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Humanistic Ethics in the Age of Globality

Edited by

Claus Dierksmeier
Professor, Department of Business Administration, Stonehill College, Boston, USA

Wolfgang Amann
Director of Executive Education, Goethe Business School, University of Frankfurt, Germany

Ernst von Kimakowitz
Independent Professional

Heiko Spitzeck
Professor, Fundação Dom Cabral, Brazil

and

Michael Pirson
Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Business, Fordham University, New York, USA

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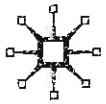

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Contributors

Wolfgang Amann graduated from Harvard's Institute for Management and Learning in Higher Education. He honed his research skills at the Wharton School in Philadelphia and his executive education skills at IMD in Lausanne. As a professor of strategy, he previously directed the Henley Center for Creative Destruction as well as the Henley Center of Excellence in Case Writing. He has also been Vice-Director of the Executive School at the University of St. Gallen and a visiting professor in the field of international strategy and sustainability at Hosei University in Tokyo, Tsinghua University in Beijing, the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, ISP St. Petersburg, Warwick Business School and Henley Business School in the UK. He now serves as the Director of Executive Education at the Goethe Business School of the University of Frankfurt, where he delivers seminars and courses on a variety of general management topics.

Michael Buckley is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York, Lehman College. His main research areas include political philosophy, ethics, and applied ethics, with a current focus on global justice and business ethics. He also serves on the board of an international nonprofit education institute, Global Majority, which promotes nonviolent conflict resolution through negotiation and mediation training. Prior to joining the faculty at Lehman College, Buckley worked as an investment and media analyst, coauthoring several books and many articles on the economics of broadcast media in the United States. His recent publications focus on the issues of justification and objectivity in political philosophy. He was awarded his Ph.D. from Emory University in 2006.

Anthony Celano is Professor of Philosophy at Stonehill College, Boston. He is a coeditor of Thomas Aquinas' *De divinis nominibus* for the Leonine Commission, Rome, and author of *From Priam to the Good Thief: The Significance of a Single Act in Greek Ethics and Medieval Moral Teaching*, The Etienne Gilson Series, 22, and Studies in Medieval Moral Teaching, 3 (2000), and articles on ancient and medieval moral theory. His current work includes the chapter on the thirteenth century in *The Reception of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (edited by J. Miller, forthcoming), and a study of the meaning of practical wisdom in ancient and medieval authors.

Claus Dierksmeier is Professor for Globalization Ethics and Economic Philosophy in the Department of Business Administration at Stonehill College, Boston. His major book publications are the following: *Der absolute Grund des Rechts: Karl Christian Friedrich Krause in Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte und Schelling* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2003); *Rechts- und Staatsphilosophie – Ein dogmenphilosophischer Dialog* (Gröschner, Rolf/Dierksmeier, Claus/Henkel, Michael/Wiehart, Alexander, 2000); *Das Noumenon Religion – Eine Untersuchung zur Stellung der Religion im System der praktischen Philosophie Kants* (Kant-Studien-Ergänzungshefte Nr. 133, 1998). His current research focuses on the role of freedom in business and economic theory, and on the ethics of globalization. Claus is also working as a consultant and academic adviser on questions of corporate social responsibility and serves on the Managing Board of the Humanistic Management Network.

Richard Fincham is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Warwick in 2004 with a dissertation on the concept of "transcendental subjectivity" within the work of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer. He was also a DAAD Stipendiat at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, in 2000–01. Prior to joining AUC he taught philosophy at both the University of Greenwich and the University of Warwick. He is the author of various articles on Kant, German Idealism and German Romanticism. At present he is working on a monograph on Schelling's philosophy of nature.

Maximilian Forschner received his philosophical Ph.D. and Habilitation in Germany. He then became Professor of Philosophy at the Universities of Osnabrück and Erlangen-Nürnberg. His most important books are *Gesetz und Freiheit: Zum Problem der Autonomie bei Immanuel Kant* (1974); *J.-J. Rousseau* (1977); *Die stoische Ethik* (1981, 1995); *Mensch und Gesellschaft* (1989); *Über das Glück des Menschen* (1st edition 1993, 2nd edition Aufl. 1994); *Über das Handeln im Einklang mit der Natur* (1998); and *Thomas von Aquin* (2006). His research focus is on the practical philosophy of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the enlightenment.

