



Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal

Accounting and the public interest: All the world's a stage

Cheryl R. Lehman

Article information:

To cite this document:

Cheryl R. Lehman, (2005), "Accounting and the public interest", Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, Vol. 18 Iss 5 pp. 675 - 689

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513570510620501>

Downloaded on: 11 October 2016, At: 23:27 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 69 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 2657 times since 2006*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2005), "What is the meaning of "the public interest"?: Examining the ideology of the American public accounting profession", Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, Vol. 18 Iss 5 pp. 690-703 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513570510620510>

(2005), "Accounting for the public interest: public ineffectuals or public intellectuals?", Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, Vol. 18 Iss 5 pp. 592-607 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513570510620466>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:474344 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.



Accounting and the public interest

All the world's a stage

All the world's a stage

Cheryl R. Lehman

*Department of Accounting, Taxation and Legal Studies in Business,
Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, USA*

675

Abstract

Purpose – Seeks to explore the interplay of accounting and the broad social roles and contexts in which it is manifested.

Design/methodology/approach – By mapping the origins of our current place in the world, a cacophony of ideas and philosophies emerge, and thus many possible trajectories for our future. Why (for example) are we witnessing “corporate” crime, environmental degradation, and mal-distributions of wealth? As these are the complicated acts of individual people while simultaneously the interactions of broad social histories, we see two pieces of this puzzle – one “grand,” one “small,” and view accounting as a part of these social practices creating relationships, collaborations, and conflicts. The micro piece of the puzzle is the inner psyche of each person, while the macro aspect appeals to the legacy of critical theory * we are socially constructed and inexorably linked to our social environment. In this paper, we link these two pieces of our puzzle illustrating with examples that the personal is political.

Findings – Concludes that “Like the salt in the stew, you cannot separate the two” aspects of who we are (from the song “Salt” by Lizz Wright 2003). Psychologically and socially we are presented with impressions, discourses, beliefs and interpretations; we act upon these, and we are mediated by “private” and “public” social practices.

Practical implications – As part of the environment, we re-create the world, offering new forms of signification and through this humans can re-conceive new social realities and negotiate “the public interest.”

Originality/value – The use of psychology to reflect on accounting's origins in “personae” and the illustrations of broader social conscience illuminates the connectedness of individual and social values, the complexities of “who we are” and “why we are,” and the power in creating alternative social constructions.

Keywords Social planning, Accounting, Public interest, Social responsibility, Social justice

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Accounting is a fascinating compendium of macros and micros – the grand and the small successes, failures, conflicts, relationships and pictures of life. As the accounting industry (the “final four” in the USA) spreads its reach across the globe as well as across domains of practice – audit, consulting, taxation – all the world appears to be its stage. Accounting is a social practice with people, cultures, and myths performing

The author gratefully acknowledges the input and support from Dean Neu, Christine Cooper, Norio Sawabe, Theresa Hammond, Eva Kant, Fahrettin Okcabol and Shana Penn. This research was, in part, supported by a summer research grant from the Frank G. Zarb School of Business, Hofstra University.



the dance and concert that create relationships, collaborations, harmonies, and conflicts. There is homogeneity imposed, and resistance to it. There are exchanges, records, and profits. There are conversations and computers, emails and audits, fiascoes and lawsuits, contracts and nuances, lunch rooms and war rooms[1], egos and discrimination. There are always people – individual, real people.

The expansion of large accounting firms – mirroring that of other multinationals to domains beyond borders – represents its macro manifestation[2]; yet accounting practice also resides in the personae of each person – the micro and inner psyche of each individual actor/actress in this play. Individuals with memories, motives, personalities, sublimation, desire, and disappointments, all interacting, protecting the status quo or promoting change. In psychology, the term interested party is used to describe those invested or affected, and our intent in this paper is to reveal accounting practice's origins in "personae," as well as the ubiquity of the practice's effect, and to consider resistances to its negative forces. These resistances speak to "the public interest" in all its complexities and contradictions.

