

# Friedman with Derrida

CAMPBELL JONES

An objective, critical examination of a man's ideas is a truer tribute than slavish repetitions of his formulas.

—Milton Friedman<sup>1</sup>

To a considerable degree, we have already said all we *meant to say*. Our vocabulary at any rate is not far from being exhausted. With the exception of this or that supplement, our question will have nothing more to name but the texture of the text.

—Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>

**F**riedman with Derrida. Is this not a strange conjunction? What possibility of communication might be found here? And moreover, not merely “Friedman *and* Derrida,” but rather “Friedman *with* Derrida.” Our question will therefore be one of the *with*, one of combination and separation, and hence a question of responsibility of the one for the other. In particular, of what it is possible to think of Friedman with Derrida. While this instance of Friedman with Derrida may be of theoretical or scholarly interest, it is at the same time motivated by an immediately concrete concern with practices of responsibility. It will seek to call into question various slavish repetitions and will do this by going back to the texture of the text.

It will be difficult to navigate this “with” with any sense of balance. Even the order of the elements here encountering one another tilts

---

Campbell Jones is Director of the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy and Senior Lecturer in Critical Theory and Business Ethics at the University of Leicester School of Management and Visiting Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School.

the playing field. One always says “Abraham and Isaac” rather than “Isaac and Abraham,” which perhaps indexes the very framing of the conjunction in advance. And perhaps I will be guilty here of reading Friedman “with” Derrida, of assuming the priority of the latter, the victim, the one who has his head on the block even before the decision is made, before we know that there is a decision to be made.

But that is not quite right. The reading here will propose to give something back to Friedman. First of all his words. Yes, we will insist on reading Friedman, but here the insistence will be on reading Friedman *to the letter*. Although Friedman has been read by those interested in the social responsibilities of business, even by those who promise to take him “seriously,”<sup>3</sup> nearly half a century after he signed various texts that are crucially important, these texts remain pregnant with mysteries.

I will treat Friedman here as exemplary for corporate social responsibility (CSR). Not in the sense that it might be possible to “generalize” what we find in Friedman but rather because, like all examples, it is more than an example, in that it exceeds the status of the purely illustrative. Friedman towers over CSR and, whether in defense or disapprobation, CSR is today only thinkable as a response to this exemplary example. We have here a text that is more than a text, holding a determinate position of prestige; organizing and mobilizing so many theoretical and practical conceptions of what might be the responsibilities of business. We will focus in particular on one speech act and, as with a text, no speech act can contain within itself its conditions of production. We know that the pronouncement of the priest has more performative power in securing marriage than does one by the President of the United States. But this is a matter of context and institution, and in other contexts the priest would be fool to count on the effective functioning of all of their discourse. The important point here is that a speech act—and here we will be focusing on a particular and exemplary speech act on the part of Friedman—will require, if it is to be felicitous, something in it more than it. It will require, at the very least, a context.<sup>4</sup>

The context of Friedman’s place in economics, in the popular press and in the public more generally is not incidental to the efficacy of his remarks on CSR. They almost always center on a particular set of statements that appear in chapter 8 of his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom* and in an article published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1970.<sup>5</sup> While Friedman’s views on the social

responsibilities of business have been widely discussed, and he later often commented on such issues, the focus of discussions of Friedman's views on the social responsibilities of business almost without exception take as their starting point these early—and dare we say foundational—speech acts.<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps also worth noting the lack of attention that writers in CSR have paid to the broader context of Friedman's writings. CSR has shown little interest in Friedman's theory of the consumption function, the quantity theory of money, his methodology of positive economics, his *Monetary History of the United States* or his policy initiatives such as the school vouchers proposals.<sup>7</sup> His introduction into CSR has far more often been through recourse to the legitimacy bestowed by his receipt of the Nobel prize in economics in 1976. Regarding this appeal to legitimacy it is perhaps important to remind ourselves that the prize was not awarded for his work on corporate social responsibility but rather "for his achievements in the fields of consumption analysis, monetary history and his demonstration of the complexity of stabilization policy" and also that the award was controversial at the time, particularly given Friedman's relationship to the military Junta in Chile.

Here we cannot account for this vast and variegated context. We will instead focus closely on the textual evidence before us, that is, we will go back to Friedman's texts. The project, to put it simply, will be to open CSR to deconstruction, or better, to see to what extent Friedman's writings on CSR are already in deconstruction.<sup>8</sup> I will avoid laying out theoretical or methodological protocols in advance, although I will later try to make more explicit how I am proposing to read Friedman. But let me here say that the important thing is that we will not read Friedman from some imagined "outside," and neither will we "apply" deconstruction from the outside. The issue is to document the work of deconstruction that is already taking place, there, in Friedman's text.