Julian Friedland is Assistant Professor at Fordham Graduate School Business in New York. Previously, he taught philosophy and business ethics for over a decade, primarily at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is half French, obtaining his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Paris, where he studied the nature of meaning and value from a Wittgensteinian perspective. Since then, he has specialized in ethics,

primarily as applied to business. His current research seeks to restore the ethical a priori to the field of management. He has published widely in ethics and philosophy and maintains a business ethics blog.

Benedetta Giovanola is Assistant Professor at the University of Macerata, Italy. She is the recipient of the Helen Potter Award (2005), awarded by the ASE (Association for Social Economics, USA) for her paper "Personhood and Human Richness. Good and Well-Being in the Capability Approach and Beyond" (*Review of Social Economy*, vol. 63, no. 2/2005). Her major publications are the following: "Re-thinking the Anthropological and Ethical Foundation of Economics and Business: Human Richness and Capabilities Enhancement" (*Journal of Business Ethics*, n. 3/2009); *Critica dell'uomo unilaterale. La ricchezza antropologica in K. Marx e F. Nietzsche* (2007), and (with F. Totaro) *Etica ed economia: il rapporto possibile* (2008). Her current research mainly focuses on the anthropological and ethical foundation of business and economics, the redefinition of the notion of economic rationality, and the relationship between development and social justice.

Ernst von Kimakowitz holds an M.Sc. from the London School of Economics and an award-winning Ph.D. from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, where he is a guest lecturer. Following several years in the strategy practice of a large management consulting firm, he now works as an independent professional, providing consulting, advisory, and executive coaching services in the corporate responsibility arena to both private and public sector clients. Ernst also serves on the Managing Board of the Humanistic Management Network.

Ulrike Kirchengast is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Philosophy, University of Graz, Austria. She is working on a dissertation on virtue ethics. Her academic background, apart from philosophy, includes linguistics and languages. In addition to her university studies she has obtained qualifications in economics with a focus on accountancy. Her research interests are primarily moral theory, practical ethics, and moral psychology.

Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Konstanz, Germany. After studying in Mumbai, India, she received her Ph.D. in 2001 from the University of Konstanz with a dissertation on liberalism, secularism, and fundamentalism in India. She received her Habilitation from the same university in 2005 with a work on the ethics of immigration, in which several strands of her foci on social and political philosophy can be found. In her research she also concentrates

on a philosophical analysis of problems generated by interculturality. She is currently involved in developing theories for an intercultural grounding of human rights.

Kai Kresse, an anthropologist, philosopher, and Africanist by training, is Vice-Director for Research at the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin, an interdisciplinary research center on Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. He was Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of St. Andrews, and Evans-Pritchard Lecturer at All Souls College, Oxford, in 2005. His research interests include African philosophy, philosophical anthropology, Islam, and the anthropological study of knowledge; his regional expertise covers East Africa and the Swahili coast. His publications include *Philosophising in Mombasa* (2007), *Struggling with History*, coedited with Edward Simpson (2007), and *Knowledge in Practice*, coedited with Trevor Marchand (2009). He is a coeditor of *Polylog: Online Journal for Intercultural Philosophy* (www.polylog.org).

Suzan Langenberg works as Senior Advisor in Belgium and the Netherlands. She is Founder and Director of Diversity bvba, a profit-oriented organization focused on the improvement of communicative processes in organizations. Langenberg studied history, philosophy of human sciences, and completed two contract studies in sexology and developmental psychopathology at the University of Amsterdam. In 2008 she completed her Ph.D. (Criticism as De-organization. Business Ethics and Free Speech) at Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands. Her main interest is the organizational position of communication and critique related to ethical business problems. She is a founding member of the Institute of Business Ethics Belgium (INBE) and founding member of Campus Gelbergen, an independent institute in Belgium that organizes courses on socially relevant topics.

Ioanna Patsioti-Tsacpounidis is Professor of Philosophy at the American College of Greece (ACG), where she currently serves as Department Head. She teaches philosophy courses with an emphasis on Greek philosophy, social and political philosophy, ethics, and business ethics. Before that, she taught Greek philosophy at University College London, UK, and the Open University, UK. She is a graduate of the University of Athens and UCL, London, where she earned a postgraduate diploma in Linguistics and an M.Phil. in Classics. She was awarded a Ph.D. by the Philosophy School at the University of Athens with a dissertation on Aristotle's moral epistemology. She is the author of many

articles on Aristotelian philosophy and has published articles and a book on the applicability of Aristotle's ethics in the domain of business. Her current research includes the moral concepts of post-Aristotelian scholars as well as of Plato's later Academy and their relevance in business ethics and contemporary society at large.

