

Spirituality, Economics, and Education: A Dialogic Critique of "Spiritual Capital."

By J. Gregory Keller and Rob Helfenbein

[T]he right has been able to take certain elements that many people hold dear and connect them with other issues in ways that might not often occur 'naturally' if these issues were less politicized. (Apple 2001, pp.220-221)

In the ultimate sense spiritual capital is the missing leg in the stool of economic development, which includes its better known relatives, social and human capital. (Malloch 2003, p.2)

The belief that the truth of a theory is the same as its productiveness is clearly unfounded. (Horkheimer & Adorno 1991, p. 244)

In 2005, the Spiritual Capital Research Program announced a \$3.75 million grant “to catalyze the emergence of a productive, vital and interdisciplinary research field of spiritual capital in the social sciences, with particular attention to building connections to economics” (Spiritual Capital Research Program 2005). This particular work, commissioned by the Metanexus Institute and the John Templeton Foundation is, as we argue in the following dialogue, an exemplar of neoliberal rhetoric taking aim at the economic uses of spirituality in a globalized world. Based in a conservative think tank with ties to the American Enterprise Institute and using such neoconservative thinkers as Francis Fukuyama, this project is, we contend, a veiled example of the “conservative restoration” at work (Apple 2000; 2001; Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005).

Traditionally, spirituality has functioned in three ways in everyday life. First, it has answered deep and often pressing questions concerning the meaning of human life, the suffering associated with loss and deprivation, and the fears and hopes connected with boundary situations such as birth and death. Second, it has legitimized existing power relations. Third, it has resisted those same power relations (see, for instance, Chopp 1986; Cobb 2000; Cobb 2002). The question we wish to address arises from the methodical and alarming co-opting of significant human values by the subtle rhetoric of a neoliberal/neoconservative agenda such that the resistance to hegemony historically available through spirituality is instead turned into another form of acquiescence (Cobb 2002; Lakoff 2004; McCutcheon 2005).

We offer a moral critique of the co-option of one major aspect of cultural capital by an agenda that aspires to strengthen certain religious sub-cultures by showing their value in maintaining a “one-dimensional” (Marcuse 1991) economic and cultural system. Our approach relies upon, on the one hand, an idea of the social and political significance of moral thinking (Arendt 1971; Keller 2005) and, on the other hand, an analysis of some rhetorical devices employed by the Right that conflate freedom with the “free market” and represent their agenda as simple “common sense” (Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005). The authors, in explicit opposition to the ideology at work in this project on spiritual capital, present a response as a counter move in the hopes of articulating a broad tactic that is directed against the forces of cultural production employed by the Right.

This paper consists of a conversation between a philosopher specialising in ethics and religion and an educational researcher with an interest in cultural studies and contemporary social theory. Dialogic in form, this paper employs an interdisciplinary response to an interdisciplinary project and offers the following components:

- a dialogic theorizing of the implications for education of a research project on spiritual capital;
- a continuation of the project of analyzing moral thinking in various cultural and societal settings;
- a continuation of the project of analyzing political rhetoric (towards an understanding of the polemics of political rhetoric);
- a reaffirmation of the value of recognizing difference and ambiguity in the global moment.

Pairing spirituality with economics empowers a vision of education as a first line of defense against the alleged risks of allowing for diversity and critical questioning (Doerr 1998). Neoliberals/neoconservatives thus produce another rhetorical shift of meaning by which to reduce dissent and resistance to the level of an anti-patriotic, anti-religious, anti-value menace to the United States and its vision of global dominance (Lakoff 2004; McCutcheon 2005; Carter 1998). This dialogue represents an effort to present a counter-balance to that rhetoric. In pursuit of these goals, the authors have decided on four major themes and attendant questions that serve to frame the inquiry in the spiritual capital project of both philosophy and cultural studies.¹ The themes are:

1. Modernity: Two essential features of modernity lie in an attempt to gain “rational” control over all things and an attempt to “create its normativity out of

itself” (Habermas, 1990). How does the notion of spiritual capital relate to these goals?