## **FRIEDMAN IN DECONSTRUCTION**

As is widely known, in Friedman we find what has almost always been read as an extreme statement of the "shareholder" perspective on CSR, in which, as the title of his 1970 essay has it, "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits." This shareholder

perspective is then typically counterpoised to a “stakeholder” perspective on CSR, in which business holds a responsibility to parties other than shareholders, a responsibility to employees, customers, community, and the environment, for example.<sup>9</sup> According to this setup, from the shareholder position and for Friedman, there is only one responsibility of business, and that is to make profit, subject to certain minimal ground rules. By contrast, from the stakeholder position, there are a number of competing claims on business, which might be balanced or negotiated in order to deal with the several parties that have a stake in the activities of any particular business. From this starting point, whether one takes one side or the other or seeks to refine one position or the other, this setup is again and again taken in CSR as the ground-zero of discussions of Friedman and of the shareholder/stakeholder debate.

We have here what is known in deconstructive circles as a “binary opposition.”<sup>10</sup> It is a binary opposition insofar as one side is split from the other and then set against the other. After the opposition is constructed it is then possible to “hierarchize,” that is, to prioritize one side of the opposition over the other. The issue, from a deconstructive point of view, is not so much which side is prioritized over the other, but rather a question of the structural integrity of the opposition itself. What is it that holds the opposition, that allows it to hold, that stabilizes it or allows it to imagine its stability? In this case, do Friedman’s texts license this opposition or is this opposition the result of something in the way that these texts have been read?

To answer such a question would require an immense task of reading and commentary, first of Friedman’s texts and then of many, many others. As I have stressed elsewhere, such a work is a massive project and not one that will be executed quickly or carried out by any single person.<sup>11</sup> Deconstruction is not going to “happen” here, even if in this paper I might try to indicate the prospects for a possible future deconstruction of Friedman or of CSR. But let us consider the texture of his text, in order to consider the stability of the shareholder/stakeholder division, and the more general stability of Friedman’s texts. These will, of course, be merely examples, but hopefully examples that point to something more than the purely idiomatic in Friedman, and hence to something of the complexities that mark responses to Friedman.

As has been noted elsewhere, one major tendency in CSR has been to reduce reading of Friedman to little more than the title of

the 1970 essay.<sup>12</sup> When this happens all we hear is the isolated claim that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.” At other times, we find one selected quotation from *Capitalism and Freedom*, which is quoted again and again to the point that it has taken on an almost satisfying familiarity. We will here follow Friedman’s own methodological advice on the construction of hypotheses, in which the concern is with “the vision of something new in familiar material.”<sup>13</sup> The quote in question, which is the speech act we propose to consider here is, from the point of view of CSR, the key phrase from Friedman, the golden 48 words. It has been quoted before, but let us remind ourselves of the text at hand. Friedman writes:

[T]here is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.<sup>14</sup>

This quotation, which first appears in *Capitalism and Freedom*, later reappears as the closing salvo of the 1970 *New York Times Magazine* article. In the *New York Times Magazine* article Friedman quotes himself and explains that in *Capitalism and Freedom* he had provided this account of what happens in a “free society.”<sup>15</sup>

But here, as he quotes himself offering this familiar phrase, the cogs bind. The problem is that this quote is not a quote, or better, it is a quote but the quote does not say what he says it says. Friedman quotes himself accurately within the quotation marks, that is to say, he reproduces the 48 words exactly, including the punctuation. It would be unlikely that this could have been reconstructed from memory. The crucial slip is that Friedman’s misquotation that appears just before the quotation marks begin. The slip: in the 1970 *New York Times Magazine* essay he claims that these 48 words describe “a free society”; in *Capitalism and Freedom* these 48 words describe “a free economy.”

Let us compare the two claims, first taking the original and then his self-citation, also providing the preceding section of his text. In the 1962 book he writes:

The view has been gaining widespread acceptance that corporate officials and labor leaders have a “social responsibility” that goes beyond serving the interest of their stockholders or

their members. This view shows a fundamental misconception of the character and nature of a free economy. In such an economy, there is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.<sup>16</sup>

The closing paragraph of the 1970 article reads as follows:

But the doctrine of “social responsibility” taken seriously would extend the scope of the political mechanism to every human activity. It does not differ in philosophy from the most explicitly collectivist doctrine. It differs only by professing to believe that collectivist ends can be attained without collectivist means. That is why, in my book “Capitalism and Freedom,” I have called it a “fundamentally subversive doctrine” in a free society, and have said that in such a society, “there is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.”<sup>17</sup>

How long has it been possible, and how much longer will it be possible, to ignore this slippage in Friedman’s text? How is it possible to quote this text, as is so often done, assuming that Friedman knows what he is talking about? The text itself is clear, in that Friedman, in a text that warns us against deception and fraud, here substitutes “free society” for “free economy.”