Michael Pirson is Assistant Professor at Fordham Graduate School of Business in New York, as well as a research fellow and lecturer at the Harvard University. Before receiving his Ph.D., Pirson worked in international management consulting for several years. He also gained experience in the political arena while working on Hillary Clinton's Senate campaign. Michael currently serves on the board of three social enterprises, and on the Managing Board of the Humanistic Management Network.

Heiko Spitzeck is Professor at Fundação Dom Cabral in Brazil. His main interest is in organizational learning in terms of corporate responsibility and sustainability. His publications have appeared in numerous international journals as well as in several books published among others by Cambridge University Press. In 2010 he lectured at INSPER in Sao Paulo, Brazil. From 2008 to 2010 he was lecturer at Cranfield University's Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility in the UK. Between 2004 and 2006 he served as Director for oikos International, a student-driven NGO for sustainable management and economics. Spitzeck was invited to give guest lectures in Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He also held visiting positions at the University of California at Berkeley, Fordham University in New York as well as the University of Extremadura, Spain. Heiko was educated in Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. He received his Ph.D. from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Ulrich Steinvorth is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hamburg, Germanyand and at Bilkent University Ankara, Turkey. He has taught at several universities in Germany, France, England, and the United States. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Göttingen with a thesis on Wittgenstein, and his Habilitation at the University of Mannheim with a thesis on Marx. Steinvorth has published books and articles in political philosophy, ethics, applied ethics, and metaphysics, in German, French, and English. His last book publication was *Rethinking the Western Understanding of the Self* (2009).

Introduction

Claus Dierksmeier, Wolfgang Amann, Ernst von Kimakowitz, Heiko Spitzeck, and Michael Pirson

The age of globality

Globalization was yesterday (Dasgupta and Kiely, 2006). Today we are increasingly facing a world of "globality," that is, a state of affairs where a global impact of individual actions, local business practices, and national politics is no longer the exception but has become more and more the rule (Carver and Bartelson, 2010). While numerous processes of globalization might still be stopped, and some reversed, the general trend of the developments of the last decades cannot be undone. The reach that globalization, especially economic globalization, has had in the past means that ever more people are faced with living in a state of *de facto* globality (Sklair, 1991). Whatever the future development of globalization, this emerging state of globality must be addressed, because its distinctive features require particular ways and modes of governance beyond those that characterized the era of the nation state. The search for adequate ethical norms for the state of globality has begun, and we hope our book will make a meaningful contribution to this quest.

While it is true that both global trade and cultural exchange have existed for centuries (Stearns, 2010), there are important differences between now and the past (MacGillivray, 2006). Today, an ever larger percentage of humanity is engaged in effortless global communication, building out a global imagination (around globalized brands and aesthetic idols) and a global awareness (crystallizing around certain geopolitical events and symbols). One could see in this merely the result of a hitherto unavailable level of technology. Yet this would overlook the fact that present technology is just a reflection of past economic and social incentives.

12
Wittgenstein and the Challenge of Global Ethics

Julian Friedland

12.1 The transcendental nature of ethics and meaning

Wittgenstein took ethics extremely seriously. In fact, he took it so seriously that he gave away the bulk of his inherited family fortune to needy artists including the poets Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Trakl, who he thought might make better use of it than himself as a salaried professor (Monk, 1990, p. 108). Paradoxically, however, he was highly critical of the academization of philosophy in general and of ethics in particular. He therefore did precious little work in ethics, traditionally conceived as an attempt to define the good and/or apply it to specific real-world contexts such as business. This is because for Wittgenstein, ethics is bound up with our natural history. It compels us by being the very lens through which we see the world (Wittgenstein, 1921, § 1, 1.1, 2.04). Hence, "man is the microcosm" (Wittgenstein, 1961, p. 84). As such, philosophy cannot itself discover and lead people to what is good (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 3e). For we cannot, for Wittgenstein, get by means of language behind the very foundations of common sense. Thus, in one of his most famous passages, he writes:

> Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question whether a rule has been obeyed or not. People don't come to blows over it, for example. That is part of the framework on which the working of our language is based (for example, in giving descriptions)....If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. (Wittgenstein, 1958, § 240, 242)

What grounds our ordinary common sense judgments about the good and the world in general is the very background upon which

conventional language is made possible. But this does not make Wittgenstein a postmodern relativist. For as he says in the preceding dialogical remark:

> "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in forms of life. (Wittgenstein, 1958, §241)

For Wittgenstein, ethics and aesthetics are part of the human form of life, which grounds our basic ability to communicate with one another. What binds us in a language is what binds us as a species, a people, a nation, a culture, or a profession; namely, collective intersubjective experiences and basic judgments of what is, for example, reasonable, desirable, dreadful, efficient, elegant, awkward, pleasing, or offensive. How, then, one might ask, do all our contextually nuanced judgments get determined? The answer is that they arise out of shared practices that have slowly, organically, evolved over time. And thus, the rules governing linguistic convention are systematically confirmed by shared backgrounds of activities, interests, and goals.

So ethics is fundamental to just about everything we do and understand. Indeed, it is a transcendental condition of our very existence. This is reinforced and made possible by our nature as social beings. Ultimately, it is the social nature of human consciousness that allows us to erect any conventional system to begin with. Hence, as Wittgenstein argues at some length, private language is logically impossible. Language is essentially conventional. If it were not, we could simply invent our own rules willy-nilly, which would not amount to language at all. Grammar compels us. And it does so by a public background of linguistic practice on which we continually rely to make sure we are applying its rules correctly. This deeper epistemological point is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein's conception of ethics and is why he was highly critical of Esperanto, a new language created for international communication and meant to bring about world peace. Although high-minded from a global ethical perspective, he found the idea deeply repellant, for it meant erecting an entire language out of thin air without any authentic organic history.

> Esperanto: The feeling of disgust we get if we utter an invented word with invented derivative syllables. The word is cold, lacking in associations, and yet it plays at being a "language." A system of purely written signs would not disgust us so much. (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 52e)

Ethics, for Wittgenstein, has to do with that essential realm of shared experience and judgment that tends to go without saying. It is the most important part of life, for it binds us together as peoples by making sense of what and why we do just about anything and everything. And that's why he found it maddening for this essentially anthropological aspect to be routinely overlooked by most philosophers. Thanks to him, it is somewhat less ignored today, as we now owe a great deal to Wittgenstein. But, ironically, his influence is often more evident outside the halls of philosophy. Perhaps more than anything, Wittgenstein showed us how grammar became structured (much as games such as chess evolved over eons) almost biologically, to the point where it contains great wisdom about human consciousness, the conditions and limits of thought and knowledge. Take the following example from the grammar of the verb "to know":

> I know what someone else is thinking, not what I am thinking. It is correct to say "I know what you are thinking," and wrong to say "I know what I am thinking."
>
> (A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar.) (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 222e)

Wittgenstein is pointing out that to say "I know what I am thinking" goes without saying since one could never *not* know what one is actually thinking while one is thinking it. And this wisdom about knowledge is evident in the very bounds of grammatical sense. Essentially, Wittgenstein is trying to cure us of thinking, especially of theorizing, beyond the bounds of common sense. Instead of forcing our thinking into preconceived theoretical notions of what reality *must* be like, including such aspects as the good, the just, and the beautiful, he implores us to *look* at how it actually is, namely, how such concepts function in their ordinary linguistic contexts. We feel sympathy or anguish or hate, not so much because of any specific overarching theoretical definition of what the good is, but more because of a natural and cultural history that binds us together, making shared judgments and communication itself possible.

And this brings us to the particular challenge of doing philosophical ethics. If, along with Wittgenstein, we take ethics to be essentially a fundamental pre-theoretical condition of experience, then it is a purely organic human phenomenon that philosophy will (and should) have precious little ability to determine. Ethics in this sense lies transcendentally outside the realm of facts (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 3e). So to seek to

ground it in an essential definition or all-encompassing theory of what the good must logically be, would only "dirty a flower with muddy hands" (Monk, 1990, p. 54; Wittgenstein, 1965).