2. Utility: Can every aspect of life be appropriately subsumed under the mantle of usefulness? What takes us beyond usefulness?

3. Doubt: Doubt can be used as a tool for attaining certainty (Descartes) or for creating need (advertising or propaganda). In science/philosophy/spirituality doubt instead represents an attitude of accepting ambiguity and uncertainty (with an open mind; as prods to questioning). Can we stand questions and dialogue, rather than turning incessantly to answers and polemics?

4. Wonder: Wonder points to wonders – the unexplained as well as the inexplicable. How do we allow wonder to open avenues of escape (points of resistance) from under the crushing weight of Modernity, Utility, and Doubt?

1. Modernity: Two essential features of modernity lie in an attempt to gain “rational” control over all things and an attempt to “create its normativity out of itself” (Habermas, 1990). How does the notion of spiritual capital relate to these goals?

In the beginning discussion of economic development, Malloch (2003) describes the “redemptive hopes and expectations” of efforts at global development and continues to describe development efforts as religious activity (p.7). Echoing notions of faithful stewardship familiar in Christian thought, the rhetoric of spiritual capital follows the missionary zeal of saving the people of the developing world from themselves.

Economic development can be viewed as creative management of endowed resources by stewards who act on their faith commitments. Here, genuine economic growth is guided by normative laws, character, and principled habits and practices that take into account the preservation needs of human beings, their environments, and their physical, mental, social, cultural, and spiritual lives. In the ultimate sense, spiritual capital may be the third leg in the stool which includes its better known relatives, namely: human and spiritual capital. (Malloch, 2003, p.7)

Certainly, in this example, one can see the attempt to “create its normativity out of itself” as the ‘norming’ function of spirituality is not only recognized but also praised. It is here that we argue that the project for conceptualizing spiritual capital falls into the arena of a broader struggle for modernity and note that what might be unique about these efforts is not their mere existence, but also their openness to public discourse.

Further, we are operating under the assumption that the bar set for these analyses of spiritual capital—although likely to be denied—is a particular brand of American Protestantism as it stands to reason that the dominance of the United States in the new global economic order privileges its own spiritual characteristics. Again, the project works to create its normativity.

John Cobb, Professor of Theology Emeritus at the Claremont School of Theology and well-known process theologian, critiques the collusion between Christianity and economics by pointing to the critical distance between the ideas and practices essential to the Christian spiritual tradition and the worldview and accompanying practices espoused by much of current economics (2000, 2002). First, he notes that academic understandings of the world typical of modernity rest on a particular metaphor: all systems within the World, including human beings, function as purely mechanical objects (2002). Most of the great spiritual traditions, however, see the world primarily in organic rather than mechanical terms. From the outset, Cobb claims, it has been not only people operating within the conceptual structure of the physical sciences but also those within the social sciences, and even within the tradition of the humanities, who represent the world in mechanical terms. Thus the very structure of knowledge, and the political, personal, and cultural composition of everyday life that draws upon that knowledge, has no room for spirit except as it is smuggled in or assumed in a manner that ignores the dissonance between the mechanical and the spiritual.

A second critical point brought up by Cobb arises from his first point. The mechanical worldview, for all its conceptual fecundity, takes apart pieces of the world's inevitable complexity for the sake of analysis (2002). Such analysis can result in truly astonishing new perspectives concerning the nature of the physical, biological, and social entities roaming the world. The problem that hides at the heart of analysis unfolds as soon as we recognize a concomitant disconnection between part and whole. A friend of mine once tried to repair his car. When he was finished he had a box of parts left over, and the car wouldn't run. While in most cases an adept mechanic could put a car back together after disassembling it, we are, at least at present, far less able to put a living body back together and even less successful at restoring order to the emotional and spiritual aspects of a person.

