake of canvassing clarification if nothing else: Is Corporate Social Responsibility really such that it is indeed so obvious and so readily made transparent? This particular question is not asked for the sake of just being difficult⁵. It is rather asked only in pursuit of concrete assurance.

For if it is the case that Corporate Social Responsibility is indeed self-evident in such and such a form then this entire project is yet again condemned to failure even before it starts to get going! If Corporate Social Responsibility is just this, that, this *and* that, or this *and* that but *not* that, then our questioning need not lead any further beyond this very point. But it will! And it will because there is something to say to the ‘this and that’ brigade! Against those that would say the Corporate Social Responsibility-*ness* of Corporate Social Responsibility is entirely self-evident in such and such a way, one can quite readily respond: ‘are you sure?’

The belief that Corporate Social Responsibility is something self-evident can be countered with the evidence, yet to be documented, that it is something very difficult to grasp with both hands, as Socrates’ Visitor from Elea and Theatetus say of the *Sophist* (Plato 1997a: 246). This very difficulty of making Corporate Social Responsibility present rigorously and without contradiction undermines the very idea

⁵ On the topic of intentional academic obscurantism see the work of Culler and Lamb (2003)

that Corporate Social Responsibility is so self-evident and readily apparent for all to see. Perhaps Corporate Social Responsibility is little other than this and that. This argument must be acknowledged and engaged. It might then be countered with the argument that things are not at all so straightforward.

It is by no means coincidental that I am already so concerned with arguing against the notion that Corporate Social Responsibility is something self-evident. This defensive move is required in order to create any sense of the need for the sort of questioning that is set to develop here. The inauguration of an investigation like this, in other words, is necessarily joined to the making of an argument for such a project against its would-be critics. The asking of this particular question, and the making of a case for the asking of it against its most prominent would-be put-downs, are two fundamentally interconnected tasks, inseparable from the development of the thesis as a whole. It is only by first of all clearing the grounds for the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, the question which I want to ask here, that it becomes possible to appropriately raise it in the first place.

The next chapter therefore begins the investigation proper. It does this by surveying that which requires elucidation, namely, the conceptual grounds upon which something like Corporate Social Responsibility emerges today. The chapter therefore describes the manner in which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is frequently approached today, namely, as a technical question of how, rather than as a theoretical question of what. That is to say that the predominant manner in which Corporate Social Responsibility is made present today is as a question for planners, administrators, technicians, managers. Of primary concern in this regard is the

widespread use of Corporate Social Responsibility towards some end, or some set of ends. And of primary concern insofar as the present investigation is concerned is the issue of how the generalised popularisation of the notion that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is a question of technique rubberstamps a sort of widespread scepticism over whether the question could ever be conceived otherwise.

Having received an initial sense for what Corporate Social Responsibility is through a consideration of today's predominantly technically endowed approach towards it, and having been unconvinced that this sort of approach necessarily has the final word on Corporate Social Responsibility, the challenge, perhaps somewhat predictably, becomes one of conceiving alternatives. This means asking how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility might be considered *apart from* its predominantly technical designation.

So within Chapter Three I go on to suggest that instead of ploughing further into a consideration of the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility, we might rather more productively turn towards a consideration of the nature of questions as a means of responding to the challenge for alternatives. This means that at this stage, the investigation turns away from its initial consideration of what Corporate Social Responsibility is and turns instead towards an extended consideration of what *the question* of Corporate Social Responsibility is. This turning towards the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is primarily methodological in its intention. At stake within this stage of the investigation is the description of how the remainder of the investigation is to be conducted, and with the according formulation of a justification as to why.

These fundamental and accordingly prolonged methodological considerations made, the focus is then turned *again* towards Corporate Social Responsibility. This return towards Corporate Social Responsibility attempts to give an account for why the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is given to us today in a philosophically impoverished (that is to say primarily technical) form. Now having established certain characteristics which are said to define all questions as such, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is shown to have a history.

This historically demonstrable characteristic of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is in turn articulated as the narrative through which the eventual emergence of the contemporaneously predominant, narrowly technical form encountered earlier on in the investigation is allowed to emerge. In other words, it is only because the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can be shown to have a history that the appreciation of it can be shown to have narrowed.

This specific explanation, itself developed over three closely interconnected chapters on the basis of a close engagement with a variety of writings on Corporate Social Responsibility, serves as the condition of possibility for the investigation's concluding discussion. Within it, the earlier misgivings concerning the explicitly technical nature of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility are reconciled with the historically coloured account of how the question has become narrowed in just such a way. Along these lines, the final question is put as to whether the question of Corporate Social Responsibility could and maybe should have been approached differently to the manner in which it was approached here.

Like everything else that has already been said in this introduction, all of these arguments still need to be made. Everything said here can only be said by way of preparation. For this very reason, a way will not be paved towards the content of the conclusion. The conclusion will rather be left to conclude on its own terms and in its proper place: at the end of the questioning, or at least at the point at which this questioning becomes grounded to a halt.

CHAPTER TWO

The Inherent Applicability of Corporate Social Responsibility

Looking over the history of corporate social responsibility, I can see it has consisted of 95 percent rhetoric and five percent action.

Milton Moskowitz, c.f. Vogel (2005: 12)

Chapter Introduction

In the place of introducing this chapter by preliminarily characterising what will be said within it, I would instead like to dive straight in, so to speak. I think it fair to say that, so far, what I have said about Corporate Social Responsibility, and about the manner in which it has been approached, has been said at a sort of distance, from a sort of theoretically induced remove. So I hope that the reader will forgive me if, for this one time, I rush on ahead into the matter at hand *without* clarifying in advance what it is that I'm rushing on ahead into. I firmly believe that succumbing to this particular form of impatience, at least in this particular way, will have the effect of offering the reader a glimpse of what I will shortly go on to characterise as today's predominately technical appreciation of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Either way, I will subsequently look back onto this experimental mode of introduction as a means of more firmly, more circumspectively and more systematically elucidating the grounds upon which something like what we are about to turn towards has itself become possible. For now however, let us simply make the plunge into the phenomenon in question.

Corporate Social Responsibility: Just Do It!

At the time of writing, Philip Kotler and Nancy Lee's *Corporate Social Responsibility – Doing the Most Good for Your Company and Your Cause* (2005) was one of Amazon.com's bestselling books on Corporate Social Responsibility. I do not know

why this particular book, of all the many books on Corporate Social Responsibility that exist today, has been so successful. Nor am I really that concerned. What matters here is not the success of this particular book *per se* but rather how the very fact of its success might offer insight into how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is most frequently approached today. For as long as we assume that popularity can be at least notionally said to have an effect upon influence, we can also assume that Kotler and Lee's engagement with the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has had quite a significant influence upon a more general understanding of what Corporate Social Responsibility is. So I think that it is at least worth considering what these particular authors have to say on the matter.

Kotler himself is by no means a latecomer to the discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility. As far back as the early seventies he co-introduced *the social marketing concept* (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971), a concept which subsequently went on to appear in many of the oversized and overpriced texts he has been involved in producing throughout the years. As with Kotler, this social marketing concept has become part of the staple diet of many the marketing student, scholar and practitioner. And just as *Doing the Most Good for Your Company and Your Cause* is by no means the first instance of Kotler's contributions to the discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility, nor is it the first project he has undertaken with Nancy Lee. Not too long ago the pair also co-authored *Social Marketing: Improving the Quality of Life* (Kotler et al., 2002). Whilst the earlier work seems to have been principally geared towards the needs of third-level students, the more recent bestseller seems to have had a quite different audience in mind.

Chances are, Kotler and Lee say, that their reader is more than likely involved in some aspect of corporate strategy, whether it be marketing, product or sales management, public relations or some aspect of corporate philanthropy (2005: ix). For, as these authors are wont to underline from the get go, “this [*sic*] is a practical book” (2005: 1). As such, the book will surely be of interest to practical people. The authors, it is clear, are very fond of such practical people, recruiting over twenty-five of them (them being corporate representatives) to each write up their own unique takes on the essence of Corporate Social Responsibility.

The practical record set straight in this regard, the authors then proceed to offer their own account of ethics: surely an indispensable aspect of any consideration of Corporate Social Responsibility. This very peculiar account of ethics takes the form of a two page excursus, developed under the heading ‘What is Good?’. It draws its inspiration not from Aristotle or Aquinas or Kant or Nietzsche or Levinas, or, indeed, from any other celebrated philosopher of morality. Nor does this particular account of the nature of the good rely upon religious, mystical or spiritualist doctrine. The question ‘What is Good?’ is rather best answered, according to Kotler and Lee, through the consultation of Fortune 500 Company websites (2005: 2-4).

Once the reader realises that Fortune 500 Company websites are to be understood as today’s moral philosophers, the reader also realises that Kotler and Lee aren’t particularly concerned with thinking about whether Corporate Social Responsibility might be anything other than an element of corporate strategy in need of elaboration. They care about results, about the fact that company X did plan Y and achieved result Z.

The logic of such an approach seems to be as follows: *there is Corporate Social Responsibility because corporate representatives say there is. Since these people are the proof of the fact that Corporate Social Responsibility exists, they are naturally the ones most capable of describing what Corporate Social Responsibility is and how it is to be undertaken.* The book might hence be said to mirror itself in a very bizarre way. Reports are gathered from Corporate Social Responsibility practitioners so that, ultimately, they can be sold back to practitioners of Corporate Social Responsibility! On this the authors say

This book has been written to support managers to choose, develop, implement and evaluate corporate social initiatives such that they will do the most good for the company and the cause (2005: 235)

This noble task, for its part, is addressed over ten chapters. In Chapter One ‘the case for doing at least some good’ is made before ‘six options for doing good’ are outlined in Chapter Two⁶. Chapters Three through Eight then address each of the Six Options for ‘doing good’ in turn by following a standard formula. Each of these six chapters first of all defines the option for ‘Doing Good’ in question and then distinguishes it from its five alternatives. Next, typical examples of the option as well as their associated benefits and concerns are outlined. Each chapter then closes by outlining keys to success, by describing when a given option should be considered and by finally indicating how an associated campaign should be developed. The penultimate chapter offers a review of what the authors call twenty-five examples of Corporate

⁶ The 6 Options for Doing Good, according to Kotler and Lee, are as follows: Corporate Cause Promotions, Cause-Related Marketing, Corporate Social Marketing, Corporate Philanthropy, Community Volunteering and Socially Responsible Business Practices.

Social Responsibility 'Best Practice' whilst the final chapter then offers advice to those seeking corporate interest in their cause on how to go about receiving it.

Over three hundred and seven pages, the reader is treated to a variety of testimonies to the goodness of Corporate Social Responsibility from representatives of such virtuous corporations as Coca Cola, Kraft, McDonalds, Microsoft, Nike, Starbucks and Wal-Mart, amongst others. The past scandals and controversies with which each of these corporations has been involved are rarely discussed. Alternatively, when we do get wind of any of these, they are presented to us as just so many preludes to just so many happy endings; just so many barriers overcome and just so many problems rectified. Throughout the duration of the book, Corporate Social Responsibility is thereby posited as that which makes the transition from adversity to righteousness possible. The Corporate Social Responsibility practitioner, it seems, would do well to learn from a collection of such been-there-done-that accounts. Kotler and Lee's book is exactly that.

Disagreeing with the various positions adopted by these authors and their colleagues, or attempting to find holes in their arguments or deficiencies in the manner in which Corporate Social Responsibility is set up by them ultimately proves a fruitless endeavour. This is not to say that any of this is impossible: far from it in fact! The point is rather that Kotler and Lee seem more than comfortable with the fact that their account of Corporate Social Responsibility might well be contentious or disingenuous from the point of view of conceptual rigour, and suchlike. This book, after all, is a set of project blueprints, a sort of Corporate Social Responsibility 'how-to' manual. As such, it doesn't require its reader to consult twenty or so more books on the topic. It rather presents the question of what it is that corporations should be doing as a set of

already solved puzzles, puzzles which can be conveniently perused, perhaps over the course of a business class transatlantic flight.

Put otherwise: it is precisely on account of *not* having rigorously clarified what Corporate Social Responsibility is that these authors put themselves in a position to write so much about it. Ignoring how their ideas might be ignorant of already existing writings on Corporate Social Responsibility and proceeding to define the world of Corporate Social Responsibility according to how they and their corporate co-writers see it, the authors somehow produce something of an argument concerning the essence of Corporate Social Responsibility. Justifying their avoidance of other positions for the sake of practical/strategic demands, Kotler and Lee submit their own definition of Corporate Social Responsibility to the test of how they themselves have already defined it (in terms of how corporate representatives who claim to be involved in the doing Corporate Social Responsibility say they have done it). It may be a circular sort of reasoning but once it is allowed to get going it is very difficult to derail.

Without any pretension, I think it is entirely fair to say that this scenario directly echoes many of the issues which Immanuel Kant firmly criticised in his provocatively entitled '*On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice*' (1996: 279-309). Within this short piece Kant begins by outlining a three-part defence of his own philosophical achievements up to that point against any notion of practice which prides itself upon not having to think in any way. In the first part of the piece, Kant writes against the criticisms made of his work by one Christian Garvé, principally upon the topic of whether his (Kant's) formal principle served to inhibit rather than inform moral action (Part One). Within the same treatise, Kant also

challenged the implicit objections to his work that were to be found *both* in Thomas Hobbes's argument for a civil subject's irrepressible right to self-protection unfolded principally within Parts One and Two of *Leviathan* (Part Two) *and* the view, attributed by him to Moses Mendelssohn, that the human race is fundamentally incapable of making moral progress (Part Three). Each of the three parts of the treatise are then tied together by Kant's introduction, itself a discussion of the nature of theory, the nature of practice and the nature of the relationship between the two.

Elaborating upon (albeit not explicitly) the Socratic assertion as to the impoverished nature of an unexamined life (Plato 1997d), Kant's text should be required reading for everyone who believes practice's absolute prioritisation to be an achievement worth having, not least of all Kotler and Lee. From the point of view of a Corporate Social Responsibility largely driven by the demands of practical relevance, Kant's argument is an essential point of reference exactly because its primary target is the very belief that the performance of so called practical affairs can be fully exempted from any sort of theorization. Kant's objections to the 'common saying' are hence both relevant and contemporary. As Jeffrie Murphy argues in his overview of the piece (1995), the Kant of this particular article

is at some level worried about the moral philistine -- the businessman, the politician, the military officer who prides himself on his role as a hard-headed, no-nonsense, realistic *man of affairs* (*Geschäftsmann*) and who, in pursuing his objective of greed or power or victory, either ridicules morality and moral theory as irrelevant to his practice or who conveniently adopts an account of morality exactly tailored to allow him to do whatever he pleases.

On the one hand, Kant argues against the prominent tendency to understand practice as theory's ultimate master. Practice, for the Kant of this short article, is not in itself justified simply by virtue of its' having taken place in the 'real world'. Kant's practice here contains within itself some previously theorised component - it is this very component which, for him, makes it possible for anybody to refer to a practice as a practice in the first place. As he writes it "not every doing is called *practice*, but only that effecting of an end which is thought as the observance of certain principles of procedure represented in their generality" (1996: 279). On the other hand, Kant is also arguing against the tendency of the practically inclined (i.e. the realistic men of affairs, *die Geschäftsmänner*) to scold theory's incapability to grasp the reality of how things really are, precisely on account of their want for real world experience. This means that for Kant, the man of affairs, the statesman and the citizen of the world generally

are at one in attacking the *academic*, who works on theory on behalf of them all and for their benefit; since they fancy that they understand matters better than he, they seek to banish him to his school...as a scholar who, spoiled for practice, only stands in the way of their experienced wisdom (1996: 281).

The general object of Kant's criticism, then, is the sort of anti-theoreticist pragmatic arrogance which to this very day remains wide-spread. For Kant, practice is always conducted with recourse to a certain theoretical sensitivity, which is also to say towards some sort of end. The man of affairs, in scornfully turning his back on theory, only manages to unwittingly make a mockery of his own self by contradicting himself. In making a virtue of theoretical ignorance, even of ignorance as such, he

simultaneously denies the existence of any principle and/or procedure through which his practical affairs might themselves be governed and/or guided.

For if there is nothing consistent about the practice that the practical man practices, in the way of principles or procedures themselves arrived at through various processes of theoretical abstraction, then it so follows that *anybody* could do whatever it is that he does. And if this were true then it would also follow, however paradoxically, that in asserting practice's non requirement of theory, the man of affairs gives absolute monopoly over consistency to the academic, having already asserted everything else as mere doing. In turning his back on theory for the sake of practice, the man of practice also turns his back on the unique idiosyncrasies of that which he practices⁷. For all of this, Kant is by no means suggesting that we simply ignore practice and focus exclusively upon theory, nor is he suggesting that we prioritize the latter in favour of the former. It is rather the case that Kant challenges that which remains unthought within the 'common saying' itself, namely, that any practice contains within it a theorized aspect that is oftentimes unacknowledged, an aspect which is constitutive of any practice *as* practice.

What then of Corporate Social Responsibility? What might Kant say of the scholars who are today seemingly responsible for the theorization of the practice of the man of affairs himself? What theoretical skills would such scholars require and how could they possibly justify them as practically relevant in the face of objections made by the

⁷ On this point, we might also recall Louis Althusser's poignant and humorous challenge to a widely espoused pragmatic anti-theoreticism where he says:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating! So what! We are interested in the *mechanism* that ensures that it really is a pudding we are eating and not a poached baby elephant, though we *think* we are eating our daily pudding! (1997: 57)

practitioners of the very practice they claim to have theorized? In other words, how could Corporate Social Responsibility scholars justify their claims towards theoretical autonomy when that which is theorized already exists practically *as* practice? Whereas Kant created the idea of an autonomous realm of theoretical production on the basis of its having a necessary (and for him socially useful) relationship to practice, the terms of engagement are altered significantly when the question of how to achieve theoretical autonomy is posed from the point of view of practice itself.

These are difficult questions and without Kant's words on this very topic, a topic his work creates when studied as contemporary, we are at a loss as to what might be said. We have the end of relating scholarly responsibility to theory and practice within the context of Corporate Social Responsibility without the necessarily sufficient means of its realization. Perhaps one of the most compelling features of Corporate Social Responsibility scholarship, in light of this particular set of issues, is exactly the manner in which it is called to respond to so many contradictory demands simultaneously whilst continuing to exist *as* scholarship. The demand for practical relevance determines so much that is written and taught in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility. Even where this demand is challenged in the name of rigour or critique, for example, it fails to disappear. The spectre of practice's relevance, even its primacy, is one that haunts more or less everything that is done in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility.

And yet, it is precisely the prevalence of this very prioritisation of practice which stands in the way of any raising of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. As will be shown, 'practice', in a variety of guises, is today's most prevalent response to

the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. And yet, as Kant shows, practice is no answer in itself. This means, in turn, that ‘Practice’ is no answer to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility; it is rather only a response which opens the respondent up to further questioning. Amongst other things, this investigation will document the extent to which all of this is indeed the case.

The Pragmatic Question, and the Questioning Thereof

Kotler and Lee are in no way responsible for the constitution and promotion of the pragmatic disposition towards the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Their work is rather symptomatic of a more general tendency which they at best perpetuate. Their work is therefore a convenient example of what I am trying to get at here on account of its popularity. And it is an effective example of the pragmatic disposition I am trying to allude towards on account of the fact that it represents it perhaps better than any caricature could. Kotler and Lee are by no means the sole champions of the pragmatic cause – within the remainder of this chapter I want to demonstrate the extent to which this is the case.

This is not being done simply for the sake of generally over-viewing or re-viewing the extant ‘literature’ upon Corporate Social Responsibility, as if this were an end in itself insofar as the present investigation is concerned. This particular overview is being undertaken rather as a means of specifically demonstrating *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is given to us, today, *by* the very tradition which puts itself towards raising it. Here, the primary concern will be to gesture towards the manner in which the extant questioning tradition has *already* settled upon a site towards which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is to be posed.

Once it is demonstrated what this site is, I will then turn, later on in the investigation, towards asking whether this is a site that is actually worth starting from. This particular judgment will be made from the perspective of the set of methodological concerns that will be laid out within the next chapter, wherein what I understand as the structure of all questions, as questions, will be alluded towards. In this regard, the contemporarily predominant approach towards the question of Corporate Social Responsibility will be considered in terms of how it stands up to the measure of considering questions *not from the perspective of the things which they question but rather from the perspective of how it is that they question these things.*

This structural appreciation of the nature of questioning will therefore become binding for the present investigation. I am not concerned with simply making the argument that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is not simply a practical question. I am ultimately concerned with raising this not merely practical question correctly, that is, *in the right way.* This aspiration, for its part, can only be legitimated after having gained a credible purview of how the already existing questioning tradition has already been laid out by others. I commence the investigation by considering the contemporary form of the already extant questioning tradition precisely because I hold no hope of glimpsing the question in a ‘pure’, ‘innocent’ or ‘uncontaminated’ form. The question exists within a tradition which it cannot be approached apart from. If I am to be guided by the question of Corporate Social Responsibility then I am not to be guided naïvely. I must rather face up to the fact that this question has been asked many times before. And in facing up to this fact, I must also come to consider *how* it is that this question has already been asked.

Within *this* chapter, to reiterate, it will be shown that today the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has largely become a question of *how* rather than *what*. In other words, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is primarily embraced today as *a practical question in need of pragmatic elaboration*. Within such an era of such a widely held pragmatic disposition, investigations such as this one become accordingly trivialized, accordingly dismissed. Indeed, those who still ask what Corporate Social Responsibility is today are frequently accused of being antiquated, impractical and unrealistic. Perhaps it need not be added that within the context of the discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility, these three qualities are considered vices rather than virtues. But it is certainly worth stating that within the more specific context of my own investigation, these characteristics are amongst the arsenal of retaliations to the very suggestion of a need for raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. These are, in other words, just some of the many hurdles which have to be negotiated on the way towards the question. Any raising of this question today cannot be laid out along a path conceived apart from these very obstacles.

The widely subscribed to notion of the inherently practical nature of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility nonetheless remains a way of engaging it. For sure, it is an intentionally disparaging way of engagement. But it is a way of engagement nonetheless. Accordingly, this chapter's discussion of the contemporaneously pragmatic way of engaging the guiding question demonstrates how this form of pragmatism attempts, but ultimately fails, to position itself apart from this investigation's guiding question. The chapter hence demonstrates how this guiding question is directly implicated within the very attempt to dismiss it. It also demonstrates that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility cannot be simply

avoided in the name of practice. To dismiss the question, in other words, is only to engage it in a particular way.

The central achievement of the current chapter, insofar as the broader development of the investigation is concerned, will be to demonstrate that the pragmatic way of dismissing the question of Corporate Social Responsibility fails to achieve *both* the sought after dismissal *and* to secure the implicated site towards which the question supposedly should be posed. As the investigation progresses, it will be shown that this pragmatic disparagement of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is in fact a quite recent mode of engaging with it, a mode of engagement that is itself historically contingent.

The question of Corporate Social Responsibility, in other words, has not always been given to us by the questioning tradition as a pragmatic question above all else. On the contrary, the question was until quite recently determined along an entire series of alternative trajectories. What will eventually come to concern me is the giving of an account of *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has become a pragmatic one, and of considering what has been gained and lost in just such a progression towards the current era of practice. But for now, within this chapter, the concern will be one of demonstrating *that* Corporate Social Responsibility's era of practice is indeed the case today.

Reminiscent of the Foucauldian project of writing *a history of the present* (1977: 31), the subsequent structure of the investigation is such that I shall first of all attempt to start precisely from where we are as a means of subsequently progressing onto an

analysis of how it is that we've gotten here. So yes, the very nature of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is given to us along a so-called pragmatic trajectory today, by a questioning tradition (or more precisely by my analysis and characterization of that tradition), as will be shown within this chapter. But no, the nature of the question has not always been given to us in this particular way, as will be shown within subsequent chapters. We will eventually bear witness to a gradual narrowing down of the question onto that which is focused upon today. For now, however, we will satisfy ourselves with bearing witness to the outcome of a questioning tradition having naturalized just such a narrow set of concerns.

Questioning Corporate Social Responsibility within a Pragmatic Era

William C. Frederick (2006) has recently told *The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility*. In broad outline, it goes like this. For over fifty years there have been a variety of attempts to infuse the amoral profit motive, the very organising principle of contemporary capitalist societies, with a moral purpose. The stakes have been high. The battles hard fought. The victories of the good guys, although slight and seldom, will eventually be shown to have been ultimately worthwhile. The champions of the Corporate Social Responsibility cause, just like true heroes, have triumphed in adversity. They have gotten their progressive message across to a significantly voluminous audience. Above all they have maintained faith in their beliefs, stubbornly resisting the temptation to accept the claims of the world's many free market apologists, precisely for the sake of bringing about a better world, despite these apologists and particularly in spite of that for which they apologise.

The story continues.

Over half a century of scholarly work in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility now shows us, beyond any reasonable doubt, that corporations today require a moral compass. The field, or rather the scholars occupying it, can offer that very device, a device that directs corporate activities towards the good. Success will be realised on the day that every corporation, or rather every corporate manager, has such a device to hand. That day is yet to come, however. The war has not been won, of course. More work is needed, for sure. All of that conceded and much more besides, the overarching moral of Frederick's story is nonetheless patently clear for all to see: those who want corporations to be 'good' now have reason to look forward to the future with a pronounced sense of optimism.

Reading through the book, one gets the sense that Frederick is well rehearsed in the skill of preaching to the converted. Considering the scholarly reception with which his book has been met to date, one finds that sense empirically verified to a rather significant extent (see, for example, Buono 2006, Swanson 2006, Wasielesky 2007, see also Frederick 2008). For all of the books' widely positive reception, however, it seems somewhat spiteful to point out that it offers a controversial set of arguments. But one need only consider the fact that elsewhere the very death of Corporate Social Responsibility is being discussed (see Skapinker 2008) to realise that it does. So too, the party might also be spoiled if one were to underline how Corporate Social Responsibility is not without its fair share of detractors. But it is – as will be shown shortly. What is perhaps most significant about Fredericks' book, therefore, is not so much the supposed originality of the set of arguments that it makes but rather the *manner* in which these arguments are made.

I'm referring in particular to the books' self-confident tone of delivery, a tone that persists despite the fact that many compelling arguments *against* Corporate Social Responsibility continue to be made to this very day. The task of understanding and subsequently explaining the peculiarity of the tone of the book might simply start and end with an analysis of Frederick's writing style. There is a lot more to it than that, however. Frederick is not the only one that believes his own arguments today. There is a wider context that somehow makes them palatable. Arguments for Corporate Social Responsibility are by no means new, for sure. But unapologetic manifestos for it, such as Frederick's own, certainly are. This era of not necessarily having to make an argument for Corporate Social Responsibility, against its many critics, is a relatively recent one. The very possibility of making a self-confident assertion of Corporate Social Responsibility, in the way of Frederick, represents an important turning point in the history of the idea.

Lest it be said that the present case is being prematurely overdrawn, it should be pointed out that Frederick is by no means a lone figure in this pragmatic regard. Far from it in fact! In the most recent report which the *Economist* dedicated towards an analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility, Harvard's Professor John Ruggie argued that the question of whether there should be Corporate Social Responsibility "is so irrelevant today" (The Economist 2008: 8). The question of whether there should be Corporate Social Responsibility is contemporaneously irrelevant for him quite simply because corporations "are doing it. It's one of the social pressures they've absorbed" (*ibid.*). To ask whether there should be Corporate Social Responsibility is, for Ruggie, an instance in theological speculation: out of touch with the modern world, therefore unrealistic, accordingly unwarranted.

Elsewhere, a recently published IBM Report on Corporate Social Responsibility (Pohle and Hittner 2008) suggests that companies can do well (in terms of finance and/or reputation) by doing ‘good’ (in terms of the pursuit of Corporate Social Responsibility). To ask whether there should be Corporate Social Responsibility, in this instance, is to ask whether there is something to be gained by corporations in the doing of it. If we can say yes to the former question, which the IBM report does, then we will be seemingly more likely to say yes to the latter, which many contemporary corporations are being compelled to do. On the foot of either analysis, whether it be the assertions of the Harvard Professor, or the proclamations of the IBM report, what ‘it’ is that corporations are doing when they are said to be doing Corporate Social Responsibility fails to present itself as something question worthy. To even raise such an objection seems entirely beside the point. What matters, it seems, is that Corporate Social Responsibility, whatever it is, is being done.

Today’s emphasis seems to be placed upon the question of *how* to do more and more of Corporate Social Responsibility, or at least of how to do it in the most efficient manner. Today’s emphasis, insofar as the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned, is therefore widely acknowledged to be largely pragmatic, albeit a largely instrumentally conceived pragmatism (see also, for example: Chymis 2008; Heal 2008; Keinert 2008; Griffin 2007; Cramer 2006; Kakabadse and Morsing 2006; Grayson and Hodges 2004; Hancock 2004; Smith 2003).

The influential work of Margolis and Walsh (2003, 2001) lauds such a scenario, albeit not without first of all considering the peculiarity of its widespread popularity. Having conducted an exhaustive meta-analysis of one hundred and twenty seven empirical

studies which each examined the connection between Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Financial Performance, these authors demonstrated, some years before the publication of the IBM report cited above, that there is *no certain link* between doing good (i.e. Corporate Social Performance [CSP]) and doing well (i.e. Corporate Financial Performance [CFP]). Furthermore, Margolis and Walsh's review of the central claims made by leading stakeholder theorists against the shareholder approach principally inspired by Milton Friedman left them similarly sceptical as to the reasoning buttressing many claims made in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility today (2003: 278-80).

Reflecting upon these empirical findings and conceptual insights, the authors proceed to wonder *how* it has been possible for so many scholars to persevere with arguments for Corporate Social Responsibility *at all*. This populist perseverance is particularly confusing for them given the existence of so many compelling arguments which so many have long ago taken to be decisive refutations of the very idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (2003: 270). Margolis and Walsh go on to explain such a peculiar perseverance in terms of the widely held *belief* that corporate attention to the ills of the world is, or at least should be, fully compatible with the paradigm of shareholder wealth maximisation (2003: 273). In this sense, it is not so much what Corporate Social Responsibility *is* that matters. What matters, within the pragmatic era, is rather what a widely held belief in the inherent utility and goodness of Corporate Social Responsibility *does*.

Rather than challenging or questioning the widespread proliferation of this wilfully unsubstantiated belief for the sake of scholarship (or fact, or evidence, or truth, or

consistency, or science, or reason, or logic, or anything else that many intellectuals have traditionally held dear), Margolis and Walsh rather endorse and actively promote the dogmatic trend's continuance. In other words, they argue that the widely held belief in the need for corporate social initiatives *should* be supported and extended by scholars of business and management. They say that if their manifesto were to be acted upon "the quality of our research and the integrity of our commitments" (2003: 297) would be accordingly assured.