But let us put aside for now the question of how to respond to this slippage at the start of Friedman’s self-citation and turn to what happens at the other margin, at the other side of the quotation. In the same way that the 1970 article faithfully reconstructs the 48 words that he quotes directly from his book, Friedman ends his quote abruptly at this point. What follows, in the 1962 text? Directly after outlining the responsibility of business in a free economy, Friedman continues, with a sentence that does not appear in the 1970 text. He writes: “Similarly, the ‘social responsibility’ of labor leaders is to serve the interests of the members of their unions.”<sup>18</sup>

Here we do not find the idea that a free economy is characterized by one homogeneous or shared interest. Here responsibility is divided and is represented by two parties. Each party has one and

only one responsibility. We have two sets of agents of responsibilities that are pitted against one another. On the one we have what Friedman clearly specifies as *corporate officials*, and these have one and only responsibility, that is, to increase profits; on the other side we have *labor leaders* who have one responsibility, which is to serve the interests of the members of their unions.

On this point we have here a position that looks remarkably similar to the idea that capitalism is organized around a basic contradiction or conflict of interests between capital and labor. What emerges, when we reinstate the sentence that is omitted in 1970, is not the idea that there is one interest that is common to all parties. Nor do we find the idea that their common interest is the pursuit of profit. To think such a thing, Friedman writes, is “to show a fundamental misconception of the character and nature of a free economy.”<sup>19</sup>

We might dispute the veracity of Friedman’s claims, but more important here is that these things are written, and how they have subsequently been read. Importantly, if we read Friedman’s texts, one might wonder how the “stakeholder” position sets itself apart from Friedman’s “shareholder” position by noticing the several parties that might claim a stake in business. Some work has to be done to Friedman’s text in order to not notice, or to pretend to not notice, the clear emphasis on conflict of interest, the clash that will almost necessarily ensue, it seems, in a “free economy.” To deny this is not to be opposed to Friedman but is to deny to Friedman’s texts what they say. And to deny of a text what it says, will surely invite charges of deception and fraud.

In this text of Friedman’s, then, there is a lot more going on than is typically acknowledged in CSR. There is a lot more movement and slippage, and a lot more conflict and contradiction. And on this point it may be wrong to think that CSR is a “fundamentally subversive doctrine.” In this case at least, CSR appears to have taken the subversive out of Friedman, both at the level of his subversive views and the subversions taking place within his own texts. Is it then Friedman, and not CSR, that is fundamentally subversive?

## DECONSTRUCTION IN CSR

How might one comprehend the twists and turns of Friedman’s texts? Here I want to propose that it is possible to comprehend the

movements of this text, and perhaps also of other movements in CSR, through some of the categories that are made available in the work of deconstruction and in particular in the writings of Jacques Derrida.

Insofar as one might recommend reading Friedman with Derrida, then we should be very aware of the risks of such a proposal. First of all the risk of misunderstanding, and particularly the risk of importing familiar categories and understandings in the place of careful reading, which might distract from a serious understanding of Derrida's work. A few years ago I wrote of "how (surprisingly) little attention has been paid to connecting Derrida's work on ethics with questions of organization and with specific issues such as business ethics and corporate social responsibility."<sup>20</sup> Given the promise of the "greenfield" site that CSR might appear to be, before any effort at wholesale importation it might be instructive to consider what has happened to deconstruction elsewhere, before attempting to explicate what CSR might learn from it.

Deconstruction and Derrida have been widely discussed in management and organization studies, and I have attempted to document some of that literature elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> While we are concerned here with CSR, it might be useful to learn some lessons from the reception of Derrida elsewhere, in particular in the uneven and often rather troubling uptake of his work in management and organization studies. Given the way his work has been received, I have found it necessary to be rather cautious in the case of the reception of deconstruction in management and organization studies, which has perhaps too quickly allowed its own demands and preoccupations to stand in the way of careful reading and analysis. Often by lumping Derrida together with others with whom he shares little but the same national language, it was often mistakenly thought that deconstruction was a method (that could be "applied" from the outside in the same way to almost anything), that deconstruction was a variety of critique (which would therefore be oppositional or negative) or that deconstruction involves relativism (implying that meaning is "indeterminate" and that any reading is as good as any other).<sup>22</sup> These notions have caught on widely, despite being contradicted by almost every line of Derrida's writings.

In business ethics Derrida has often been evoked in the context of discussions of "postmodernism," something to which Derrida was often assumed to belong. In a similar way to debates in management

and organization studies, debates in business ethics in the early 1990s played out in a similar way, and later commentaries then tended to accept this setup, in which Derrida and deconstruction were part of a postmodernism that was to be variously embraced or criticized.<sup>23</sup> We find such notions repeated today when textbooks choose either to not mention Derrida or to include him under a loose discussion of “postmodern business ethics.”