This work examines issues related to "micro" aspects of accounting, primarily by providing an overview of "where we come from" in a particular psychological sense. It illuminates personality development and origins of "anti-public interest" – discrimination, racism, corruption and crime – in order to confront them. When we look around us and see, "corporate" fraud, crime, discrimination, environmental degradation, deteriorating work lives, etc., we must consider that these are the acts of individuals – people, not a thing called a corporation – no matter the manifestation of instrumental rationality, social constructions, bureaucracy, or the chains that bind people to perform these acts. This paper explores a piece of the puzzle regarding the make up of these complicated people. We recognize that individuals reflect and are inexorably linked with their broad social environment, and there is a valuable body of accounting research examining the larger framework (e.g. Arnold, 1999; Arrington and Puxty, 1991; Briloff, 1990; Broadbent *et al.*, 2001; Chua, 1986; Cooper, 1992; Cooper and Sherer, 1984; Dillard and Nehmer, 1990; Gallhofer *et al.*, 2001; Hammond and Streeter, 1994; Kirkham and Loft, 1993; Lehman and Okcabol, 2002; Neimark, 1994; Oakes and Hammond, 1993; Okcabol, 2002; Parker, 1986; Tinker, 1999; Williams, 1980 to name a few).

In section 2 we look at the more micro aspect of what we define as "anti-public interest." Socially desirable practice, as a significant objective of public interest research, motivates us to understand non-desirable demons in order to change them. In section 3 we broaden our horizons to look at the formation of social ideals and possibilities, illustrating with the social construction of "an accountant." Section 4 ("The personal is political") links our viewpoints of the past, present and future recognizing that disconnecting from certain realities – even in accounting – has implications. We then describe in section 5 ("Implications") the larger impacts of accounting practice in order to confirm the importance of being accountants in the public interest.

2. "Who are you? I really want to know" (Peter Townsend, *The Who*)

Examining our micro origins in a psychological sense is complicated, but an overview gives us interesting linkages in our desire to better understand public interest

trajectories. Are there psychological characteristics that are essential to, and characteristic of, human nature? What is our philosophy or “image” of what human beings are, essentially ... or should be ... or should become? Marcuse wrote, “Psychological categories become political categories to the degree to which private, individual psyche becomes the more or less willing receptacle of socially desirable and socially necessary aspirations, drives, feelings, and satisfactions” (Marcuse, 1966, p. viii).

All the world’s a
stage

677

If we were to examine psychological categories where would we turn? Many philosophers from East to West have contemplated personality development over the millennia with numerous contributions, and thus it is impossible to illuminate all of them here. Many views combining psychological, spiritual, and philosophical views – Buddhism, Unitarian, Hinduism, Kabbalah, mysticism – asking the questions of who we are, where we came from, how we are to create meaningful life – enhance our understanding of the world. Their exploration is important but we limit our review to primarily the work of Sigmund Freud, reasoning that his work has become a basic twentieth-century psychiatric language and re-writing of personality development. We also allude to the work of Carl Jung, significant regarding the imprints or embeddedness of our psychic history and present motifs.

Given the ubiquity and controversy surrounding Freud’s work in twentieth-century Western psychology and psychoanalytic theories we reflect on a few main themes and categories. Freud, elaborating on two essential elements of personality development, conceived of the mind as two-dimensional, with one dimension being that of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The second dimension was that of the id, ego, and superego aspects, and these are described as the three main systems of the “total personality,” which in “mentally healthy persons” form a unified and harmonious organization[3]. Working cooperatively they enable a person to carry on efficient and satisfying transactions with the environment (Hall, 1982).

Many of Freud’s terms have become part of “normal lingua” – such the id, ego, and superego. The id, described as the seat of instincts, lacks organization in comparison to the ego and the superego: the id does not possess values, ethics, or morality and logic or reason does not govern it. It is the ego that is the “master plan” – within the reality of the world – that attains for the person what s/he needs. To sustain life – food, partnership, shelter – it is necessary for a person to take into account external reality, either by accommodating him or her self to the reality, or by asserting mastery over the environment what s/he needs. The superego is made up of two subsystems: the ego-ideal and the conscience, these two being “on opposite sides of the same moral coin” (Hall, 1982, p. 31).

To the moral transgressor the superego says: for being “bad,” you will be punished with something unpleasant, perhaps an upset stomach, an injury, or a lawsuit. Among the insights for which Freud is remembered is this delving into the intricate and subtle workings of the human personality – revealing psychological reasons why people have accidents, get “caught” for criminal activity supposedly covered up, and have “slips of the tongue” through a “guilty conscience.” In making distinctions between conscious, preconscious, and unconscious it is believed that Freud was trying to understand the determining forces in personality that are not directly known to the observer. For example, a person who has an accident is usually not aware (“conscious”)

that the accident may represent an unconscious desire to hurt/punish oneself, yet this is precisely what a number of studies have shown (Hall, 1982, p. 55). If we are unaware of what we do, we can do some “strange” things – for example, justify “white collar” crime, or throw a “blind eye” to discrimination and racism.