This is a somewhat brave move, I think. Prioritising belief over evidence is contentious, at least. Making a virtue of such a prioritisation is more contentious still. But making a virtue of such a prioritisation, and doing so *in the name of scholarship*, well this clearly borders upon the realm of the perverse. Margolis and Walsh are by no means blind to this particular problem: they do have a response to it. They say that the fundamental scholarly reorientation which they strive to promote requires a following in the philosophical footsteps of William James (1975). And this philosophical apprenticeship, for its part, requires a pragmatic understanding of what truth is. On this the authors say:

The first step of James's pragmatic approach is to assume that an idea is true. In this case, we need to begin with the idea that organizations can play an effective role in ameliorating social misery. From that beginning, pragmatism then instructs us to look at the consequences of acting on this belief...The pragmatic perspective poses a second question: How can the assumed truth that companies can be effective agents, not just of economic efficiency but of social repair, be realized? (2003: 283)

This pragmatic reorientation then results in the unravelling of a set of brand new descriptive and normative agendas, agendas which scholars and theorists of Corporate Social Responsibility, and management more generally, are strongly encouraged to apply themselves towards (2003: 285-296). This call to arms is reiterated within an article that stops just short of lambasting the Academy of Management, along with management theorists more generally, for not having addressed the higher purposes of the management vocation (Walsh, Weber and Margolis 2003). In all of these works, the issue is one of calling theorists of Corporate Social Responsibility (and business and management more generally) forth in order to accept their responsibility to make the world a better place, via a widely and strongly held belief in the idea that Corporate Social Responsibility is the most appropriate means of attaining this particular good. More recently still, Margolis and Elfenbein (2008) have gone so far as to offer an almost deontological argument for Corporate Social Responsibility.

Whatever else might be said about all of this, it is clear that today Corporate Social Responsibility is not without its fair share of supporters and well wishers. All the more reason to ask what Corporate Social Responsibility actually is! Whereas John Roberts (2003, 2001) has characterised 'The Ethics of Narcissus' primarily in terms of the *corporate* tendency to see the good as that which corporate codes of ethics state it to be, it might now be said that *scholarly* advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility have also fallen in love with the beauty of their own reflections. In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith, one might then say that Corporate Social Responsibility has become something akin to the 'conventional wisdom' (1998: 6-17) of many sections of contemporary business and management scholarship. It is something that many supposedly know needs to be done precisely because it is that

which is being done on an increasingly grand scale. Following Galbraith further, it is therefore worth recalling that such conventional wisdoms are worth questioning, not least of all because they have such material impact.

So here, I now want to consider some of the consequences of this self-conscious turn towards the apparent relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility, via a strongly held and largely uncritical belief in its goodness, for advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility. Amongst other things, the remaining discussion within this chapter will focus upon how belief has become prioritised over evidence within the discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility and upon some of the consequences of having made just such a prioritisation of the belief in Corporate Social Responsibility, for advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility. The remainder of the chapter, to be clear, is not so much about Corporate Social Responsibility as it is about the belief in the need for Corporate Social Responsibility. And it is not so much about the philosophy of pragmatism in general as it is about how a particular idea, in this case the idea of the corporation as a potentially morally righteous person, has become more believable in its having become more widely well received.

Friedman's Opposition to Corporate Social Responsibility

The discussions of the “social responsibilities of business” are notable for their analytical looseness and lack of vigor. What does it mean to say that “business” has responsibilities? Only people can have responsibilities (Friedman 1970).

In many ways Milton Friedman, or more precisely his work, or more precisely still one of his short articles, is like the great barrier to Corporate Social Responsibility's would-be great march, the Socratic gadfly to its otherwise utopian empire, that which must be overcome for the sake of doing that which supposedly should be done. So much of what Friedman wrote, particularly within the aforementioned single article, and also within a single chapter of a bestselling book intended for popular consumption (Friedman 2002: 119-136), jars with the sensibilities of those that believe the socially responsible corporation should be a prominent feature of the worlds of both today and tomorrow.

Within this section I will briefly outline the core aspects of Friedman's notorious *New York Times* article (1970) by focusing upon the manner in which his critique of Corporate Social Responsibility developed therein hinges upon a distinction between two distinct and separate concepts of moral personhood. I will then consider how certain critics of Friedman's work have opposed this very argument for the sake of making a case for Corporate Social Responsibility. I then proceed to analyse the opposition between Friedman, on the one hand, and anti-Friedmanite advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility, on the other, in terms of a more primordial interconnection they can be shown to share. This argument is made on the basis of a reading of Nietzsche's analysis of the relationship between contract (here represented by Friedman) and conscience (here represented by his opponents) as outlined in his *Genealogy of Morality*. The chapter closes with a retrospective glance onto the concerns expressed within its introduction and a prospective glance onto the horizon of the subsequent development of the guiding question.

Now, as already stated, Friedman's argument against Corporate Social Responsibility relies upon his having made a formal distinction between two opposing concepts of personhood. On the one hand Friedman describes the real, human person. On the other hand he posits the artificial, corporate person. This distinction, as will be shown, becomes the condition of possibility for his juridical and moral challenge to what he sees as the tenets of Corporate Social Responsibility. On the basis of this distinction, Friedman ridicules the notion of corporate moral personhood *as such*, an idea which many advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility have nonetheless come to rely upon within their arguments against his work, as will be shown.

With regards to the formulation of the distinction in question, Friedman famously argues that because the corporation is only an artificial person, it cannot do anything of its own accord. The corporation is for him rather a mechanism through which real people act, a framework within which human agency is actualised, takes place. In this sense Corporate Social Responsibility, for Friedman, is nothing but an activity performed by individuals that have been contractually assigned particular roles within what is called the corporation. These individuals are what Friedman calls executives and/or managers. These executives/managers are always and only responsible to the owners, that is to say the stockholders, of the corporation that they have been entrusted, that is to say contractually employed, to run. And all of this means that for Friedman:

the whole justification for permitting the corporate executive to be selected by the stockholders is that the executive is an agent serving the interests of his

principal. This justification disappears when the corporate executive imposes taxes and spends the proceeds for “social” purposes. (*ibid*)

For Friedman it follows from the above that corporate executives are responsible for nothing other than the achievement of a profit. Certainly the executive, as an individual person with an existence that continues to be the case apart from their being contracted as just such an executive, is free to do many things other than achieve a profit for a corporation. But once they are acting in their capacity as corporate executives, these individuals are agents responsible for the achievement of that which their principals, the stockholders, have employed them to achieve: a profit. The executive, as executive, is not and cannot simultaneously be a social worker, a civil servant, an eco-warrior, a human rights activist, a diplomat, a philanthropist, a keeper of the peace, the eradicator of all diseases or the panacea to all problems. These roles may be consequential to the role of the executive from the perspective of an observer. But in so far as Friedman’s executive is to be concerned, s/he is always and only an executive responsible for the generation of a profit.

So for an executive to use corporate funds as a means of achieving socially responsible goals is for them to jeopardise the attainment of the highest possible level of profit. It is also for them to use somebody else’s money and put it towards their own discretionary expenditure. This, for Friedman, is tantamount to theft. And for an executive to feign interest in such apparently worthwhile goals and causes as a means towards the generation of profit is, for Friedman, arguably akin to fraud. Executives, Friedman argues, “can do good – but **only** at their own expense” (*ibid*). To do ‘good’, in the sense of Corporate Social Responsibility, is for executives to dine out on the

funds and the faith of the corporation's stockholders. And for Friedman, this sort of behaviour is condemnable not only from the perspective of efficiency. It is also to be criticised from the purviews of both legality *and* morality. The 'good' of Corporate Social Responsibility is a drain upon profit, therefore inefficiency. The 'good' of Corporate Social Responsibility directly contradicts the contractual obligations of the executive, therefore illegality. The 'good' of Corporate Social Responsibility takes fraud and deception as its very ground of possibility, therefore immorality. So it is for Friedman. Hence the infamous tagline: "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits".

Nevertheless, for all of Friedman's convincing and vitriolic chastisement of Corporate Social Responsibility, managers/executives sometimes do choose to conduct programmes in order to achieve whatever they believe to be the extra fiduciary responsibilities of the corporation. Towards this end, they act not out of any legal obligation but rather out of some sort of perceived ethical duty or other. This is when Corporate Social Responsibility happens. And those responsible for bringing Corporate Social Responsibility into the world are, for Friedman, nothing other than the "unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades" (*ibid*). These misguided corporate executives are, Friedman argues, the puppets of "pure and unadulterated socialism" (*ibid*).

Corporate Social Responsibility is a vague activity for Friedman precisely because its advocates tend not to realise such simple truths. But once these truths are generally realised, that is to say, once everybody recognises that Corporate Social Responsibility is not within the remit of the corporate executive, indeed that it is not

within the remit of anybody at all, then “the fundamentally subversive doctrine” (*ibid.*) of Corporate Social Responsibility can be left behind once and for all. The sooner this happens, the better, at least as far as Friedman and his followers are concerned.

This entire argument is buttressed upon Friedman’s initially having made a strong conceptual distinction between a human person, on the one hand, and an artificial person, on the other. What Friedman does not give us up front, however, is a rigorous conceptual distinction between an artificial person and a fictitious one. The corporation may indeed be an artificial person with artificial responsibilities – Friedman acknowledges as much. But it doesn’t necessarily follow from this that just because the corporation is an artificial person, it cannot accordingly be spoken of along a particular logic of personality. Artifice is clearly not the same as fiction and for better or for worse, person-hood *is* legally attributed to the corporation. That which is legally attributed may only be an artificial form of person-hood, for sure. Yet a form of person-hood *is* legally attributed nonetheless. Personhood, whether understood in the ‘artificial’ or ‘real’ sense, is by no means a self-evident phenomenon: Thomas Hobbes saw to that! (see especially Hobbes 1998: 106-110, see also Skinner 2007, 2005). The corporate person, artificial or not, *has* been written into the text of the world out of the book of the law. And the book of the law, as Mark Neocleous points out in his fascinating work on corporate personhood, is not a work of fiction (2003: 91).

So what is the nature of this artificial person for Friedman? And what is it about this artificial person that makes it not a real person? We do know, from Friedman, that the

artificial person somehow exists. And we also know that this artificial person is defined by its not being a real person. And we are furthermore told, finally, that the first step towards clarity on the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility is to move entirely beyond the idea of an artificial person. Otherwise, Friedman doesn't give us much to work with. It seems that we can only know the artificial person, from Friedman, as a simple inversion of the characteristics of the real person. The artificial person is something. It is something artificial. It is something artificial that has artificial responsibilities. It is not a real person. It is something that blocks access to the truth of Corporate Social Responsibility. As far as Friedman is concerned, Corporate Social Responsibility can only be known with recourse to a discussion of the agents that perform it: real, i.e. not-artificial people. But again we ask what these agents are, what this artificial person is. What is it about this artificial person that makes it not a person in the truest sense? This artificial person, where does it come from? How was it brought into being? What makes it something rather than nothing? These questions cannot be left unanswered by Friedman.

And they are not. This artificial person exists, for Friedman, within "a free-enterprise, private-property system" (Friedman 1970). The laws governing such a system therefore produce the artificial person, they grant to it an existence of sorts. The corporation is, for Friedman, an artificial person within a free market context. It is not a self-evident thing nor does it exist at the root of its own cause. It is therefore not a principal. This artificial person, the corporation, is rather an agent of the law itself. It is the law of a free market context that grants the corporation a person-hood of sorts. The law reigns supreme. Apart from this lawful context, the corporation has no person-hood, artificial or otherwise.

What, then, of the laws governing the context that makes such an artificial person possible in the first place? Friedman, for his part, does not see anything questionable, disputable or vague within the law of the system itself. It is so obviously superior to its socialist other that it's governing wisdom need not even be questioned. The laws of the system are simply the case. Corporate Social Responsibility is something that threatens these laws, and therefore this system, right down to its very core. Friedman is not prepared to proceed along a line of questioning which would interrogate the naturalness of these laws as to their naturalness. He simply doesn't see the need. Friedman's artificial person is, for him, a juridical concoction. But the manner in which the law has concocted this artificial person into existence need not be considered, at least not by him, within his argument against Corporate Social Responsibility.

Certainly Friedman, the arch-Libertarian, the former Head of the Chicago School of Economics and the one whose ideas formed the economic basis for the policies of both Regan and Thatcher, does not shy away from arguing why he believes capitalism is the only viable system. But what matters *here* is that his argument against Corporate Social Responsibility already presupposes the rightness of such rhetoric to the point that the argument need not even be made.

The Anti-Friedman Argument for Corporate Social Responsibility

The idea that companies have no responsibilities to the communities in which they operate, that in other words, we operate in a vacuum, or the idea that our actions have no consequences on a world around us is short sighted at best,

and is certainly not sustainable for very long (Fiorina 2003; c.f. Kotler and Lee 2005: 182).

Friedman's argument against Corporate Social Responsibility is the stated target of the above quotation. The quotation is taken from a speech given by Carly Fiorina, one time CEO and Chairman of the Board at Hewlett Packard. What Fiorina's words fail to take account of is the fact that, as has been shown, Friedman never actually suggested that corporations operated in a vacuum. Nor, similarly, did he ever say that corporate actions had no consequences upon the world. He was explicit about the context within which corporations operate: free-market capitalism. And he was also more than forthcoming on the question of the worldly consequences of corporate actions: directed away from profit they would eventually result in socialism.

So Fiorina has obviously misrepresented Friedman's argument. This tactic is interesting to the extent that it has pragmatic consequences. Only on the basis of her having misrepresented Friedman's work does she put Hewlett Packard in a position to pursue the end of Corporate Social Responsibility. And only by moving away from Friedman, however disingenuously, is it possible for her to move towards Corporate Social Responsibility. It is in the making of this very manoeuvre that she and many of the contemporary advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility are like kith and kin. Goodpaster and Matthews Jr., for example, challenge Friedman's critique of Corporate Social Responsibility by saying:

In our opinion, this line of thought represents a tremendous barrier to the development of business ethics both as a field of inquiry and as a practical

force in managerial decision making. This is a matter about which executives must be philosophical and philosophers practical. A corporation can and should have a conscience. The language of ethics does have a place in the vocabulary of an organization (1982: 132).

This argument; originally made over two decades ago and recently republished within a *Harvard Business Review* anthology on Corporate Responsibility (2003), posed and responded to what has to this very day remained one of the central questions for both theorists and practitioners of Corporate Social Responsibility. That question was whether a corporation could in any way be said to have a moral status, a conscience. Goodpaster and Matthews Jr. concluded upon this question in the affirmative and, with certain qualifications (1982: 139-141), insisted that “attributing actions, strategies, decisions, and moral responsibilities to corporations as entities distinguishable from those who hold offices in them poses no problem” (1982: 135). Conscience, for these authors a definitive property of moral individuals, could become meaningfully projected onto a collective (i.e. corporate) level with very little being lost in the translation. They approvingly cite the work of Peter French in this regard (1979, see also French 1983), extending the consequences of his work by rendering it practically relevant to the concerns of corporate managers.

This projection of the idea of moral standing onto an institutional level, to be clear, wasn't made simply for the sake of theoretical novelty. For Goodpaster and Matthews Jr., the manner in which corporations could be excused of moral culpability on the basis of the argument that they had no moral standing was profoundly disquieting. As such, this argument necessitated urgent redress. Yes, the corporation is obliged to

obey the law. That goes without question for them. But corporations should also be obliged to be good, in the moral sense, in addition to their being right, in the juridical sense. The law makes a certain abstraction from material conditions in order to conjure the corporation into existence. Friedman's work, as has been shown, suggests as much to us. And if this is possible, then it must also be possible for corporate chastisement to be effectuated along a similar line of abstraction from material conditions.

For Goodpaster and Matthews Jr. this artificial person, the corporation, exists. It must therefore be commendable and condemnable in the much the same way as a real person is. To convert the corporation into a conscience ridden moral agent was an achievement worth making, for them. To project the idea of individual conscience onto the collective level was seemingly the most efficient means towards just such an end. Goodpaster has since elaborated upon this idea of a projectable corporate conscience, applied it to a set of contemporary examples and published it in the form of a monograph (2006). In her review of this work, Rachel Browne (2006) argues that it "illustrates vividly that business ethics is both possible and desirable" whereas elsewhere William Frederick holds the work in even higher regard, casting the notion of corporate conscience as one of the major "conceptual foundations of inquiry into the normative practices of large business corporations" (2007b).

Resonances are to be found between this analogy of the corporation as a bad person that should behave better and the widely publicized work of Joel Bakan (2004). Both conceptualisations of corporate moral personhood recognise corporate scandals as in some sense determinative of the problems dealt with by Business Ethicists and

advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility. And both projects also allude towards what they argue to be the incapacity of the extant legal system to regulate corporations along supposedly truly moral rationales. That said, within the notion of Corporate Conscience, corporate scandals are ultimately traced back to the moral failings of particular decision making entities: Bad Corporations. In the work of Bakan, however, these failings are structurally attributable to the laws that grant the corporation an artificial personality in the first place. So Bakan questions the very laws that remained beyond question for Friedman's argument against Corporate Social Responsibility. And Goodpaster and Matthews Jr., like Friedman, similarly neglect to question these laws, electing instead to work on the basis of their premises.

For the advocates of Corporate Conscience, moral management practices are those which manifest above and beyond the demands of the law. For Friedman, they are to be found in the rigorous observation of the law, particularly the law of contract binding the manager to the stockholders of the corporation. And for Bakan, morality cannot be appropriately spoken of within such a system of law since the system itself is the single greatest barrier to moral behaviour.

The central controversy that has been raised by the notion of Corporate Conscience, however, is not on the topic of whether moral obligation can be meaningfully abstracted from the structural scenario within which it manifests. The corporate correctionism of the notion of Corporate Conscience doesn't extend *that* far (see also Jones 2007). It is possible, at least as far as Goodpaster and Matthew Jr. are concerned, to harmonise morally commendable corporate behaviour with the profit motive. The intellectual challenge is one of demonstrating *how*. And it is in this

regard that the interchanges between Ranken (1987) and Goodpaster (1987), Ewin (1991) and Wilson (1994), the revision offered by Sheppard (1994) and the overview offered by Moore (1999) are to be understood.

So against Friedman, the advocates of Corporate Conscience insist that corporations should pursue moral ends, that they should, in other words, be socially responsible. Fiorina supportively echoes this belief to the extent that she misrepresents Friedman's argument in order to make an argument for Corporate Social Responsibility. Margolis and Walsh argue that programmes of Corporate Social Responsibility should be pursued even though Friedman's argument against it is acknowledged by them to have never been refuted. And Frederick goes so far as to make a virtue of the fact that the Corporate Social Responsibility movement has posited itself at the forefront of business and management scholarship through its perseverance with the belief that corporations should pursue socially responsible ends. This avowedly pragmatic strategy of challenging Friedman by simply choosing to diverge from his conclusions on the proper social responsibilities of businesses will remain the focus for much of the remainder of this chapter.

Synthesizing Contract and Conscience

To endorse Corporate Social Responsibility has become more or less synonymous with the endorsement of a departure from Friedman. To believe that corporations can and should be socially responsible is to believe that Friedman is wrong to believe what he believes to be the true social responsibilities of corporations. It is also to believe that it is right to believe that corporations should pursue socially responsible initiatives. Following the proclamations of Margolis and Walsh, if scholars of

business and management are to help foster the good then they will have to believe that corporations should be socially responsible. They will therefore put themselves towards the worthy task of describing how the socially responsible corporation is to be brought into and subsequently sustained within its being. All of this would also be done without question, pragmatic believers in the good of Corporate Social Responsibility as business and management scholars would have chosen to be. Alternatively, Friedman can be followed down his path, out and away from Corporate Social Responsibility. One way or the other, it seems that a decision is required.

It is precisely upon this supposed need for a decision between these two apparently opposing articles of faith that we would do well to consider Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality* (1996). This is a work which conscientiously brings the concerns of the frameworks which have been hitherto held as fundamentally antagonistic to one another (contract and conscience) into a fundamental relationship with one another. Nietzsche's work approaches contract and conscience (as well as obligation, responsibility, guilt, and 'the good') as interrelated phenomena susceptible to genealogical scrutiny. It therefore embarks upon an historical quest for the origins of what Nietzsche calls our "moral prejudices" (1996: 3). The study is relevant to our present concerns, therefore, to the extent that it uncovers the roots of the decision with which we are presently concerned with making: it shows how the seemingly opposed poles of contract and conscience are primordially interconnected.

Prefacing his quest, Nietzsche somewhat reluctantly confesses his reservation in the face of everything celebrated as morally good. He writes that what he calls this *apriori* reservation led him to question the conditions under which man *invented* the

judgments ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and to ask what value, if any, these judgments possessed in themselves. Such questioning energises the project as a whole. The issue for Nietzsche is not one of uncritically presupposing the good or bad of any particular moral framework, nor is it one of comparing, contrasting or ranking moral frameworks, nor, finally, is it one of accepting the value of moral frameworks in general. The issue is rather one of interrogating whether morality, as it has been hitherto understood principally within Judeo-Christian traditions of moralising, is in any way valuable in the pursuit of a meaningful life. Nietzsche goes on to write, again by way of preface, that whilst he insisted upon being guided by his suspicions as to the value of morality, rather than allowing himself to become convinced by the essential good of any particular moral framework, a new demand eventually confronted him. On this demand he says

Let us articulate this *new demand*: we stand in need of a critique of moral values, *the value of these values should first of all be called into question*. This requires a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances of their growth, development and displacement...knowledge the like of which has never before existed nor even been desired (1996: 8)

The knowledge Nietzsche professes to be new in this regard in no way resembles a treatise on how to be good or on how to avoid being bad. The categories of good and bad are to be found between inverted commas throughout the study since it works on the level of what has been *called* ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rather than at the level of what it is that definitively constitutes suchlike. The journey towards the previously unsought after knowledge could not possibly have proceeded on the basis of a presupposition

that there is, after all, something timeless and essential about the designations constituted by various moral proclamations, an essence that need only be demonstrated and subsequently emphasized.

This sort of presupposition had been the shaky ground upon which the spirit of what Nietzsche called the ‘English psychologists’ (by which he means Utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham or those inspired by them such as his adversary in love Paul Rée), for example, erected their unstable moral scaffolds (by defining the good in terms of the useful). Nietzsche understood these predecessors of his to be lacking in the historical spirit fundamental to the task at hand. For him they committed the flaw of looking “in the wrong place for the real origin of the concept ‘good’” (1996: 12). With historical and etymological sensitivity pointing him in the right direction, however, Nietzsche sees himself to be committing no such mistakes (1996: 14). He responds to the aforementioned new demand with recourse to a demonstration of the material conditions through which the moral judgements of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were themselves produced, an investigation which Book I of the *Genealogy* performs.

So if our notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ *are* historically derivative phenomena, as Nietzsche argues, what then of conscience and contract (as well as obligation, responsibility and guilt)? To say that the opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is historically derived and etymologically demonstrable is not yet to say what these phenomena are: it is to imply that they have come about historically, but without specifying how and under what conditions. If these *are* etymologically demonstrable phenomena, we can still ask *how* they came about. On this point Nietzsche concurs and in Book II of the *Genealogy* he sets out to clarify the interrelated biographies of “‘Guilt’, ‘Bad Conscience’, and Related Matters”. In so doing, Nietzsche gestures

towards the manner in which such phenomena have become the case, embedded themselves amongst the various facts of human psychology and created for themselves an almost unquestionable reality. “Guilt, Bad Conscience and Related Matters” are the case; Book II of the *Genealogy* seeks to demonstrate how *that* has become the case.

Responsibility, we are told, is fundamentally grounded within the more primordial structure of promise-keeping. “The long history of the origin of *responsibility*” (1996: 40) is, for Nietzsche, one of rearing to the extent that man has been bred into the animal *entitled to make promises* (1996: 39). This promise maker is a being made accountable both to itself (in conscience) and to others (in conscientious obligation); it keeps promises for the sake of awards and breaks them in anticipation of punishment (both from within, in the form of guilt and conscience, and from without, in the form of overt forms of punishment).

The incessant quantification of equilibriums between beings in the world, the unabated contractualisation of one’s own affairs with other beings in the world and the irrepressible conscience which never fails to remind oneself of the masters towards whom it must respond; this is the ground from which Nietzsche’s concept of responsibility takes its meaning. Having grown into this structure and having come to regard one’s obligations as ontologically foundational, Nietzsche argues that man, the promise keeper, “eventually did come to see reason” (1996: 44). This marriage of promise keeping, memory, custom, calculability, punishment, internalisation, guilt, conscience and reason called responsibility is for its part rooted within a more primordial structure still. Gesturing towards this structure Nietzsche asks:

have the previous exponents of the genealogy of morals had even the slightest inkling that the central moral concept of ‘guilt’ [*Schuld*] originated from the very material concept of ‘debt’ [*Schulden*]? (1996: 44)

This is a crucial point. For Nietzsche moral concepts [e.g. Guilt – *Schuld*] come from material phenomena [e.g. Debt – *Schulden*], the act of moralising is therefore a subsequent reaction to the act of living. And the economic analogies are by no means incidental to Nietzsche’s own wordplays. At the core of his critique of the various Judeo-Christian moral traditions is what he sees as their tendency to drag everything that can be said about being with others in the world down to the quantitative level (who is most responsible, how can this level of responsibility be equalised through punishment, how many people must be considered for these purposes, have we divided this fairly etc.). This “by now perhaps ineradicable idea” (1996: 45) of a being with others as a being eternally obliged to settle its accounts with these others (and to have them settle theirs with it) is, Nietzsche says, as old as the concept of the legal subject, a concept which first of all makes what are called *debtors* and *creditors* themselves possible. And the constitution of legal subjects; that is subjects protected/punished by the law, “points back in turn to the fundamental forms of buying, selling, exchange, wheeling and dealing” (1996: 45).

It is, for Nietzsche, our historically derivative status as legal subjects which makes us responsible to others, just as much as this very same structure makes others responsible to us. The being in the world made accountable, calculable, measurable, determinable and above all knowable to others; this, for Nietzsche, is the origin of the possibility of what we have come to call obligation. The infamous “blood and horror

at the bottom of all good things” (1996: 44), flow and scream from the worldly abattoir which bred man into the promise keeping animal we see him as today. The ideals of morality are, for Nietzsche, built upon the material ground of legislated human relationships. Man is not a natural promise keeper; man was raised to become one. Having become such a promise keeper, man has become the kind of being that can be held responsible, the kind of being that can be called responsible or irresponsible. So too, the promise keeper, man, became the kind of being that can be said to have a conscience and be enamoured with guilt. Man, for Nietzsche, is responsible to the extent that he has been made so upon the ground of the promise-keeping relationship. This ground is itself rooted in the law and is contemporaneous with the birth of the legal subject, this subject being that which is punished and protected insofar as it can be said to deal with others in all of its worldly dealings.

For Corporate Social Responsibility = Against Friedman?

If one is to now call the value of Corporate Social Responsibility into question on the grounds that the achievements it might make are, from the point of view of moral progress, trivial at worst or unclear at best, then one will have *completely* misunderstood the nature of Nietzsche’s project. Perhaps nothing could have been further from Nietzsche’s concerns than the question of whether moral personhood could be meaningfully projected onto an institutional level. Such a project would have flown directly in the face of more or less everything his philosophy had ever achieved. Why, after all, would a figure who explicitly confesses his suspicion as to the value of everything hitherto celebrated as morally good engage in a project that sought to generalise moral categories onto a higher level of abstraction on account of

their unquestionable, inherent value? How could such a project possibly announce itself to such a figure as in any way worthwhile?

It could not have because Nietzsche was not concerned with illustrating and solidifying the essential truth of moral judgments as themselves ineradicable and irrefutable phenomena. The task within the *Genealogy of Morality* was rather with demonstrating the perverse consequences of particular moralities coming to be held in high regard in part or at all. This is not to suggest, of course, that in questioning morality Nietzsche fell on the side of immorality. It is rather to suggest that in challenging the tenets of various moralities, Nietzsche also challenged the bigoted self-righteousness characteristic of so much that has been done in the name of the good. And for that reason, if nothing else, the project of willing the possibility of moral juxtaposition onto a grander level of abstraction would to him have represented either a fallacy or a comedy; perhaps even both.

This point in turn brings us back, eventually, towards the more immediate concerns of the present investigation. A prominent reaction to Friedman's ideas has been shown to be distinguished from them by the simple offering of an alternative opinion upon affairs. Corporations should not pursue extra-fiduciary responsibilities *versus* they should. This alternative opinion has become popularised, indeed it has become an object of populism. Within this faithful movement towards Corporate Social Responsibility, belief in the goodness of Corporate Social Responsibility seems to have become enough to guarantee the actual goodness of Corporate Social Responsibility. Fervent devotion and commitment, devoid of any significant empirical and/or conceptual support, has come to take on some sort of hermeneutical currency.

In this particular light the extant self-confidence accompanying contemporary arguments made in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility becomes as compelling as it is worrying. This is a scholarly concern to the extent that the dogmatic acceptance and perpetuation of a particular set of beliefs has somehow become a legitimate barometer of truth within the field of business and management studies. But it is also a wider political problem to the extent that an unjustified set of beliefs has widely become accepted by the very people who are so often expected to subject widely held beliefs to systematic and critical interrogation. A pragmatic approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility guarantees to those that adopt it only a confirmation of the beliefs that they already held as dear. Yet this does very little, if anything, to challenge Friedman's assertions on their own terms.

None of this is to endorse Friedman's argument against Corporate Social Responsibility outright, however. The problem here is not one of deciding which option is most worthy of pursuit. These options, as has been shown in the above discussion of Nietzsche, aren't really options in any case. The conscience/contract opposition is a false one simply because the issue is not one of simply taking sides. The issue is rather one of challenging the very idea that it is either a matter of wanting Corporate Social Responsibility, or not, in the first place. One cannot simply take issue with Friedman's admonition of Corporate Social Responsibility for the sake of believing that he simply got it wrong, that he is myopic, or that he is evil by proxy.

The argument for Corporate Social Responsibility, if there is to be one, must cut to the heart of the matter, it must undermine Friedman on Friedman's own terms. This would mean following Hanlon (2008) in his assertion that the pursuit of Corporate

Social Responsibility often equates to a journey away from a structural consideration of the political and economic context within which Corporate Social Responsibility manifests. It would also mean echoing Spector's words (2008) when he says that the journey towards Corporate Social Responsibility is an 'ideological' one which conceals so much more than it reveals. The journey away from Friedman need not go towards the dogmatic avowal of Corporate Social Responsibility, however.

Friedman, as has been shown above, argued against Corporate Social Responsibility because it was against the tenets of free-market capitalism, not because it resulted in immoral corporate activities. So if Friedman is to be challenged then it is surely upon this point that he is to be challenged. The real argument with Friedman would be one which focused not so much upon the issue of whether corporations should pursue socially responsible programmes, or not. The real argument would rather focus upon the supposed self-evidence of that which Friedman himself refuses to give over to questioning. The real argument would therefore focus upon Friedman's devout account of free market capitalism and ask questions of it.

Contemporary advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility may not be willing to realign their focus in this regard. But this is the only way, I would argue, in which Friedman's argument can be properly challenged. The pragmatic approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility is acknowledged by many, its advocates not least of all, to amount to a fundamental difference of opinion with Friedman. Yet this difference of opinion, for its part, serves only to ignore the focus of Friedman's argument. Avoidance of an adversary cannot be taken for victory over that adversary. A pragmatic approach to Corporate Social Responsibility necessarily amounts to an

avoidance of the question of whether Corporate Social Responsibility is an appropriate answer to free market capitalism's reliance upon moral crises. To assume that it is entirely appropriate to such a task is to adopt a pragmatic approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility. For all of its avowedly practical emphasis, a pragmatic approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility ends up being based upon an immensely idealistic assumption. So it is with most devout systems of belief.