12.2 The evolution of ethical consciousness

This theoretically deflationary attitude can certainly be taken too far, as perhaps it was by Wittgenstein himself. Philosophers have indeed had a great deal of impact on public moral consciousness at pivotal historical times, such as during women's suffrage and in civil rights movements more generally. Still, it is not clear that the philosophical thinking required at such periods of social awakening is at all abstract. Indeed, it has little or nothing to do with metaethical debates about the nature of the good itself. It may well be that any great ethical leader is thus merely a product of his or her historical context. Even if that is true, it is perhaps a little disingenuous of Wittgenstein to act as if ethical philosophy were any less worthy of serious attention than the study of the nature of knowledge, epistemology. For if, as he says, a whole cloud of epistemological philosophy can be condensed into a single drop of grammar, then the same ought to be true of ethical philosophy. And philosophers and nonphilosophers can and do misuse language just as easily. Therefore, some degree of new thinking on the nature of the good and the just has surely led at times to increased clarity of vision and genuine progress.

The attributes of what one might call "a good woman," for example, have certainly changed over the last century. For women are now no longer expected to be merely subservient to men. Thus, if a person at a funeral oration this year were to say "she was a truly good woman," that would naturally imply all sorts of qualities that would have been excluded from such a statement uttered at a funeral oration a hundred years ago. The same is true of statements such as "he was a good man" or "he lived a good life." Such statements are expressions of ethical value that continually evolve (or devolve) socially over time (Wittgenstein, 1965; 1958, p. 189e). One can, for example, imagine a funeral oration for an SS soldier in Nazi Germany where the words "he was a good man," might mean something altogether different from what those same words might mean today.

On this, Wittgenstein would surely agree. But he would caution us to the dangers of erecting philosophical constructs so divorced from shared experience that they would never have a chance of compelling an ordinary person on the street. However, the ordinary person on the street

does have a certain moral sensibility that has evolved over (and within) generations. As the above example shows, all sorts of behaviors and attitudes, once commonplace, may later be judged as ethically questionable by large numbers of nonphilosophers. Take bigotry in all its forms for example, or smoking. Or overeating. Or littering. Or not recycling. Or driving a large sport-utility vehicle (SUV) in New York City. Various and growing social pockets of relatively reform-minded people in effect begin to pressure others by making them feel guilty about perpetuating some irresponsible *status quo*. And they often begin this process by thinking at least somewhat philosophically about their behavior. They take the trouble of reconsidering, now and again, whether their usual habits are truly consistent with their fundamental ethical convictions. Indeed, this is how social progress occurs. We come to see that some activity and/or attitude has a negative impact and we are pressured by our conscience, and that of others around us, to change for the better. As a result, we tend to feel satisfaction and a greater sense of belonging within an ever-widening realm of human solidarity.

Ideally, by applying rational thought to action, we form good habits. Thus, new positive behaviors gradually become second nature, while bad habits are gradually stamped out. Eventually, we no longer have to think very much at all in order to embody a deeper ethical consciousness. Instead, we naturally desire and do the right thing, experiencing little or no temptation to regress into old habits. This is the ultimate goal of virtue ethics, namely, to reach complete happiness through self-actualizing activities.

Perhaps the greatest force compelling people to change their behavior on ethical grounds is the realization that their behavior is somehow causing, facilitating, or ignoring some significant harm. We look into another's suffering eyes and, in a sense, we see ourselves. This is compelling, for it is immediately experienced via our basic nature as social beings. And this is what is truly at the heart of ethics for Wittgenstein. For as he says, at various points:

> What is essential for us is, after all, spontaneous agreement, spontaneous sympathy. (1967, §667)
>
> Instinct comes first, reasoning second. (1967, §689)

So perhaps the greatest part of being ethical is simply to become conscious of the interests of those around us. And this has always been, and will ever be so. But the particular challenge of globality is specific to our age. For how can one see into another's suffering eyes when those who are made to suffer may be out of sight on the other side of the planet? Or they might be future generations (if not one's own) in any of the myriad possible worlds transformed by global ecological calamity resulting from unbridled resource depletion. When each person's actions taken in isolation have no clear or measurable negative effect on anyone in particular, everyone is much less likely to take responsibility for the collective result that billions of other people's actions, taken together, may cause.