Over the past decade some business ethicists have, instead of subsuming Derrida under the rubric of postmodernism, concerned themselves with Derrida’s work more directly. Hugh Willmott has drawn on Derrida to argue for a posthumanist ethics, to challenge the antinomies of good and evil, self and other, and to argue for a business ethics grounded in precariousness rather than a straightforward politics. Hugo Letiche has drawn on Derrida to argue that any specific assertion of justice is always unjust, and that justice is therefore always singular, situational, and circumstantial. Michael Kerlin has discussed Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* in some detail in the context of questions for business ethics of the relevance of Marx and the idea of the end of history. Raymond Mackenzie has drawn on Derrida and others to demonstrate the importance of language and concepts of self for corporate writing and the practices of business ethics. I have drawn on Derrida to pose the question of the possibility of business ethics, within its current limits.<sup>24</sup>

Depending on where one draws the boundary between business ethics and CSR, one might conclude that, despite the significant body of work on Derrida in management and organization studies and some work in business ethics, in CSR we have almost nothing that has engaged with deconstruction and Derrida. Although widely discussed in contemporary discussions of ethics, one might be led to think that deconstruction has barely touched CSR.

We should be very careful here to not move too quickly and as a result get everything out of place and understand nothing. Here we run the risk of treating deconstruction as a method that could then be applied from an outside to an inside. As the common understanding suggests, deconstruction does involve asking questions about what holds one thing apart from another. Deconstruction involves the question of the border and of the frame.<sup>25</sup> But we must take some care here. Deconstruction is not a matter of rejecting all boundaries. If this were the case then there would be no need for analysis, for thinking, for reading and writing. Deconstruction is

more a matter of negotiating with contamination, that is, of working against the assumption of a division of the inside from the outside by showing, documenting, and demonstrating the instability of specific boundaries. Deconstruction is therefore not so much a matter of calling into question all boundaries as it is of showing how this or that boundary does or does not hold. This is why it is crucial to understand that deconstruction is not a “method” that could be “applied” to another object. Deconstruction *is* applied; it is always “at work.”<sup>26</sup>

To better grasp this it might be useful to consider two important texts by Derrida. The first appears in the “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” which was written by Derrida to a translator puzzled by how to translate the French *déconstruction* and *déconstruire* into Japanese. In his response Derrida makes clear that deconstruction is not a thing (and therefore any statement such as “deconstruction is X” misses the point) and further, that deconstruction is not a method that could be then applied or used as a means of reading or interpretation. Rather, Derrida explains, “Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity.”<sup>27</sup> We hence run up against the idea that deconstruction is something that is in control of a consciousness, an interpreter who then interprets. We also must think beyond the idea that deconstruction is simply located within the boundaries of the book. That “deconstruction takes place” refers first of all to the way that the book is exceeded by its relation to that which is outside it, and that deconstruction is not something that is then applied or done to a text. Deconstruction happens. It takes place.

Derrida explains further in his comments on Paul de Man’s critical reading of Derrida’s earlier reading of Rousseau. Derrida writes:

[L]ook at Paul de Man: he begins by saying that finally “there is no need to deconstruct Rousseau” for the latter has already done so himself. This was another way of saying: there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works, especially in *literary* works. Deconstruction cannot be applied, after the fact and from the outside, as a technical instrument of modernity. Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves, it is enough to recall it or to recall them to oneself.<sup>28</sup>

The point here is that Derrida does not “deconstruct” the works of Rousseau, or Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hegel, Kant, Saussure, Heidegger, Levinas, Foucault, or anyone else. It would be somewhat

arbitrary to think that one could simply deconstruct anything at all, which would almost not require anything particular about the text in question. But if deconstruction takes place, in this or that place, then the task is instead to seek out and locate the deconstruction that is taking place, there, in the text. In this sense, deconstruction is always already at work. We find further formalization of this in the book on de Man:

[T]he very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work, not at the center but in an excentric centre, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it at the same time threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes *afterwards*, from the outside, one fine day; it is always already at work in the work; one must just know how to identify the right or wrong element, the right or wrong stone—the right one, of course, always proves to be, precisely, the wrong one. Since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the architecture of the work, all one would finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this *always already*, is to do memory work.<sup>29</sup>

Derrida does not unequivocally “accept” de Man’s framing of deconstruction, but himself uses it as a stepping stone. We will use it too, as a stepping stone to seeing where we can locate, or dislocate, a certain deconstruction that is at work in Friedman and in CSR more broadly. If deconstruction takes place and is always already at work then we will not need to impose it from outside. Rather, we will need to do memory work, to remember the work of deconstruction that is already at work in Friedman’s texts. In which case the project will not be negative, critical, nor something to be “done” to Friedman or to CSR. Rather, it will be to see to what extent CSR is already in deconstruction.