So what justifies such a widely held belief? What are its conditions of possibility? What is it about the question of Corporate Social Responsibility that has it answered for the most part along a practical trajectory? What is it about the contemporary discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility, in other words, that directs it towards practice and away from a consideration of what it is that is practiced in this so called practice? Why is such a form of questioning routinely de-prioritised in favour of this peculiar sort of doing? Is it the demands of the day? Or the need to get things done? The will not to be left behind? The appealing nature of a call to arms? Or is it the opportunity to be involved in the promotion and perpetuation of a seemingly worthy cause? Perhaps it is none of these. Perhaps it is all of these. It is not for me to cast final judgment upon such questions.

What is within my remit is to demonstrate *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has been given to us, today, in this way. And it is here that the aforementioned notion of offering a *history of the present* begins to make a bit more sense. Since the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is today a predominantly pragmatic one, as has been shown, it is not for me to simply object or disagree. This is because I hold no hope of gesturing towards some sort of outside or safe haven, a

virtual space wherein the question can be posed in a somehow ‘better’ way. The question is today being predominately posed as a pragmatic one: that much we now know. *This* is the present from which I start. I shall now proceed to ask *not* how this question should be posed but rather *how it is that is now so frequently posed in this way*.

In order to do be capable of doing this, however, I am required to consider the history of the question, to look at how it has been posed within alternative contexts, along alternative trajectories and, above all, towards a variety of distinct and separate sites. Yes, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is today a largely pragmatic one. No, this question was not always this way. Between now and the consideration of this history, I will first of all discuss and outline the core methodological predicates that will guide the way.

CHAPTER THREE

How to Question Corporate Social Responsibility

It was an error of phenomenology to believe that phenomena could be correctly seen merely through unprejudiced looking. But it is just as great an error to believe that, since perspectives are always necessary, the phenomena themselves can *never* be seen, and that everything amounts to contingent, subjective, anthropological standpoints. From these two impossibilities we obtain the necessary insight that our central task and methodological problem is to arrive at the *right* perspective. We need to take a precursory view of the phenomenon, but precisely for this reason it is of decisive importance whether the guiding perspective is adequate to the phenomenon, i.e. whether it is derived from its substantial content or not (or only constructed). It is not because we must view it from some perspective or other that the phenomenon gets blocked off from us, but because the perspective adopted most often does not have a genuine origin in the phenomenon itself.

Martin Heidegger (2002a: 203-204)

Chapter Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility is in the process of being interrogated within this investigation. This means that the question ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ is being asked through out. But what, specifically, does such a questioning entail? And what is to be gained from its performance? Am I to simply and tediously repeat the same question over and over? Or is there something specific about the question itself which gestures towards the necessity of just such an extended questioning procedure? The goal of this chapter is to address such concerns by clarifying the precise manner in which this investigation, this questioning, will proceed from here on. This means that the present chapter will engage in a ‘methodological’ discussion. The discussion will be ‘methodological’ to the extent that here the ‘how’ of this questioning of what Corporate Social Responsibility *is* will be elucidated.

The reader may well feel that they *already* know what is going to be said here, even before it is said. For it has already been intimated that the questioning will be influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger – this by virtue of the fact that the opening words of the introduction chapter were given to him. So if one knows what ‘Heideggerian’ means then surely one will also know, more or less, what the investigation itself will be like. It will be a ‘Heideggerian’ study of Corporate Social Responsibility, a ‘Heideggerian’ questioning of what Corporate Social Responsibility is. What is the significance of evoking Martin Heidegger, in his adjective form, within such a context? Would the form of the investigation alter fundamentally if, for example, in the place of some of the words of Martin Heidegger, I were to have inserted some of the words of Michel Foucault? Or *any* other figure for that matter?

Not at all! Or at least not yet! By knowing the name, even the body of work that is attached to that name, we still know very little of what that name, as well as the associated body of work, might actually *do* within the particular context of the present investigation. Indeed, in the very evocation of the very idea of a knowable body of work and a correspondingly knowable name which can supposedly be held responsible for the existence of such work, one would do well to consider Foucault’s comments upon the contentious nature of the very idea of an *oeuvre* (2002: 25-27).

With that warning shot fired, it should now be underlined that all I have said so far which will be of any consequence to the present investigation is that my way of questioning, my inquiry, will be chiefly influenced by the work of Martin Heidegger. But in itself this assertion clarifies very little. If anything, it serves only to cloud and confuse matters; merely attaching a venerated name to an investigation that is yet to

even get going, and even this in an entirely arbitrary fashion. Certainly, of course, there is superficial credence to be grasped for an investigation that can clothe itself within venerated garb. Put otherwise, an investigation that can come to its task of investigating having *already* clothed itself within venerated garb will more likely have a privileged place reserved for it at the discussion table. But the issue here is not and cannot be one of taking such garb ‘off the rails’, so to speak. Nor can the issue ever be structured along such lines for as long as clarity is a pressing issue, a real concern. At the present stage it is entirely contentious as to whether this work has the right towards any association, Heideggerian or otherwise, in part, or at all.

It is one thing to characterize my questioning as Heideggerian by merely stating it to be such. But it is another thing altogether for me to clarify what it might actually mean for it to be such. Within this chapter, therefore, the principal concern will be to clarify *how* I will ask what Corporate Social Responsibility is. This will be done by delimiting the manner in which Heidegger asked his characteristic question, the question of Being, insofar as this *way of questioning* can in turn be shown to directly influence my own. Towards this end, I will attempt to evoke a series of thematic parallels.

Clearing the Way for the Question

Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* opens by listening in to a discussion between Theatetus, a promising student of geometry who just the day before had discussed the essence of knowledge with Socrates (see Plato 1997b, see also Heidegger 2002a: 107-229) and an unnamed Visiting Philosopher from Elea (Plato 1997a, Heidegger 2005:

19)⁸. Socrates' encouragement serves as the catalyst for this particular dialogue (Plato 1997a: 236-238) but it is the Visitor and Theatetus that determine its subsequent progression. The dialogue's driving concern, and the driving concern of the two dialogues that immediately follow it, proposed by Socrates, is to arrive upon a philosophically appropriate distinction between the Sophist, the Statesman (see Plato 1997c) and the Philosopher⁹. By first of all focusing their efforts upon determining what the Sophist is, the discussants find that they have to take a quite significant detour through a much more diverse set of considerations. It is within the cut and thrust of *these* considerations that Heidegger cites the words of the Visiting Philosopher, who advises Theatetus upon what should be said to anybody speaking of being as if they knew what it was. And so we hear the following words:

For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression "*being*". We, however, who use to think we understood it, have now become perplexed (Plato 1997b: 265, c.f. Heidegger 2005: 20)¹⁰.

⁸ This statement is by no means un-contentious. Theodore Kisiel (1995: 21) points out that this avowedly literal response to the question of how *Being and Time* beings (i.e. 'with a quotation from Plato's *Sophist*') brackets out the fact that *Being and Time* is itself the product of a long drawn out path of Heidegger's own thinking. *Being and Time*, for Kisiel, simply cannot be properly understood apart from this path, as if it were some sort of starting point for Heidegger's own path of thinking. At the very least, it is rather a point along an already well initiated journey (see also Kisiel 2002 and Kisiel and Van Buren 1994).

This is not to say, however, that *Being and Time*, the book, does not open with this quotation. It does. And this particular quotation is by no means an arbitrary imposition made by Heidegger. On the contrary, Richard Rojcewicz (2003) points out that within *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1997), Heidegger himself insisted upon the inherently non-decorative nature of this particular quotation (see also Heidegger 2003). Not in any way seeking to contradict Kisiel's remarkable research, I would say here only that *Beings and Time*, the book, does indeed open with a quotation from Plato's *Sophist*.

⁹ In *The Essence of Truth* (2002a: 217), Heidegger states that the *Sophist* "belongs" to the *Theatetus* "both chronologically and substantively".

¹⁰ Nicholas P. White (Hackett Publishers) translates the same passage as follows:

Then clarify this for us, since we're confused about it. What do you want to signify when you say *being*? Obviously you've known for a long time. We thought we did, but now we're confused about it.

Over two thousand years later, in our time, Heidegger interrupts these speakers by asserting that the situation remains much the same today. Indeed, if anything, it has only deteriorated. Not only do we now not have an answer to the question of Being. Today, we do not even any longer understand what it means to ask what Being is. For Heidegger this means that what is first of all required, before any answering of the question of Being, and even before any asking of the question of Being, is a deliberate attempt “to reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question” (2005: 20). Our present day situation, one in which we have *forgotten* the question of Being, demands that the meaning of the question itself be made transparent before it can be appropriately addressed. In other words, for Heidegger, we need to understand what we are asking before we can even go about the business of asking. And all of this before we can even consider getting to the business of answering.

Today, the question of Being surely, perhaps inevitably, strikes us as something peculiar, perhaps even as something absurd. Struck in such a way, why should we ever care about whether the meaning of the question of Being has been forgotten? Why should such a strange question affect us? Why can't we just go out and answer the question in any old way? Or failing that, why can't we just ignore this peculiar question outright? What difference would any such course of action really make? It is precisely in the face of just this form of disinterested reservation that Heidegger posits the necessity to explicitly restate the question of being itself. He says:

a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect...if

anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method (2005: 21).

For Heidegger, the dogma which sanctions the neglect of the meaning of the question of Being, the dogma authorizing a negligent approach towards the question itself, predominantly manifests in the form of three distinct pre-suppositions. *Firstly*, it is presumed that Being is the most universal concept (2005: 22). This means that despite its frequently posited all encompassing pervasiveness, Being does not become correspondingly transparent. On the contrary in fact, it is precisely because of its frequently posited universality that Being becomes the concept which is “the darkest of all” (2005: 23). *Secondly*, it is presumed that the concept of Being is indefinable (*ibid.*). This indefinability, for its part, does not sanction a neglect of the questioning of the meaning of Being. On the contrary, this indefinability is, for Heidegger, the very ground of possibility for any such questioning. It is, in other words, only because Being is presupposed to be indefinable *that* we must seek to understand what it means to ask what Being is. Or, in Heidegger’s words, the very belief that Being is something indefinable only “demands that we look that question in the face” (*ibid.*). *Thirdly and finally*, it is presumed that of all concepts, Being is the most self-evident. This by virtue of the fact that we *always* operate within an understanding of Being. In this sense Being, for Heidegger, is not only the concern of the philosopher or the intellectual. It is rather the concern of *everybody*. For we are, every single one of us, always in the midst of *beings*. In our everyday lives, each one of us continuously characterizes beings in terms of what they *are* - we cannot *not* do so. We say: the sun *is* hot, the food *is* unhealthy, the football team *is* brutal, the paper *is* white, the method chapter *is* boring and in doing so, we say something of Being, of beings.

On the one hand, then, we don't know what Being, as such, is. But on the other hand, in an everyday sense, we know nothing *but* Being, nothing but beings. For Heidegger, this confusing situation is not something that we can turn away from or ignore. The very fact of the existence of such a confusing situation rather "proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again" (*ibid.*).

Heidegger certainly wants to overcome these three prejudices. Indeed, he needs to. He needs to overcome them insofar as they block his way of access to the very question that he wants to ask, the question of Being. These prejudices directly foreclose the very possibility of understanding what it means to ask this question in the first place, putting in the place of the real need for the question the superficial answer of its non-necessity. So if the meaning of the question is to become felt in the first place, if it is to be reawoken, then these prejudices need to be overcome first of all. They need to be overcome *so that* the issue at hand can be properly addressed. On this point Heidegger says:

By considering these prejudices...we have made plain not only that the question of Being lacks an *answer*, but that the question itself is obscure and without direction. So if it is to be revived, this means that we must first work out an adequate way of *formulating* it (2005: 24).

At this point it is probably worth momentarily withdrawing from the exegetical role in order to underline what should be nonetheless obvious from the title of *this* investigation, *this* questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility. Here, let me be clear, I am in no way at all proposing to formulate, ask or answer the question of

Being. Far from it in fact! My guiding question concerns not 'Being' but 'Corporate Social Responsibility': I want to first of all understand what it means to ask what Corporate Social Responsibility is before then asking what it is.

Nevertheless, a discussion of Heidegger's way of questioning Being is by no means superfluous to the concerns of the present work. On the contrary, it is precisely through such a discussion of Heidegger's work that the questioning which is to be undertaken here, the questioning that is already underway, can be analogically determined, or at least analogically clarified. Let me again be clear: I am by no means attempting to take over Heidegger's questioning of Being here. But I am absolutely attempting to take over *the way in which* Heidegger questions that which he questions, Being. The remainder of this chapter will be accordingly concerned with clarifying what the taking over of this way of questioning Being actually entails for my way of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility. Towards this end, as has already been implied, it will be argued that there are certain definite parallels to be drawn between Heidegger's path of questioning and the path that is being laid out here. The first of these parallels, as the reader has at this stage no doubt recognized, takes the form recently described.

Whether it is an investigation into the question of Being, or, as has already been shown, an investigation into the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, there exists first of all a need to clarify and subsequently clear away an extant variety of prejudices which trivialize the supposed need for the question itself. If the question is to be presented as a question that is worth asking then the investigation must first of all address the prejudices which presume the exact contrary. When it comes to the

question of Corporate Social Responsibility, of course, these prejudices take on their own distinct form: they are not to be simply read off the question of Being and subsequently juxtaposed onto the question of Corporate Social Responsibility.

The question of Corporate Social Responsibility, in other words, need not be cleared of the particular prejudices which characterized the apparent non-necessity of the question of Being: universality, indefinability and self-evidence. But for the purpose of drawing parallel lines the predicament *is* formally similar. Anti-inquisitive prejudices can, in the case of both questions, be shown to be those which have to be addressed and tended to *first of all*. Insofar as the present investigation is concerned, within the previous chapter we have already received a strong sense for the necessity of such a purported ground-clearing with particular emphasis having been placed upon the prevalence of what was there called the pragmatic engagement with the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with sketching an additional series of just these sorts of parallels, parallels between Heidegger's question of Being, on the one hand, and my question of Corporate Social Responsibility, on the other hand. Having outlined and elaborated upon each of these, the chapter will then turn towards a discussion of the manner in which these parallels will be put to work throughout the remainder of the investigation.

The Three Part Structure of Questions, and Their Formulation

Having explicitly stated the *need* to formulate the question of Being, Heidegger then proceeds towards the *task* of its formulation. For him, "the question of Being can be made visible as a *very special* one with its own distinctive character" (2005: 24). The

unique character of this particular question becomes gradually elucidated as it becomes gradually formulated.

Nevertheless, before the question of Being can be shown to have such a unique character, it is first of all said to be at one with all other questions of any sort whatsoever. In other words, before the question of Being can actually be shown to be a special one, nothing yet justifies any premature saying of its supposed special-ness. This is because the question of Being, like all other questions, itself exists first of all just as a question. This means, in turn, that Heidegger has to first of all demonstrate “what belongs to any question whatsoever” (*ibid.*) *in order to* derive the unique aspects of his own driving question, the question of Being. If the question of Being is to be formulated, then this very act of formulation must be done with a keen eye towards the set of “structural items” (2005: 25) which characterize all questions, as questions, as such. So what are these so-called structural items? Heidegger is worth quoting at length upon this point:

Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has *that which is asked about* [sein *Gefragtes*]. But all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something [Anfragen bei...]. So in addition to what is asked about, an inquiry has *that which is interrogated* [ein *Befragtes*]...Furthermore, in what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out by the asking* [das *Erfragte*]; this is what is really intended: with this the inquiry reaches its goal. Inquiry itself is the behaviour of a questioner, and therefore of an entity, and as such has its own character of Being (2005: 24).

For Heidegger, as can be seen, there are three structural aspects to any question, three essentially component parts. Firstly, a question will necessarily have that which is asked about, *das Gefragtes*. Secondly, a question will also have that which gets interrogated, *das Befragtes*. Finally, a question will furthermore have an eye towards finding out something, an aspiration, *das Erfragtes*. But that is not all. In addition to mentioning these three structural components of all questions, Heidegger also mentions the fact that any questioning is itself a sort of behaviour, a behaviour that cannot be properly understood apart from that which does this questioning-behaving, the questioner.

For the sake of demonstration, let us take the question: ‘what is a book?’ That which is asked about (*sein Gefragtes*) within this question would be that which is questioned, the entity which is put into question by the question ‘what is a book?’ We cannot simply say that ‘a book is a book’ since this would be to place ourselves within a never ending tautological spiral. So what we must rather insist upon is a distinction between the question, on the one hand, and that which is questioned by the question, on the other. A question asks about something. That which it asks about is its first structural component insofar as Heidegger’s characterisation of questions is concerned.

Secondly the question ‘what is a book?’, like all other questions, will also delineate a site towards which the question is to be posed. We would be waiting a while if we were to ask a book what it was. But we can nonetheless interrogate the book, so to speak, perhaps in terms of a characterisation of its material properties, for example, as a means of asking the question ‘what is a book?’. This would be to consider the

second structural component of all questions, it would be to look towards the securing of what Heidegger calls that which is to be interrogated by (*ein Befragtes*) the question. Finally, Heidegger discusses the goal or intention of a question, what it is that the question seeks to find out, the stuff which will bring the question towards its terminus, *das Erfragte* of the question. Put simply, this would be the implication of an answer to the question ‘what is a book?’. A question invites responses – it gestures towards the possibility of its being answered.

So the task of formulating a question, for Heidegger, becomes one of putting these three structural component parts of a question together in such a way as to make it possible to launch an inquiry into whatever it is that is being inquired about. And in addition to these three characteristics of questions, Heidegger also alludes towards an additional characterization of the act of questioning as something which is necessarily performed by a questioner. The questioner, for Heidegger, is that which puts questioning to work. The questioner is therefore the condition of possibility for the very activity of questioning. And this means, furthermore, that the questioner is therefore the very condition of possibility for the existence of all questions. Questions would not exist if they were not first of all asked, in other words.

Within the preliminary stages of *Being and Time* Heidegger proceeds to clarify the role and importance of each of these structural components, along with their interrelationship, with recourse to the example of his own question, the question of Being. And it is in clarifying how the structural items which characterize all questions manifest within the question of Being that Heidegger also arrives upon the first real intimation, the first real clue, that this question is indeed a very special one.

So what, then, is to be taken from Heidegger's structural characterization of the act of questioning onto the current path of questioning? Certainly, I am by no means entitled to describe my own investigation as a special one, particularly not along the lines in which Heidegger eventually shows the question of Being to be a special one. But the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can certainly be formulated with an eye towards the set of structural items of questions so clearly demarcated by Heidegger. I can, in other words, clearly take from Heidegger *a way of questioning* which does not pertain exclusively to the questioning of Being. What matters in this regard is that a robust attempt is made to understand what is asked for in the asking of the question. So as with the question of Being, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can be structurally formulated even *before* it encounters Corporate Social Responsibility.

As regards these structural components of questions, then, what can be said of them insofar as the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned? Firstly, with respect to what is being asked about, *das Gefragtes*, we can speak of Corporate Social Responsibility. The guiding question asks about Corporate Social Responsibility, it asks what Corporate Social Responsibility is. Corporate Social Responsibility is that towards which this questioning has us turning towards: it is that which is being asked about when this question is asked. Now, in this very sense of turning towards something, we simultaneously must realize that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is not an entirely speculative question, an entirely detached question, a question entirely without presuppositions. Rather, in this very act of asking about Corporate Social Responsibility, and in the very fact that such an act is possible *at all*, we must realize that we already know something about Corporate Social Responsibility.

For whatever else might be said, we know that Corporate Social Responsibility is, or at least that it is not 'nothing'. And we also know that Corporate Social Responsibility is in such a way that questions can be asked about it. What Heidegger says in the quotation below of Being can therefore be *directly* substituted for what we are now entitled to say about Corporate Social Responsibility or, indeed, about anything else which we might ever want to ask about. For Heidegger, the very possibility of the act of asking itself means that questioning is not and never can be done in an entirely abstract, detached or removed fashion:

Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way...We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What is "Being"?', we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptionally what that 'is' signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact* (2005: 25).

Secondly, regarding that which gets interrogated within the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, *das Befragtes* of the question in other words, the parallel is not to be so readily drawn. Nevertheless, there is a parallel to be drawn. In Heidegger's case, beings are that which gets interrogated: "These are, so to speak, questioned as regards their Being" (2005: 26). But as we have already seen, many things get characterized as beings. Indeed, everything that is, is a being. So in this sense, if beings are what is to be interrogated by the question of Being, that is to say, if beings are to be *das Befragtes* of the question of Being, then the problem instantly becomes

one of deciding upon which particular beings, indeed which particular being, is to be interrogated. For Heidegger, the problem of deciding upon an appropriate *Befragtes* is therefore much more challenging than the problem of deciding upon an appropriate *Gefragtes*. He reflects upon the difficulty of this predicament along the following lines:

In *which* entities is the meaning of Being to be discerned? From which entities is the disclosure of Being to take its departure? Is the starting-point optional, or does some particular entity have priority when we come to work out the question of Being? Which entity shall we stake for our example, and in what sense does it have priority? (*ibid.*).

Heidegger then goes on to say that an appropriate formulation of the question of Being requires an explanation of:

how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way of access to it (*ibid.*)

This challenge is famously resolved by Heidegger when he selects and goes on to privilege the entity which he calls *Dasein* throughout his unfolding of the question of Being. The kind of being which can ask questions about Being becomes, for Heidegger, the kind of being that is to be questioned as regards its Being. *Dasein* is *das Befragtes* of the question of Being. The being which is there, the being for which that very Being is an issue for it, in other words *man* or *the human being*, is the being

which is to be interrogated as regards to its Being, within the question of Being. For Heidegger, it is this “remarkable ‘relatedness backward or forward’” (2005: 28) of the question of Being which goes so far towards determining its unique and special character. Not this alone, of course. But what Heidegger posits as the unique and special character of the question of Being insofar as *Dasein* is concerned, a character which hovers above all possible questions, cannot possibly be appreciated until the hermeneutical peculiarities of the question, for their part, are appreciated *first of all*.

Whereas the questioning of Being finds an entirely appropriate *Gefragtes* within the term Being, owing to the fact that Being is indeed that which is asked about in the asking of the question of Being, the *Befragtes* of the question is not so easily had. We find that *Dasein* eventually becomes the *Befragtes* most entitled to priority within the unfolding of the question of Being (2005: 28-35). For its part, this very prioritization immediately raises another question: *Dasein*, what is that? *Dasein* is the being which has its very Being the case as an issue for it, for sure. And *Dasein* is also a particular way in which the human being is to be understood. But what does *that* mean? Heidegger devotes no less than the remainder of *Being and Time* towards an engagement with just this question.

So where does all of this leave *us*? If Corporate Social Responsibility is indeed *das Gefragtes* of our question, that which gets asked about within it, what is going to be the corresponding *Befragtes* thereof? What is going to be that which is interrogated by the current investigation’s guiding question? What, in other words, am I to select as an appropriate site from which I might solicit an appropriate response to my question? In as much as Heidegger spent his entire book clarifying the nature of the *Befragtes* of

the question of Being, so too here much of my remaining effort will be devoted to reaching towards an appropriate site for adequately addressing the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Much as it was the case for Heidegger that any old entity simply would not do, so too here my ongoing concern will be with securing the most appropriate site towards which I can address *my* question.

Before further clarifying how this concern will be subsequently expressed, it is first of all worth briefly turning towards a consideration of the third and final structural component which Heidegger characterizes all questions in terms of. *Das Erfragtes* of the question: the objective, goal, or intention thereof. Once a questioner has achieved clarity upon this aspect of their question, then the questioning procedure has already reached its terminus. In other words, the very need for a question might be said to become entirely extinguished through its having been fully realized. This in as much as any object of desire no longer exists as such an object of desire from the very instant at which it is captured, onwards.

In this sense, if we have *das Erfragtes*, the goal of the question, in advance, then we apparently need no longer undertake any investigation at all. This is because we would have what we are seeking to go out in search of *even before* the undertaking of the searching itself! And if we already know what we want to find out with the asking our question, whether that question be of Being or of Corporate Social Responsibility, then there is nothing else for the act of questioning to achieve. So in as much as the questioning procedure is to be ever capable of finding anything out then, from the outset, *das Erfragtes* will perhaps necessarily present itself to the questioner as that which remains to be determined. This seems to be the case here to the extent that I do

not yet know what the asking of this question will bring to me, at least not yet. But I do strongly suspect that this question is one which is worth asking.

So let me now finally attempt to clearly formulate this question, the guiding question, with an eye towards its structural components. Within this investigation I want to ask what Corporate Social Responsibility is. My question, therefore, is ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ In order to understand what it means to ask this question, I had to first of all clear away a set of prejudices which suggest that this question is one which need not be asked. I think this has been done in the previous chapter and so now the challenge has more recently become one of attempting to clearly formulate the question of Corporate Social Responsibility against the pragmatic prejudice against it which is widespread today.

So now I want to understand what it means to ask what Corporate Social Responsibility *is*. This is the *Erfragtes* of the guiding question. This is what my question seeks to achieve: an understanding of the meaning of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. This would be to understand how to formulate this question in a manner that is entirely adequate to the task at hand. In stating my objective along such lines, I come no closer to an understanding of what it might mean to achieve such an objective. Corporate Social Responsibility *is*, as has already been shown, *das Gefragtes* of the question. And it remains to be seen what I am to interrogate in order to ask the guiding question in an entirely appropriate fashion. The *Befragtes* of the question, in other words, remains to be determined.

Considering the Site Towards which the Question Should be Addressed

An account of *what* is to be interrogated here as a means of asking the question of Corporate Social Responsibility remains outstanding. Any such account, for its part, must be accompanied by an associated justification as to why this particular interrogative site, out of all possible interrogative sites, will have eventually been privileged. If I am actually concerned with not simply starting from anywhere, from any old place, but rather with starting from the correct place, then the very nature of what this correct place might actually be must become a question for me. And it must become a question for me *before* I can even consider congratulating myself for having achieved and secured it.

In as much as this has become a driving concern for the present investigation, it hardly ever presents itself as anything more than a superfluous concern, or certainly not as anything more than a circumstantial after thought, within so much of what is and has been written in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility to date. This very fact warrants extended consideration. What makes it possible for such extant writings to avoid the sort of explicit and concerted reflection that I have now put at the centre of the present investigation? How has it been possible for so many figures to write in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility without having first of all come to terms with what is here being posited as a methodological necessity of determining an appropriate site for interrogation?

Is it the case that considerations such as the ones being named here can be avoided on account of the fact that an appropriate site towards which this question should be posed has already been achieved by those writing in the name of Corporate Social

Responsibility? Is it rather the case that just this sort of consideration is yet to be undertaken? Or is it otherwise the case that such considerations are *continuously* undertaken *precisely because* the appropriate site for interrogating Corporate Social Responsibility has not yet been secured? These matters cannot be settled in advance. And so the following question must be asked: *why is it that the questioned of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility rarely, if ever, presents itself as something which is itself question-worthy?*

This very question, on patient inspection, eventually presents us with the necessity of turning towards a consideration of the manner in which the nature of the questioned of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, its' *Befragtes*, has been traditionally presented and/or absented. If we are to successfully secure an entity for interrogation, an entity which will be adequate to the complete structural formulation of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, in light of the fact that a structural component of this question remains presently outstanding, then I am surely required to consider *how* this entity has been constituted as a concern for others, or not.

For Heidegger, as has been shown, questions *as such* are structured in light of their three component parts, irrespective of whether the questioner formulates their question with an open eye towards these three. So similarly for me, even though I am seeking to formulate the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, and to do so with a clear vision of its components, I must also have an eye towards the fact that the hitherto extant tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility *necessarily* undertakes considerations such as my own, even if this has not always been done explicitly. Towards this end, within this investigation I am accordingly obliged to

look again towards the tradition of investigating Corporate Social Responsibility, a tradition which cannot *not* express my own concern within it, at least not for as long it proclaims what Corporate Social Responsibility is. To make such proclamations, after all, is to engage with my guiding question in a round about way.

And where does this realization bring me? Certainly nowhere closer to a solution to what has recently become the driving problem. Nevertheless, in recognizing the fact that my concern over how to select the most appropriate site for interrogation must find expression elsewhere, I have simultaneously presented myself with a horizon upon which the search for a solution, and hence an eventual formulation of the question, can itself become appropriately expressed. Put simply, in recognizing that the quest for an appropriate site towards which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can be posed is not only my own, I simultaneously recognize that something essential is to be gained by me if I look towards the way in which this quest has a determinate precedence. Put more simply still, my recently identified conceptual problem *itself* has a tradition that I cannot but look towards here.

It is through this very observation that a direct connection can be made between the previously posited requirement for me to clear my question from the prejudices that serve to conceal it today *and* the recently realized requirement for me to find an appropriate entity towards which I am to pose my question. For in both cases the sought after site necessarily amounts to the same place! In as much as the argument against the need to explicitly state the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is intimately connected to the notion that this question need not be posed *exactly*

because appropriate ways of addressing it already exist, both can be shown to be rooted within, and therefore to be explainable in terms of, the self-same ground.

This ground, for its part, is nothing other than the extant tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility. Both the guiding question *and* the extant prejudices against it can be shown to be rooted there, tightly interwoven within one another. And so, if this investigation is to succeed in arriving upon an entirely appropriate structural formulation of its guiding question, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, it becomes correspondingly necessary for me to turn towards the extant questioning tradition for clues as to how this should and should not be done.

Why necessary? Necessary precisely because the appropriate formulation of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility necessitates a clearing of the way for it from the prejudices that would otherwise prohibit its formulation! The way, as has already been shown, is currently blocked by these prejudices, prejudices which are to be located nowhere else but within the very tradition which proceeds upon the basis of some sort of understanding of what Corporate Social Responsibility is. To labour along such lines is to necessarily have some sort of a response towards the question of what an entirely appropriate *Erfragtes* for the question of Corporate Social Responsibility would be. For my part, I do not yet know what this might be, other than to say that practice in and of itself is not enough. I therefore need to find out what else the question might be formulated in terms of, what else it has been formulated in terms of.

If these extant ways of offering an appropriate *Erfragtes*, an appropriate site towards which the question is to be posed, show themselves to be appropriate, then I need not concern myself any longer with the appropriate formulation of the question. If such a way already exists then I can simply proceed to take it over and proceed on its basis. But if these extant ways of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility show themselves to be inappropriate to the task at hand, this on account of the fact that the various sites selected turn out to be, for example, arbitrary or unstable, then it becomes correspondingly necessary for me to clear this very tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility *away from* the guiding question *so that* I can proceed to attempt to approach it in just such an appropriate manner.

This very way of turning towards a tradition, one which looks for guiding clues as to how a question is and has been formulated, whilst simultaneously maintaining the possibility of undertaking a departure away from that very tradition for the sake of the question, is not for its part without expression within Heidegger's work. Within *Being and Time*, he referred to such an activity under the rubric of *destruction*. It therefore makes sense to now consider what Heidegger meant by *destruction*.

