

Crowther, D. and Rayman-Bacchus, L. (Ed.) (2004). *Perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility* (Corporate Social Responsibility Series). Ashgate Publishing.

Over the last decade the question of the relationship between organisations and society has been subject to much debate, often of a critical nature. The decade has seen protests concerning the actions of organisations, exposures of corporate exploitation and unfolding accounting scandals. At the same time ethical behaviour and a concern for the environment have been shown to have a positive correlation with corporate performance. The nature of corporate social responsibility is therefore a topical one for business and academics.

There are, however, many different perspectives upon what is meant by corporate social responsibility and how this might be applied within organisations. This book is intended to explore some of these different perspectives based upon the experiences of different people in different parts of the world. (From back cover of the book.)

Excerpts from the Introduction of the book:

“For many people, particularly in the Western world the year 2002 will be the one in which corporate misbehaviour was exposed by the collapse of some large corporations. In particular the spectacular collapse of Enron and the subsequent fallout among the financial world — including the firm which Arthur Andersen himself founded in 1913 — will have left an indelible impression among people that all is not well with the corporate world and that there are problems which need to be addressed. This will be particularly the case amongst those adversely affected by this collapse, not least of whom are the former employees of the company who have lost their jobs, their life savings and their future pensions. Equally remembered however in other parts of the world is that 2002 was the tenth anniversary of the Union Carbide incident in Bhopal, India — the worst pollution incident in the history of the world. This incident killed thousands, left thousands permanently injured and an even greater number living a life of misery in the area surrounding the former plant. To date not one penny has been paid in compensation to those whose lives have been blighted by an incident caused by the lack of safety precautions which would be required in the Western world and which any socially responsible organisation would implement as a matter of course.

Issues of socially responsible behaviour are not of course new and examples can be found from throughout the world and at least from the earliest days of the Industrial revolution and the concomitant founding of large business entities and the divorce between ownership and management — or the divorcing of risk from rewards, as Crowther argues. But corporate social responsibility is back on the agenda of corporations, governments and individual citizens throughout the world. In this book for example Abreu and David consider practice in the European Community, while Mahon and McGowan consider practice in the USA. Clarke and de la Rama take a wider perspective in considering practice and performance in various Anglo-Saxon countries. [...]

Conclusions: This book quite deliberately does not take any position on the debate surrounding corporate social responsibility. Indeed the perspectives of the contributors is too diverse to allow this to happen. This is of course deliberate and part of our wish to show the diversity of concerns which fall within the umbrella term. It is equally part of the objective of this book to show that a concern with corporate social responsibility is a worldwide issue which is being addressed by scholars in many countries. Thus the contributors to this book come from a number of different countries. Our aim is to present a spectrum of approaches from a variety of scholars from different countries and from different disciplines in order to show the diversity of the debate and the diversity of contributors. In doing so we hope to both broaden the debate and make it more inclusive by the facilitation of scholars from different countries, disciplines and ontologies in engaging with each other because it is our that this is a manner in which progress will be made.

The worldwide and wholesale transformation of political and economic values currently taking place shows our (human) fixation with liberty, property and the good life. Evidence suggests widespread belief that the economic and political institutions of the free market economy model holds out the better promise for the wellbeing of both individuals and communities. Nonetheless, governments, international agencies, business and consumers all need to bear in mind the force of historical contingency. Past social attitudes, business practices and institutional arrangements have delivered a legacy to us the full implications of which are still unfolding. Continued disclosure of corporate wrong-doing and negligence suggests that while corporate social responsible behaviour has improved, there remains much room for improvement. This book seeks to make a contribution to the debates within this important subject, by pressing for open and accountable corporate governance, societal consciousness of the issues and for government action to reflect a greater sensitivity to the place of business in society.” (pp. 1, 14-15)