## **CSR IN DECONSTRUCTION**

The point of the reading of Friedman we have outlined here is not that Friedman could be deconstructed. The point, rather, is

that whether we like it or not, Friedman is in deconstruction. Friedman's text struggles with a set of claims and counter-claims that are inconsistent and at odds with themselves. It is not simply that Friedman doesn't know what the social responsibilities of business are, but that he doesn't know that he doesn't know. Some might not like this, and some might struggle to cover this up. But the "rules of the game" of CSR are themselves up for grabs, and this being up for grabs is itself something of the deconstruction that takes place in CSR. What is today called a free society and what is called a free economy, are far from clear and this, in part, is what it means to be in deconstruction. This should be apparent from the current and urgent global struggles about what it might mean to live and work in anything that might meaningfully be called a free economy or a free society. And insofar as CSR takes responsibility for responding to these struggles, so too is CSR in deconstruction.

One of the puzzles for newcomers to CSR is the way that CSR proliferates so many different understandings of so many things. One of the achievements of CSR has been to lay out the conflicting interpretations and interests at stake in business. CSR points to the irreconcilability of, for example, the interests of shareholders and other stakeholders, or between business as usual and the environment. For some, the task is to reconcile these claims, to bring about resolution to these conflicts. But have any uncontested resolutions been found? Will any be found?

Among other things, deconstruction refers to the existence of these tensions and difficulties. Deconstruction is that there is indecision about which way to go, and that there is and will be conflicting pressures, and with this there will be undecidability about the good. Deconstruction involves not avoiding such tensions or seeking to make them manageable, which is after all a way of avoiding them. Deconstruction alerts us that decisions are difficult and not reassuring. As Derrida puts it, "No-one could or should be quietly reassured about their decisions. When someone says 'I have taken my responsibility, I have made a good decision,' one may be sure that it's wrong."<sup>30</sup>

There certainly are efforts in CSR to get "the answers," and CSR is often offered as a set of answers rather than as a way of comprehending conflicting and unanswerable aporias. But who is satisfied by these answers? That they are again and again called into question,

both in academic work and in efforts to apply them are so many signs of the deconstruction at work within CSR. In fact, the great debates and questions in CSR over the meaning and place of responsibility (Who should one respond to? On what grounds? With what consequences?) are indicative not of the fact that CSR is in need of deconstruction, in the sense that deconstruction might come from outside and destabilize CSR. Rather, these difficulties or “aporias” are themselves indicative of the way that CSR is already deconstructing itself. In this sense deconstruction is not something that needs to be imposed from outside, but is something that takes place. Insofar as CSR is marked with responsibility it has been subject to deconstructive movements, even if they are not usually described by the word “deconstruction.”

If CSR is already in deconstruction, does it have any need for Derrida? How many of the current impasses of responsibility in CSR can be clarified by reading Derrida? Might Derrida enable us to think responsibility differently? So far, we have hardly begun to grapple with these questions. If anything, what might have been achieved is to place Derrida back within reach of CSR. Contrary to what has been said in the newspapers, Derrida is not someone desperately hostile and foreign, an irrelevance or a demon requiring exorcism. Derrida is an important thinker of what it means to read, and with this, what it means to make a decision. He is also an important thinker of ethics, justice, and responsibility. He is, I have argued, an important ally if CSR is to think of the difficulties that it has already begun to notice in the concept of responsibility. My proposal, then, is not to merely add deconstruction and Derrida to CSR, but to work with them to comprehend and to intervene in the already contested and aporetic space of CSR.

To think this will require undoing some of the work that has been done, by both his proponents and his detractors, in creating a caricature of Derrida that is, let me be clear, simply false. By treading carefully, by reserving judgement and by entering into Derrida’s texts, CSR might begin to show a hospitality and responsibility to Derrida, and to others, that have too often been lacking. Here we might take the lack of attention to Derrida in CSR not as an obstacle but as an opportunity, in that there will be less to undo in CSR around the name “Derrida.” By contrast with the haste, and dare we say the irresponsibility, that has so often marked the reception of Derrida in the management academy and

elsewhere, CSR might begin to take seriously some of the greatest philosophical work on responsibility that has emerged from Europe in many years.

I do not want to offer a defense of Derrida, as if the important matter is one of taking sides. The point is not to replace a “no” with a “yes,” which would be to somewhat miss the point. Rather the point is to shift the grounds so as to begin to make something of a connection possible. If ignoring Derrida is no longer a possibility, then let us not usher in a new moralism that feels it now has the answer to CSR or that reassures itself with Derrida.<sup>31</sup> We need to be just as vigilant about the things that have also been said in his name, which includes what I have written here too, which is brutal in haste, short in explanation of concepts and context, and has rushed to draw conclusions. With and for Derrida I have perhaps advanced little more than a plea for scholarship and a request for honesty with respect to what is written in his texts and in the texts of others. Responsibility to an Other is perhaps this, and also, at one and the same time, it is also something much more demanding and disquieting.

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

In *The Gift of Death*, a book that seeks to learn from Jan Patočka and others the “secrets of European responsibility,” Derrida poses the question of responsibility with disarming precision.<sup>32</sup> Taking from Emmanuel Levinas the sense that responsibility involves a response to a call from the other person and that justice involves the impossibility of negotiating the demands of more than one Other, Derrida poses the question of responsibility in terms of “whom to give to.” The question of responsibility, therefore: to which Other must I respond?