The Questioning Tradition, Itself Questioned

For Heidegger, Western philosophy had hitherto failed to adequately formulate the question of Being. Yet the Western philosophical tradition had nonetheless come to regard this particular question as one which need not even be asked today, despite its characteristic un-success in this regard. Enter again the variety of anti-ontological inquisitional prejudices already discussed. These prejudices, as well as many others like them were, for Heidegger, *produced within* the Western philosophical tradition

itself. These prejudices were a product of the tradition's very historical progression and they were not to, indeed they could not be, appropriately understood apart from it.

The contemporaneously prevalent neglect of the question of Being, to be sure, was not always the case. The question of Being had after all once been "one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle" (2005: 21). But this was the case no longer. It therefore becomes central to Heidegger's initially projected task within *Being and Time* for him to explain how the subsequent trivialization of the question of Being itself became the case (2005: 63-64). This very transformation of the way in which the question of Being figured within the tradition, for its part, was something which could *itself* be explained. Indeed, for Heidegger, this was something which had to be explained if a sense for the meaning of the question of Being was to be eventually and appropriately arrived upon. As he puts it:

The question of Being does not achieve its true concreteness until we have carried through the process of destroying the ontological tradition. In this way we can fully prove that the question of the meaning of Being is one that we cannot avoid, and we can demonstrate what it means to talk about 'restating' this question (2005: 49)

The driving issue of *destruction*, for Heidegger, is therefore one of wondering, better still demonstrating, how the closeness of the ancients to the question of Being had subsequently and progressively fallen away. It is one of asking what had happened *within* the Western philosophical tradition so that such a fundamental, but no less indisputable, transformation of prerogatives could somehow come about. It is in this

precise sense that Heidegger sets down the necessity for nothing less than the task of ‘Destroying the History of Ontology’ (2005: 41-49, 63-64).

This *destruction*, for its part, suggests nothing at all like an incitement towards violence, a recommendation of book burning or an invitation towards any sort of starting afresh. On the contrary, *destruction* has a quite precise, even technical meaning within Heidegger’s work. It refers, as has already been intimated, to a very particular way in which a tradition, in Heidegger’s case the Western philosophical tradition, might be initially approached and subsequently engaged. For Heidegger, destruction was a way of characterising his way of approaching the question of Being in terms of how it had, but ultimately had *not*, been formulated within the history of the Western philosophical tradition. This very philosophical tradition, for its part, operates within the parameters of an engagement, however explicit, with that very question. Heidegger says that with destruction:

we have nothing to do with a vicious relativizing of ontological standpoints. But this destruction is just as far from having the *negative* sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its *limits*; these in turn are given factually in the way the question is formulated at the time, and in the way the possible field for investigation is bounded off (2005: 44)

So any destruction of the history of ontology, for Heidegger, necessitates an engagement with the way in which the question of Being *has* been formulated. And

with an eye towards the ways in which his guiding question has been formulated, Heidegger also has an eye towards the *limits* of any such formulation. What allows him to see these limits? Nothing other than his approaching of Being as a *question* first and foremost, as a question that has not yet been appropriately formulated in terms of its aforementioned structural components. Again he says:

The destruction of the history of ontology is essentially bound up with the way the question of Being is formulated, and it is possible only within such a formulation. In the framework of our treatise, which aims at working out that question in principle, we can carry out this destruction only with regard to stages of that history which are in principle decisive (*ibid.*).

So in as much as the tradition has been the very site at which the question of Being has been continuously posed, however inappropriately, so that it reaches the stage at which it is felt that the question need not even be posed today, the tradition is also the very site at which the question cannot be understood apart from. The tradition is the very site at which the question is necessarily posed, the only site at which it can be appropriately posed. The ontological tradition, for Heidegger, is therefore *simultaneously* the site which determines the question of Being in an inadequate manner, on the one hand, whilst also being the very condition of possibility of any questioning of Being, on the other hand.

All of this means that it is simply wrong to say that Heidegger has contempt for the tradition with which he is engaging, even when this engagement is undertaken in the name of *destruction*. Heidegger rather engages with the tradition, in the name of

destruction, as that which must be destroyed in order for an appropriate formulation of the question of Being to be realized *and simultaneously* as that which simply cannot be destroyed if the question of Being is to ever have a chance of being appropriately formulated. The issue, for Heidegger, is not one of *either* engaging with the tradition, *or* not. The issue is rather one of engaging with the tradition as that which determines a line of questioning whilst also being that which fails to entirely determine that very line.

It is in this precise sense that we are to understand Heidegger's description of tradition in the quotation below: not as something which is to be simply turned away from for the sake of positing a merely nominal and therefore entirely unsubstantiated originality. Instead, the tradition is something that must be turned *towards*, first of all, in order to nourish the very possibility of any subsequent turning *away* towards something else which the term original might then be attached. Much like Heidegger's own frequently highlighted 'turn' away from a concern with the Being of beings towards a concern with the truth of Beings, the latter, as David Farrell Krell points out (2004: 33), is possible only to the extent that the former has been thoroughly gone through *first of all*. And so Heidegger says:

When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks out access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have

had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand (2005: 43).

For Heidegger, the very notion *that* tradition is something which need not be turned towards is itself a prejudice which frequently manifests within the tradition itself. It manifests here because it is here, and indeed only here, that it is presumed that that which has been done already within the tradition has already been done well enough. But this is clearly not the case insofar as Heidegger is concerned, absolutely not. The history of ontology, for Heidegger, is not a story of progress, at least not for as long as progress is understood in the sense of some sort of ‘improvement’ upon something previously ‘deficient’. This history is rather something which is to be continually re-engaged for the sake of making anything like progress possible. The history of philosophy is therefore not at all populated by a long list of dead philosophers whose ideas require our sympathy today. This history is rather populated by a long list of living philosophies, living philosophies which need nothing *else* from us.

As Heidegger once famously said in the introduction to one of his celebrated lectures on Aristotle “he was born, he worked, he died” (Emad and Maly 1994: x). The issue, for Heidegger, is never one of describing, worse still explaining a philosophy with determinate reference to the ‘concerns’ or ‘background’ of the philosopher. The issue is rather always one of describing how the philosophy of the philosopher *itself* makes connections to, and is indeed itself intimately connected to, an entire historical tradition of philosophizing. And it is *only* in this very sense that anything like a destruction of the history of ontology makes any sense *at all*.

Again we can now inquire as to the nature of the connection between these concerns and our own concerns, insofar as the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is itself concerned. It has been stated from quite early on that within this chapter I will sketch a series of parallels between Heidegger's *way of questioning* and my own. So what is the nature of this particular parallel to be given as now, with regards to the notion of a questioning tradition, and the very possibility of approaching it *destructively*?

This particular connection more or less makes itself. This in as much as within the remainder of this investigation, I will proceed to seek my bearings from within the tradition which questions (*and* therefore already works within an understanding of the question of) Corporate Social Responsibility. This tradition, for me, will be simultaneously that which determines the guiding question in a variety of ways *and* that which might be shown to express a variety of inadequate formulations of this very question. The tradition cannot be said to be inadequate to this fundamental task of questioning in advance. It must rather be *shown* to be such. And this showing cannot be done without a continuous eye towards the tradition and, therefore, without a continuous eye towards the very manifestation of the particularity of the supposed limits thereof. And *how* is *this* to be done? I can now finally turn towards addressing this most crucial of methodological concerns¹¹.

¹¹ Is all of what we have come to know as this chapter really nothing but an over bloated exercise in self-deception? Can all of this talk of parallel lines really amount to anything other than an under cooked attempt to form connections where they ultimately cannot be made? Heidegger, as we know, questioned Being. I am attempting the preparation of a questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility. As with all parallel lines, is it also the case that *these* two concerns shall never meet? The reservation has now been raised. It can no longer be avoided. The remaining sections of this chapter will have two tasks assigned to it. Firstly: to respond to the charge that there is no worthwhile connection to be established between Heidegger's method of questioning and my own. Secondly: to more rigorously outline Heidegger's method of questioning which will, in turn, become the method which I will seek to put to work throughout the remainder of my own questioning. These tasks are, as will be shown, one and the same.

Is it Phenomenology that Questions the Questioning Tradition?

Heidegger characterizes the method of investigation carried out throughout *Being and Time* as “phenomenological” (2005: 49-63). *Being and Time*, at least on Heidegger’s reckoning, is therefore a thoroughgoing exercise in phenomenological questioning.

This assertion of Heidegger’s raises many interesting questions, questions which continue to compel many commentaries upon continental philosophy, as well as the history of ideas more generally. This is especially the case when Heidegger’s phenomenological self-categorisation is considered alongside the later statements made by him in his 1963 piece *My Way to Phenomenology* (see Heidegger 1972) and the fact, illustrated by Spiegelberg (1971: 271-357), that Heidegger’s earlier work is characterised by phenomenological posturing whereas his latter work is characterised by a conspicuous lack of references to phenomenological work and phenomenology more generally. This particular point is also echoed by the work of Richardson (2003) which argues for an appreciation of the development of Heidegger’s thinking as following a trajectory into, through and ultimately out of phenomenology. Otherwise, the works of Moran and Mooney (2002), Moran (2000), Glendinning (2007) and Spiegelberg (1981), amongst many others, further consider the intricacies of the ambivalent nature of Heidegger’s relationship to phenomenology.

What matters insofar as the present investigation is concerned is not the casting of a judgment over whether Heidegger was a phenomenologist, or not. What matters here is rather that Heidegger categorises the method of questioning undertaken in *Being and Time* as phenomenological. Since this is the method of questioning that this investigation strives to replicate, for as much as is possible, it makes sense to

categorise the method of questioning undertaken here as phenomenological. This for as long as the method of questioning undertaken here remains as faithful as possible to the method of questioning which Heidegger himself categorised as phenomenological within *Being and Time*.

Phenomenology, according to Heidegger, is not to be understood as some sort of pre-given 'standpoint' upon the way in which the world is (2005: 50). Instead, for Heidegger, phenomenology "must develop its concept out of what it takes as its theme and how it investigates its object" (1988: 1). Phenomenology, therefore, is not a way of responding towards the question of how the world is, or towards any other question at all for that matter. 'I think things are this way because I am a phenomenologist' does not get to the crux of the issue. Phenomenology, for Heidegger, is rather itself a way of raising questions and of subsequently following them through. 'As a phenomenologist, I study how things are to be approached' would be more in line with the matter at hand. Phenomenology does not know, in advance, how to approach the world. It is perhaps nothing but an ongoing attempt to become an appropriate approach towards the world. Furthermore, for Heidegger, what phenomenology is, and what phenomenology does, cannot be adequately grasped or understood through an historical study of the connections which the word 'phenomenology' makes. Nor, similarly, can phenomenology be appropriately understood in terms of the connections towards the word that have been made by particular 'schools' that have been called phenomenological (2005: 50- 51, 1988: 1-2). Instead, for Heidegger:

The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the what of the objects of

philosophical research as subject matter, but rather the *how* of that research (2005: 50).

So if phenomenology is a term denoting the ‘how’ of research, rather than the ‘what’, what then, we might ask, is this how? How is phenomenological research to be undertaken? What does phenomenological research entail? And again, what is phenomenology if it is *not* primarily a standpoint, a school of thought, a relatively recently emergent word, or any other such thing? If phenomenology is *not* these then what *is* it? A way of questioning, for sure! But what sort of way?

Just prior to undertaking an incredibly dense etymological, historical and, above all, philosophical discussion which sweeps along with it Plato, Aristotle, Kant, realism, idealism and Husserl, amongst others, (2005: 51-63), Heidegger focuses upon the fact that phenomenology, the word, is itself a combination of two component parts: ‘phenomenon’ and ‘logos’ (2005: 50). These words are Greek in their origin: φαινόμενον and λόγος respectively. So in this sense, at least superficially, Heidegger describes phenomenology as an ‘ology’, a discourse or a science [Heidegger (2005: 55-56) insists that λόγος isn’t readily translatable] of the ‘phenomenon’.

So if sociology is the λόγος of the social and biology is the λόγος of life and theology is the λόγος of God, then it follows that phenomenology must, for its part, be “the *science of phenomena*” (2005: 50). Heidegger’s aforementioned incredibly dense discussion hence sets towards the task of clarifying what it means for the components φαινόμενον and λόγος, phenomenon and logos, to be put together. It therefore attempts to clarify what a science of phenomena, phenomenology, actually entails.

This very same discussion also preliminarily demonstrates the manner in which this science of phenomena, phenomenology, has itself been continuously articulated and re-articulated throughout the history of philosophy. This demonstration of phenomenology's various historical articulations is done only preliminarily within *Being and Time*. Heidegger saw the fuller demonstration of the manner in which phenomenology is 'scientific philosophy' as a task for an ongoing destructive project, a project he originally planned to carry out within *Being and Time* (p. 63-64). But for Heidegger this task *could* be undertaken, as he remarks elsewhere, against the notion that phenomenology is a recent movement within philosophy:

phenomenological research can represent nothing less than the more explicit and more radical understanding of the idea of a scientific philosophy which philosophers from ancient times to Hegel sought to realise time and again in a variety of internally coherent endeavours...We shall maintain that phenomenology is not just one philosophical science among others, nor is it the science preparatory to the rest of them; rather, *the expression "phenomenology"* is the name for the *method of scientific philosophy in general...* (1988: 3).

So phenomenology is the science of phenomena, the axiom of which, following Husserl's famous assertion (Moran 2002: 1), is '*To the things themselves!*' (Heidegger 2005: 50, 58). And for Heidegger, all scientific philosophy has been labouring under this very axiom since ancient times, since philosophy's very inception. To quote Heidegger again:

That philosophy is scientific is implied in its very concept. It can be shown historically that at bottom all the great philosophies since antiquity more or less explicitly took themselves to be, and as such sought to be, ontology. In a similar way, however, it can also be shown that these attempts failed over and over again and why they had to fail (1988: 12).

But to say that philosophy, phenomenologically understood, is scientific, what does *that* mean? What is the meaning of scientific here? And how is this advocating of a scientific philosophy to be squared with the Heidegger we otherwise know to have been an unconcealed and acerbic critic of the modern, positivist form of scientific investigation (e.g. Heidegger 2004a, 2004b, 2002b, 1969)? Have we to make a choice between two different Heideggers here? Or is there a sense in which these two Heideggers, the one against science and the other for science, can be shown not to be inconsistent? The matter is surely worthy of pursuit. To have a science of phenomena, Heidegger argues, means nothing but:

to grasp its objects *in such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly (2005: 59).

This evocation of science in connection with philosophy, in the name of phenomenology, for Heidegger, means nothing but an attempt to redeem what philosophy meant *before* 'philosophy' and 'science' became gradually understood, and performed, distinctly and separately from one another (1988: 3-4). This observation, for its part, launches Heidegger on a discussion of the distinction

between “scientific philosophy”, on the one hand, and “philosophy as world-view” on the other. These two apparent forms of philosophy, which initially appear to our modern sensibilities as mutually exclusive, are forms which Heidegger proceeds to articulate in terms of their primordial interconnection (1988: 4-23).

For Heidegger, it isn't the case that philosophy is either a science of phenomena, of the being of phenomena, on the one hand, or a mere view point upon these phenomena, any old way of ascertaining the being of these phenomena, on the other hand. For on the one hand philosophy is always a particular way in which an existing human being ascertains the world of phenomena. It is therefore always a worldview, a way in which the world is viewed by the human being. But on the other hand, philosophy is always more than a mere outlook upon the world of things. As Heidegger says:

Whether the world-view is determined by superstitions and prejudices or is based purely on scientific knowledge and experience or even, as is usually the case, is a mixture of superstition and knowledge, prejudice and sober reason, it all comes to the same thing; nothing essential is changed (1988: 6).

To characterize philosophy as worldview is not to subjectivize philosophy to such an extent that each world view, since it is necessarily a world view, will be as adequate to the task of viewing the world as any other world view, whether philosophical, or not. In other words, to say that philosophy is a world view is only to say that philosophy, by very virtue of its being the case, is itself always a way of looking at the world. Philosophy, for Heidegger, is the very expression of a foundational

possibility which the existing being, *Dasein*, can (but need not) undertake. Philosophy need not be undertaken by *Dasein*. But world views cannot be avoided by *Dasein* by virtue of the fact that it is in the world. For as long as the human being is there, in comportment with its world, it will necessarily have a view upon that world. To characterize philosophy as world view is to therefore merely characterize philosophy as an endeavour which *Dasein* can undertake by very virtue of its being there.

The very possibility of doing anything like philosophy is therefore produced by the very way in which *Dasein*, as a viewer of the world, is. And whilst the erection of any philosophy is simultaneously the erection of a world view, it in no way follows that worldview-ness alone constitutes the philosophical essence of philosophy. Indeed, Heidegger insists that philosophy is perhaps least understood as world view alone. To understand philosophy as *merely* worldview would be the same as understanding the essence of music, religion, poetry, politics, ethics (or anything else for that matter) as *nothing but* ways of viewing the world, ways of being in the world. Now formally such a characterization is indeed correct. But to say that the essence of these various ways in which existing beings can be are each best understood through formal reference to the fact that they are *just* such ways of being is itself nothing short of absurd!

Each of these (music, religion etc.) are simply ways in which beings can be? So what! What of the way itself! The particularity of worldviews always requires us to see and say much more than the mere fact of their worldview-ness. And so it is with philosophy. Philosophy is a world view, for sure. But it is not only that. Philosophy cannot set out to formulate or rigidify a particular way of viewing the world because it

already is just such a way of viewing the world. For philosophy to seek to formulate a world view would be for philosophy to seek that which it *already* is in its very inception. Heidegger says:

the notion of a world-view philosophy is simply inconceivable. For it implies that philosophy, as science of being, is supposed to adopt specific attitudes toward and posit specific things about beings. To anyone who has even an approximate understanding of the concept of philosophy and its history, the notion of a world-view philosophy is an absurdity (1988: 12).

This observation in turn paves the way towards Heidegger's discussion of the notion of a scientific philosophy as opposed to the partially disregarded notion of philosophy as world view. Heidegger initially evokes the everyday notion that philosophy is a scientific way of looking at the world, a sort of scientific world view, thereby suggesting that it is this scientificity alone which distinguishes philosophy from a merest apprehension of the world (1988: 7-9). But this common sense understanding of the essence of philosophy is evoked only so that it can be disregarded. Philosophy, on this normal showing, is a more appropriate, more accurate, more correct way of accessing the world of beings than a mere world view.

But, and this is the crucial point, for Heidegger, philosophy does not have a view upon particular beings, upon particular entities, at all. Philosophy rather has an eye towards Being, the entity-ness of entities. In this sense, the notion of philosophy as a scientific world view is entirely incorrect. It is incorrect because philosophy, for

Heidegger, has nothing at all to do with the positing of what particular beings are. Philosophy is rather the thoroughgoing consideration of what the Being of beings is.

It is only in this sense that philosophy is understood by Heidegger as 'scientific'. Philosophy is scientific to the extent that it and it alone seeks to ascertain the being of beings. It is therefore the science of Being: this for as long as we understand science not in its positivist sense, as that which posits, but rather as λόγος. World-views state the such and such of beings. Science, understood in the positivist sense, does this also, albeit in a quite specific and specialised fashion. But philosophy, for its part, is not at all concerned with formulating positive statements concerning beings. Philosophy, for Heidegger, is rather the attempt to formulate an approach towards what beings are, labouring under the mystery as to why there are beings rather than nothing at all (2000). And it is also in this sense that the Heidegger who despairs as to the progress being made today by scientific positivism can be reconciled with the Heidegger who characterizes his own philosophy as scientific. Again, we must consider the two senses of the term scientific being evoked here. Heidegger says:

Philosophy is the science of being. For the future we shall mean by "philosophy" scientific philosophy and nothing else. In conformity with this usage, all non-philosophical sciences have as their theme some being or beings, and indeed in such a way that they are in every case antecedently given as beings to those sciences. All the propositions of the non-philosophical sciences, including those of mathematics, are positive propositions. Hence, to distinguish them from philosophy, we shall call all non-philosophical sciences positive sciences (1998: 13).

Philosophy, for Heidegger, is therefore the science of Being, in fundamental contradistinction to the many extant sciences of beings. This very distinction between being, on one hand, and beings, on the other, is absolutely crucial to an understanding of all of Heidegger's philosophy. He characterizes this differentiation with recourse to the Greek *krinein*, and famously calls it *the ontological difference* (1998: 17). The ontological difference is the name which Heidegger gives to the irreconcilable void between a positing of beings with regards to their properties (sciences and world-views), on the one hand, and a questioning of Being insofar as there is a very mysterious is-ness which everything that is can be seen to be initially approached through (philosophy), on the other hand. Of this critical turn between two fundamentally irreconcilable starting points, Heidegger says

in distinction from the sciences of the things that are, of beings, ontology, or philosophy in general, is the critical science, or the science of the inverted world. With this distinction between being and beings and the selection of being as theme we depart in principle from the domain of beings (1988: 17).

And what of phenomenology insofar as this science of being, ontology is concerned?

Heidegger says:

Ontology and phenomenology are not two distinct philosophical disciplines among others. These terms characterize philosophy itself with regard to its object and its way of treating the object (2005: 62).

Phenomenology, as the science of phenomena is therefore the science of the Being of phenomena, the science of the Being of those which are, of those which are within Being. Whereas the positive sciences, on Heidegger's watch, will go out towards a variety of different phenomena for the sake of positively determining them along particular lines of inquiry (biological, physiological, sociological, etc), phenomenology, as the science of phenomena, the science of the Being of beings, will go out towards phenomena as such. Phenomenology seeks the phenomena-ness of phenomena, the Being of beings.

This phenomenological going out towards is not inaugurated for the sake of positing a particular characteristic or set of characteristics concerning the phenomenon approached. It is rather a going out towards which is characterized by its having an eye towards the possibility of ascertaining the fundamental constitution of the phenomenon, of allowing "that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (2005: 58). In other words, it is not for phenomenology to determine the Being of any being in advance. It is rather for phenomenology to attempt to allow the Being of any being to speak for itself, from itself. Perhaps above all else, to repeat what has already been said above, phenomenology is the ongoing attempt to formulate an approach towards the world. As Heidegger says:

The very *point of departure* [*Ausgang*] for our analysis requires that it be secured by the proper method, just as much as does our *access* [*Zugang*] to the phenomenon, or our *passage* [*Durchgang*] through whatever is prevalently covering it up. The idea of grasping and explicating phenomena in a way

which is ‘original’ and ‘intuitive’ [“originären” und “intuitiven”] is directly opposed to the *naïveté* of a haphazard, ‘immediate’, and unreflective ‘beholding’. [“Schauen”]...Everything which belongs to the species of exhibiting and explicating and which goes to make up the way of conceiving demanded by this research, is called ‘phenomenological’ (2005: 61).

Surely, in light of all of this talk of the Being of beings as opposed to the comportment towards beings as such, my own line of questioning is indeed condemned to the realm of the non-philosophical sciences? In comporting the present investigation towards something which is, Corporate Social Responsibility, as opposed to is-ness as such, have I not also directed my investigation away from the very possibility of its being phenomenological? Must this work not now be understood as positivist in its intention, at least for as long as it takes its clues not for Being, but from a particular being? This certainly seems to be the way in which the matter at hand presents itself in light of the above. But on the other hand, isn’t it phenomenology which teaches us to take our bearings not from the way in which things appear but rather from the way in which things are to be approached? Indeed it is! So let us look closer. Let us try, in the spirit of phenomenology, to find our bearings from the matter at hand.

A Phenomenological Destruction of Corporate Social Responsibility

From the outset of this entire investigation, the phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility was a mystery to me. Still now I quite simply do not know what Corporate Social Responsibility is. Or rather, I do have certain notions of what Corporate Social Responsibility might be, as do most people. But that which serves as

the primary motivation for my question is the fact that I do not know how to describe what Corporate Social Responsibility is in any way other than by eventually falling back upon a common-sense notion or little other than my world-view. So in asking the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, I am also asking whether Corporate Social Responsibility can ever be accessed in a more robust way, whether it ever has been accessed in such a way.

I by no means seek to trivialize, distort and thereby dismiss this mystery, this phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility, by calling it an ‘oxymoron’, ‘nonsensical’, ‘stupid’, ‘misguided’ or any such thing. I rather want to know what Corporate Social Responsibility is *that* it can be called such things. Corporate Social Responsibility, whatever else might be said about it, is clearly *something!* This by virtue of the fact *that* it is! But this recognition, on its own, does not tell me *what* Corporate Social Responsibility is. It only tells me that the question has not yet been properly understood, properly formulated. Hence the current investigation! Here raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, in as much as I refuse to cut this questioning short through a premature trivialization of the phenomenon that is to be given over to questioning, I simultaneously have little interest in the notion that Corporate Social Responsibility has *already* been made present in a particular form, adequately, positively.

So within this chapter what I have been trying to do is clarify *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is to be understood. I have done this with an eye towards the following thematic clues: *the need to clear the grounds* for the question from the prejudices that cast it as irrelevant, *the need to formulate the question* in

terms of its three structural components and *the need to determine a site*, what Heidegger called *ein Befragtes*, towards which the question should be posed.

The aforementioned grounds were partially cleared within the previous chapter where the prevalence of what I called the pragmatic disposition towards the question was elucidated in terms of how it authorised some questions whilst trivialising others. The need to formulate the question and the need to determine a site towards which it should be posed were then identified as interrelated tasks. These tasks were to be addressed by *destroying the tradition* of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility, that is to say, by considering the history of how this question has been posed with an eye towards the limits of this very same endeavour.

Even now, I am not sure that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can be appropriately conceived *at all*. Hence the need for a destruction of the history of Corporate Social Responsibility, hence the need to look closely at how this question has already been addressed. This destruction in turn lent itself towards the need to expose more prejudices against the guiding question and was said to require a *phenomenological method*. This phenomenological method, for its part, demanded a questioning of the tradition which questions Corporate Social Responsibility, a questioning which took its bearings from the phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility and from studying how it is already being approached.

This all means that I now understand the very notion of an already extant presence of Corporate Social Responsibility as itself a prejudice which conceals the need which I find most appropriate, that is, the need to approach Corporate Social Responsibility as

a question first and foremost. This prejudice, for its part, will shortly be shown to have been produced by the very tradition which questions, and more often than not directly responds to, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. In order for us to be capable of raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, we must realize that we cannot avoid comporting ourselves towards the many instances in which that question has been traditionally articulated.

To reiterate, we are to do this *destructively*, destruction here understood in the positive sense of conceiving a tradition precisely in terms of its self-imposed limits. These limits take the form of the prejudices already mentioned, the prejudices which block the path towards an understanding of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility as a question first and foremost.

To approach the question of Corporate Social Responsibility as a question first and foremost for its part therefore means to approach it with an eye towards its structural components, the components which characterize all questions as questions as such. If Corporate Social Responsibility is to be given over to questioning in this manner then we must formulate its definitive and characteristic question, the question of what it is, with an eye towards these structural components *and* with an eye towards the manner in which these have been articulated elsewhere and otherwise. The structural components of our guiding question have been determined above, at least as far as is possible at the current stage in the inquiry. The manner in which the tradition has articulated these components will remain a concern throughout.

Specifically, I am to be predominantly guided by this pursuit of an entirely appropriate *Erfragtes*, an entirely appropriate site towards which the question is to be posed. I will take clues as to what this might be *from* the tradition. Destructively, I recognize the tradition as both that which enables this questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility and as that which disables it. Correspondingly, I seek to precisely demarcate the way in which this tradition simultaneously reflects upon the nature of what this site should be whilst also undertaking this very reflection in a manner which fails to reckon up to the challenges of the task at hand. The driving concern is therefore one of attempting to access Corporate Social Responsibility, as a question, by patiently attempting to give it over to questioning through a precise determination of an as yet to be filled structural component of the question as a question.

Through all of this the question remains as to whether Corporate Social Responsibility is something which lends itself towards such thoroughgoing phenomenological investigation. The elephant in the room, so to speak, is the notion that Corporate Social Responsibility is much too un-philosophical a phenomenon to be approached in such an overtly philosophical manner. This particularly in light of the fact that the work of Martin Heidegger, from whom this investigation takes so much, itself posits the questioning of anything other than being, in a realm far removed from philosophy. How is this suggestion to be responded to? Perhaps only by following the investigation through!

CHAPTER FOUR

Questioning Corporate Social Responsibility

Like the brand names of the best selling detergents (as “Blast” and “Surge”), the labels affixed to social issues and to commentaries upon them are often chosen more to titillate than to inform...One such social issue bears the label “corporate social responsibility” or just “social responsibility.” The term is a brilliant one; it means something, but not always the same thing, to everybody...Even the antonyms, socially “irresponsible” and “non-responsible,” are subject to multiple interpretations.

Dow Votaw (1972: 25)

Chapter Introduction

The methodological concerns outlined within the previous chapter require me to be assured that the entity towards which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is eventually posed is the correct one. This means that I cannot simply pose the question at anything: it must rather be posed towards something which *can* give account of that which I seek to question. The driving concern now, in raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, is to secure just such an entity. If there already exists something which is widely held as being capable of correctly responding to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility then it is worth investigating what *that* is, and, moreover, investigating how this something has come to assume just such a role. Such is the shape of so much of what is to follow, both within this chapter and also across the various proceeding chapters.

This chapter therefore reviews some of the most prominent ways in which the phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility has been approached, thereby reviewing the various ways in which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has been asked. The concern of this chapter is to illustrate *how* Corporate Social

Responsibility has been posited and subsequently deliberated over by some of its most influential theorists and advocates. Or, in methodological terms, the concern of this chapter is to interrogate how the questioning tradition has summonsed a variety of sites that are held to be appropriate sites for interrogation when raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Or again, within this chapter I will consider how what Heidegger called *ein Befragtes* of all questions, in this case the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, has been laid down in a variety of ways insofar as the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned.

The chapter begins with a discussion of how *definitions* have been frequently made to assume such a role. As will be shown - there exists today a widespread tendency to approach Corporate Social Responsibility through so-called definitions thereof. This means, in turn, that for many today Corporate Social Responsibility, whatever it is, appears as something already defined even *before* it has been investigated, however preliminarily. Such a scenario places the researcher in a somewhat peculiar position. Only when we have a so-called definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, it seems, can we go about saying anything definitive about it. And only when the so-called definition becomes an appropriate model for accessing Corporate Social Responsibility do we become accordingly obliged to consider answers to our question even *before* we have even properly posed it.

Significant as this observation is to my overall concerns, however, the objective of the opening section of this chapter is *not* to expand upon it. The objective of the opening section of the chapter is to rather demonstrate *why* the posited proliferation of arbitrarily imposed definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility, rather than

securing access to it, actually serves to block the very possibility of forging an appropriately inquisitive path towards it *at all*. This sceptical disposition towards the idea of adopting a definitional approach to Corporate Social Responsibility is necessarily shared, it will be argued, by the variety of works which serve as the focus for the remainder of this chapter.

This remainder, which is indeed the bulk, focuses upon the three *questioning conventions* that have, I argue, largely come to characterise extant scholarly literature on Corporate Social Responsibility. Within each of these questioning conventions the concern is *not* to start with a definition of Corporate Social Responsibility and move on from there. The concern is rather to attempt to understand what Corporate Social Responsibility by first of all *asking*, rather than asserting, what it is that it is. This has been done, as will be shown, along three distinct conceptual trajectories. Hence the term *questioning conventions*: what will be of concern throughout the latter part of this chapter will be the accurate depiction of the three most predominant ways in which the question ‘what is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ has been asked.