Essentially, this is what I take to be the Wittgensteinian challenge of global ethics. While applied ethicists may at times succeed in making compelling philosophical arguments for increased personal and corporate responsibility and government regulation, these can often be rather abstract. Their theoretically based arguments do not compel us as do, say, the sad eyes of a child who is denied an education based on her race. Similarly, if one litters by carelessly discarding a plastic bag on the sidewalk, there is a clear and immediate negative consequence to that action, namely, to the beauty of the neighborhood. In such cases, negative impacts are clearly felt in concrete human terms. A mere modicum of self-reflection aided by a degree of social pressure can suffice to eventually bring even the most callous to effect a corrective behavioral change.

Unfortunately, it is not at all clear that the disparately destructive and diffuse web of actions and reactions of globality can ever be felt by another person in quite the same way. We do have high-speed global communications bringing news reports to mass audiences worldwide, and this certainly helps galvanize public concern on important issues, often at a bewildering pace. However, as new information streams in day and night on countless subjects, concerns ebb and flow in and out of public consciousness. For example, global warming is now taken much less seriously, at least in the United States, presumably in part because most Americans have not witnessed much climate change for themselves and so have tended to direct their attention to more evident and immediate concerns. In a recent poll, 48 percent say the science is exaggerated, up from only 41 percent in 2009 and 31 percent in 1997; 35 percent say the effects will either never happen (19 percent) or that they will not happen in their lifetime (16 percent) (Gallup, 2010).

Of course government regulation can step in to press consumers to behave more responsibly. In 2009, Sweden for example, introduced new dietary guidelines and labeling of grocery items according to their carbon footprints. Swedish scientists estimate that 25 percent of the emissions produced by consumers in industrialized nations is generated by the food industry. And if Sweden's new food guidelines were strictly

followed, the country could cut its emissions from food production by 20 to 50 percent (Rosenthal, 2009). As a result of Swedish labeling requirements and extensive government-funded research and dissemination of the causes and impacts of global warming, consumers and business leaders are beginning to take action:

> A new generation of Swedish business leaders is stepping up to the climate challenge. Richard Bergfors, president of Max, his family's burger chain, voluntarily hired a consultant to calculate its carbon footprint; 75 percent was created by its meat.
>
> "We decided to be honest and put it all out there and say we'll do everything we can to reduce," said Mr. Bergfors, 40. In addition to putting emissions data on the menu, Max eliminated boxes from its children's meals, installed low-energy LED lights and pays for wind-generated electricity. (Rosenthal, 2009)

Consumers ordering at Max, the largest Swedish hamburger chain, now see on the menu board that a basic hamburger represents 1.7 kilograms of carbon emissions, compared to only 0.4 kilograms for a chicken sandwich. And while this has not produced a change in everyone's behavior, it does seem to be affecting the choices of some, who report beginning to feel guilty for choosing the hamburger. Since emissions counts were posted on the menu, sales of the more climate-friendly items have increased by 20 percent (Rosenthal, 2009).

Geographer Jared Diamond, following Garrett Hardin's seminal article "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968), argues via historical evidence that most individuals will only tend to act as responsible stewards of an environmental resource if they are either forced by their governments or can each clearly see the negative effects of each of their actions on that resource (Diamond, 2005). In the latter case, as with littering, the public tends to inflict shame on the person with the irresponsible behavior. As it stands, few governments are enacting carbon emissions limits or even sweatshop labor rights standards on imports. And again, this is probably because there is precious little public support for such measures, which may increase costs, since the negative impacts of carbon emissions and labor rights abuses in the developing world remain mostly out of sight and mind to the bulk of consumers in most parts of the world. This is the practical ethical problem of global capitalism. We don't see, when shopping at, say, Wal-Mart, the poor child forced to toil in a cacao field or a factory because his parents don't earn enough to afford to send him to school.

12.3 The rise of corporate consciousness

Interestingly, corporations are in many ways better positioned than international government treaties to effect positive change on social and environmental issues, since they are often freer to act independently. Governments are often loath to voluntarily restrict their own industries for fear of voter retaliation. As a result, the onset of the global multinational corporation as the dominant force of economic activity may provide a crucial opportunity for meeting the new humanistic ethical challenge that globality presents.