A corollary problem to that of analysis lies in the particular emphasis placed on the results of that analysis. So, for example, economists frequently see money, wealth, or societal indices of wealth as the key to understanding the function of society (2002). Cobb makes the obvious point that Christian (and Buddhist) perspectives cannot agree with placing wealth at the center of social and political life. He says, “[W]e deeply, fundamentally, oppose placing the quest for wealth first” (2002). He says further that, from either the Christian or Buddhist perspective, “Justice, peace, and meeting the basic needs of all are much higher priorities than simply increasing overall wealth” (2002). But the problem of economic analysis lies deeper yet. Some contemporary economists have seen the grave difficulties posed by analysis simply in terms of wealth.² But one need not look to religious voices or to our contemporaries for an objection to putting wealth at the center of social concerns. Aristotle explained it quite simply by saying that wealth cannot be the highest aim of human life for the simple reason that wealth necessarily has secondary status; it is always sought for what one can then do with it.

The greatest difficulty with the economic outlook, according to Cobb, lies in its “particular view of human beings,” which is “an abstraction from the fullness of human reality” (2002). He points to two particular parts of that abstraction. First, the standard economic view takes all rational human behavior to be strictly (and quite simply-mindedly) self-interested and, second, takes all human beings to be possessed of (or by) “insatiable wants” (2002).³ At the very least these two claims ignore the breadth and depth of human interests on the one hand and set the scene for an industry oriented toward “creating unsatisfied wants” which fuel “an unsustainable system” (2002).

All of the previous points led to one over-riding set of claims: (1) “The only form of satisfaction that is recognized is that derived from the possession or consumption of desired goods and services” (2002), (2) the value of anything or anyone “is the price that someone is prepared to pay for it [or them]”; i.e. all objects, events, processes, and people are seen as commodities (2002), and (3) concerning what Cobb calls *economism*, he says, “I think of it as the first truly successful world religion” (2000). He follows up that last point by saying why he passionately rejects economism as a viable world view. He believes that the economic growth at which it aims “does not improve the economic condition of real people” (2000); that even if major economic changes were to reduce the

numbers of the “desperately poor,” the policies that strengthen economic growth “will destroy the natural basis for our life together long before they resolve the problem of poverty” (2000); and that “these economic considerations fail to deal with the real needs of people” (2000). “Policies,” he says, “designed to improve the real quality of life of human beings will prove very different from those designed to increase production and consumption overall” (2000).

Cobb’s overall point is reminiscent of H. Richard Niebuhr’s (1993) claim that we cannot do without faith, the question facing us is faith in what? The spiritual aspects of life need not be confined to the perspective of one religion, or to any traditionally religious perspective at all. The spiritual resides in our capacity for wonder, in resistance to the totalizing and dehumanizing effects of mechanistic and oppressive worldviews, in what Nishitani (1983) calls the “Great Doubt” – that which calls into question our certainties, our repressive and obsessive rationalities, our submersion in privilege and games of power, our claims to knowledge and to making objects out of all things. Spirituality, from this perspective, lies not in Truth but in questioning, not in conquest but in openness, and, finally, not in control but in letting go.

Pushing an analysis of economism even further, it seems not far a field to characterize the conflation of economics with spirituality as another set of moves toward the creation of subjects to a larger regime of power. Connecting this to Cobb, to be seen as a commodity fundamentally changes the nature of what it means to be. And particularly since the current dominant political force in the United States – what Grossberg (2005) calls the New Conservative Alliance – represents the strange bedfellows of free market neoliberals and the current formation of the Religious Right, for those that might offer another perspective, understanding how such a conflation might operate seems increasingly imperative. Foucault (2003) suggests that the project of social analysis should be to “bring out...relations or operators of domination” (p.45) rather than studying power as some bounded subject or unitary force. It is here that the reader is reminded that those engaged in the project of studying spiritual capital as such neither represent such a unitary force, nor agree on the usefulness of the notion. However, as part of the attempt to understand the workings and cultural formations of late capitalism, the term begs the question, “what is at stake?”