After having undertaken such an investigation the chapter then closes, as has already been implied above, by discussing the manner in which each of these questioning conventions connect to the guiding concern here, namely, the raising of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility in the correct manner. Throughout the chapter, indeed throughout the entire investigation, the concern will be with the question *and* with that after which it asks. These two aspects of the investigation, as will be continually demonstrated, need not, indeed cannot, necessarily be understood as one and the same thing.

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility

What is Corporate Social Responsibility? Answers to this question can, and frequently do, initially come to us in the form of various *definitions* thereof. So if we are truly interested in investigating what Corporate Social Responsibility *is* then such definitions would surely represent an entirely appropriate preliminary port of call. And if any particular definition consulted here indeed does capture the essence of that which we are out after here, such a port of call would simultaneously represent the terminus of our journey: these necessarily being one and the same location in just such a case.

Such a distinct possibility certainly warrants extended consideration. Indeed, the distinct possibility that Corporate Social Responsibility has already been more than adequately defined, and that this has happened more than once before, simply cannot be avoided by an investigation like this. I must, rather, face up to the possibility that what I am seeking to do here has already been done before, perhaps even many times over. And it is only in the aftermath of just such an initial facing up, a confrontation with that which I must strive to somehow distinguish my own approach from, that the impetus and subsequent momentum of this investigation is to be either temporarily gained or forever relinquished.

If the current line of questioning is to be set upon firm ground then this will be done *not* by initially ignoring the variety of answers that have been given to the guiding question. This line will rather be forged only if we first of all attempt to *encounter* answers that have already been given to ‘our’ question, preliminarily in the form of a definition. On towards the definition of Corporate Social Responsibility then!

According to the European Trade Union Confederation, which embraces the by now prevalent tendency to represent Corporate Social Responsibility by the acronym CSR, that which we now seem to be seeking to define here can indeed be defined. Corporate Social Responsibility is, above all, an extra-legal corporate orientation towards its extra-fiduciary requirements. Or, in the words of the Confederation itself:

CSR is defined as “A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Trade Union Confederation on Corporate Social Responsibility 2004).

We need not dwell upon the details of this particular definition just yet. This is because whilst this particular definition is doubtlessly prevalently cited and therefore relatively influential, it is by no means the only definition of Corporate Social Responsibility that exists today. The government of the United Kingdom, for its part, determines matters as follows:

Specifically, we see CSR as the voluntary actions that business can take, over and above compliance with minimum legal requirements, to address both its own competitive interests and the interests of wider society (Csr.gov.uk 2008).

Elsewhere, the CSR Network, a consultancy firm which “helps companies around the world do business in a responsible way” (CSR Network 2008a), offers the following definition to the world:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is about how businesses align their values and behaviour with the expectations and needs of stakeholders - not just customers and investors, but also employees, suppliers, communities, regulators, special interest groups and society as a whole. CSR describes a company's commitment to be accountable to its stakeholders (CSR Network 2008b)

And the final definition which we will consider for our purposes here, offered by Corporate Watch, a Non-Governmental Organisation which identifies itself as “part of the growing anti-corporate movement” (Corporate Watch 2008a) defines the object of our concern, Corporate Social Responsibility, in the following manner:

CSR describes the principle that companies can and should make a positive contribution to society. CSR is the practice of managing the social, environmental, and economic impacts of the company...being responsive to 'stakeholders'...and behaving according to a set of values which are not codified in law. In practice the term can refer to a wide range of actions that companies may take, from donating to charity to reducing carbon emissions (Corporate Watch 2006: 5).

We now have four definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility whereas previously we had none. This means that we now have four answers to our question whereas previously we only had our question. What do these four answers to our question, these so-called definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility, tell us about Corporate Social Responsibility? What do we now know about Corporate Social Responsibility

that we did not know beforehand? At the very least we now know that there is more than one definition of Corporate Social Responsibility. But it is quite probable that we knew *that* already. Indeed, in order for it to have been possible to go out in search of definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility, it must have been known, in a certain way, that multiple definitions *already* existed. That said, at the very least we have now had our suspicions that Corporate Social Responsibility can be defined in more than one way confirmed, this by virtue of the fact that events have indeed transpired accordingly. But this fact seems somewhat beside the point. What of the definitions themselves? What of Corporate Social Responsibility itself?

Each definition cited above, as can be clearly read, alludes towards Corporate Social Responsibility as a business practice, voluntarily undertaken, for the sake of the actor *and* a variety of external interests and/or stakeholder groups. Each definition also constitutes Corporate Social Responsibility as a set of actions voluntarily undertaken by corporations towards a set of obligations that exist over and above the formal demands of the law. It is also worth pointing out, finally, that although these definitions are offered by organisations which each represent distinct and diverse interests, their contents nonetheless resonate strongly with one another.

On this showing, then, we seem to have a somewhat stable answer to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, even if this answer differs lexically from definition to definition. Lexical differences or not, we might nonetheless be tempted to say that what really matters here is that the various definitions considered gesture towards a similar set of dynamics. The above attempt towards synthesis, however brief, suggests that such dynamical similarities can indeed be identified. So even if we do not have an

inalterable definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, which we clearly do not, the very fact that the definitions cited here gesture towards something more or less coherent will surely suffice as an answer to our question.

I would gladly embrace this as being the case were it not for two associated but nonetheless determinative factors. Firstly: the definition selection process undertaken here was done more or less entirely arbitrarily. Secondly: the need for a robust definition of Corporate Social Responsibility remains a core concern for scholarly specialists in the area, even to this very day. A discussion of this first factor will preoccupy me for the remainder of the current section. And a discussion of the second factor will preoccupy me for the according remainder of the current chapter.

Regarding the first factor then, it should be quite clear that there is nothing entirely commendable, methodologically speaking, about the manner in which these four particular definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility were selected. There is nothing, in other words, that reliably guarantees this posited part being justifiably taken as a representative depiction of the wider whole, at least not at present. Nor, furthermore, can the hitherto silence upon the specific manner in which these particular definitions were selected be tolerated any longer, at least not by any self-respecting researcher. Despite such flaws, however, this entirely *arbitrary* definition selection procedure nonetheless gestures towards a methodological principle that will become *essential* across the course of the investigation.

For the sake of alluding towards this principle let us conduct a very brief thought experiment. First of all, let us assume a hypothetical scenario wherein the entire

population of all definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility that have ever been formulated and will ever be formulated could be once and for all determined in advance and for all time. Notwithstanding the truly preposterous likelihood of such a scenario ever actually coming to pass, let us nonetheless assume that thanks to it we have now found ourselves within a position from which we can go on to consider the content of each and every possible definition of Corporate Social Responsibility. Given such a hypothetical scenario, the hypothetical question is this: would we come any closer to an indisputable answer to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility if all of this were to ever come to pass?

Of course we would not! A complete anthology of definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility would only tell us that Corporate Social Responsibility, whatever it is, has been approached in many different ways. Yet the question ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ asks for nothing of that sort! It asks ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ It does not ask ‘How has Corporate Social Responsibility been hitherto defined?’ It does not ask *this* question in as much as it does not ask after the capital city of the United Kingdom, the author of *Ulysees*, the current captain of the Columbian football team or the length of a piece of string. To answer our question with a list of definitions, or to even answer it with an aggregate or synthesis of definitions, is to fundamentally misunderstand what it is that the question asks for. The guiding question is only interested in the existence of various definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility to the extent that their very existence points, in turn, towards the more primordial fact that something called Corporate Social Responsibility has been approached in a variety of ways. Here we are concerned with *making the right approach*.

A multi-definitional scenario, namely the scenario within which we presently find ourselves regarding the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, merely gestures towards the existence of *something* which these various definitions necessarily cease to question. This by virtue of the fact that definitions, almost by definition, seek to respond to ‘what is’ questions. They themselves are not and cannot be such questions. It is this *something*, this something which definitions as such no longer question, that we are striving to give over to questioning here. This something is the very phenomenon that will concern us here, throughout our investigation. Indeed, it will be no less than that from which our guiding question takes its bearings.

This means, in turn, that even if our question has been answered within this, that, any or no definition, and if we thereby subsequently sought to reproduce or reinforce the selected answer *at the level of the answer*, our entire investigation would have failed. It would have failed for as long as it located itself at the level of what has been merely stated of Corporate Social Responsibility, whether in the name of a definition, or not. To pick up and work with a definition would be to take answers to our question on their surface, thereby refusing to first of all comprehend that towards which they respond. What matters for us, even before all answers, is that the question ‘What is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ itself has been properly understood in advance.

Failing that, a concerted effort towards the comprehension of this question, even if ultimately unsuccessful, is nonetheless indispensable for our present concerns. Such an inquisitive disposition can only be secured by us if we initially seek to clarify what it is that is asked for in the asking of our question. According to Heidegger, this kind of questioning requires:

dispensing with a *definition*. Perhaps a definition is precisely what is least suitable for grasping an essence. It is not a matter of capturing this essence in *sentences* (or in a *single* sentence) that we can repeat and pass on. The sentence as such says least of all (2002a: 48).

An arbitrarily happened upon definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, however accurate this definition might be, cannot possibly define anything of *this* questioning in advance. In asking the question what is ‘Corporate Social Responsibility?’ reliance upon definitions becomes not only superfluous to our concerns. Definitions pronounce themselves as those which are entirely at odds with concerns such as our own. *This* is the methodologically essential principle alluded towards above, a principle already outlined in the previous chapter.

Against the Definitional Approach

For all the hitherto talk of the necessity to dispense with definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility for the sake of forging an appropriate path towards it, it nonetheless remains the case that definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility do indeed proliferate, even to this very day. This brings us towards a discussion of the second factor determining why an approximate description of Corporate Social Responsibility cannot be accepted in advance. The fact of definitional proliferation within the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility must now be confronted with this methodological suspicion concerning the value of definitions, precisely for the sake of making a case for just such a suspicious disposition. It is one thing to assert a preference for a particular methodological standpoint. It is quite another matter entirely to argue *why* such a standpoint should be adopted.

It is this latter matter towards which I will attend now. The presently held contempt for a definitional approach to Corporate Social Responsibility cannot be simply justified in advance. A case for it must rather be made in the face of the fact that just such a definitional approach thrives today. This case, for its part, will be made across two movements; the first negative, the second positive, the first which will carry us immediately and briefly, the second, towards which the first brings us, which will carry us shortly and more extensively.

In the name of this first movement, let us focus upon the predicament of what is one of the most influential, if not the most influential definition of Corporate Social Responsibility that exists today within the scholarly literature: the definition offered by Abigail McWilliams and Donald Siegel. Throughout our movement within this particular definition, which will ultimately amount to a critical departure from it, let us consider how a scholarly definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, and not just any scholarly definition but a hugely influential one, can be said to substantially differ, if at all, from the four arbitrarily selected definitions cited above.

Let us ask whether it is the case, in other words, that Corporate Watch, the CSR Network, the British government and the European Commission are as entitled to write authoritatively in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility as each other and anybody else. Or, on the other hand, let us ask whether it is instead the case that those devoting themselves towards the task of theorising Corporate Social Responsibility along scholarly lines, in this case McWilliams and Siegel, are actually in a position to capture something fundamental within their definition thereof. Let us keep this

question active in the background as we turn towards McWilliams and Siegel's definition of Corporate Social Responsibility itself:

The definition of CSR is not always clear. Here we define CSR as actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law (2001a: 117).

It is clear that even as McWilliams and Siegel define Corporate Social Responsibility, they simultaneously recognise the inherent difficulties that exist in the task of composing and subsequently endorsing just such a definition. This is clear from the apologetic pronouncement which immediately precedes their wheeling out of the definition itself: "the definition of CSR is not always clear". A notional stab at reflexivity is so clearly being made here, in deed if not in word, whereby the very act of definition is acknowledged to be not without its associated problems. And for this, presumably, leniency is in turn expected from us. But let us not accept this outstretched hand just yet, however. Admission is not the same as absolution: McWilliams and Siegel's 'definition' of Corporate Social Responsibility is, in the end, still passed off as just such a 'definition'. Their hubris ultimately trumps their humility: and this more than once, notional reflexivity notwithstanding. Within an editorial published within a special issue of the *Journal of Management Studies*, five years after their initial pronouncement of the definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, these authors write:

Consistent with McWilliams and Siegel (2001), we define CSR as situations where the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in 'actions that appear to

further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law'. However, this is just one interpretation of CSR. Numerous definitions of CSR have been proposed and often no clear definition is given, making theoretical development and measurement difficult (McWilliams, Siegel and Wright 2006: 1).

Again we have conscious recognition made that definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility are not easily had. Nevertheless, the second definition of Corporate Social Responsibility remains wilfully consistent with their earlier one. Indeed, the authors go so far as to point out the fact that their own work is consistent with their own work, that they have, in other words, the capacity to be consistent with themselves! This is reassuring. Less reassuring, however, is the supposed rigour of the definition with which the authors have chosen to remain consistent, namely their own. Duane Windsor (2001a), for example, takes McWilliams and Siegel's definition of Corporate Social Responsibility to task for its not having offered what he calls a general theory of Corporate Social Responsibility. McWilliams and Siegel (2001b) agree with Windsor on this point. Their definition is, they claim, of Corporate Social Responsibility as a strategic project, a form of investment, undertaken by a firm towards the end of profit maximisation. McWilliams and Siegel hence argue that in offering his critique Windsor:

merely quibbles about our definition of CSR and contends that the framework does not apply to all types of CSR (2001b: 505)

They then proceed to excuse themselves accordingly:

Our contribution was to outline a model that can be used to address resource allocation decisions regarding *certain types* of CSR...Windsor is correct to point out that our model may not apply to *all* types of CSR, as he has *broadly* defined it. Indeed, as stated in the second paragraph of the paper, it was never our intent to examine all aspects of CSR (*ibid.*).

It must be said that something very peculiar is happening here! McWilliams and Siegel readily admit that their definition of Corporate Social Responsibility doesn't actually define Corporate Social Responsibility. They thereby argue that they are offering a definition of Corporate Social Responsibility which isn't actually a definition of Corporate Social Responsibility. This means, in other words, that they are admitting to the charge that they aren't actually up to the task which they nonetheless later claim to have previously achieved! What is more, these authors actually excuse themselves *affirmatively* for not having done that which they later on claim to have achieved! A moment of pause is warranted so as to unravel the absurdities of such a scenario.

Why do McWilliams and Siegel choose to stick with this definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, a definition that they themselves know to be incapable of performing the one task assigned to it, by them? Why do they choose to remain consistent with something they so obviously know to be inconsistent with itself? Windsor, for his part, is said by McWilliams and Siegel to merely 'quibble' over their definition of Corporate Social Responsibility. But surely any scholar worth their salt would 'quibble' over this point, at least for as long as scholarship is to be legitimately held as distinct from farce, folly and quackery. Of what merit, in the end, is a

definition which doesn't actually define; a definition that is actually defended for its not having defined anything? McWilliams and Siegel are not actually consistent with themselves after all, their own claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

Yet the question remains as to why this definition of Corporate Social Responsibility has been so influential. According to Google Scholar, the work has been cited literally hundreds of times. And the *Oxford Handbook on Corporate Social Responsibility* (Crane et al 2008), having been co-edited by these figures, amongst others, offers additional symbolic confirmation as to the significance of the contribution of these figures to the field of Corporate Social Responsibility. That contribution has been discussed above; its shortcomings are there to be seen. What is more, these shortcomings are freely admitted by the authors themselves. So why has this contribution been so influential?

Whatever the answer might be, it is clear that McWilliams and Siegel can write so confidently about Corporate Social Responsibility only by first of all ignoring, or in any case trivialising, the very difficult question of *what* it is. Once Corporate Social Responsibility becomes no longer question worthy, it becomes something straightforward, uncomplicated and obvious. Such an understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility certainly aids the pragmatic engagement with the question discussed earlier. But for now it must be said that it is somewhat confusing, if not just simply outrageous, for leading scholars of Corporate Social Responsibility to ask what it is, to give an answer, and then to say that the answer is not really an answer.

Why, to reiterate, has such perversity been met with such positive reception?

One might say, charitably, that in working from what they describe as a theory of the firm perspective based upon the work of Barney (1991) and thereby explaining Corporate Social Responsibility as a form of investment, McWilliams and Siegel have succeeded in opening up a channel for discussion. But this answer inevitably leads us to question the value of this very discussion. Such a questioning would not require us to discuss the merits and demerits of a theory of the firm perspective *as such*. It would rather require us to question the value of only seeing Corporate Social Responsibility through such a lens. Certainly McWilliams and Siegel are more than happy to look at the world accordingly. But what of the rest of us that are not already converted to such a worldview? What are we to learn about Corporate Social Responsibility *itself* from statements such as, for example, the following?

some level of CSR will maximise profits while satisfying the demand for CSR from multiple stakeholders. The ideal level of CSR can be determined by cost-benefit analysis...managers should treat decisions regarding CSR precisely as they treat all investment decisions [Emphasis added] (McWilliams and Siegel 2001a: 125).

Let us admit, bluntly, that we learn very little, if anything at all, about Corporate Social Responsibility itself from statements such as these. McWilliams and Siegel define Corporate Social Responsibility from the point of view of a theory of the firm perspective. Corporate Social Responsibility thereby becomes a project, amongst others, that managers might choose to invest in (see also McWilliams and Siegel 2000). We hence learn something about what they believe the theory of the firm to be from their work. This is fine, of course, if that is what you require. But it is more or

less useless if you are interested in learning about what Corporate Social Responsibility is, which this investigation so clearly is.

As far the present investigation is concerned, then, let it be said right now and forever more that I simply cannot allow myself to be tempted by any such answer to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Nor, similarly, will I be convinced by any answer which positions any sort of “perspective”, that is to say “world-view”, theory of the firm or otherwise, before the question and then proceeds to retrospectively concoct the question in terms of the perspective. This is only to say that for me, when it comes to the overarching attempt to understand what Corporate Social Responsibility is, questioning will always remain an activity that exists prior to definitional answering.

Before turning towards a consideration of the manner in which such a concern can already be seen to be widely expressed *within* the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility, a concern which will occupy the remainder of this chapter, let us briefly consider, in the final moment of this negative movement, the following definitional statement, made by Buchholz (1991: 19):

While various definitions of social responsibility have been advocated, there seem to be five key elements in most, if not all, of these definitions: (1) corporations have responsibilities that go beyond the production of goods and services at a profit; (2) these responsibilities involve helping to solve important social problems, especially those they have helped created; (3) corporations have a broader constituency than stockholders alone; (4)

corporations have impacts that go beyond simple marketplace transactions; and (5) corporations serve a wider range of human values than can be captured by a sole focus on economic values.

At this stage it should be clear that the above statement, irrespective of its doubtless accuracy, can be of little help in pointing us towards that which we are out after here. To reiterate the methodological principle which is fast becoming an axiom of the present investigation, *answers* to the question that we are trying to come to terms with here tell us least of all. What matters is not the response, but rather the way in which the response is already largely determined by the question itself. And it is in this sense that we now turn towards the three questioning conventions that can be argued to characterise much of the extant literature on Corporate Social Responsibility. It is also in this sense that our hitherto movement of distinction by negation relents, becoming instead a movement which begins to gradually posit that which the investigation actually seeks to do.

Towards the Question

Not everybody has been content with avoiding the question of Corporate Social Responsibility with recourse to an answer that they themselves don't even believe to be sufficient. Many scholars have instead taken the task that they have set themselves seriously. I will now turn towards the task of examining some of the more patient attempts to come to terms with what Corporate Social Responsibility is. Much like McWilliams and Siegel, the scholars whose work is considered here recognise the inherent difficulty of pinning Corporate Social Responsibility down to a particular definition. Unlike McWilliams and Siegel, however, these scholars have not decided

that the solution to the problem is for everybody to pretend that an incomplete definition can pass for a complete one.

Our discussion, as has already been stated, will hence take us through three distinct approaches to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. The first of these will be referred to as *the originary questioning convention*, whereby Corporate Social Responsibility is questioned in terms of its historical underpinnings. The second questioning convention will be referred to as *the evolutionary juxtaposition convention*, whereby Corporate Social Responsibility is questioned as an emergent intellectual field of investigation. The final convention, which we will here call *the convention of self-enclosure*, can be preliminarily characterised in terms of a certain narrowing down of the second convention to focus upon more and more specific issues. More will be said about this most crucial of questioning conventions towards the end of the chapter.

The Originary Questioning Convention

Many scholars have approached Corporate Social Responsibility as an historically determined phenomenon, something that can only be properly explained in terms of the chronologically preceding phenomena out of which it derives its true meaning. Corporate Social Responsibility hasn't always existed. It must have come from somewhere. It has to have evolved out of something. These very *somewheres* and *somethings* are what the first questioning convention gives over to questioning. Morrell Heald, for example, looks back to 1920s America's political concerns as a means of explaining the emergence of the corporate concern with issues of social responsibility (1961, 1957). Elsewhere Earl Cheit (1964: 3) argues that Corporate

Social Responsibility is best understood as yet another campaign undertaken by American businesspeople “to justify their autonomy, to fortify their image, and to promote new understanding of their place in society”. For Cheit ‘The Gospel of Social Responsibility’ professed by mid-1960s American business managers was simply a direct continuation of the 1940s ideology of Free Enterprise, the roots of which could in turn be traced back to the Progressive Era of the 1930s.

Cheit highlights that by the 1950s, business managers had become immensely outspoken on the topic of their own ethical fortitude. So much was this the case that Peter Drucker (1954) quipped “you might wonder, if you were a conscientious newspaper reader, when the managers of American business had any time for business”. Corporate Social Responsibility is therefore best understood, according to Cheit, as yet another stage in an ongoing image sanitation campaign undertaken by and on behalf of the interests of American capitalism. This, moreover, was a stage which “we should welcome” (Cheit 1964: 19), a stage which might bring with it “the basis for more flexible use of private enterprise in our mixed economy” (*ibid.*, see also Mitchell 1989).

Theodore Levitt (1958) tells a somewhat similar story to Cheit’s, albeit with quite a distinctive evaluative spin upon the truth of matters. Like Cheit, Levitt noticed how the engagement of business managers with what they saw as their social responsibilities had become much more than a passing phase of post-World War II American capitalism. Unlike Cheit, however, Levitt refused to understand such a prevalent corporate dedication to socially responsible campaigns in solely defensive or mitigative terms. For Levitt, the real issue of concern was that an initially

apologetic feature of American capitalism, the prevalent engagement of corporations with socially responsible programmes, had somehow become an affirmative project in its own right. As Levitt (1958: 46) argues:

It is perfectly legitimate for each group to fight for its survival by seeking to influence others. But somehow the past decade has produced a new twist: self-serious self-righteousness. And there is nothing more dangerous than the sincere, self-righteous, dedicated proselyte sustained by the mighty machinery of a powerful institution – particularly an economic institution...As Greek tragedies show, there is nothing more corrupting than self-righteousness and nothing more intolerant than an ardent man who is convinced he is on the side of the angels (1958: 46).

Levitt's primary fear, passionately and provocatively pronounced, was that in an emergent era which had individual business managers congratulating themselves for their having pursued a calling higher than the calling of profit, everybody would stand to ultimately lose out. His argument hence preceded much of what was to be contained within Milton Friedman's own infamous attack upon Corporate Social Responsibility, an attack which we discussed within Chapter One. Levitt's work, for its part, traces the existence of Corporate Social Responsibility back to a prevalent managerial self-righteousness, something which is in turn traced back to the project of morally legitimating capitalism against its critics¹².

¹² For Levitt, as for Friedman, this project was fundamentally misdirected.

Levitt's work, as with Cheit's, directly implies the question-worthiness of historical precedent within the scholarly literature upon Corporate Social Responsibility. And we can ask, with both of them, whether it is indeed possible to speak of a first mover, a founding gesture or a moment of revelation in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility. Can we really, in other words, point to the moment at which it all began, the time when it started to present itself to us, the something that eventually put all of its wheels into motion? Such a search for origins is the very inquisitive mechanism by which the originary questioning convention proceeds, a procession which Levitt and Cheit are by no means solely party to.

Consider, for example, the work of Duane Windsor, the so-called quibbler mentioned previously. Like Archie Carroll, whose work we will discuss as the very epitome of our second questioning convention, Windsor writes of Bowen's *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (1953) in disciplinarily foundational terms. For both Windsor and Carroll, Bowen is considered 'The Father of Corporate Social Responsibility' (Windsor 2001b: 230, Carroll 1999: 270). This is the case primarily on account of the fact that Bowen is said to have been the figure who first posed the following question: "to what extent do the interests of business in the long run merge with the interests of society" (Bowen 1953: 5). This is the very question that Bowen proceeded to engage over the duration of his landmark contribution to the literature, the very question which many scholars of Corporate Social Responsibility continue to engage with to this very day.

Windsor points out that Bowen "intentionally avoided making a specific definition [of Corporate Social Responsibility], preferring instead to leave the matter to managers in

light of concrete conditions” (2001b: 227, square brackets added). Windsor hence admires Bowen for founding Corporate Social Responsibility on the basis of a question, a question towards which the answer remained outstanding, outstanding but forthcoming nonetheless. The first person to pose such a question was, for Windsor, the father of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Nevertheless, in identifying Corporate Social Responsibility’s moment of birth and in subsequently explaining this birth along paternal lines, Windsor also identified certain conditions upon which the fathering of Corporate Social Responsibility was itself dependent. Corporate Social Responsibility may have a father but that father, along with the line of questioning he is said to have fathered, are themselves historically contingent. And so, in looking for the beginning of Corporate Social Responsibility, Windsor is forced to look further and further back over his shoulder: through Cheit, through Friedman, through Levitt and through Bowen.

Bowen may be the father of Corporate Social Responsibility but, as the logic of the originary questioning convention goes, Corporate Social Responsibility can only be properly understood in terms of the inheritance derived from its forefathers. Windsor (2001b: 227) therefore points out how the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility became gradually assimilated within the Corporate Social Performance framework (which we will discuss primarily within Chapter Six), itself dating at least as far back as Kreps (1940). Yet the retrospective stare goes through even Kreps, through Carnegie (1900) and as far back as the Progressive Era, “a broadly diffused and diversified set of reactions to the post-1865 Gilded Age” (Windsor 2001b: 229). Having been so abruptly brought back to the middle of the 19th century, we find that

Spencer (1851) enshrined the self-interested path towards general social welfare pronounced by Adam Smith (1776) less than a century earlier (*ibid.*). The buck then seems to stop with Smith. Corporate Social Responsibility can, finally, be broadly understood as a set of reactions which Smith's work is said to have put into motion (see also Windsor 2006: 95-98).

So the logic of attempting to explain Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of its predecessors seems to go as far back as Smith. To my mind, nobody has attempted to understand, much less explain Corporate Social Responsibility along a logic that would make Smith and *his* work a by-product of something earlier still. Corporate Social Responsibility has its predecessors, as does Friedman, Levitt, Bowen and Carnegie. Even capitalist apologism and major historical and political movements such as the Progressive Era can, it seems, be explained along the logic of chronological inheritance eventually manifesting in the form of Corporate Social Responsibility. So why not Smith?! What is it about Smiths' work that makes it exempt from being explained as something influenced by something else? Consider the manner in which Windsor summarises Corporate Social Responsibility:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is, regardless of specific labelling, any concept concerning how managers should handle public policy and social issues (2006: 93).

To reiterate, the operation of conceptualising just such a managerial practice is traced back as far as Smith and no further. The question is why? Certainly, in sourcing Corporate Social Responsibility back to Smith, Windsor goes further than most.

William Frederick for example, a figure whose work we will consider in some detail within the next two chapters, analyses Corporate Social Responsibility as an ongoing interplay between responsibility and responsiveness, an interplay which is for him a half century long project (2006, 1978). Cochran (2007) emphasises the significance of the debate between Berle (1954) and Dodd (1932) as a foundational moment in the history of Corporate Social Responsibility. Garriga and Melé (2004: 51) are happy to trace questions concerning Corporate Social Responsibility as far back as Bowen. Parket and Eilbirt (1975: 10), for their part, go as far back as Keynes (1926) whilst Buchholz (1991: 19-21) goes as far back as Sheldon (1923) whose work, Buchholz argues, predates many of Friedman's infamous arguments against Corporate Social Responsibility.

Elsewhere Freeman and Liedtka (1991: 92) explain the project of Corporate Social Responsibility as an outgrowth of Andrew Carnegie's charity and stewardship principles of capitalism. They also argue that "the idea of corporate social responsibility has failed to create the good society" (*ibid.*) which means that "Adam Smith is seen as having the last laugh after all" (1991: 93). Smith is said to have the last laugh because, Freeman and Liedtka argue, Corporate Social Responsibility has not been able to respond definitively to the challenges which he set down to the would-be reformers of capitalism. Smith, along with all of his work, therefore seems to be something of a given whilst everything else is given to us by Smith.

But even if this weren't the case, even if the starting point were not Adam Smith but, for example, Niccolò Machiavelli, would it actually make much of a difference? On a formal level, it clearly would not. Even if Smith was to become understood as a

consequence of a still more profound movement towards Corporate Social Responsibility, we would still be left with the basic paradox of positing origin. Put bluntly we ask: if something predates Smith then what predates *that* something? And that something in turn! For no matter how far back in time we go in order to explain the source of Corporate Social Responsibility, we can always imagine a position that will hypothetically precede the already stated position.

Indeed, it could be rightly said, against some of the assertions made above, that the social contracts approach to business ethics (see for example Donaldson and Dunfee 1999) *is* an engagement with questions concerning Corporate Social Responsibility from the perspective of pre-Smith figures (e.g. Hobbes, Kant, Rousseau and Locke). And if we are prepared to concede this point then we might as well also concede the point that Robert Solomons' work on business virtue (e.g. Solomon 1994), based as it is upon Aristotelian ethics, might conceivably force us to identify and explain Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of certain pre-Christian roots.

Having gone back over two thousand years to Aristotle, what's stopping us from in turn going that little bit further backwards to Plato, to Socrates, to Diogenes, to Parmenides, to Heraclitus, to Anaximander and to Thales? And finally, if we are prepared to trace the beginnings of Corporate Social Responsibility as far back as the 7th century BC, if not further, we must also realise that the very attempt to trace Corporate Social Responsibility back to a foundational moment, or set of moments, perhaps causes as many problems as it solves. So it is with the originary questioning convention. The question of Corporate Social Responsibility is always playing catch-up for as long as historical precedence is considered the line most worth running with.

The Evolutionary Juxtaposition Convention

The second questioning convention reverses the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and the one who questions it. Whereas the originary questioning convention sought its guidance from a Corporate Social Responsibility that existed out there, somewhere, in time, the evolutionary juxtaposition convention already has Corporate Social Responsibility a lot closer to home, so to speak. That is to say that within the second questioning convention, Corporate Social Responsibility is not something which is strived for by an intellectual field or discipline. Corporate Social Responsibility rather already exists *within* a gradually emergent intellectual field or discipline. Therein, the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility is constituted as something which a gradually emergent intellectual field or discipline is increasingly coming to take possession of. The crux of the distinction pivots upon the manner in which the questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility becomes a more widely prevalent and self-conscious task.