Ethical branding and corporate consciousness are very much on the rise. For example, while the S&P 500 showed a four percent loss from 2005 to 2010, Ethisphere's list of the World's Most Ethical companies (WME) of 2010 has shown 53 percent returns. This list of 100 of the world's most ethical companies also substantially outpaced the FTSE 100 by over half as much as it did the S&P. Overall, the lesson seems to be that the WME tends to outperform the rest of the market even during times of negative growth, in this case 2008–09, in which WME losses were lower than the other two averages. Indeed, they were only at about one third of the other overage losses.

What is more, if we bring privately controlled businesses into the mix, we find that prior to the downturn in 2008, socially responsible investment assets grew by 324 percent between 1995 and 2007. That sharply outpaced growth in the wider marketplace, which only grew by 260 percent over the same period (Social Investment Forum, 2007). Even during the latest downturn, now commonly known as the Great Recession, socially responsible investment funds grew at higher rates than ever, to an estimated $2.7 trillion (Stengel, 2009). As a result, many observers are starting to refer to this market trend as the "responsibility revolution" (Hollander and Breen, 2010).

We are seeing an increase in ethical labeling, with more and more companies placing labels on their products telling customers that a percentage of proceeds from their purchase will be sent to a given non-profit such as the Nature Conservancy or Sierra Club. Shareholders in the Fortune 500 have even begun convincing the executive class of the corporations they invest in to consider corporate social responsibility as a fiduciary duty. Intel is the latest and highest profile company to do so. As a result, the company is now creating a "Board Committee on Sustainability." While this resolution had been voted down by management the previous year, Intel is now convinced that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting helps preserve the longer-term

interests of the company. As a result, Intel directed its outside legal counsel to "write a legal opinion specifically stating that pursuant to Delaware law, corporate responsibility and sustainability reporting based upon the committee's charter, was part of the fiduciary duty of company directors" (Kropp, 2010). This legal opinion may help form a basis for the position that such reporting is a critical factor in corporate financial performance. Ultimately, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) may decide to make ESG reporting mandatory, especially given the current government trend toward increasing corporate regulation and accountability. ESG reporting represents a growing realization that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not only the right thing to do ethically, but also provides a firm foundation for long-term stability, as this chart from Pax World Investments indicates:

Environmental Factors

- Resource management and pollution prevention
- Reduced emission and climate impact
- Environmental reporting/disclosure

Impact on Performance

- Avoid or minimize environmental liabilities
- Lower costs/increase profitability through energy and other efficiencies
- Reduce regulatory, litigation, and reputational risk
- Indicator of well-governed company

Social Factors

Workplace

- Diversity
- Health and safety
- Labor–Management relations
- Human rights

Product Integrity

- Safety
- Product quality

Impact on Performance

Workplace

- Improved productivity and morale
- Reduce turnover and absenteeism
- Openness to new ideas and innovation
- Reduce potential for litigation and reputational risk

Product Integrity

- Create brand loyalty
- Increased sales based on product safety and excellence
- Reduce potential for litigation
- Reduce reputational risk

Governance Factors

- Executive compensation
- Broad accountability
- Shareholder rights
- Reporting and disclosure

Impact on Performance

- Align interests of shareowners and management
- Avoid unpleasant financial surprises or "blow-ups"
- Reduce reputational risk

Although, ironically, multinational corporations (MNCs) are usually considered faceless and impersonal, we are witnessing a dramatic rise in corporate consciousness worldwide. This ethical awakening provides a unique opportunity for widespread evolution in global consumer consciousness. If, as Wittgenstein claims, ethical norms must compel us pretheoretically to behave in specific ways, this development is certainly a case in point. We need not agree with any philosophically abstract ethical proposition to conclude that ESG reporting is in fact a good thing. Tellingly, Intel, for example, is not employing any particular definition or philosophical argument on the nature of the good, such as deontology or utility or virtue theory, to justify its new resolution. Rather, it is expressing a new global worldview, or as Wittgenstein would have said in his native German, a new *Weltbild*:

> When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)
>
> It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another *mutual* support. (Wittgenstein, 1972, §141–2)

In this way, Intel shareholders have come to a new global worldview on the proper place of business in society. As a result, companies embracing initiatives such as the ESG or "triple bottom line" reporting of social, environmental, and financial performance (Global Reporting Initiative) are convincingly branding themselves as socially responsible, thereby attracting like-minded investors, consumers, and suppliers. This creates a socioeconomic solidarity of vision – a global compact – between all stakeholders involved with such companies. This should come as no surprise, given the fact that humans are essentially social beings who take pleasure in shared experiences and collective enterprises. Furthermore, we in the developed world are increasingly isolated from our communities because of our extensive reliance on private automobiles, personal computers, and cell phones to interact with each other. This surely creates a greater longing for connection and belonging and gives corporations a crucial role to play in filling this new psychological void. For the power of MNCs now rivals and even exceeds the power of governments to reinforce and reshape ethical norms.