To approach the stakes of this conceptualization, the intersections of these notions are critical. How then might the notion of spiritual capital work in the creation of subjects? How do normativity and subjectivity operate in this struggle for modernity? First, to follow Foucault (and later Giorgio Agamben) we turn to the question of sovereignty, since subjectification as a process lies in some legitimation of sovereign power. Sovereignty in this type of analysis includes three essential elements: 1) discussion of how subjects become subjects; 2) an assumption of the multiplicity of power that converges in all relations of power; and 3) how power is legitimated in something more basic than law (2003, pp.44-46). In the case of spiritual capital — and perhaps its most surprising attribute — the creation of subjects is explicit; they are just waiting to be born. Malloch (2003) offers “the concept is pregnant with possibilities drawing on the intersection of economics and religion...in the ultimate sense spiritual capital is the missing leg in the stool of economic development, which includes its better known relatives, social and human capital” (p.2). Fusing business rhetorical terminology and accepted management technique with a shallow reading of social theory, the notion of total human capital can be reduced to an equation (see Davenport 1999 cited in Malloch, p.4). While this tendency to reduce human behavior (and even value) to a quantifiable formula resonates in our earlier analysis of the context of shifting modernities, most striking is Malloch’s allusion to an even more mysterious variable in such machinations: the human connection to the work.

Not only is sovereignty in this case justified on the basic economic relations common in late capitalism but it is suggested that certain characteristics might tie workers to corporate operations ever more tightly, producing so-called comparative advantage (p.4). This connection of workers to work in the hopes of increasing productivity captures the language of spirituality in a discourse of “development...based on hope” (p.4), “development...[as] religious category” (p.7), and, most specifically, “the impact of religion on conduct and rules as employees and employers, consumers and producers; and citizens at every level of existence” (p.8). Recent social theorists have a term for such a precise descriptor: biopower (Foucault 2003; 1998; Hardt & Negri 2000, 2004). It is precisely the multiplicity of forces at work in this creation of subjects — economic, social, cultural and now, to be clear at least rhetorically, spiritual

— that productivity and profit, and for the sake of our argument, biopower itself is to increase. This leads to the third aspect of sovereignty: legitimation.

For the sake of global capital, the argument for legitimacy hardly needs to be made. There is no question about the rhetoric of development itself. Fundamental questions regarding the nature of a globalized development effort (i.e. profits for whom?) and the larger question of what is at stake for those whose spiritual characteristics must be abandoned or adapted in order to capitalize on them remain out of bounds (an exception seems to be Berger & Hefner 2003; Woodberry 2003). So it is in this way that “what is at stake” in this conception of spiritual capital is yet another position in the struggle for modernity, utilizing the normative power of spiritual/religious institutions to foster development in ways neither questioned nor contradicted. Underlying all of this is the notion that spirituality serves a purpose beyond itself, it has use.

2. Utility: Can every aspect of life appropriately (usefully?) by subsumed under the mantle of usefulness? What takes us beyond usefulness?

Our discussion of utility comes from the effort to characterize spirituality in the terms of capital, a language of exchange and use. Calling spiritual capital the “third leg in the stool” (Malloch, 2003) and citing Pierre Bourdieu as inspiration for defining this subset of social/cultural capital (Berger & Hefner, 2003; Finke, 2003; Iannaccone & Klick, 2003), those scholars involved in planning this line of research have tended to de-emphasize the theoretical implications of the concept of cultural capital and instead jump immediately to notions of use value (i.e. production and protection of capital, migration and transfer, and impact on organizational development and growth; see Finke 2003). Before offering a conception of spirituality as beyond usefulness, a quick detour through the theoretical context seems appropriate.