So unlike the originary questioning convention already discussed, the convention which sought to explain Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of an underlying event, idea or figure, this second questioning convention begins with a developmental model of disciplinary evolution onto which the field of Corporate Social Responsibility is then subsequently juxtaposed. If intellectual disciplines can be said to go through certain developmental stages, and if Corporate Social Responsibility can also be said to have exemplified some if not all of what are said to be stage-characteristic concerns, then Corporate Social Responsibility can consequentially be understood as an intellectual discipline in its own right. This is how the story of our second questioning convention goes. Corporate Social Responsibility is best

understood as a would-be intellectual discipline - the question becomes one of investigating how it can be made more and more sophisticated.

Although variations on this basic theme do exist¹³, our second questioning convention is one that generally attempts to explain what Corporate Social Responsibility is in terms of a temporally (and conceptually) progressive conceptual model into which particular scholarly contributions are inserted. So rather than looking for something which caused Corporate Social Responsibility to exist, the trick here is to instead assume from the beginning that Corporate Social Responsibility is an intellectual discipline *first and foremost* and that this intellectual discipline has become increasingly sophisticated with the passing of time.

The most influential version of this questioning convention is undoubtedly the work of Archie Carroll, in particular his article: *Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct* (1999). It is hence worth considering this article in some detail as a means of concretely illustrating the perspective on the world of Corporate Social Responsibility that it epitomises.

From the very outset Carroll states that whilst the business community has been concerned with social demands for centuries, “formal writing” on Corporate Social Responsibility has really only gotten going during the second half of the 20th century (1999: 268). We are then told that such formal writings have been most evident in the United States of America whilst simultaneously being offered the concession that writings on Corporate Social Responsibility need not be written in the United States

¹³ See for example Gerde and Wokutch (1998) and Preston (1986).

of America in order to qualify as formal. Unfortunately, we are told nothing else about what any given piece of writing has to achieve in order for it to qualify as formal (*ibid.*). Presumably the nature of formal writing is supposed to become evident to the reader upon completion of Carroll's article. This is not the case however: formal writings are rather simply defined on the basis of Carroll's say so.

The article, for its part, takes the form of a decade-by-decade review of these formal writings on Corporate Social Responsibility, a review which commences at the beginning of the 1950s with the proviso that the contributions of Barnard (1938), Clark (1939) and Kreps (1940) are mention worthy predecessors. Caveats aside, Carroll then states that it "makes sense" (1999: 269) to begin a review of what Corporate Social Responsibility is in the 1950s, the decade within which Corporate Social Responsibility is said to have become modern (1999: 269-270). Bowen is given the credit for the birth of Corporate Social Responsibility proper whilst the contributions of Selekman (1959) and Eells (1956) are also considered instrumental to its preliminary establishment. Carroll then demonstrates how the 1960s bears witness to an expansion in the scholarly literature on Corporate Social Responsibility, an expansion within which the works of Davis (1960), McGuire (1963) and Walton (1967) figured prominently (1999: 270-273).

Time is seen to breed sophistication and the 1970s are said to have brought with them a proliferation of definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility (1999: 273-284). Carroll reviews these various definitions, without synthesis, and underlines the significance of the one offered by the Committee for Economic Development (1971). The 70s are also said to have been driven by the need for more empirical work in the

face of conceptual ambiguity, a call for which Zenisek (1979) is largely credited. Carroll finally argues that the formal writings of the 70s were characterised by a preliminary focus upon the Corporate Social Performance framework, his own four-dimensional model thereof (1979) figuring quite highly in his own estimation.

The seventies, for their part, eventually become the eighties, a decade of “fewer definitions, more research, and alternative themes” (1999: 284-288). Consolidation seems to have been the order of the decade: consolidation in the form of increasing attention being paid towards the construction of the Corporate Social Performance framework. Corporate Social Responsibility was going beyond Corporate Social Responsibility and becoming Corporate Social Performance. Corporate Social Responsibility was therefore, according to Carroll, becoming less fragmented, less sporadic, more focused and more systematic. The 1990s, for its part, was a decade within which “CSR further yields to alternative themes” (1999: 288-291). The section of Carroll’s paper devoted to the nineties opens with the following assertion:

As a general statement, it should be observed that very few unique contributions to the definition of CSR occurred in the 1990s. More than anything else, the CSR concept served as the base point, building block, or point-of-departure for other related concepts and themes, many of which embraced CSR-thinking and were compatible with it (1999: 288).

Having made this statement, Carroll then proceeds to name three “themes, or theories, related to Corporate Social Responsibility that have captured the most attention in the 1990s”, namely Corporate Social Performance, business ethics and stakeholder theory

(1999: 290). Carroll argues that “in virtually all cases” these themes “were consistent with and built on the CSR definitions and constructs discussed in this article” (1999: 292). As will be shown within the next chapter, this statement is by no means uncontroversial. Indeed, it will be shown to be an outright lie. Such potential quibbles notwithstanding, Carroll’s narrative reaches its crescendo in the form of the following upliftingly clairvoyant moral (1999: 292):

The CSR concept will remain as an essential part of business language and practice, because it is a vital underpinning to many of the other theories and is continually consistent with what the public expects of the business community today...More than likely, we will see new realms in which to think about businesses responsibilities to our stakeholder society, particularly at the global level, and in new and emerging technologies, fields, and commercial applications. In this context, it appears that the CSR concept has a bright future because at its core, it addresses and captures the most important concerns of the public regarding business and society relationships.

At the end of the story, it makes little difference whether Carroll has had to stretch the truth in order to bolster his claim for the relative sophistication of Corporate Social Responsibility as an intellectual discipline. The moral we should take from his story, in other words, is *not* ‘Archie Carroll is a liar’ since this wouldn’t bring us any closer to our task of understanding what Corporate Social Responsibility is. What matters here is that Carroll has asserted the imminence of Corporate Social Responsibility’s promising future on the basis of its rich history, the crux of which he believes himself to have narrated to us.

For my part, I went so far as to label Carroll's work as the very epitome of the second questioning convention. So what moral is to be taken from it? How about: Archie Carroll believes himself to be telling the truth *and* he believes that it matters that he is telling the truth. Or else: the evolutionary juxtaposition convention tends to assume the guise of a self-congratulatory, self-fulfilling prophecy. Or even: the tendency to understand Corporate Social Responsibility as an intellectual discipline, and to assess it as one, has become something of a task in its own right. All of these morals are good ones. The third one is most appropriate since it most clearly articulates the way in which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has been asked within what is here called the evolutionary juxtaposition convention.

The Convention of Self-Enclosure

Within the previous questioning convention, it remains somewhat questionable as to whether it is correct to consider Corporate Social Responsibility as an academic field in its own right. Within this third questioning convention, however, it is no longer necessary to pose such a question. This final questioning convention *already* sees Corporate Social Responsibility questioned as an object of intellectual interest. And since it would be tautological to ask whether an object of intellectual interest is an object of intellectual interest, we no longer need to question *whether* Corporate Social Responsibility is an academic field in its own right. We already know *that* it is. And since we already know that Corporate Social Responsibility is an academic field in its own right, what remains for us to do is to question what that field *itself* is composed of. When we do that, we will know what Corporate Social Responsibility really is. This, in essence, is the logic by which the final questioning convention functions. This is the further turn inwards that is made by it.

The work of Lockett et al. (2006), for example, overviews ten years of Corporate Social Responsibility scholarship as a means of over viewing what Corporate Social Responsibility is. In doing so, the article offers descriptions of Corporate Social Responsibility's central topics, the manner in which these topics have evolved, the influence Corporate Social Responsibility has had upon management research more generally, and the intellectual influences that Corporate Social Responsibility has tended to draw upon. For these authors Corporate Social Responsibility is not a discipline, it is a field (2006: 116-117), a field which can have certain things said about it, such as

CSR knowledge could best be described as in a *continuing state of emergence*.

While the field appears well established (overall profile in management journals, increasing significance of other CSR literature in emerging knowledge), it is not characterised by the domination of a particular theoretical approach, assumptions and method (2006: 133).

To be sure, this statement doesn't come from just anywhere. It is the result of a detailed publication and citation analysis, a painstaking investigation that considered the content of almost 8,000 citations made by articles on and about Corporate Social Responsibility. There can be little doubt that these authors really do know what they are talking about. Not only do they know what they are talking about; they can furthermore summon an impressive stock of evidence in support of their various claims. And therein lays the problem. It is in this very sort of solution to the question of what Corporate Social Responsibility is that a much more profound problem lies. It is also here that we can grasp the essence of our final questioning convention.

It has become more and more frequent that within scholarly work upon Corporate Social Responsibility, an apparently empirical phenomenon becomes passed off as if it were a manifestation of the very phenomenon posited. The work of Lockett et al. therefore offers a very good example of a field of inquiry that has become increasingly concerned with nothing other than itself as the very manifestation of that which is being sought. And it is by no means the only one.

Consider the following articles: Margolis and Walsh (2003), Orlitzky, Schmidt and Rynes (2003) and de Bakker et al. (2005). Perhaps more than any other works, these three articles give the reader a great sense for what counts as the contemporary literature on Corporate Social Responsibility today. Yet the greatest strength of these studies is also to be understood as their greatest weakness insofar as the current investigation is concerned. Each article gives immensely insightful answers to a very important question, an important question, albeit, that hasn't yet been properly articulated. Such is the direct consequence of our final questioning convention having become prevalent.

In the case of de Bakker et al. (2005), for example, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is considered through an analysis and assessment of three different scholarly views thereupon (2005: 283-286). The 'progressive view' sees that with the passage of time, Corporate Social Responsibility progresses from conceptual vagueness to conceptual clarity (286-288). The 'variegational view' on the field is one that recognises the introduction of newer and newer perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility to be to the detriment of the quality and development of the field as a whole (2005: 288-290). And the 'normativist view' is more sceptical still; perceiving

that no progress has or can be made by the field, precisely because of its inherently normative constitution (2005: 290). In order to assess the validity of each of these three views, the authors undertake a bibliometric analysis of 30 years of the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance (see also de Bakker et al. 2006). And elsewhere, Margolis and Walsh's similarly exhaustive examination of this same literature (2003: 273-278, 2001) is criticised by Orlitzky, Schmidt and Rynes (2003: 404) who posit their own analytic methodology as superior.

What matters here is not so much the various results of these studies but rather the manner in which a particular approach to the asking of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility made them possible in the first place. For our purposes it doesn't really matter who, if anybody, is correct. What matters here is that a spiralling and self-referential form of asking our guiding question herein manifests. And there can be little doubt that it does. Such studies would not have been possible were the existence of the field of Corporate Social Responsibility to become a matter of controversy for these researchers. Indeed, not only is Corporate Social Responsibility primarily understood by these authors in terms of what has been published within scholarly journals about it. It is furthermore seen as something that can be properly understood *only through* the assessment of such competing scholarly discussions thereupon.

Such a way of accessing and subsequently accepting the field can only come into being, for its part, when enough figures forget the reference to an infinitely receding precedent (our first questioning convention), consider Corporate Social Responsibility

instead as an academic field of inquiry (our second questioning convention) and eventually begin to posit Corporate Social Responsibility as something that cannot be considered apart from this field (the final questioning convention). It is along these lines that anything like expertise, within this particular context, can become formalised in the first place.

The very fact that this particular questioning convention seems so natural an approach to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility today only goes to show the extent to which scholars of Corporate Social Responsibility have been successful in converting so many to their tale of self-sufficient self-severance. The path towards expertise on the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility, in the first instance, isn't a product of scholars continually telling the truth about Corporate Social Responsibility. It is rather an issue of convincing, or failing that pacifying, a sufficient number of people into the belief that the truth about Corporate Social Responsibility is being told by those that have come to be known as its theorists.

Self-Enclosure and Self-Assertion

A few closing remarks are perhaps required.

First of all, in erecting this framework of three questioning conventions, I am by no means claiming to have exhausted the range and scope of everything that has ever been written with regards to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Nor, similarly, am I claiming that the three questioning conventions outlined here are necessarily mutually exclusive from one another. If the framework is to serve any purpose of all, it will be one of illustrating how the question of Corporate Social

Responsibility, which is in the end the overarching question of this entire investigation, has tended to have been approached. If it is successful then it will have given a sense for the both the conjectures and failures that are littered along the path of the history of the questioning tradition. It will, in other words, have elucidated some of the sites of interrogation, what Heidegger called ein *Befragte*, of the guiding question.

Secondly, it should be pointed out that integral to the overall investigation is to succinctly demonstrate that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility can in no way be considered an obscure, banal or abstract concern. On the contrary this guiding question is posed very frequently, by a variety of figures, intentionally (though usually not) and more or less as a matter of course. The questioning convention framework therefore demonstrates the extent to which this is the case. The framework is articulated as a means of underlining the fact that the concern which is being expressed here, within this investigation, is not being externally imposed upon the Corporate Social Responsibility literature.

Instead, this concern is continuously expressed *within* the literature itself. The question ‘what is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ therefore energises a set of investigations that are more or less distinguishable from so many assertions of opinion concerning the matter at hand. That formal distinction is to be made on the basis of *the material* that is summonsed as a means of approaching it. Everybody might have their own opinion on what Corporate Social Responsibility is, that is fine, let them have them. The theorists and experts are the ones that make themselves responsible for knowing what Corporate Social Responsibility really is about. They are the ones

whose work has created the field of Corporate Social Responsibility. In other words, the scholarly literature is the very site within which the contemporary theorists on Corporate Social Responsibility discuss the contemporary nature of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Thirdly, this progression through the three questioning conventions indicates something of how the very existence of Corporate Social Responsibility has become more and more bounded to the literature upon Corporate Social Responsibility. In earlier times, around the time where what Carroll called ‘formal writings’ on Corporate Social Responsibility were only starting to come to the fore, Corporate Social Responsibility was written about, quite straightforwardly, as an apology for capitalism, an attempt by businessmen to morally justify their operations. This no longer happens today, at least not to the extent that it did, and certainly not in the name of scholarship. Today, Corporate Social Responsibility has become the preserve for dedicated scholars, a topic with which these scholars concern themselves as a matter of course. The simplistic ideas of the fields’ forefathers therefore no longer suffice. Things have moved on. There is now a canon in place. That canon has many definitive things to say against those who would dismiss Corporate Social Responsibility as simplistic, pointless or oxymoronic.

Fourthly and finally, this establishment of a privilege to write about Corporate Social Responsibility is certainly not without its drawbacks, particularly in light of this investigation’s own concerns. Most significant in this regard was what was shown to be the fields’ characteristic self-referentiality. This is not to suggest, of course, that the identification of self-referentiality within a field is akin to the identification of a

fundamental shortcoming of that field. On the contrary, intellectual fields of inquiry would not exist *at all* were it not for the fact that their incumbents recognise the existence of a particular tradition or set of traditions that they believe themselves to be working within and beyond.

The problem identified, however, was with the extent to which self-referencing might be said to have gotten out of hand within the field of Corporate Social Responsibility. In this regard it was found that once the questioning convention of self-enclosure came to the fore, Corporate Social Responsibility came to be described in terms that bore very little relation to anything other than what had already been written in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility within the literature. Corporate Social Responsibility theorists were hence seen to elevate themselves to the position of the only ones who can know about Corporate Social Responsibility, precisely by deriving the truth of Corporate Social Responsibility out of the totality of what has been written about it within the literature.

Once it becomes the case that Corporate Social Responsibility can only be known from the literature, theoretical activity begins to take on the form of writing about what other people have said Corporate Social Responsibility is, about what others have said about these views of Corporate Social Responsibility, about whether these views on Corporate Social Responsibility are compatible with each other, and so on. We end up getting ourselves in a circle out of which it is very difficult to escape.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Question of Practice

Corporations are no longer regarded as purely economic institutions, but social ones as well. As more and more companies respond to the mounting pressures for corporate action, corporate managers are realizing that they must allocate their resources more systematically and rationally to achieve meaningful results and minimise unproductive and counterproductive efforts. The question is: How?

Terry McAdam (1974: 8)

Chapter Introduction

Within the previous chapter I made the argument that the history of the tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility has also been a history of the remit of that question's becoming increasingly narrowed down. In particular, I argued that with the existence of more and more writings on and engagements with Corporate Social Responsibility, the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility itself increasingly became a seeming matter for expert discussion, for qualified erudition. In this regard the questioning conventions outlined, the latter two in particular (the evolutionary juxtaposition convention and the convention of self-enclosure) served to constitute the question of Corporate Social Responsibility as a question which is to be most successfully approached with a keen eye towards the manner in which it has previously been approached by an already extant questioning tradition.

In other words, the more a tradition devoted to the questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility succeeded in asserting itself as that which must be consulted in any questioning of Corporate Social Responsibility, the more the question itself came to be more generally conceived as a question that cannot be approached apart from the tradition. The very fact that the tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility has become a reviewable literature (e.g. Lee 2008) suggests as much.

A certain tradition has therefore taken possession of the right to respond to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. This right, for its part, is secured on the basis of the questions' having become generally conceived as the kind of question towards which expertise can indeed be generated. The right of response is therefore a privilege of expertise. And expertise is the seeming condition for legitimately participating with the question. This is not an absolute right, for sure, to the extent that it is not universally recognised that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is a question that must be appreciated in light of its tradition. But it is nonetheless a well recognised right to the extent that the very existence of a questioning tradition itself necessitates the pre-existence of just such a belief in the possibility of a tradition being constructed around just such a question.

Now, if this framework of questioning conventions allows us to see the conditions of possibility of expertise, and therefore of tradition, what, we might ask, are we to do about them? Might we seek to undermine these conditions, to challenge them, to criticise them, to do away with them? Should we not indeed expose the underpinning dynamics of expertise within the context of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility for the sake of disposing of them, for the sake of reposing the question? Such an endeavour seems tempting. And yet, such an endeavour is not at all in line with the *destructive* concerns outlined earlier. There, we spoke of destruction as a positive activity which staked a tradition out precisely in terms of its limits. And so here, if destruction is to continue to mean anything, it is not for us to choose to leave it behind and get on with the real business of starting from scratch. With destruction there is no context-free site or outside from which to approach a tradition. Indeed, with destruction, the tradition is itself the context.

So the destruction of the tradition which questions Corporate Social Responsibility that is being carried out here is not at all concerned with 'getting rid' of Corporate Social Responsibility, or of the manner in which it has been approached, contrary to the connotations of the word destruction. This destruction rather requires us to face up to the fact that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is indeed approached in such and such a way. It is not for us to say that such and such a way is necessarily deficient, it is rather for us to elucidate the manner in which supposed deficiencies in the formulation of this question themselves say something about the question, and about that which it questions. It is, in other words, not for us to label certain formulations of the question as deficient and leave it at that. It is rather for us to ask how the supposedly deficient formulations of this question function, of having an eye towards what it is that they produce.

And it is in this connection that I think it fair to say that this project takes almost as much from Foucault as it does from Heidegger. Whereas for Heidegger, the concern of destruction is one of demonstrating the emergence of particular structural formulations of the Question of Being in terms of how they relate to *and* break with a wider tradition of questioning, so too, for Foucault, the concern of archaeology is one of considering the emergence of particular discursive formations in terms of how they are implicated, and not, within a wider tradition. In both cases the history, evolution and transformation of the issue at hand remains key. In the case of Foucault, what matters, perhaps above all else, is that we diagnose the fits and starts of the discursive formation, rather than trying to destroy it on account of its fits and starts (see Butler 2008 and Jones 2002). And this is entirely reminiscent of the destructive concern to posit the evolution of a questioning tradition precisely from within that very tradition.

Fascinating as it is, however, this is not the place to elaborate upon the nature of the interconnection between the work of Heidegger and Foucault¹⁴. The philosophical likeness identified here should serve simply to clarify why disavowal and destruction have little, if anything, to do with one another, with showing how a concern with staking out the limits of a tradition is a project which simply cannot gather its strength from anywhere other than the place at which those very limits can be said to have arisen (see Jones 2003). This questioning convention framework erected, therefore, it is not for us to pause for some self-congratulatory respite. It is rather for us to press onwards in our questioning of the questioning tradition, to ask how this self-enclosed questioning framework, this tradition of questioning Corporate Social Responsibility, has progressed along certain definitive lines.

This, in turn, brings us back towards the question of practice previously suspended. The reader will recall that in the earlier stages of this investigation, the contemporary question of Corporate Social Responsibility was shown to be largely conceived along pragmatic lines. It was then stated that the reasons for why this was the case would be revisited from the perspective of later findings. This return to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility's supposedly inherent practicality first of all required the ascertainment of certain definitive methodological principles and these principles, for their part, had to find expression within the idea of an extant questioning tradition.

¹⁴ Foucault (1998: 250) himself says:

Heidegger has always been for me the essential philosopher...My whole philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger...I think it's important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn't write.

Otherwise, the work of Hubert Dreyfus (2001), Stuart Elden (2001), and, more recently, Timothy Rayner (2007), have done more than most to underline the intricate nature of this interconnection to the English speaking world.

All of this has now come to pass and so we are therefore ready to elucidate *why* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is today largely approached as a practical question, a question more of means than of ends, a question more of how than of what, a question more of technique than of reflection. And so we ask: *how has the question of Corporate Social Responsibility come to be produced as a practical question?*

Becoming Responsive

Is it conceivable that we might one day have at our disposal a theory of Corporate Social Responsibility that is simultaneously a practice thereof? That we might eventually work within an understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility that is on the one hand theoretically rigorous whilst on the other hand practically applicable? Might Corporate Social Responsibility eventually become a notion informing behaviour, a concept suggesting procedure, an idea directing action? The late 1960s and early 1970s represent something of a crucial turning point in the historical development of the questioning tradition insofar as engagements with questions such as these became increasingly pronounced. This period of time therefore brought with it a serious challenge to the questioning tradition's hitherto foundation, a serious challenge to the notion that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility had ever even been addressed in an appropriate manner.

That challenge, as illustrated by Votaw and Sethi (1969) and Sethi and Votaw (1969), was an avowedly practical one. The very nature of the questioning of what Corporate Social Responsibility is was seen by many to place needless constraints upon action,

to offer abstract ideas when practical initiatives were required, to think when doing was the order of the day.

General Electric's Ian Wilson, for example, argued for the need to embed the preachings of Corporate Social Responsibility within the practical needs of businesses (1974) whilst Keith Davis (1973) considered the arguments for and against Corporate Social Responsibility from the clear eyed perspective of the corporate strategist. Eilbirt and Parket (1973), for their part, argued that corporations could not simply ignore the demands for social responsibility whilst Peter Challen (1974) underlined the practical difficulties involved in the delivery of Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. Elsewhere, Robert Ackerman (1973) reviewed the ways in which corporations could actually respond to demands for Corporate Social Responsibility. Bowman and Haire (1975) advocated a strategic orientation towards demands for Corporate Social Responsibility. Buehler and Shetty (1975) wrote of the need to manage social responsibility as if it were a corporate function. Feldberg (1974) attempted to re-evaluate the practical role that is to be played by businesses within society and Carroll (1978) outlined a way in which Corporate Social Responsibility programmes could be strategically operationalised.

With Hamlet as a likely informant, these authors, as well as many more besides them, collectively agreed that too much deliberation was a bad thing. The time for thinking and talking had passed; the time for acting had arrived. Corporate Social Responsibility was being brought back down to earth, away from the contemplative hilltop and down towards the hustling and bustling marketplace.

Out of such practically oriented misgivings, a practically oriented response was derived. Where critics began to undermine Corporate Social Responsibility for its lack of practical resonance, advocates began to place increasing emphasis upon the notion of Corporate Social Respons-*iveness*, as distinct from that of Corporate Social Respons-*ibility*. It is hence significant that some of the earliest proclamations of Corporate Social Responsiveness were made with recourse to a dilemma (e.g. Votaw and Sethi 1973): Corporate Social Responsiveness was the dilemma facing those that might have wanted to put Corporate Social Responsibility into practice. Too much thinking equated to too little doing. Too much theory equated to too little practice. Such was the not so practical Corporate Social Responsibility of the time.

In this regard Ackerman and Bauer's *Corporate social responsiveness: The modern dilemma* (1976) is significant for the manner in which it solidified a wide-ranging set of concerns and misgivings on the practical myopia of Corporate Social Responsibility into a focused, well specified framework. To be clear, the collection of essays did not invent or create anything new in the sense of adding something to the Corporate Social Responsibility debates which had not already been the case. The issues discussed therein were already acknowledged as significant for quite some time. What the edited volume did succeed in doing, however, was giving a name to a recurring problem; roughly speaking, the problem of thinking about how to actually do Corporate Social Responsibility.

Such a systematisation of Corporate Social Responsibility's how to is significant because of the manner in which it gathered together that which was previously scattered whilst simultaneously inferring the non-gathered by proxy. Within the

concept of Corporate Social Responsiveness, what exists is an attempted nominalisation of the practicing of Corporate Social Responsibility. The concept also produces a distinction between such practical orientations and that which they are not. More importantly, this very distinction made it possible to assimilate the pragmatic complaints against the discipline of Corporate Social Responsibility within the discipline of Corporate Social Responsibility. In other words, the most severe complaints against Corporate Social Responsibility were embraced by its most notable protagonists as if they were their own. Such is the achievement of opposing the notion of Corporate Social Responsiveness to that of Corporate Social Responsibility.

This separation between Corporate Social Responsiveness and its' alter became greatly intensified within William C. Frederick's much heralded distinction between CSR₁ and CSR₂. In his 1978 article republished in 1994 as a 'classic paper' within the journal *Business and Society*, Frederick made the argument that the epoch of CSR₁ (Corporate Social Responsibility) was being gradually replaced by that of CSR₂ (Corporate Social Responsiveness). This very evolution, Frederick argued (with recourse to a comprehensive overview of the discussions taking place at the time), was of profound importance. No longer were Corporate Social Responsibility's concerns of an abstract and impractical nature as was the case with CSR₁. They were, in the spirit of CSR₂, becoming increasingly focused upon the real issues at hand.

The guiding question was no longer 'what is Corporate Social Responsibility?' but rather 'how can Corporate Social Responsibility be done?' The essence of the improvements that should be made in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility

were no longer topics for debate: the more pressing task was one of demonstrating how such improvements were to be made, better still the actual making of them. No longer were people puzzling over what is to be done in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility. They had, in the era of Corporate Social Responsiveness, already reached the stage of actually doing it.

In order to create his distinction between CSR₁ and CSR₂, Frederick positions on the one side the apparent abstractions of moral philosophy insofar as they are applied to the question of what Corporate Social Responsibility is or might be. Such an approach to Corporate Social Responsibility is, on his reading, fundamentally inadequate to the task at hand, raising more problems than it solves. In this regard Frederick makes four observations.

First of all, taking his lead from Sethi (1975), he says “the content or substance – the operational meaning – of corporate social responsibility is supremely vague” (1994: 152). Secondly, he argues that it isn’t at all clear whether there are any “institutional mechanisms through which the idea of “corporate social responsibility” could be made to work, assuming that its essential meaning could be clarified” (1994: 153). Thirdly, Frederick makes the point that another “unresolved issue in the corporate social responsibility debate is that the tradeoff between economic goals and costs, on the one hand, and social goals and costs, on the other hand, cannot be stated with any acceptable degree of precision” (1994: 153).

The final objection Frederick makes to CSR₁ is that “the moral underpinnings of the idea are neither clear nor agreed upon. One searches in vain for any clear and

generally accepted moral principle that would impose on business an obligation to work for social betterment” (1994: 153-4). If Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR₁) remains an eternally spiralling theoretical discussion devoid of practical implications then, quite simply, it cannot have any concrete effects. Hence, in direct opposition to CSR₁ and its four-fold failings, Frederick positions the inherently practical concerns of how to actually do Corporate Social Responsibility as exemplified within then extant discussions of Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR₂).

As the title of Frederick’s article itself insists, the evolution from the abstract procedures of CSR₁ towards the concrete activities of CSR₂ signifies nothing less than the maturing of business and society thought itself. Frederick names this new era the era of CSR₂, ushering in with it the possibility of consistently discussing and ultimately informing:

the capacity of a corporation to respond to social pressures. The literal act of responding, or of achieving a generally responsive posture, to society is the focus of “corporate social responsiveness.” The key questions are: Can the company respond? Will it? Does it? How does it? To what extent? And with what effect? One searches the organization for mechanisms, procedures, arrangements, and behavioural patterns that, taken collectively, would make the organization as more or less capable of responding to social pressures (1994: 154-5).

Frederick’s line of questioning suggests that within the era of Corporate Social Responsiveness, it becomes less important to wonder about *whether* Corporate Social

Responsibility is to be undertaken and more important to wonder about *how* it is to be actually undertaken. The question moves from the likes of ‘should we engage in a particular programme?’ towards the likes of ‘can we engage in a particular programme and if so how?’ Corporate Social Responsiveness is therefore, as Dalton and Cosier (1982: 27) put it “less concerned with *why* it is done than with the fact that it *is* done”. Corporate Social Responsibility can be done – the question posed by Corporate Social Responsiveness is simply the question of demonstrating how.

It is through such a series of elaborations upon Corporate Social Responsibility as Corporate Social Responsiveness that the supposedly practical inadequacies of Corporate Social Responsibility are most rigorously constituted and most widely pronounced. So too, it is at this specific juncture that a terminology was established which gave voice to the apparent separation between a theory of Corporate Social Responsibility and a practice thereof.

This very terminology (Corporate Social Responsiveness as distinct from Corporate Social Responsibility), in setting the terms for all the debates that were to follow on the problem of unifying theory with practice in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility, simultaneously set the parameters, that is to say the limits, for any possible resolution of the problem to which it had initially given voice. Corporate Social Responsibility’s project of unifying theory with practice is inaugurated within the discussions of Corporate Social Responsiveness - these discussions are seen to be putting an abstract debate onto its applied feet. From now on Corporate Social Responsibility scholars had to focus their energies upon the kinds of issues that really matter. Those issues were of course issues of practical importance.

Nevertheless, for all of the many important innovations implied within this well heralded progression, Corporate Social Responsiveness wasn't all good news, at least as far as Frederick was concerned. In the conclusion of his article, he writes "it is likely that time will reveal that social values stand at the core of all business-and-society concerns" (1994: 161) hence anticipating some of the problems likely to encounter those working towards responsiveness without responsibility. Corporate Social Responsiveness had its problems; it was by no means some sort of universal panacea. Frederick therefore goes on to suggest that each side of Corporate Social Responsibility might one-day resolve the shortcomings of the other, forming a general synthesis of particular contradictions that would henceforth be referred to as CSR₃. The era of CSR₃, Frederick argues, "will clarify both the moral dimensions implied by CSR₁ and the managerial dimensions of CSR₂" (1994: 162).

So for all of the practical fanaticism which went towards defining the era of Corporate Social Responsiveness, Frederick nonetheless readily acknowledges that when it comes to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, action cannot be completely devoid of reflection, doing cannot be rigorously distinguished from thinking and practice cannot be understood absolutely autonomous from theory. And it is upon this very point that more or less every subsequent effort towards a theory of Corporate Social Responsibility in practice has hinged. The many subsequent attempts to improve, assimilate or complete the problem of CSR₃ have only succeeded in repeating or recasting its respective elements.

Whatever divides the many contemporary attempts to unify Corporate Social Responsibility in this regard, they are in the first instance intimately bound to one

another by the fact of their commonly inherited project, namely, the project of unifying Corporate Social Responsiveness with Corporate Social Responsibility. That project, along with its importance, becomes more and more pronounced through the formulation of various, so far failed attempts, to once and for all effect its ultimate realisation.