This is not the place to outline in detail the work of Levinas, which has been done admirably in a recent issue of *Business Ethics: A European Review*.<sup>33</sup> Neither will it be possible to offer anything like an adequate account of either Derrida’s work as a whole, of his ethics, or of his work specifically concerned with responsibility. If introductory remarks on Levinas and Derrida might help to situate as much as they might reduce, let us be aware of the risks of reducing a complex tradition of thought to a few summary points. Any

introductory remarks offered here will demand further thinking, response, deconstruction.

For Levinas, responsibility involves a response to the other person, the singular other or Other. In the encounter with the face of the Other, one is called to a responsibility that is nonprogrammable and unlimited. If I know in advance what my responsibilities are then there is no other as Other. Each other person is singular, and responsibility involves a response to the singularity of the Other. Responsibility is thought no longer in terms of codes or programs nor duties in the conventional sense. To think in terms of generalizable duties threatens to destroy the singular demand of the Other, to know the Other in advance and hence to reduce the Other to the same. Responsibility, for Levinas, calls the subject into question, in an opening of givenness and openness, a demand to respond to the needs of the Other.

Such images are taken up, extended, and refined by Derrida, for whom the question of responsibility for the Other is inflected through a thinking of the welcome, hospitality, and justice, and in the practical spheres of border control, immigration, xenophobia, war, globalization, and the future of Europe. The work of Levinas is crucial to the development of Derrida's ethics, which can be situated as Levinasian or post-Levinasian, at the same as Levinas is subjected to a vigorous critique by Derrida.<sup>34</sup> But at the same time that Derrida draws from Levinas, he *responds* to Levinas, in that he responds both with respect for the intricacies of his thought and also responds to the problems and difficulties it presents.

Derrida's work, from 1989 at the very least, has been profoundly concerned with ethics, and he has offered, following Levinas, one of the most significant attempts to reinvigorate ethical philosophy. Beyond Derrida's direct engagement with the ethical tradition in *The Gift of Death* and in so many other texts, it is possible to locate both a general and a specific place of responsibility in deconstruction: *general* in the sense that deconstruction is, through and through, a matter of putting in relation to an Other and with this a speaking in the name of what might responsibly be thought "to-come"; *specific* in terms of his production of a catalogue of concepts, or "quasi-concepts" that attest to responsibility. To offer what are clearly more than examples, we might mention Derrida's work on the adieu, admiration, alibi, aporia, cosmopolitanism, enlightenment, Europe, forgiveness, friendship, hospitality, inheritance, justice,

memory, mourning, paperlessness, the gift, the impossible, the rogue, touching.<sup>35</sup>

In this work Derrida positions responsibility not in the space of certitude that one has done the right thing or known which path to take, but instead responsibility involves undecidability. Undecidability is the condition of possibility for ethics, politics and justice, and for responsibility. One is only responsible when one is not sure if one has been responsible. If we have the certainty that we are in The Good, then it has slipped away. This is a thinking that calls into question the reassurances that previously might have been available. It is a thinking, clearly, “without alibi.” No alibis, no excuses. Infinite responsibility.

I only gesture at these ideas here, by way of setting the scene, of opening a space. These ideas have deeply marked recent discussions of responsibility and of Derrida’s work on ethics, justice, and politics.<sup>36</sup> They are also importantly connected with other developments in recent European philosophy, which speaks of responsibility. Clearly, this discourse on responsibility takes a number of forms, including legal and political conceptions of rights and responsibilities, ecological concerns over environmental responsibilities, feminist questions and conceptions of responsibility, the important work of Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas.<sup>37</sup> There still remains a strong interest in Kantian and more broadly deontological conceptions of responsibility as obligation and duty (*Pflicht*). Against but also drawing on these elements in the European tradition is the thinking of responsibility for the other person that emerges out of the work of Levinas and is today most notably represented in the work of Derrida.

All I hope to have done so far is to indicate that, whatever one makes of this line of thinking, there is today a considerable amount of philosophical activity in European philosophy that is concerned to think and to rethink responsibility. This philosophical work on responsibility is the starting point for those engaged with European philosophy, and from such a viewpoint, any conversation about responsibility that failed to engage with these debates would be irresponsible.