Bourdieu’s importance to contemporary social theory is obvious, recognized (although mocked in Iannaccone & Klick 2003, p.3) by the scholars of spiritual capital. In reading the *Outline of a Theory of Practice* one sees connections to discourse theory, neo-Marxist analysis, and cultural studies ala Birmingham (2000). First thoughts on Bourdieu, remind me of the notion of people in a history not of their own making, making their own history. As a post-structuralist he resists a social formation in which force, or

rules, dictate social practice but rather, suggests a theorized habitus that delimits the possibilities of action and production. In other words, habitus is “a system of dispositions—a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future” (Bourdieu 2000, p.82). But as these dispositions are not necessarily constant or inevitable, Bourdieu is interested in thinking about society as a “struggle of symbolic forces” (Madarasz, 2002). This habitus serves to set the guidelines for both the perception of objects and the production of practices (Bourdieu, 2000 p.118). Bourdieu’s conception allows for both the social construction of meaning and the material improvisation of actors interacting with the social world. In this way, social practice, while restrained by the “schemes engendered by history,” still holds no guarantees in terms of the cognitive or linguistic practice that ensues (p.82). The parallel here with audience theory, or what Stuart Hall (1992) might call ‘encoding and decoding’, forms an essential framework for cultural studies analysis. It is precisely the possibility for improvisation — the spaces opened up — which allows a theorization that includes an explicit politics. It is here that Bourdieu’s theory is one of resistance, of revolutionary practice. It is here that Bourdieu would argue against intentionally bringing in spirituality to the realm of capital.

The habitus, as guidelines for both means of perception and practice, allows for an understanding of those actions in cultural practice that defy an economic logic. Theorists advocating a reproductive model of social hierarchy, especially in education, continually fall short of explaining the processes by which such limiting organizational structures and contradictory liberatory rhetoric can coexist. As an alternative, Bourdieu’s description of the creation and social involvement in cultural capital provides both an understanding of seemingly non-economic behaviors and furthermore relates specifically to the impact of credentialism in modern society. In relation to schools, the cultural capital most valued and easily transferred into economic capital is notably absent from school curriculum. But perhaps most interestingly, Bourdieu suggests that the impact of cultural capital on social systems is one of distinguishing between individuals and positions. This form of objectification through credentials, which in modern society are transferred through educational institutions (but, in this case religious ones?), becomes reified into a false objectivity, another form of the

misrecognized mechanics of the social (p.187). Could the efforts at cataloguing spiritual capital be a better example? To list the characteristics of forms of spirituality and place them in some taxonomy of economic benefit reduces them to economic variables. In this way, spiritual credentials translate into economic benefit in a seemingly neutral way. This misrecognition of the history and processes of perpetuation in the social interactions in turn forms the common sense conceptions that form the habitus of a new form of class-consciousness. The circle is complete; Bourdieu spins in his grave.

Bourdieu's commentary points out that the objectification that occurs in the move to credentialise leads to a misrecognition of inequity and even critique. Habitus then not only preserves the social hierarchy but also allows for those who benefit from it to enjoy the deception as social groups to lie to themselves, at every level. It follows that the efforts to categorize spirituality in terms of utility — as a form of capital — fit with and follow from Bourdieu's logic of the legitimation through which the shift from recognizing individual gain is occluded by the presentation of objective positions such as “development.” In this way, as Bourdieu states,

Gentle, hidden exploitation is the form taken by man's exploitation of man [sic] whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible (Bourdieu, 2000, p.192)

Now then, what to do? This reading of Bourdieu is not a hopeless one. Although the description has been kept brief, the possibility for revolutionary practice and social change resides in this critique. It would seem then that the possibility for social change comes in the historicizing (recognizing?) of the processes of social hierarchy, or moving the doxa. In other words, challenging the habitus as much as possible in order to address the inequities of the system. I'm vaguely reminded of Laclau and Mouffe and the utilization of both the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence to challenge social practice, using the postmodern dispersion to form temporary alliances in pursuit of political good.

From the impact of spiritual capital on the habitus and thus on the individual embedded in society, we turn to the effects of this idea on religion itself. “Religion must not be considered from the viewpoint of its *utility*, any more than life should” (Nishitani, 1983, p. 2). Keiji Nishitani, Buddhist philosopher of the Kyoto School, tells us that many

aspects of everyday life offer themselves to us as items to be used. Religion, he suggests, comes to us in an altogether different guise. Nishitani uses the word “religion” here not to designate religions, but to designate the underlying experience that lies beneath the external formalities of religions. In keeping with Nishitani’s concerns and with our current questions of spirituality and capital, the word “spirituality” will be substituted for his word “religion.”

