

Chapter 22

The Corporate Social Responsibility Meme as a Business Foundation for Economic Peacemaking

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents economic peacemaking in historical business terms through an exploration of the meaning of competition in the 20th century. The 19th century meme, “survival of the fittest,” may be considered a quality of natural law that has been used to defend laissez-faire capitalism, which has at times produced economic outcomes that are good for a select few at the expense of humanity at large. The counter-concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which was developed in the mid-20th century, presented an alternative view of the corporation as citizen, and called for the compromise of profits for the sake of the betterment of the community in which the business existed. This chapter explores the historical development of these concepts in the social science context of social Darwinism vs. neo-Darwinism, concluding that economic peacemaking through stakeholder management and CSR implementation is an inherently natural concept and preferable for humanity to unregulated competition.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores peacemaking by examining the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as part of a shift away from thinking of capitalism in Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest terms. The shift is linked to other efforts to move economic principles from individualistic to communal applications, and from amoral to stoic morality in terms of criteria for decision making. It will be shown that the CSR theory has likely developed as a counter-meme, in order to correct a deleterious mutation in social thought that misinterpreted natural selection as universal justification for amoral individual competition. This contributes to the peacemaking theory by encouraging corporate decision-makers to

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participate with their resources and strategic plans in the betterment of their local and global communities. No other presentation of CSR as the product of a natural communal tendency toward peacemaking in economic terms is presently known to exist.

This study begins by tracing the history of the concept of survival-of-the-fittest, which may be considered the pure form of capitalism. This concept had tremendous impact on the world of business and economics and was thought to be aligned with the natural order at the turn of the 20th century. Its use in the social sciences is linked to the ideology of Social Darwinism.

Next is reviewed the history of the theory of CSR, from its origin in classical philosophy through to its re-emergence in the 20th century as a philosophy of business.

Finally, this study blends the history of social Darwinism as the foundation of free market capitalism with the history of CSR, to comment on CSR as an evolving social meme, noting its interrelatedness with the peacemaking concepts of stoic morality and new ideas about human nature, as informed by recent discoveries in primatology which contradict the idea of survival-of-the-fittest.

BACKGROUND

Social Darwinism developed toward the end of the 19th century as a philosophical extension of Herbert Spencer's interpretation of Charles Darwin's evolutionary natural selection theory as amoral individualistic competition. The import of Spencer's thought into social sciences provided justification for a dog-eat-dog view of business.

Survival-of-the-fittest was coined by Herbert Spencer in 1864, five years after Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species*. At the time, Spencer might not have been aware what a tremendous impact his and Darwin's ideas would have on the world of business, although Darwin's own suspicion that the evolutionary theory might be applied to social studies has already been noted (Hodgson, 2005, p. 902).

Darwin's theory took account of how biological information is passed along generationally, through the processes of genetic variation, inheritance, and selection (Hodgson, 2003). The process known as natural selection was widely received as providing genetic evidence of individualism at the heart of evolutionary development. The species, it appeared, survived because its best, brightest, fastest, and most cunning members survived. Darwin's biological language was subsequently applied to Adam Smith's vision of unrestricted, self-regulating economic competition in *Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776). A new language was adopted to illuminate as natural selection what Smith had called the "invisible hand", and what the Industrial Revolution had come to know as competitive advantage. Smith's invisible hand was essentially dead; it was superfluous in the new academic understanding of disinterested evolution as the driving force behind social change and institutional development.

Already by 1889, theorists clearly understood that a form of cultural transmission existed in parallel to what biologists were describing as genetic inheritance. George Lewes, Henry Drummond, and David Ritchie were among the pioneers in this realm of social evolution (Hodgson, 2005, p. 904). In 1896, as the effects of the Darwinian theory on sociology were being explored, David Ritchie made a distinction between the influences of Darwinist style inheritance in individuals and in social organisms. Ritchie wrote,

In applying the conception of natural selection to human beings, we have to recognize that there is not merely the struggle for existence between individuals competing for food and for the opportunity of producing and rearing offspring, but also, and to some extent interfering with this "natural" struggle, there

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