I allude to these texts here not because CSR needs to be puzzled by what it means to speak of responsibility, but rather because the puzzle is already immediately before us. Many have shrugged their shoulders at these difficulties and, with good conscience, have sought to get on with the business of responsibility. But here we

might stress the impossibility, the radical undecidability and the lack of coherence that rests at the heart of CSR. This is not a coincidence, but marks something remarkable about responsibility—first of all that we do not know what it is. As Derrida writes, opening the question of responsibility that imposes itself on us today:

The concept of responsibility, like that of decision, would thus be found to lack coherence or consequence, even lacking identity with respect to itself, paralyzed by what can be called an aporia or antinomy. That has never stopped it from “functioning,” as one says. On the contrary, it operates so much better, to the extent that it serves to obscure or fill in its absence of foundation, stabilizing a chaotic process of change in what are called conventions. Chaos refers precisely to the abyss or the open mouth, that which speaks as well as that which signifies hunger. What is thus found at work in everyday discourse, in the exercise of justice, and first and foremost in the axiomatics of private, public, or international law, in the conduct of internal politics, diplomacy, and war, is a lexicon concerning responsibility that can be said to hover vaguely about a concept that is nowhere to be found, even if we can’t go so far as to say that it doesn’t correspond to any concept at all. It amounts to a disavowal whose resources, as one knows, are inexhaustible. One simply keeps on denying the aporia and antinomy, tirelessly, and one treats as nihilist, relativist, even poststructuralist, and worse still deconstructionist, all those who remain concerned in the face of such a display of good conscience.<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

1. M. Friedman, “The monetary theory and policy of Henry Simons,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, X (1967): 1–13. Quote on p. 1.

2. J. Derrida, “Plato’s pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 65. I have substituted “vocabulary” for Johnson’s “lexicon” as a more straightforward rendering of *lexique*.

3. B. W. Husted and J. de Jesus Salazar, “Taking Friedman seriously: Maximising profits and social performance,” *Journal of Management Studies*, 43, 1 (2006): 75–91. The effort to read Friedman seriously presages note 4, below (see in particular Austin, p. 9 and Derrida, “Limited Inc,” p. 34).

4. On speech acts see, in particular, J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). In the present context see also J. Derrida, "Signature, event, context" and "Limited Inc a b c" in *Limited Inc.*, 1–23 and 29–110 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

5. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits" *New York Times Magazine*, 13 September 1970: 32–33 and 122–126. Alongside these texts, and for readers of this journal, we should take note of an interview that appeared as the leading article in the opening volume of this journal, *Business & Society Review*, in 1972. See M. Friedman, "Milton Friedman responds" *Business & Society Review*, 1 (Spring 1972): 5–16. This 1972 interview is later reprinted in chapter 11 of *There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1975). It is perhaps worth noting that, in the collection *There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch*, Friedman notes in his preface that he elected to replace the 1970 *New York Times Magazine* article with the 1972 *Business & Society Review* interview. Friedman does not attribute this choice to the discovery of the infelicitous speech act that we will discuss shortly, but rather, explains that the later interview "covers the same subject but also ranges more widely" (*There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch*, p. xi). We might also note, in passing, that the editor of the first issue of the *Business & Society Review*, while happy to publish Friedman's 1972 interview as the leading article, was at the same time keen to distance himself from the content of what he perceived to be Friedman's thesis. Such oscillations continue, perhaps to the current day.

6. Among Friedman's later discussions of the social responsibilities of business see, for example, S. London, "Lunch with the FT: Milton Friedman" *Financial Times*, 6 June 2003, online at [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com); M. Friedman, "Social responsibility: 'Fundamentally subversive?'" *Business Week*, 15 August 2005, online at [www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com); M. Friedman et al., "Rethinking the social responsibility of business: A reason debate featuring Milton Friedman, whole foods' John Mackey and Cypress Semiconductor's T. J. Rodgers" Reason Online: Free Minds and Free Markets, October 2005 ([www.reason.com](http://www.reason.com)).

7. See, respectively, M. Friedman, *A Theory of the Consumption Function* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); *Studies in the Quantity Theory of Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), M. Friedman and A. J. Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ch. 6.

8. For a related reading of Friedman see, for example, C. Jones, M. Parker, and R. ten Bos, *For Business Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2005), especially pp. 97–99, also 121–124 and 174–175.

9. The classic source for this counterposition is typically R. E. Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston, MA: Pitman, 1984).

10. For one statement of Derrida's strategy regarding binaries see, for example, J. Derrida, *Positions*, tr. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 41–43.

11. C. Jones, "As if business ethics were possible, 'within such limits' . . ." *Organization*, 10, 2 (2003): 223–248. See pp. 240–242.

12. C. Jones, M. Parker, and R. ten Bos, *For Business Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 97.

13. See M. Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 43. On this point, as we will see below, there is an almost perfect coincidence with the deconstructive strategy of reading from within in order to find what is unfamiliar in what appears familiar. Compare Derrida: "There is always a surprise in store for the anatomy or physiology of any criticism that might think it had mastered the game, surveyed all the threads at once, deluding itself, too, in wanting to look at the text without touching it, without laying a hand on the 'object,' without risking—which is the only chance of entering into the game, by getting a few fingers caught—the addition of some new thread. Adding, here, is nothing other than giving to read." "J. Derrida, "Plato's pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 63. See also J. Derrida and M. Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Oxford: Polity, 2001).

14. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p. 133.