How, then, does spirituality confront us so that we may not put it to use but instead become “a question to ourselves” (Nishitani p. 3) through it? It strikes us in the moments when our certainties, our self-sufficient self-representations, and our entertainments drop away and we see before us the “abyss [that] is always just underfoot” (p. 3). But, in moments of reflection, we need not wait for “death, nihility, or sin” (p. 3) to grab and shake us. We can, at any time, turn our eyes to what lies beneath, around, and in us all the time. “[The] fundamental conversion in life is occasioned by the opening up of the horizon of nihility at the ground of life” (p. 3) – in short, spirituality in this sense lies in facing the faceless, nameless mystery upon which we stand and to which we answer.

As human beings we face the danger of being so bound by the “wisdom” of our own cultural achievements that we take religion or spirituality as simply another means to accomplish our goals. In the business of making and using things, we simply do not notice that certain fundamental realities of life do not present themselves for shaping or for use. We may, of course, use for our own ends the results and rituals of religion; it is in fact a commonplace that religion gets used by individuals, by groups and governments, by the scrupulous and unscrupulous alike. Nishitani, however, points to an easy yet costly mistake we make in that process. We fail to realize that the core, experiential reality of religion can never be co-opted by us. The underlying mystery, the silence behind the words will not wait upon our purposes and will not become subject to our projects and strivings for control.

Nishitani quite simply points to the way that not only religion but also we we become objects of use. *Here again, our conversation turns to the notion of subjects. How “we ourselves become objects of use” aptly describes the process of subjectification. But perhaps more importantly, the conception that there is at least the possibility of*

something else—here described as the “Great Doubt”, or “the abyss underfoot” or even provocatively, “the underlying mystery”— points to such controversial terms in social theory as agency, resistance, and hope. Here we might point out that the dangers of economism already discussed lie not only on the political Right as vulgar Marxism suffers from the same tendency to reduce the sum of human interaction to the economic. The flaw in these types of analyses — even if it comes from political allies—resides in the failure to recognize the existence of these mysteries (i.e. agency, resistance, and hope). Further the great mystery of social critique may be that be in pushing the recognition of the Marxist maxim of people making their own history in conditions not of their own making into the more troubling arena of “yes, but how can it be so?” What might be said to be missing in either modernist critique is doubt.

3. Doubt: Doubt can be used as a tool for attaining certainty (Descartes) or for creating need (advertising or propaganda). In science/philosophy/spirituality, doubt instead represents an attitude of accepting ambiguity and uncertainty (with an open mind; as prods to questioning). Can we stand questions and dialogue rather than answers and polemics?

The capacity for doubt might well be the most spiritual of our natural capabilities as human beings. Doubting our beliefs, our capacities, the potential for our hopes to be realized, the continuation of our own existence, and the structures and meanings assigned to objects and people by any given culture – this doubt provides us a glimpse of our finitude, of the genuine and valuable uncertainty that underlies our boastful dogmas. Philosophers and religious thinkers, mystics and religious practitioners find themselves drawn to dogmatic utterances meant to cover up the insistent voice of doubt. Yet doubt is not our enemy.

Descartes turned to doubt as a friend and advisor in his attempt to find a single point upon which to erect a monument of truth. The subsequent history of philosophy has, of course, shown his enthusiastic certainty to be misplaced. But many have admired and drawn upon his method. The method did not begin with him. Who can say which solitary thinker or which conversation between people in earnest pursuit of some truth first brought to light the deep and enduring value of questioning that which seems most obvious? The entire history of human thought owes its presence and its hopes to the

method of doubt. Yet as a method it shows certain signs of fracture and wear that the more prominent thinkers often try to cover with a tapestry here and a new paint job there. Its dangers lie not in doubt itself but in our play with it.