Even if consensus has not yet been reached on the question of *how* such a realisation is to come about, a more primordial consensus nonetheless remains the case. Every singular attempt at the realisation of Corporate Social Responsibility's unification along the lines of theory and practice is already complicit with the notion *that* unification in this regard is something to be eventually realised. The many subsequent attempts to think practice are hence united, apart from their otherwise distinct concerns, by the inauguration of an ongoing attempt to unify theory with practice *as* a seminal problem for those working in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Becoming Less Responsive

In an article published a few years after his groundbreaking piece, Frederick proceeds to name the already promised era of CSR₃ the era of 'Corporate Social Rectitude' (1986a). This new era of CSR₃ overcomes the failings of CSR₂ because the nature and content of Corporate Social Responsiveness is, for Frederick "partially or even largely controlled by the corporation that is under social attack" (1986a: 132). As such, Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR₂) was prone to becoming a somewhat self-serving, disingenuous or inauthentic aspect of corporate strategy. This time cast as intimately connected to US Republican Party public policy initiatives, CSR₂ becomes further undermined by Frederick for two more, apparently determinative reasons.

Firstly, the era of CSR₂ went on to prioritise “the not-so-tender mercies of David Stockman’s cost-benefit calculations where – miraculously – the costs of social initiatives always outweighed their benefits” (1986a: 132). Additionally, the era of CSR₂ also served to highlight “the reluctance of its advocates to acknowledge or emphasize how thoroughly saturated the public policy process is with value-laden phenomena” (1986a: 133). Before offering his solution to such a difficult scenario, a scenario wherein CSR₂ had become insufficient to the task it had originally been charged with, Frederick argues

So, after a highly fruitful decade during which corporate social responsiveness theory was hammered out by the second wave of pioneers, the business-and-society field stands about where it was at the beginning of that period concerning the normative aspects of business operations. CSR₂ thinking has unwittingly come to reflect the dominant values of corporate culture, thus becoming a defensive rationale for the corporate status quo (1986a: 133).

The resulting discussion in the face of the failings of Corporate Social Responsiveness unfortunately bears little resemblance to, and no continuation of, the specific nature of the challenge previously inaugurated in the name of CSR₃. Rather than taking up the slack from where he left off, Frederick instead wheels out an argument in the name of CSR₃ which more or less exemplifies everything he had previously admonished in the name of CSR₁. Recall that the most difficult problem with CSR₁ was, as far as Frederick was concerned, that it remained unclear as to whether there existed any set of moral principles which could be agreed upon and put into action. This, of course, has been one of the foundational problems for *all* moral and political philosophy. But

Frederick, for his part, resolves this age-old problem by suggesting that we simply *choose* between what he calls the Judeo-Christian, Marxist and Secular Humanist ‘moral-archetypes’ (1986a: 134). And rather than this simplistic selection process being seen to pose any distinctive problems of its own, Frederick instead casts the content of his new catalogue as;

the group of moral principles that was just beyond the grasp of the CSR₁ pioneers who, haltingly but with true normative instincts, spoke of the need for greater responsibility and accountability of business to society. Here are the standards for defining responsive social performance that is more broadly moral in meaning and scope than the dominant values of corporate culture or those to be found in extant public policy (1986a: 135).

Corporate Social Rectitude, now cast by Frederick as the embodiment of “the notion of moral correctness in actions taken and policies formulated” (1986a: 135) proceeds to take on some additionally confusing colourings. In outlining the new nature of CSR₃ Frederick therefore practically ignores the substance of his previous criticisms of CSR₁ and makes a series of weak assertions where robust arguments needed to have been developed.

To resolve the problem of vagueness he previously ascribed to CSR₁, for example, Frederick offers a strategy, in the form of bullet points, which scholars and managers should follow. This same list, one can only guess, is also supposed to solve the problem of the under clarified institutional mechanisms that could put the theory of Corporate Social Responsibility into practice. Specifically, if scholars and

practitioners do what Frederick suggests they do, it seems that the era of CSR₃ will arrive. As for the economics/morals trade-off, Frederick simply prioritizes the latter in favour of the former.

It is upon this point which David Vogel responds to Frederick. Vogel's point is not that Frederick absolutely ignores the principles which he had previously insisted upon, as is the point being made here, but rather that his under theorised set of suggestions directly contradict a corporation's own reason for being (Vogel 1986a; see also Frederick 1986b and Vogel 1986b). Frederick's theory of CSR₃, as far as Vogel is concerned, simply isn't practical enough. The Frederick of the CSR₁₋₂ transition may well have agreed with such an emphasis upon the strategic/corporate matters at hand. But the Frederick of the new CSR₃ simply does not, prioritising in its place "the normative basis of the SIM field" (Frederick 1986b).

To posit this normative basis is not to solve the problem which Vogel raises, a problem which Frederick *himself* had previously highlighted as being of immense significance. Vogel hence sees Frederick as incapable of thinking the demands of practice, a criticism which Frederick himself had previously attributed to the authors of the era of CSR₁¹⁵. This irony is lost on Frederick, however, who stubbornly perseveres along the lines of his own prerogative, eventually publishing in the name of CSR₄ (1998). Moving the goal-posts more or less completely at this stage, CSR is now made to stand for Cosmos, Science and Religion.

¹⁵ Frederick briefly mentions Vogel in his book (2006: 62) and reviews Vogel's work (2007a). Vogel (2005), however, does not mention Frederick.

The argument made in this regard is as incoherent as it is bizarre. I simply do not understand it, nor do I, having carefully studied Frederick's aforementioned monograph (2006), understand how anybody could believe it to make any sense, Frederick included¹⁶. Nevertheless, irrespective of the fact that the stage of CSR₃ seems to advocate a jumping back into "the hopeless bogs of CSR₁'s moralistic debate" previously admonished by Frederick (1994: 161), and irrespective of the fact that the stage of CSR₄ verges upon the abyss of the absurd, the distinction between Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Responsiveness, a distinction Frederick played more than his fair hand in solidifying, remains determinative for more or less everything that went on to be written in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Performing Responsibility Responsively

The Responsibility/Responsiveness distinction served an important purpose in the sense that it placed the concerns of practice firmly upon the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda. But without having arrived upon a solution to the problem of what it would mean to fully synthesise the demands of Corporate Social Responsibility with those of Corporate Social Responsiveness, a proper account of what practice *is* remained wholly outstanding. This lack of a resolution to the problem of practice became a characteristic concern for Corporate Social Responsibility as such, not least of all on account of the fact that the quest for it had hitherto failed. Out of this failure, another apparent solution emerged in the form of Corporate Social Performance.

¹⁶ For a more generous discussion of Frederick's later work, see Mitnick (1995). It is worth mentioning that Frederick's fourth model was not yet published when Mitnick was writing this particular article.

One of the earliest archetypes of Corporate Social Performance was an article written by Archie Carroll (1979), itself buttressed by the earlier efforts of Aldag and Bartol (1978), Spicer (1978), Preston (1978) and Holmes (1976). What is significant about Carroll's short piece was the manner in which it offered a summary of what Corporate Social Performance is whilst simultaneously constructing a framework for so much of what was to follow. Carroll's model hence played a monumental role in solidifying the terms of engagement for future scholars of Corporate Social Performance. This emerging body of researchers would, after Carroll, labour under the auspices of a three dimensional conceptual model, a model which synthesized

1. A *basic definition* of social responsibility (i.e., Does our responsibility go beyond economic and legal concerns?)
2. An enumeration of the *issues* for which a social responsibility exists (i.e., What are the social areas – environment, product safety, discrimination, etc. – in which we have a responsibility?)
3. A specification of the *philosophy of response* (i.e., Do we react to the issues or proact?) (1979: 499)

Carroll explicitly credits Frederick's work with having "articulated the responsiveness view" (1979: 501), hence crediting Frederick's work with having prepared the conceptual groundwork for the third dimension of his own model of Corporate Social Performance. Carroll also credits Frederick with having offered insight into "our first aspect of the conceptual model" (1979: 502) hence borrowing his own distinction between theory and practice from Frederick. What Carroll fails to consider in the rolling out of his model of Corporate Social Performance, however, is the already

discussed emphasis Frederick placed upon the necessity of synthesizing the theoretical concerns characteristic of the era of CSR₁ with the practical concerns characteristic of the era of CSR₂. This most idiosyncratic concern of Frederick's work is in fact de-prioritised by Carroll to the point of erasure. Carroll simplistically synthesizes the theoretical concerns of CSR₁ with the practical concerns of CSR₂, thereby performing a synthesis that Frederick rightly insisted upon being anything *but* simplistic. By a sleight of hand, the inherent difficulty Frederick recognised in amalgamating reflection with action are written away by Carroll for the sake of a diagram depicting a three dimensional cube (see Carroll 1979: 503).

Carroll's partial reading of Frederick hence has the consequence of ignoring the very concern which Frederick's early work so succinctly articulated, recruiting it instead to act as the grounds for a project which it could not possibly have buttressed. As has already been shown within the previous chapter, Carroll would go on to emphasize the immense significance of his own work on Corporate Social Performance within the history of the Corporate Social Responsibility questioning tradition. Yet this instance of self-congratulation is conducted without Carroll's mentioning either this problem of mis-application or, perhaps more significantly, without even acknowledging the centrality of Frederick's 1978 article to the very idea of Corporate Social Performance he continues to champion (1999: 282-284).

That Carroll's work manages to underplay the very concern which Frederick was at pains to emphasize is concerning. That his work gets away with having underplayed such a crucial matter is worrying, more worrying still on account of the fact that it represents no obvious discussion point for any of his successors.

Strand (1983: 91), for example, challenges Carroll's model for its incapability to adequately theorise the place of organisational intentionality. In so doing, he fails to mention both Frederick and the influence which Frederick's work had upon Carroll's. Carroll and Hoy (1984) retell the history of the emergence of corporate social policy without mentioning Frederick's work. Ullman (1985) challenges Carroll's expanded model (1981) by focusing upon the contingent nature of the Corporate Social Performance project, admonishing his work for the manner in which it fails to account for same. Ullman also ignores Fredericks' influence upon Carroll.

Elsewhere, within the introduction to their influential contribution to the Corporate Social Performance discussion, Wartick and Cochran (1985) make the following statement by way of methodological preamble

In scholarly inquiry, new models do not appear suddenly. They evolve through a process of analysis, debate, and modification. The value of a model therefore is as much a function of its past as its future. In his 1979 work Carroll covered much of the background literature of his CSP model. However, his review failed to capture the model's dynamic evolution (1985: 758-9).

Carroll's work is hence taken to task on account of its imprecise nature. In taking this task up, the authors do indeed recognise the central place which Frederick's work occupies within Carroll's model. But this centrality is only posited by constituting Frederick as a mere step along the way to Carroll. And Carroll, for his part, is in turn sketched as a step along the way to Wartick and Cochran. But in attempting to cast the project of Corporate Social Performance as a story of incremental progression, the

authors end up, perhaps inadvertently, pitting Frederick's own arguments against his own work. This latter point requires exegetical support and expansion.

For Wartick and Cochran, there are three apparently determinative comments to be made against the idea of Corporate Social Responsiveness for the sake of Corporate Social Responsiveness. First of all they argue that "to replace social responsibility with social responsiveness eliminates or at least dramatically deemphasizes considerations of business ethics and social *irresponsibility*" (1985: 763). Frederick, of course, made the exact same point, anticipating the era of CSR₃ as the eventual resolution to this very problem. Wartick and Cochran's second point of supposed dispute is the argument that

social responsiveness does not require continual evaluation of the relations between corporate objectives and societal objectives...As a result, social responsiveness by itself is likely to lead to reaction rather than the proaction that many advocates of responsiveness call for (1985: 763).

This is essentially the same criticism of Corporate Social Responsiveness as the one already offered, namely, that Corporate Social Responsiveness has no inherent capacity for reflection. This was also one of Frederick's most basic points. The final charge which these authors make against the notion of Corporate Social Responsiveness is that it ignores

what Davis (1973) called the Iron Law of Responsibility – if an institution has social power, that institution must use its power responsibly or the power will

be taken away by society...Over the long term, the socially responsive firm's existence may be threatened by the Iron Law of Responsibility (1985: 763).

This point, of course, is yet another variation on the very same fundamental theme, namely, that there can be no responsiveness without responsibility. Just in case it needs pointing out yet again, this was Frederick's own argument.

Wartick and Cochran's interpretative liberties are certainly interesting. More interesting still are the conclusions they proceed to draw on the basis of their idiosyncratically imaginative rendering of affairs, conclusions which they are by no means entitled to draw. In opposition to the deficiencies of Corporate Social Responsiveness, deficiencies they believe themselves to have pointed out, Wartick and Cochran position Corporate Social Performance as the "synthesis of the challenges" made of Corporate Social Responsibility (1985: 763).

The distinction between theory and practice hence becomes further thematized and thereby narrowed down within the framework of Corporate Social Performance. For Wartick and Cochran, Corporate Social Performance picks up exactly at the point where the evolution from Corporate Social Responsibility to Corporate Social Responsiveness breaks down. The authors thereby cast their own work as a pivotal moment in the movement towards Corporate Social Performance, pointing out how they have been able to see the very things which remained obscured from many of their predecessors (1985: 765-766). The story of Corporate Social Performance is hence told very much along progressive, even heroic, lines.

The era of Corporate Social Performance is, for them, “the result of the analysis, debate and modification that characterizes scholarly inquiry” (1985: 767), an outcome which has “grown out of an initial admonishment that firms need to be more socially responsible and into an integrative, three dimensional model of corporate social involvement” (*ibid.*). Corporate Social Performance also qualifies as a “paradigm” according to Jones’ (1983) definition of the term whilst simultaneously pulling together so much of what the field of business and society is all about (Wartick and Cochran 1985: 767-8). The many positives of the era of Corporate Social Performance culminate in the final assertion made by the authors, namely that “the past, healthy discourse that led the development of the Corporate Social Performance model makes its future very promising” (1985: 768).

But, to revisit the point previously stated to be in need of expansion, in order to tell such a positive and uplifting story about Corporate Social Performance, Wartick and Cochran attempt to take the credit for the very points which Frederick (and others before him) had already made. Wartick and Cochran hence cast Frederick as an outright advocate of the Corporate Social Responsiveness view (see, for example 1985: 762), proceeding to undermine his work in terms of three supposed blind spots. These supposed blind spots, of course, are nothing of the sort. Frederick never advocated a Corporate Social Responsiveness without qualifications. But Wartick and Cochran cover over such apparent trivialities, accuse Frederick for not having realised some of the very points which he himself *made*, and proceed to cast his realisations as if they were their own.

I should point out that the intention here is *not* to place too great an emphasis upon the correct way in which Frederick should have been read. Nor, just as equally, am I immensely concerned with making a big deal of the fact that some authors have misread others. What matters here are the various *consequences* of this obvious misreading of Frederick's work in so far as these bear upon the manner in which the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has come to be understood.

In this regard, we might ask how it was possible for Wartick and Cochran, as well as Carroll before them, to so blatantly misrepresent Frederick's work. Frederick, after all, is a business and society scholar making a relatively straightforward argument in a business and society journal. The assertions he makes are anything but concealed or enigmatic. Indeed, for all that is being made of Frederick's earlier work here, its assertions are patently straightforward. It cannot be argued, or at least it cannot be argued in good faith, that several authors have miscast Frederick's earlier work on account of their failing to come to terms with its intricate meanderings. It also cannot be doubted that these authors each read Frederick's work at some stage. They each quote him. They each draw inferences from his work. They each situate his work within the broader trajectory of Corporate Social Performance. And it also cannot be said, finally, that these authors were unable to get to grips with the difficulties of Frederick's work. This because there is really nothing difficult to get to grips with! So what *is* at stake in having read Frederick in this so obviously partial way? How can such a reading have taken place without attracting much in the way of critical commentary?

What, in other words, did such a misreading produce?

At this stage the answer should be obvious: the era of Corporate Social Performance itself was made possible by the universalised self-conceitedness demonstrated here. Only when the fundamental incommensurability of the challenges which the eras of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR₁) and Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR₂) posed to one another became assimilated into a broader framework, namely the framework of Corporate Social Performance (CSP), did it become possible to leave such a difficult problem behind and focus attention elsewhere. No matter if the problem itself remains unresolved, which of course it did. For as long as assimilation gave the appearance of resolution and hence progress that was more than enough.

Such is the concealment of every assertion of and subscription to the notion that the so-called paradigm of Corporate Social Performance comes to us on the back of a long drawn out intellectually progressive movement. The truth is rather in the details that had to be systematically passed over *in order to* tell the story that intellectual progress was the proper name for what was being made. That being the case, such a generalised conceitedness is not without its consequences for the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, as the next chapter will go on to show.

CHAPTER SIX

The Performance of a Response

Like all vital, living things, the practice of business management is not static. It changes - sometimes at a relatively slow pace, sometimes more rapidly.

Frank Abrams (1951: 29)

Chapter Introduction

In returning to this concern with demonstrating *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has come to be largely conceived as a practical one, I should point out that this investigation's guiding question, what *is* Corporate Social Responsibility, has *not* been accordingly left behind. Indeed, in making such a turn, I have not lost sight of the guiding question *at all*. I am rather continuing to proceed on *its* basis, taking my bearings from the manner in which the question has been asked, focusing my attention upon how the manner in which the question has been asked has brought us to a situation in which this very asking is largely conceived along practical lines. The asking of this guiding question has already been shown to be a quite general concern. The asking of this question within the purview of practice, however, is now being argued as being a historically determined development.

This task of confronting the notion of the apparently inherent practicality of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, then, is not being undertaken here for the sake of anything like 'rescuing' theory from practice. Nor, just as equally, is it being undertaken for the sake of formulating some sort of prioritisation of practice above theory. Indeed, instead of presupposing or laying down the meaning of practice in advance, this engagement with the idea of the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility itself *illustrates* how practice has been, and indeed continues to be, an ongoing concern expressed within the questioning tradition.

The concern here is to show *how* the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility has *itself* become a theoretical object. Above all, this recognition of a theoretical project towards practice is *not* an imposition made by me upon the work that I am engaging with here. This concern can rather be seen to already exist *within* these very discussions. It is there that the inherent difficulty of considering Corporate Social Responsibility from a wholly practical point of view is discussed and deliberated over. And it is therefore at that precise level that this analysis is located at.

Now, since it is widely recognised that the essence of the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility has not yet been made entirely transparent, as will be illustrated, it so follows that the various notions of practice hitherto secured cannot yet have the final word on the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. And if it is not yet known what Corporate Social Responsibility practice is then the act of questioning, for its part, cannot be once and for all admonished for its want of practical relevance, nor for its want of supposed closeness to the matter at hand.

Practice, as will be shown within this Chapter, and despite the predominant prejudice which has been elucidated within Chapter Two, has not yet cleared a way for itself apart from questioning. And yet the role of questioning, for its own part, is routinely admonished for its want of practical applicability. What is compelling in this regard is the historical unfolding of the theoretical quest for practice itself, the quest which I began to outline within the previous chapter. There we saw that quest's earlier expression within a widespread ambivalence towards the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility and indicated how this ambivalence in turn paved the way towards the frameworks of Corporate Social Responsiveness and Corporate Social Performance.

The reality of practice, on all of these showings, resists theorisation. This is as much a theoretical problem as it is a practical one. Given the fact that the present investigation attempts to make a theoretical contribution along theoretical lines, a detailed discussion of what is meant by practice, as opposed to theory, is by no means circumstantial to the overall task at hand. Indeed, such an extended engagement with the problem of practice directly indicates *why* any asking of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility need not take its bearings from those who are said to practice it nor from those sites within which such practising is said to take place.

The ‘practice’ of Corporate Social Responsibility, as is currently being shown, is not something waiting to be simplistically identified and subsequently measured. Indeed, identification and measurement are perhaps that which the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility tends towards least of all in the first instance. Practice is not to be understood as something that can be initially glimpsed, unreflectively approached and subsequently gathered. On the contrary, practice is shown here to be precisely that which is not and cannot be grasped first of all. Practice is rather that which is striven towards in the first place and thereafter. Even if we say practice is that which simply happens, we can still ask what it is that is simply happening. Above all, practice itself demands questioning, not least of all because its apologists so readily admonish just such questioning. Such admonition is both hugely premature and, moreover, hugely naïve. For it is not the case, at least in the case of Corporate Social Responsibility, that the asking of ‘what is’ questions offers an unhelpful, abstract or ‘academic’ counter-point to the inherent applicability of the matters of the day. It is rather that case that these very questions serve to bring practicality itself into greater relief (see Kaulingfreks 2007).

This means, in turn, that I must concede that the very discussion of practice being conducted here necessarily simplifies the very thing it claims to write in the name of. Such is the lot of every attempt to write the essence of practice. To extend the point, it is clearly not the case, as is so often suggested, that theorisation over-complicates the essence of practice. It is rather the case that practice itself is complicated and that theory, for its part, cannot help but following suit. The inherent complexity of practice hence determines the very difficulty of doing theory; the theorist's challenge becomes one of simplification without misrepresentation. And since there is nothing straightforward about practice, such a task is never easily accomplished.

The problem of unifying Corporate Social Responsibility's theory and practice into a coherent whole has become a perennial problem for the questioning tradition, even to this day. What is being undertaken here is a demonstration of how *that* has become the case. This investigation, to repeat, is not to be understood as some sort of evaluative review of the many attempts that have been made to effect this unification. It is rather to be understood as a demonstration of the manner in which the problem of unification has itself unfolded historically. At the same time, this demonstration is also an engagement with the question of how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has become narrower in its focus with the passing of time.

With all of this in mind let us now recall, finally, that within the previous chapter it was shown that the questioning tradition previously established the fact of its own practical inadequacies through a discussion of what Corporate Social Responsiveness entails. The discussion of Corporate Social Responsiveness marked the very contours within which the practical inadequacies of Corporate Social Responsibility could be

addressed. This discussion simultaneously established the very ground of possibility for the elimination of the various practical inadequacies already outlined. In turn, the eventual era of Corporate Social Performance allowed its incumbents to understand the theory (Corporate Social Responsibility) *and* practice (Corporate Social Responsiveness) of Corporate Social Responsibility more or less synonymously: each became cast as particular moments in a more general movement. That this development simply recast Frederick's old problem in new clothing was entirely beside the point. A framework had been put in place. The task became one of working within that framework. Application, in other words, became the order of the day.

This is not to say that what were called theoretical refinements and conceptual adjustments could no longer be argued over and implemented¹⁷. It is rather to say that the basic idea of Corporate Social Performance became a sort of unquestioned backdrop for more or less every further investigation undertaken in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility. This chapter will now proceed to examine the stakes involved in this widespread acceptance of the Corporate Social Performance model in more detail.

Measuring Responsibly Responsive Performance

With the Corporate Social Performance framework, an appropriate scholarly lens had seemingly been developed through which the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility could finally be observed in its actual state. Practice had, in other words, finally been made accessible to theorists. Discussions from the mid-eighties onwards operationalised this apparent separation between the researcher and the

¹⁷ See for example Epstein (1987)

researched. The era of an accessible practice of Corporate Social Responsibility had finally arrived, in no small part thanks to the erection of the framework of Corporate Social Performance. It simply remained for everybody to get on board.

Symptomatic of the times was the work of Ullman (1985) which argued the need for much more empirically focused work in the area, empirically focused work that would, of course, be directly informed by the Corporate Social Performance framework. In so doing, Ullman reviewed the empirical research projects which had already been undertaken in this vein, including, amongst others, the work of Abbot and Monsen (1979), Aldag and Bartol (1978), Alexander and Buchholz (1978), Arlow and Gannon (1982), Cochran and Wood (1984), Preston (1978) and Sturdivant and Gitner (1977). These were just the sorts of studies that were required if the era of Corporate Social Performance was to be nourished, it seems. Towards this end, shortly after the publication of Ullman's work, Aupperle et al (1985) similarly focused their unimpressed attention upon the need for more empirical research to be done in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility, a sentiment which was for its part *furthermore* echoed within the work of McGuire et al (1988) and O'Neill et al (1989), for example.

Each of these projects, despite all of their empirical innovations and discoveries, systematically ignored the conceptual inconsistencies of the Corporate Social Performance model alluded towards within the previous chapter *in order to* study it empirically. This is simply another way of saying that the project of measuring and therefore controlling Corporate Social Performance could only commence once its conceptual inadequacies were systematically ignored for the sake of making such

measurement and control possible. Yet this fetish for measurement, this notion that scholarship only really takes place at the very instant where measurement becomes possible, is for its part never really argued for. It is rather asserted, continuously, as if it were a matter of fact, as if it were a matter upon everybody was already in agreement with.

It is upon this point that a discussion of the significance of Donna Wood's hugely influential re-visitation of Corporate Social Performance (1991a) becomes relevant. Wood's article has become something of a cornerstone for the entire Corporate Social Performance debate¹⁸. As with the work of her predecessors, Wood's concern within this article was with the history of Corporate Social Performance and its tendency towards an as yet unrealized synthesis. Her project was to therefore establish, once and for all, *how* the phenomenon of Corporate Social Performance could become a determinate, measurable entity. In this regard she argues that whilst

milestones toward a theory of corporate social performance can be identified...there is not yet such a theory. Conceptual developments have not been systematically integrated with one another, but usually have been treated as free-standing, implicitly competing ideas (1991a: 691).

Written within the context of such a scenario, Wood's paper attempts to constitute just such a systematic integration. Her thoroughgoing analysis eventually arrives at a definition of Corporate Social Performance as

¹⁸ In a recently published article it was hailed as "one of the most influential, helpful, parsimonious yet comprehensive conceptualisations of Corporate Social Performance" (Orlitzky et al 2003: 411).

a business organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships (1991a: 693)

There is clearly a lot to this – each of the terms used within this definition are for their part related to a variety of academic literatures. Wood's definition therefore constitutes Corporate Social Performance as an analytical framework with no less than *nine* basic and fundamentally interrelated parts. In particular, the framework is divided into three first order layers (responsibility, responsiveness and outcomes, the latter of which are of central significance in so far as Wood is concerned). These first order layers are then each in turn further decomposed into three elementary points for scholarly interrogation (1991a: 694).

The article then works through each of these nine principles of Corporate Social Performance in turn, discussing their various histories whilst simultaneously demonstrating the manner in which each principle is to be from then on understood as fully integrated within the wider framework of Corporate Social Performance. The framework hence synthesizes insights from literatures as diverse as Institutional Legitimacy Theory (e.g. Davis 1973), Public Policy (e.g. Preston and Post 1975), Moral Discretion (e.g. Carroll 1979), Strategic Environment Analysis (e.g. Bourgeois 1980; Fahey and Narayanan 1986), Stakeholder Theory (e.g. Freeman 1984) and Issues Management (e.g. Brown 1979; Wartick and Rude 1986). Having attempted such an ambitious synthesis, Wood then claims that her work offers a framework of Corporate Social Performance which “gives management researchers a more useful

framework, or template, for organizing their research and theory on corporate social performance” (1991a: 713). Hers is a framework which, she insists

permits CSP to be seen not as something that is implicitly good in itself and “desirable” for firms “to have,” or that is linked to particular but unspoken values, but as a construct for evaluating business outputs that must be used in conjunction with explicit values about appropriate business-society relationships (1991a: 693-4).

To understand the essence of Corporate Social Performance along these lines suggested by Wood would hence be to understand a particular business organisation as a compound of nine compound parts. It would also be to make it possible to distinguish any particular compound from any other particular compound similarly constituted. Once Corporate Social Performance becomes an analyzable object then it can be compared, assessed and ranked. Wood’s framework of Corporate Social Performance, to her mind, therefore assimilates the eras of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Responsiveness, directing researcher attention beyond such notions of Corporate Social Responsibility and towards the practical consequences that can be said to derive from them (Wood 1991b: 66). A measurable entity was thereby made of Corporate Social Responsibility. A system had been erected within which Corporate Social Responsibility became a formal, demonstrable and comparable feature of all business organisations.

No longer was the researcher required to choose between abstract philosophies and concrete strategies. Never again would a compromise have to be made between the

theory of Corporate Social Responsibility and the practice thereof. The framework of Corporate Social Performance, that synthesis of all syntheses, saw to that. And Wood's landmark achievement, this elaboration upon Corporate Social Responsibility's inherent measurability, in turn served as the grounding possibility for so much of what was to follow in the name of Corporate Social Performance¹⁹.

Why Measure Responsibly Responsive Performance?

If Corporate Social Performance becomes a measurable phenomena then towards what and in the name of what might such measurement be undertaken? Of what significance is such an analytic framework if not to be put towards some sort of end? For McWilliams and Siegel, as has been shown previously, a definition of Corporate Social Responsibility was required because the absence of one made "theoretical development and measurement difficult" (2006:1). So is the scenario the same here? Is theoretical development and measurement all we stand to gain from Wood's very many conceptual innovations? Surely it cannot be the case that the framework of Corporate Social Performance is erected solely for the purpose of giving the questioning tradition something else to do. It must rather be the case that the Corporate Social Performance framework itself serves as a means towards some sort of extra-scholarly end or set of ends.

¹⁹ The following articles, and no doubt there are many others, each acknowledge their debt to Wood's work: Gatewood and Carroll (1991); Wood (1991c); Thomas and Simerly (1994); Sethi (1995); Wood and Jones (1995); Clarkson (1995); Swanson (1995); Burke and Logsdon (1996); Griffin and Mahon (1997); Preston and O' Bannon (1997); Mitchell et al (1997); Harrison and Freeman (1999); Ogden and Watson (1999); Agle et al (1999); Weaver et al (1999); Johnson and Greening (1999); Roman et al. (1999); Mahon and Griffin (1999); Carroll (1999); Swanson (1999); Carroll (2000); Mitnick (2000); Husted (2000); Griffin (2000); Rowley and Berman (2000); Orlitzky and Benjamin (2001); Margolis and Walsh (2001, 2003); Orlitzky et al (2003); Smith (2003); Meijer and Schuyt (2005); de Bakker et al. (2005, 2006).

Wood argues as much, suggesting that if business and society researchers, that is to say the contemporary experts of the questioning convention, re-orient themselves towards the predicates of Corporate Social Performance, they:

may be able to stop asking so many tangled questions about responsibility, and start asking more concrete questions about outcomes. Who is harmed and who benefits from corporate actions? Is it right or just that these harms and benefits should occur? What can be done to reduce the harms and increase the benefits of corporate behaviours? Then we shall move closer to answering the question of corporate social responsibility, and in the process move also toward “the good society” and a better world (1991b: 66).

Whether Wood’s framework is in fact capable of playing its part in the creation of a better world is not the issue here. What it is important to consider here is rather the manner in which the framework of Corporate Social Performance, a framework championed for its descriptive capabilities, is itself buttressed upon inherently normative aspirations. Although Wood offers Corporate Social Performance to the world for the sake of integrating a variety of disparate research projects, this very integration is itself ultimately undertaken for the sake of creating a better world. Yet for all of that, unfortunately, the norms that could or should be operationalized in the creation of this better world are nowhere to be found from within the Corporate Social Performance framework.