15. M. Friedman, "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits," p. 126.

16. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p. 133.

17. M. Friedman, "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits," p. 126.

18. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p. 133.

19. M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p. 133.

20. C. Jones, "As if business ethics were possible," p. 225.

21. C. Jones, "Jacques Derrida" in S. Linstead (ed.) *Organization Theory and Postmodern Thought* (London: Sage, 2004). See also "Deconstruction" in J. Bailey and S. Clegg (eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies* (London: Sage, 2007).

22. See C. Jones, "Jacques Derrida," pp. 38–47.

23. See in particular the 1993 special issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 3, 3. See also the later texts by S. P. Feldman, "Playing with the pieces: Deconstruction and the loss of moral culture," *Journal of Management Studies*, 35, 1 (1998): 59–79; R. E. Freeman and R. Phillips, "Business ethics: Pragmatism and postmodernism," in R. Frederick (ed.) *A Companion to Business Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 128–138; A. Gustafson, "Making sense of postmodern business ethics," *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 10, 3(2000): 625–658; M. Parker "Business ethics and social theory: Postmodernizing the ethical," *British Journal of Management*, 9(1998): 27–36.

24. H. Willmott, "Towards a new ethics? The contributions of post-structuralism and posthumanism," in M. Parker (ed.) *Ethics and Organizations* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 76–121; H. Letiche, "Business ethics: (In-)justice and (anti)law—Reflections on Derrida, Bauman and Lipovetsky," in M. Parker (ed.) *Ethics and Organizations* (London: Sage, 1998), 122–149; M. Kerlin, "The end of history, Specters of Marx and business ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, 15(1998): 1717–1725; R. MacKenzie, "Language, self and business ethics," *Journal of Markets and Morality*, 3, 1(2000): 22–42; C. Jones, "As if business ethics were possible, 'within such limits' . . ." *Organization*, 10, 2 (2003): 223–248.

25. See J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982); J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

26. See C. Jones, "Practical deconstructivist feminist Marxist organization theory: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak" in C. Jones and R. Munro (eds.) *Contemporary Organization Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 228–244; C. Jones, "Jacques Derrida" in S. Linstead (ed.) *Organization Theory and Postmodern Thought* (London: Sage, 2004), pp. 38–41. See also G. Bennington, "X" in J. Brannigan, R. Robbins and J. Wolfreys (eds.) *Applying: To Derrida* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

27. J. Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese friend," trans. D. Wood and A. Benjamin, in D. Wood and R. Bernasconi (eds.) *Derrida and Difference* (Warwick: Parousia Press, 1985), p. 4.

28. J. Derrida, *Memoirs for Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava and P. Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 123, emphasis in original. See P. de Man, "The rhetoric of blindness: Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 102–139. Derrida's reading of Rousseau appears in J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

29. J. Derrida, *Memoirs for Paul de Man*, p. 73, emphasis in original.

30. J. Derrida, "On responsibility" *PLI: Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on "Responsibilities of Deconstruction," 6(1997): 19–36. Quote on pp. 20–21.

31. On this danger of reassurance see, inter alia, J. Derrida, "Passions: 'An oblique offering'" in *On the Name*, trans. D. Wood, J. Leavey and I. McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 15.

32. J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

33. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, July 2007, vol 16(3): 191–321.

34. For Derrida's critique of Levinas see J. Derrida, "Violence and metaphysics: An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), "At this very moment in this work here I am," trans. R. Berezdivin, in R. Bensaconi and S. Critchley (eds.) *Re-reading Levinas* (London: Athlone, 1991) and *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

35. J. Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); J. Derrida "The laws of reflection: Nelson Mandela, in admiration," trans. M. A. Caws and I. Lorenz, in J. Derrida and M. Tlili (eds.) *For Nelson Mandela* (New York: Seaver, 1987), J. Derrida, *Without Alibi*, trans. P. Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); J. Derrida, *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (one another at) the "Limits of Truth,"* trans. T. Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); J. Derrida, *Of Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001); J. Derrida, "Enlightenment past and to come," trans. G. Cragg, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 6 November 2004; J. Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); J. Derrida, *Of Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001); J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins (London: Verso, 1997); J. Derrida and A. Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); J. Derrida, "Force of law: The 'mystical foundation of authority,'" in D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, and D. G. Carlson (eds.) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3–67; J. Derrida, *Memoirs for Paul*

*de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava and P. Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); J. Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); J. Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); J. Derrida, "From Psyché: Invention of the other," in D. Attridge (ed.), *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992); J. Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. P.-A. Brault and M. Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); J. Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. C. Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

36. See, for example, T. Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); G. C. Spivak, "Responsibility," *Boundary 2*, 2, 3(1994): 19–64; R. Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996); S. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); C. Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Oxford: Polity, 1998); H. Rapaport, *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work* (London: Routledge, 2003).

37. See H. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. J. Kohn (New York: Random House, 2003); H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

38. J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, pp. 84–85.