C. S. Peirce (1868) points out that that the Cartesian doubt that one brings in as a prop only to dispense with it moments later (revealing its use as a magician's rather than a logician's tool) weakens one's arguments.⁴ Paolo Freire (1998) notes in his critical assessment of a banking education that the curiosity with which we begin to learn gets systematically frozen out by icy answers that do little to address the pulsating warmth of our genuine doubts. Freire then suggests the deep significance of developing what he terms "epistemological curiosity" as part of our individual development toward freedom.

Nishitani takes aim at a central problem in Cartesian doubt by saying that it remains too shallow, protecting answers already assumed rather than dredging the depths of our need to know, to control, to maintain our certainties that are pathetically uncertain despite our wishes otherwise. Spirituality begins from these hints and hopes to unfold the reasons we cannot put answers first, the reasons we cannot use spirituality to uphold our domains of power and surface control, the reasons we cannot place maintaining the status quo at the heart of any true form of spirituality.

The great doubt pointed to by Nishitani uncovers a fissure at the heart of human life and culture that no amount of plastering over can disguise. Spiritual need arises from the truth of uncertainty. Allegedly spiritual notions that remove ambiguity or that place the spiritual in the service of commerce will never ring true. They cannot because they must always hide from doubt, turn it into a marketing tool, or blame its presence on excessive materialism rather than on our humanity itself. But the hidden will always emerge from its exile, the tool will turn upon its maker, and the blame that falls so effortlessly from the rhetoricians lips will slip to reveal the self-inflated but ordinary human figure behind the curtain. Doubt cannot be eradicated as though it were some rootless weed. It is instead the ground, the rain, the sun, and the tender cultivator of the human condition.

Doubt too is the ground in which this critique is rooted. Fundamentally, we contest the notions that the project of modernity leads to global development as stewardship or more incredibly, redemption. In this way we engage in the struggle for

modernity. Agamben (1998) points to the biopolitical as the prime mover of modernity with a disturbing ultimate destination, the concentration camp. Far from redemption, this analysis of the modern project comes out of recognition of that relation between sovereignty and the creation of subjects. As cited earlier, sovereignty as a form of power is legitimated through forces beyond mere law (Foucault 2003). Sovereign power lies in the state of exception, or, that position of power that necessarily lies outside of the jurisdiction of law (i.e. the right to execute, the right of conquest, or in contemporary terms, executive or congressional privilege). Too many contemporary examples exist of the expanding domain of the state of exception to spend time detailing them here, but what remains important is the possibility for doubt in the critique of this horrifying path. Agamben however seems to presage the project of spiritual capital when he notes, “the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest” (Agamben, 1998, p.122).

The intimate symbiosis of the biopolitical indeed seems to point to the ultimate structure of control.

[F]rom this perspective, the camp—as the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception)—will appear as the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity, whose metamorphoses and disguises we will have to learn to recognize. (Agamben, 1998, p.123)

But, if this process of modernity is inevitable, what good can then good come from recognizing “metamorphoses and disguises?” Could it be that even Agamben has doubt as to the outcomes of these complex forces? It would seem so and we, in the construction of this paper, came also to ask “why then are we not there?” in response to his mapping of the route to the concentration camp. Here we return again to the “Great Doubt” and the “underlying mystery” of how subjects find voice, struggle against structures that seek to define them, and come to wonder about how the world might be different — taken broadly, spiritual questions all.

4. Wonder: Wonder points to wonders – the unexplained as well as the inexplicable. How do we allow wonder to open avenues of escape (points of resistance) from under the crushing weight of Modernity, Utility, and Doubt?

Socrates says that his mission from the gods revealed that no one was wiser than he because he alone seemed to be aware of the poverty of his knowledge. Plato echoes a similar recognition when he says that philosophy begins in wonder (1997). A. N. Whitehead concludes that philosophy not only begins but also ends in wonder (1968). Certainly we can say the same for spirituality. Any alleged spirituality that turns away from wonder to make of religion another tool for our use has failed to comprehend the deep need we have to recognize the inexplicable at the heart of the World.