But again, while this reshaping is a kind of persuasion, it is, for Wittgenstein, more akin to a cultural or religious conversion than logical argument. In very much the same way, someone who blithely litters

may gradually come to realize why littering is immoral. For example, several years ago I had the unnerving experience of witnessing a Chinese man hiking in the Grand Canyon National Park, who after finishing his can of Coke, casually tossed it over the edge of the cliff, where it landed, clearly visible, but out of reach. When he was then confronted by several Americans, he very politely replied that he did indeed appreciate the awesome beauty of the canyon very much. Obviously, this man's conception of appreciation was very different from that of the others, who tried, in a few minutes of rather vain persuasion, to explain why littering is forbidden, especially at the Grand Canyon. In order to fully understand, he would have to be given, and then reflect on, a whole host of reasons, ecological and aesthetic, or undergo public shame (or both) before he could come to see differently. At that point, he might take on a new worldview or *Weltbild*. Wittgenstein provides a similar example in the context of G. E. Moore's so-called proof of an external world:

> Men have believed they could make rain; why should not a king be brought up with a belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way.
>
> Remember that one is often convinced of a view by its *simplicity of symmetry*, i.e. these are what induce one to go over to this point of view. One then simply says something like: "*That's* how it must be." (Wittgenstein, 1972, §92)

This is how, say, a person or group that maintains willful ignorance of global warming might be persuaded to a different global vision. Ultimately, it takes much more than a grasp of the science. It also requires adopting a moral concern for the continuing detrimental impacts of our collective behavior on the climate—and by extension on our lives. It does not happen overnight or after simply following the logic and evidence of a single argument. Rather, it is a gradual change fostered by myriad social forces working culturally in concert.

In much this way, via ethical branding, corporations, consumers, and suppliers can begin to share in a global ethical vision of social responsibility. And like any good habit, the more consumers begin taking responsibility by shopping conscientiously, the more those habits are

reinforced. Gradually, conscientiousness spreads to friends and family, creating a wider social context of elevated ethical awareness and expectation. As shoppers continue to seek deeper personal and social gratification via their consumer choices, corporations can meet this demand by finding new and convincing ways to brand themselves ethically. Fair trade labeling on coffee and cacao imports is yet another example. There is also the third-party nonprofit sweatshop auditor the Fair Labor Association (FLA), which now counts most major athletic wear MNCs among its clients. The next obvious step in this industry is a fair labor retail label. And conscientious American fast-food chains might begin following Swedish chain Max Hamburger in placing carbon footprint labels on their menus. Indeed, many chains have already begun placing caloric values on their menus. When will we see one of these companies offer an organic children's meal, for example? It is worth recalling that the first organic product to be mass-marketed in stores such as Wal-Mart was baby food. For consumers who might not yet purchase organics for themselves will often begin by purchasing it for their children. Venturing into "naturally raised" and organic options would be an excellent way for almost any fast-food giant to capture more educated and health-conscious consumers. Colorado-based chains Chipotle and Good Times, for example, are doing this already.

As consumer ethical consciousness spreads, MNCs that embrace a strong ethical mission are poised to thrive. For in the global marketplace, we are all faced with the stark choice of being part of the solution to the world's economic, social, and environmental problems, or to remain part of them. Early adopters of corporate consciousness are pressing their increasing market advantage by stepping up to this challenge. That is something we can all take heart from. And if one asks any leading CEO in corporate social responsibility "but why is it the right thing to do?" she might do best by replying, with Wittgenstein, that at this point we have exhausted the justifications. For we have reached bedrock, and our spade is turned. This is simply what we do because it is who we are (Wittgenstein, 1958, §217).

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Part IV

Non-Western and Nontraditional Approaches