It is on this very point that Diane Swanson challenges Wood’s model, arguing that the framework of Corporate Social Performance makes it impossible to offer consistent

moral arguments and, furthermore, that it offers inadequate normative criteria for the assessment of both corporate social responsiveness *and* the outcomes of responsive processes (1995: 49-51). Swanson's solution to the dilemma is a broadening out of the Corporate Social Performance model, beyond the manner in which Wood had constructed it, so that it can more sufficiently embrace its normative underpinnings. Only when the questioning convention explicitly recognizes its inherently normative nature, argues Swanson, will it be possible to set Wood's quest for the good society in motion (Swanson 1995: 52). Swanson's adaptation of Wood's model hence respects the "assertion that the CSR principles are analytical forms to be filled with value content that is operationalized" (Swanson 1995: 60).

In a later article Swanson pushes this same point by underlining what she describes as the "integration dilemma" characterizing the business and society field as a whole (Swanson 1999). The nature of this dilemma, as she sees it, is as follows. On the one hand, the field harbors inherently normative aspirations "because it seeks to explain what corporations *should* or *should not* do" (Swanson 1999: 506). On the other hand the field also seeks to explain and describe "what corporations do or can do" (*ibid.*). This problem, Swanson argues, is self-perpetuating, which in turn explains the inherently fragmented nature of the field at large (Swanson 1999: 507-510). This means that for Swanson, to deny the fact that values reign supreme within the field is both unrealistic and unproductive.

Rather than attempting to erect a framework that would deny or neglect the existence of normative presuppositions, Swanson instead offers a research strategy for Corporate Social Performance on the basis of what she calls *value attunement*. This

strategy, she argues, would make a normatively poised theory of Corporate Social Performance possible (1999: 519), hence going some way towards overcoming the massive hurdle that is the integration dilemma. Throughout her work, Swanson is at pains to underline, emphasize and extend the absolute centrality of adopting normative evaluative positions for anybody concerned with understanding what Corporate Social Responsibility is. And it is in this light that the supposed significance of a *value attuned* Corporate Social Performance framework is portrayed by her.

Nevertheless, for all the talk of value necessity that proliferates throughout her work, Swanson fails to offer any particular values of her own. She instead argues that because relativism is “more realistic” than formalism, business and society scholars must adopt a relativist stance to all matters of corporate social policy (1999: 518). Insisting upon the inherent plurality and sociality of all normative values, Swanson proceeds to underline the need for a communicative ethic which would, in turn, make an expansive notion of value attunement possible (1999: 518-519). But in systematizing notions such as mutual understanding and collective toleration within the supposed means towards an apparently unspecified end (i.e. a reinvigorated framework of Corporate Social Performance towards a good society), Swanson has nonetheless smuggled a particular set of values in through the backdoor.

On close consideration, one is faced with the unavoidable realization that the ends achieved by Swanson’s value attuned procedure could only ever reflect the values contained within the very means towards their realization. To put it otherwise, Swanson’s apparent openness to the relativity of all values nonetheless prioritizes its

own values: plurality, openness, communication, dialogue, consensus, respect and toleration to name but a few. If Swanson were to take her own relativism seriously, she could not prohibit anything in the terrain of norms and values since, if ethical relativism were truly the case, then literally anything would go. But Swanson does make certain foreclosures, paradoxically in the name of openness, most notably in her dismissal of the utility of ethical formalism.

We are hence entitled to be somewhat suspicious of the extent to which what she calls value attunement is actually attuned to the disparity of values she writes in the name of. Such openness to the plurality of values, on closer inspection, looks very much like a manifesto for liberalism. This is not to say that there is anything inconsistent in any of this since Swanson *is* arguing, after all, that values underpin the field as a whole. Nevertheless, perhaps she should do her readers the courtesy of simply calling her argument a liberal take upon the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, rather than calling it a value attuned engagement therewith.

But even if this slight deception weren't the case, Swanson's failure to explicitly argue in the name of a particular normative position or set of positions on the proper nature of the good society leaves more serious problems unresolved. What is given by her with one hand is taken away by the other. On the one hand, the will for a better society is offered. On the other hand, the possibility of achieving suchlike is renounced. The logic seems to run as follows: We all want a good society. We all have different ideas as to what that good society would be like. Let's all go and create a good society on the basis of the fact that we all have different ideas as to what a good society would be like. It is as if the reader is given a destination but no map. Or

rather, it is as if every reader is given a different destination and a different map and told to make their way to wherever it is they want to go, all the while assuming that those places will all be the same. Swanson's value attuned model of Corporate Social Performance therefore announces a goal whilst simultaneously withdrawing the possibility of its achievement.

There are of course other directions in which the inevitability of values argument has been used in order to push a transformative agenda in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility. We have already discussed one within the previous chapter: the path that Frederick's later work took. But, as already illustrated, to simply choose any old normative position (or 'moral archetype' as Frederick called it) and proceed to run with it for the sake of having something to run with is much too facile a response towards much too difficult a problem. Swanson's failure to offer any normative position, however, for its part is met with no obviously superior fate.

How is Corporate Social Responsibility to Be Done?

Whoever ponders the necessity, the genealogy and therefore also the limits of the concept of responsibility cannot fail to wonder at some point what is meant by 'respond', and '*responsiveness*', a precious word for which I can find no strict equivalent in my language. And to wonder whether to 'respond' has an opposite, which would consist, if commonsense is to be believed, in not responding. Is it possible to make a decision on the subject of 'responding' and of '*responsiveness*'? (Derrida 1995a: 13)

Let us recap the key points of the previous two chapters before returning, finally, towards an attempt to explain the present day infatuation with the notion of the inherent practicality of Corporate Social Responsibility. We have seen that whereas Frederick saw the fundamentally normative aspirations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR₁) evolving into the fundamentally descriptive aspirations of Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR₂), Wood considered the descriptive essence of the Corporate Social Performance framework as a preamble *towards* normative intervention. Certainly, Frederick focused upon processes of responsiveness whereas Wood focused upon outcomes. But such distinctions between the two models are superficial at best. The basic problem is the same for Wood as it was for Frederick: neither author has been capable of offering a definitive account of what Corporate Social Responsibility practice actually is.

This is the case not least of all on account of the fact that neither Frederick nor Wood have been capable of putting theory at the service of practice, nor practice at the service of theory, for the sake of Corporate Social Responsibility. The movement from theory to practice (or vice versa) is certainly not linearly causal in either case. Frederick, as has been shown, anticipated a synthesis between theory and practice that was yet to come, a synthesis which a future generation of business and society scholars might strive to achieve. Wood, as has also been shown, constructed her Corporate Social Performance framework for the sake of a not yet articulated normative position towards which her framework would be subsequently operationalised. And Swanson's intervention, for its part, was to attempt to address the normative shortcomings in Wood's model, albeit in a wholly unsatisfactory manner.

The basic problem which Swanson gestures towards is, in turn, the very same problem which Frederick had originally pointed out, namely, that in order to understand what is practiced when Corporate Social Responsibility is supposedly practiced; one first of all requires an idea of what Corporate Social Responsibility practice actually is. For Swanson, for Wood, for Corporate Social Performance, for Frederick and for Corporate Social Responsiveness, Corporate Social Responsibility must be practiced towards some sort of end. After almost thirty years of debate, we remain no closer to a widely accepted and widely acknowledged demonstration of what that end might actually be. A 'good society', for sure. But who wouldn't want that!

Irrespective of these problems, today's demand for a 'practical' engagement with the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, indeed today's insistence upon it, remains pronounced. Practice, in other words, continuously becomes presented to us today as that which ultimately has access to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, even though the actual nature of this privileged thing called practice continuously eludes theoretical encapsulation. "Practice" has become what might be called a sort of not-yet-realized-but-realizable-nonetheless promise which Corporate Social Responsibility continues to make.

The recent attempt by Rowley and Berman (2000), for example, to overcome the very idea of Corporate Social Performance for the sake of a more viable theoretical framework presupposes *that* a proper account of Corporate Social Responsibility in practice *can* be once and for all theoretically secured, eventually. Attempting to move beyond the tradition within which their work is implicated, Rowley and Berman's

article only succeeds in dressing the theory/practice division up in new clothing. Their work hence offers yet another variation on the same fundamental theme; the theme of the so far un-kept promise which Corporate Social Responsibility continues to make to itself and to its advocates. This promise is that Corporate Social Responsibility is something inherently practical and, moreover, that Corporate Social Responsibility is something inherently worthwhile. On the evidence of what has been seen, however, that promise has yet to be kept.

Nevertheless, as has been seen in Chapter Two, devout engagements with the very notion of an inherently practical, inherently good Corporate Social Responsibility are increasingly becoming the case. That is to say, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility, as has already been shown, is increasingly becoming a question of *how*, rather than *what*. To the examples already offered we could also add the argument of, for example, Bies et. al. (2007: 792), who introduce a recent special issue on the idea of corporations as “social change agents” by arguing that this very idea is

a call to scholars to question the very foundation of many of their assumptions about the role and function of corporations in the twenty first century and how they impact lives around the world. In other words, these papers are a call to intellectual action, especially to interdisciplinary scholarship and to the recognition of the complexity and importance of issues associated with corporate social action.

Towards the end of Chapter Two we asked how we have gotten here. How has it come to pass that scholars and practitioners alike have come to appreciate the supposed need for Corporate Social Responsibility, how they have come to argue for the need to bring Corporate Social Responsibility into being. The answer that I want to give now, indeed the only answer that I can now give, is that we have gotten here precisely because the notion of a practically applicable Corporate Social Responsibility is itself something which has been held as worthwhile by a long drawn out historical tradition of questioning what it is that Corporate Social Responsibility is. It has been shown, precisely from within this very tradition, that this fully practically applicable Corporate Social Responsibility is something that has not yet been secured – hence the ongoing discussions concerning Corporate Social Responsibility. And this lack of having secured that which must nonetheless be secured is, for its part, the very condition of possibility for so much of what is being written in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility, even to this very day.

All of this is not to say that the quest for a theory of Corporate Social Responsibility practice cannot be realised. It is rather only to say that for as long as this quest remains unrealised, there is nothing to be said for a procedure which would ignore the role theory might have to play in coming to terms with practice. In other words, any account of Corporate Social Responsibility practice which locates itself exclusively at the level of corporate practice and congratulates itself for the access it has to the truth of the phenomenon supposedly accounted for does little else than congratulate itself for wanting to be stupid. This statement, for its part, is made not out of some sort of a spirit of theoretical arrogance or elitism. It is made rather out of an utmost familiarity of the intricacy of the question in question.

The chastisement of theory from the perspective of what is called practice is too often made too easily. If it were clear what Corporate Social Responsibility practice was then this chastisement would be fully justified. But the very fact that Corporate Social Responsibility practice has been made to represent so many things only means that whenever Corporate Social Responsibility practice is mentioned today, it is in no way clear that such a thing possesses any essential meaning at all. To reiterate, the problem is not that the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility practice is ridiculous, far from it in fact. The problem is rather that the meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility practice has not yet been secured by anybody.

Because of this, nobody, so-called practitioners and eminent theorists included, has yet spoken with absolute authority on the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility in practice. Its essential meaning hence remains contentious in itself. This is not a task from which theorists should shy. It is rather a theoretical challenge that must be directly confronted. Similarly, this is not a task from which practitioners should scurry. It is rather a question that is of immense practical significance.

This failure (if it can be called such) is not without its consequences, not least of all today. For at the very same time that the idea of the supposed applicability of Corporate Social Performance was being prematurely and therefore disingenuously rendered relevant to the reorientation of the role of business in society by its advocates, its inherent lack of fixity was also putting a lot of wind in the sails of a much more conservative project. That project was one of attempting to connect Corporate Social Performance to Corporate Financial Performance. If this connection could be made conceptually, better still empirically, then 'business as usual' would be

somewhat if not entirely vindicated, fully aware and fully assured of its own demonstrable goodness. This is precisely the kind of opportunity which Michael Porter and Mark Kramer (2006: 13-14) seize upon when they argue, for example, that

Corporations are not responsible for all the world's problems, nor do they have the resources to solve them all. Each company can identify the particular set of societal problems that it is best equipped to help resolve and from which it can gain the greatest competitive benefit. Addressing social issues by creating shared value will lead to self-sustaining solutions that do not depend on private or government subsidies. When a well-run business applies its vast resources, expertise, and management talent to problems that it understands and in which it has a stake, it can have a greater impact on social good than any other institution or philanthropic organization.

In other words, if the practicing of Corporate Social Responsibility can be harmonised with the more general competitive concerns which define corporations, then corporations should do Corporate Social Responsibility. In other words still, corporations should pursue Corporate Social Responsibility only if it is in their more general interests. Or again: corporations should act in their own interests, or rather in the interests of their shareholders, at all times. This is precisely the way in which Husted and Salazar (2006) attempt to “take Friedman seriously”, fully mindful of Jensen's argument (2002) which underlines the logical impossibility of simultaneously maximising returns along more than one dimension. In this sense what Porter and Kramer call ‘corporate philanthropy’ (2002) should actually be called ‘corporate philargyria’ instead. This is because it is not for love of people but for love

of money that the various acts which they label as philanthropic are to be undertaken, something which we might also justifiably say of, for example the works of Prahalad (2006), Wilson and Wilson (2006) and Lodge and Wilson (2006).

And this is also the understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility which Margolis and Elfenbein (2008) and, to a lesser extent, Corporate Social Responsibility's more self-avowedly progressive advocates so fervently oppose, the understanding which says that Corporate Social Responsibility is *nothing but* a means towards more traditional corporate ends. In this regard it is held that Corporate Social Responsibility, when practiced, must make some sort of difference to the way in which corporations behave (hence, for example, *Corporation Be Good!*). So if Corporate Social Responsibility is to simply be a means towards conventional corporate ends then Corporate Social Responsibility is little other than a legitimating foil for "business as usual". And for its traditional advocates, Corporate Social Responsibility must of course be a lot more than that.

But having said *that*, it is not at all clear how an avowedly pragmatic understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility can bring about anything different, particularly because just such an understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility explicitly forecloses the question of what it is that Corporate Social Responsibility *is*, prioritising instead the question of how it is to be done. For what is the difference, in the end, between appreciating Corporate Social Responsibility as nothing but a means towards "corporate" ends, on the one hand, and appreciating Corporate Social Responsibility as nothing but a means towards "social" ends, on the other? In both

instances we are talking about an indistinct sort of practice which necessarily lends itself towards further questioning (What are corporate ends? What are social ends?).

In the case of corporate ends, answers are readily apparent. In the case of social ends, they are not. But if what matters, in the first instance, is that Corporate Social Responsibility happens, then the question of what it is that is happening when Corporate Social Responsibility is said to be happening becomes trivialised, lambasted even. The idea of a measurable Corporate Social Performance and moreover, the idea of a Corporate Social Responsibility that has to be practiced, somehow, has therefore become an instrument for both a reformist and a conservative take upon what form the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility might actually assume. And yet, when we reach a stage at which Corporate Social Responsibility is said to be happening, the necessity of this distinction becomes obliterated and what is said to matter, above all else, is that Corporate Social Responsibility is happening, that it is being done.

And finally, it is in this sense and in this sense *alone*, that the contemporary appreciation of the emergent prevalence of Corporate Social Responsibility is to be understood. Corporate Social Responsibility has become a practical question for us today precisely because the potentially revolutionary components of a generalised social critique of corporate practice, and of its capitalist context, has become hugely domesticated, accommodated and tamed by those who it would otherwise represent a severe threat to. The likes of Michael Porter can now therefore write in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility only because Corporate Social Responsibility has become the kind of thing that his work can incorporate, accept, invite (see Karamali

2006). Corporate Social Responsibility has been made into a practical question for business strategists precisely because the nature of socially responsible corporate practice has not yet been secured. And this has not yet been secured in large part because the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has not yet been understood, much less considered, as a question of determinatively productive significance.

Conclusion: Pragmatism and the Question of Corporate Social Responsibility

At this point it is worth speculating as to whether the history of the questioning tradition could have developed otherwise, worth wondering about whether this convention had to steer a course onto practice. Surely, after all, advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility had to strive towards practical relevance from the very beginning. Surely compromise, and the necessarily contaminated rewards that it receives, is a better road to have followed than the road of outright refusal, the road that meets with nothing but its own recollection of the stubborn principles from which it commenced and, perhaps occasionally, with the patronising glances of those who insist upon inhabiting 'the real world'.

Surely to argue for anything other than compromise, to stick to principles as it were, is to advocate an engagement with the question of Corporate Social Responsibility as something impractical, something non-applicable, something unrealistic? Surely, in other words, the argument for Corporate Social Responsibility had to betray itself somewhat in order to assert itself more generally.

Perhaps...

But perhaps there is also something to be said for an engagement with the question of Corporate Social Responsibility which directly refuses to make concessions and compromises, an engagement which makes demands rather than requests, an engagement which asks what Corporate Social Responsibility is rather than simply allowing its inquisitors to be told. In this sense, practice, and everything that has been seen to go with it, would be that which advocates of Corporate Social Responsibility would strive for least of all. Practice would rather be that which could never be secured or settled upon, and this precisely for the sake of maintaining and preserving the radical potential which the notion that corporations are simply not doing enough contains. Somewhat counter-intuitively, then, we might say that a practically applicable Corporate Social Responsibility would be that which its advocates strove *not* to achieve, precisely for the sake of Corporate Social Responsibility.

But even this proposition, somewhat paradoxically, offers such advocates the potential to practice Corporate Social Responsibility, this by virtue of the fact that the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility would simply be the practice of just such a healthy scepticism towards the very idea that Corporate Social could ever become accessible as practice (see Keenan 1997, see also Derrida 1995b, 2005 and Jones 2003). Simultaneously we can say, destructively speaking, that a conscientious attempt to work these decisions through is already taking place, continuously, within the questioning tradition which we have taken our bearings from here, as has already been shown.

This difficult predicament of Corporate Social Responsibility in mind we might now ask, rhetorically speaking, whether anything has ever secured for itself the right to

Speak in the name of responsibility before speaking? If yes then it will surely first of all have to have known what it is that responsibility *is*. Have we secured, within the present investigation, any such assurance? We have not, nor are we even yet convinced as to possibility of the very existence of just these sorts of guarantees.

Yet isn't this to do nothing at all but watch? In a world that calls each being there to respond, of what practical relevance is this eye which only regards? Of what use is it? What does it achieve? This watchful eye, an eye that responds only in the way of silence, is it nothing if not irresponsible to that which it watches; taking everything in and giving nothing back? This eye which sees everything and says nothing, what can there be said of it, since it itself has nothing to offer but a sense for the questionability of (Corporate Social) Responsibility? Perhaps this eye should be plucked out so that we might go on to concern ourselves not with an optics of responsibility but a pragmatics thereof? Surely it is a greater achievement to have been responsible than to have seen what it is that being responsible necessarily presupposes?

Certainly it is possible to conclude in this regard. Yet for all of the temptation that calls us into that most promised of lands, that utopia at which we arrive *only* at the very instant when we no longer ask *any* questions of it is, for as long as we remain unprepared to make our leap there, not yet what we can have any faith in. Nor *can* we ever have any such faith, nor even be said to have acted out of such faith, for as long as we continue to concern ourselves with what it is that we are being called to have our faith in. Faith is often said to be blind, and with good reason.

If responsible practice is the ultimate test of responsibility then we must forever remain at a loss as to what it is that is practiced *in* this practice of responsibility. There is *no* pragmatic answer to the question of responsibility that shows itself as the proof of the question. Things are always the other way around. There is no way of definitively knowing responsibility that has not first of all clarified how it is that responsibility is anything at all. The will to pluck the eye that looks for responsibility, along with the will to deny oneself any reception of a sense for its foundation; this is the very essence of a pragmatics of responsibility. Yet this pragmatic spirit, for all of the reversals and inversions it attempts, is first of all grounded in an as yet unfulfilled inquiry; its place is determined in a line of questioning, despite its determination to determine things otherwise.

If that which is written and practiced in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility continues to appear as just so many responses to the question of how Corporate Social Responsibility should be, or of how it should be done, then this is only because so much theoretical groundwork remains outstanding. Such is the rationale for approaching Corporate Social Responsibility precisely as a question. Perhaps it will be objected that the incumbents of Corporate Social Responsibility's questioning convention have neither the time nor inclination to comport themselves in this regard. I cannot but hold this objection in contempt. Everything that determines responsibility by way of mere assertion, pragmatic or otherwise, necessarily arouses suspicion. If we are to have any confidence in the value of whatever has been called responsible practice, Corporate Social Responsibility not least of all, then we must first of all be convinced that the designation in question is itself grounded within an appropriate account of responsibility.

This challenge must be taken seriously if the idea of socially responsible corporate behaviour is to prove itself distinct from the anti-theoreticist, self-righteous and self-congratulatory pragmatism to be found within the likes of Hirshberg's *Stirring It Up: How to Make Money and Save the World* (2008), Allen's *Your Ethical Business: How to Plan, Start and Succeed in a Company with a Conscience* (2007) and Sisodia et al's. *Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose* (2007). That such contributions might mean well is not the issue. Writing under the auspices of the good and offering a set of practical guidelines in this regard, such books trivialise and debase the very question of what it is that a good life is and of how this good life is in turn related to political co-ordination.

But surely, again, being responsible is better than knowing what responsibility is? I can concede to this point and still say that in being responsible, one is obliged to describe what it is *that* they are being. One must surely know, in other words, what it means to be responsible, in order to be assured as to one's own being responsible. In a pragmatic era with a pragmatic emphasis, however, inquiries undertaken in such a direction are systematically discouraged. The main problem, therefore, is not that we charge the corporations of today with being socially irresponsible. The main problem is rather that we now insist upon their being socially responsible.

CONCLUSION

On Having Questioned Corporate Social Responsibility

There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena...

Friedrich Nietzsche (1990: 96)

Summary and Justification

You start with a question and, so it seems, that is exactly what you end up with. At the end of this investigation, perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly, we have not really come any closer to formulating an adequate response to the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. Nor have we even really learned how to pose the question correctly. This is not for want of trying, for sure, but it is by no means an entirely comforting state of affairs, not least of all for me. That said - I am confident this questioning exercise has not been without its merits. This investigation has not, in other words, failed to be productive. So what, then, has it produced? And how has it produced that which it has produced? What, in other words, has been done here in the name of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility? A brief wrap up is probably in order.

I introduced this investigation by asserting the need to explicitly raise the question of Corporate Social Responsibility (i.e. what is it?) again, this necessity having been derived out of the fact that there existed too many answers and hence, with an implicit nod towards the fable, too much spoiled broth. Having made this provisional case for raising the question again, *against* the notion that the question has already been answered well enough, I then turned towards a consideration of how cases have been made for this already answered nature of Corporate Social Responsibility. I turned, in other words, away from the question of Corporate Social Responsibility and towards a variety of responses that have been given towards it.

Most prominent in this regard, as shown in Chapter Two, was the notion that Corporate Social Responsibility already existed as practice, in practice. That is to say, when I turned towards an initial engagement with contemporary discussions of what Corporate Social Responsibility is, I found that, for the most part, Corporate Social Responsibility is today said to be something wholly practical. In this regard, Corporate Social Responsibility was said by many to be a question of how, rather than what, a question of practice, rather than of theory, a question of doing rather than being. This meant, in turn, that the very raising of the question ‘what is Corporate Social Responsibility?’ was seen by many to be a naïve and unnecessary exercise, an unhelpful and unrealistic engagement in what one prominent commentator labelled as little other than “theological speculation”.

Nevertheless, the repressed theologian in me persevered, despite (or perhaps because of) my predominantly anti-Catholic upbringing. The thrust of the investigation hence turned towards a consideration of *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility today gets answered with almost exclusive recourse to practice. Quite early on, therefore, I had to make the argument for *why* an investigation into the question of Corporate Social Responsibility need not focus upon those who are said to practice it, nor upon the sites within which such practising is said to take place. Such apparent anti-pragmatism, to reiterate, was not evoked as a means of simplistically disparaging or undermining investigations that claim to be located at the level of practice. It was rather evoked as a means of erring on the side of caution. That is, rather than presupposing Corporate Social Responsibility practice as empirically accessible in the first instance, I instead posited the possibility of practice itself being a phenomenon that required theoretical elaboration even before it could be empirically demonstrated.

In order to support and elucidate the consequences of such a proposition, Chapter Three took the form of a detailed methodological discussion. This crucial chapter was set the goal of describing the subsequent development of two fundamental tasks. *Firstly*, the task of describing how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility is to be understood and approached, with particular reference to Martin Heidegger's celebrated discussion of the act of questioning. *Secondly*, the task of describing how the question of how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has become largely understood as a pragmatic one is to be addressed. Chapter Three therefore established a set of what might be called hermeneutic principles, principles, that is, which would become determinative for the subsequent development of the investigation.

Questions, from then on, were to guide the nature of the investigation - the investigation turned towards an attempt to understand the nature of questions and questioning in order to understand that which it put into question. This meant that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility presupposed a site for interrogation which was to be elucidated and that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility was simultaneously determined by and determinative of a longer going questioning tradition. This questioning tradition, for its part, was to be susceptible to an historical *destruction*; this destruction was to be incapable of absolutely overcoming the supposed shackles of the questioning tradition and this entire way of questioning was to be somewhat captured by the term 'phenomenology'. These methodological principles, for their part, were not simply plucked from the tree of knowledge, so to speak. They were rather justified and clarified from the purview of the guiding question, the question of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Chapter Four then considered the question of Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of how it has been traditionally addressed. In so doing, this chapter addressed the general concern expressed within Chapter Three, namely, the concern to interrogate *how* the question of Corporate Social Responsibility *has* been asked, practice apart. “Practice apart” precisely because at this stage in the investigation the concern was with ascertaining whether there already existed a posing of the question which had an explicit concern with the structural characteristics of the question. That is to say, what was of initial interest within this chapter was the attempt to find out whether the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has already been appropriately raised, bearing in mind that suspicions had already been earlier raised as to the veracity of the pragmatic claim towards having done so.

Whilst such a structurally mindful posing of the question was not found, what was found instead was the condition of possibility of a Corporate Social Responsibility questioning tradition existing in the first place. This condition of possibility, for its part, was posited with recourse to the questioning convention framework. The very fact, in other words, that it has become possible to approach the question of Corporate Social Responsibility with reference to expertise, to a literature, to a sense of progression, indeed, with a nod towards a tradition, itself demonstrated that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility was the kind of question which lent itself towards just the sort of destruction outlined in the previous chapter. In this sense, Chapter Four legitimized some of the hanging questions which marked the departure from Chapter Three whilst paving the way towards the subsequent development of the guiding question. Chapter Four, in other words, pointed towards the existence of a questioning tradition which Chapter Three had yet to find any assurance of.

Chapters Five and Six shared a more precise task still, the latter picking up where the former left off. Together, these two chapters engaged the questions laid out in Chapter Two from the perspective of the principles laid down in Chapter Three with the assurance of the findings made in Chapter Four. Or, in other words, the general question of how the question of Corporate Social Responsibility was to be addressed and the more particular question of how it is that the question of Corporate Social Responsibility has come to be predominately addressed as a practical question, were tackled within these two chapters. This was done with the guidance of the methodological principles laid out within Chapter Three *and* with the assurances that a questioning tradition did indeed exist, as guaranteed by Chapter Four.

Chapters Five and Six therefore mapped out the history of the questioning tradition of Corporate Social Responsibility with particular emphasis placed upon how it is that this question has become historically constituted as a primarily practical one and, moreover, with demonstrating how it is that this question has gotten this way. Whilst this broad task was addressed across these two chapters, Chapter Five focused predominately upon how practice became opposed to Corporate Social Responsibility in the name of Corporate Social Responsiveness whilst Chapter Six focused upon how practice became re-assimilated in the name of Corporate Social Performance.

Within these two chapters we found that advocacy's need for Corporate Social Responsibility to be practical, to be applicable, that is, to be contemporaneously relevant, is by no means a recent development. We also found that this very advocacy, long drawn out, has not *yet* realized its practically applicable ambitions, despite its best efforts. This is not to say that the nature of the practice of Corporate Social

Responsibility remains fleeting simply because its theorists and practitioners have been so far incapable of presenting it, finally, in an unambiguous form. It is rather to say that Corporate Social Responsibility appears to us as initially ambiguous precisely because it is never accessed ‘in itself’ but rather always *by a questioner*. As such, an account of what Corporate Social Responsibility is in practice will necessarily come to us in a fragmented form, despite the best efforts of any form of questioning, and despite the best efforts of anybody else that might try their hand at the challenge of overcoming all ambiguities.

The posing of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility to begin with, therefore, is never an issue of putting the pieces together in the name of a definition, in the name of responsiveness, in the name of performance, in the name of practice or in the name of anything else at all for that matter. The posing of the question is rather an effort to come to terms with the fact that the inquisitive move is centripetal rather than centrifugal in the first instance. The question, in other words, does not seek to recreate or reestablish a primordial unity that has subsequently fallen apart. It rather inquires into *why* this particular unity is not to be found first of all as something that might *then* be smashed into pieces.

Why, we asked, is the movement of raising the question of Corporate Social Responsibility done from fragmentation towards unity? Why do events not transpire in the opposite direction? Consensus around the notion of an already extant practical Corporate Social Responsibility was in this regard understood as a false unity, the sort of superficial conceptual alignment which only serves to cover over a more profound discontinuity.

And this is why today's prevalence of Corporate Social Responsibility was described as the very failure of Corporate Social Responsibility. The extant questioning tradition's ongoing quest to present Corporate Social Responsibility as both practical and applicable is precisely what led to its having made notable concessions to corporate strategy, to shareholder returns, to the profit motive, to *business as usual*, in other words. The question of Corporate Social Responsibility comes to us today largely in a practical form precisely because it has become increasingly co-determined by those for whom Corporate Social Responsibility originally represented something of a threat to. This is not to say that Corporate Social Responsibility is, at root, a revolutionary position to adopt. It is rather only to say that with the passing of time, Corporate Social Responsibility has become an inherently conservative disposition.

So somewhat paradoxically, Corporate Social Responsibility loses its reformative potential at the very moment at which it becomes generally acceptable, agreeable and palatable. That is to say, at the very moment at which Corporate Social Responsibility becomes generally useful as an instrument of practice, it becomes generally useless as an instrument of criticism. That very moment is the moment at which Corporate Social Responsibility becomes more or less dogmatically, that is to say unquestionably, accepted as that which should exist, that which should be done, that which needs to be applied today, if only a lot more. Familiarity with this inherent tension at the heart of Corporate Social Responsibility, this tension which holds thinking on the one hand and doing on the other hand, was shown to be generally prevalent within the questioning tradition itself, even if this tension was not frequently represented as an object for collective deliberation. The questioning tradition was instead shown to err on the side of optimism, to choose to tell the story that a

practically applicable Corporate Social Responsibility is fast becoming the case, and that that case will be good.

But the case that has been made here is otherwise: a generalized acceptance of the already extant practicality of Corporate Social Responsibility is a generalized refusal to question this practicality in terms of its worth. And to generalize such a refusal is to generalize a neglect of the question of Corporate Social Responsibility. The argument that has been made here is that only questioning Corporate Social Responsibility as to what it is will maintain the properly transformative potential of Corporate Social Responsibility, if indeed such exists. One thing that is certain, however, and it is that such potential is pummeled out of all possibility by a consensus driven pragmatic agenda. It is questioning that disrupts this. It is therefore questioning that is required.

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