We view the world and ourselves as object or subject under the aspect of control, from within the reign of certainty. We make “things” and “selves”; we are creators of a World with clearly delimited boundaries and clear-cut rules. Yet in controlling, reigning, making, creating we fall prey to the very power we wield. The “Modern” world of enlightened rationality ends, Agamben says, in the concentration camp, in the bare, merciless hand of sovereign biopower. The usefulness of things and persons points a skeletal finger toward emptiness when the uses of usefulness open before us – opening to means and purposes that must be named yet resist the naming. Doubt reminds us of all that we fail to know and of the failure of knowledge itself when within it the sovereignty of control and certainty is revealed. So in the end we find ourselves approaching wonder.

Yet how may we approach wonder, the ever-receding view of openness or emptiness (Nishitani, 1983) before which the mirage of control and sovereignty, of objects and subjects grows dim. Do we turn wonder into another means of control, another aspect of power relations through which we “master” the unknown? Or do we escape from “grand narratives” only to ground our lives in and even revel in a new reign of naked power that escapes the chains of reason only to be bound by the chains of unconsciousness? Certainly philosophy and spirituality begin in wonder and, most likely, end there as well. Does wonder become the new tool of unbridled ignorance, of the sovereignty of force, or of a kinder, gentler form of economic co-opting of government, education, and daily life?

We end not with the answer to all life’s mysteries, nor with a shrug of the shoulders to the ways of power, but with a plea for questions and ambiguity, for the openness of wonder in the face of that which might but must not replace outer with inner

obedience. Wonder sets the stage for educational practice, a practice that denies the noble lie, that asks what lies beyond usefulness, beyond the concentration camp, beyond the objects and subjects of knowledge. We do not know; we wonder, and, wondering, seek a doorway into diversity, ambiguity, and complexity, without apology but with courage. As M. C. Escher wrote, “He who wonders discovers that this is in itself a wonder” (2001).

It is almost as if, starting from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individual’s lives with the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves. (Agamben, 1998, p.121)

“Crushing weight” is right! But even Agamben begins with the “it is almost as if;” It is but not quite. Wonder lies in the incompleteness of these processes of subjectification at work in the expanding reach of economism. It seems quite convincing (at least to these authors) that these “dreadful foundations” are indeed being laid by projects like those tying spirituality to capital; but even so, just as intriguing is the subsequent question, “why then are we not there?” Why are we not in the camp? This alone provokes wonder and, perhaps, avenues of escape. Bill Reynolds, a curriculum theorist working through Deleuze, suggests that our work in conceptualizing schooling should ultimately,

be about developing new lines of flight. Line of flight (becomings) that allow, however contingently, briefly, or momentarily for us to soar vertically like a bird or slither horizontally, silently like a snake weaving our way amid the constant re-configurations, co-optations and movements of the ruins. (Reynolds, 2003 p.94)

The effort to conflate spirituality with global capitalism is without doubt a co-optation but as we stand on the ruins of what once seemed outside the reach of the vulgar rhetorics of development, we should always look for that line of flight, those becomings that momentarily provide escape. It is the expansive nature of global capital that creates its counterpoint — what Lefebvre calls “the incessant to and fro;” what Hardt and Negri call “Multitude.” This constant interactive movement pushes us from the thinking of “either/or” into the “yes/and?” of lines of flight, possibility. It is here that not only do we revel in the wonder but the wonder of wonders, hope.

We're told businesses have souls, which is surely the most terrifying news in the world (Deleuze 1995, p.181).

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Notes

1 For the sake of preserving the dialogic nature of this project, the philosopher's responses will be in normal font while the educational researcher's responses will be presented in italics.

2 For a comprehensive, thoughtful investigation of many of those difficulties, see Amartya Sen, (1987, 2000, and 2004).

3 See Sen for an economist's attack on these standard claims of economics.

4 "We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us can be questioned. Hence this initial skepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not real doubt; and no one who follows the Cartesian method will ever be satisfied until he has formally recovered all those beliefs which in form he has given up" (1868 p. 140).