The role of the social environment in the development of the ego is considered crucial: the amount of stimulation provides for increased, sophisticated understandings of the world, and the elaboration of psychological processes of perception, memory, thinking, and action. As more stimulation and a high quality of positive social interfaces occur, the person develops a higher quality of perception and discrimination.

The development of personality proceeds, in large measure, by a series of energy displacements[4], or object substitutions with the causes of displacement similar as those that produce personality development. These causes include maturation, frustration, conflict, inadequacy, and anxiety (Freud, 1933). It has been observed that humans may have a desire, a “primitive drive” toward homeostasis, and displacement is one process for achieving homeostasis.

What determines the direction or form or selection of a displacement? There are two major posited reasons why displacements follow a particular course. First, there is the extent to which an object has resemblance to the original urge and desire. The degree of resemblance usually becomes less and less with each successive displacement and the final choice is always a compromise. The ego – controlling the final object selection – has to make many such compromises between the conflicting demands of the id, the superego, and the external world (Hall, 1982, p. 81). The second major reason why displacements follow a particular course is due to society. In this second form, displacements for which society has a more approved and socially sanctioned influence on the choice are called sublimations (e.g. “sibling rivalry” becomes socially approved competitiveness in the university or workplace).

Displacements can be negative; and become the basis of prejudice and acts of discrimination. Projection, as a psychological defense mechanism is displacing the negative feelings toward a group that an individual would otherwise direct at him/her self. Discrimination can be the release of tension and frustration and thus prejudice is a form of displacement, this time of feelings of frustration. Countering feelings of insecurity or inferiority is another psychological aspect of racism and/or sexism, with an insecurity being displaced, by criticizing and belittling another (person, group, culture, race, etc.). Authoritarian personalities emerge as a reaction to low tolerance for uncertainty, submitting to authority for valuation.

Winnicott (1965) coined the phrase “antisocial tendency” which he claimed not to be a diagnostic category but a tendency found in both “normal” and “abnormal” people to a greater or lesser degree during the early formative years. He wrote, a “child who steals an object is not looking for the object stolen, but seeks the mother over whom he or she has rights” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 311). The child is seeking parental caring, the loving that he or she should have rightfully had, not the item that was stolen. He believed that children who destroy property are seeking sufficient environmental stability to tolerate the strain of their impulsive behavior (Chescheir and Schulz, 1989). Winnicott wrote, “One can discern a series – mother’s body, the mother’s arms, the

parental relationship, the home, the family including cousins and near relative, the school, the locality with its police stations, *the country with its laws*" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 310, italics added).

Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2001) summarize how our psychological processes, insecurities, fears, projections, and repressions contribute to a low quality of consciousness, and towards a person's ability to "be racist." If we accept America's stated ideals of freedom and human dignity, then "something maladaptive" is going on for a person to justify racism[5]. Thus, theorists have conjectured that there must be thinking patterns that enable the racist to rationalize racism, and that these thinking patterns must be flawed, they must be different from those thinking patterns of "non-racists." Some of these thinking patterns are described as: power thrust – the inflating of low self esteem by viewing oneself as all-powerful and unique; ownership – an attitude that one's rights are unlimited, and thus a disregard of boundaries (extreme form: slavery); failure to consider injury to others – denial of injury to victims; and blaming the victim, self-righteousness, a distorted view of oneself as the good person.

Boynton (2004) summarizes some of the debates between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as "represent[ing] the twin therapeutic impulses of the modern age: neurotic self-scrutiny versus New Age spiritual redemption. Freud, the essential Enlightenment figure, meant for psychoanalysis to free man [sic] from the elements (the unconscious, superstition) that deprived him of autonomy. Jung, the German Romantic, for whom individuation meant returning to the archaic and the mystical, complained that Freud's biological theories excluded the very Dionysian, polygamous spirituality essential to the fully realized life" (p. 8).

Jung came to believe that the key to decoding the conditions of neurosis lay within the history of civilization and mythology (Jung, 1953, 1976; Smith and Elmes, 2002). With his eye on history, Jung developed the concepts – archetypes, New Age, collective unconscious, synchronicity, anima, the two dimensions of personality (extroverted, introverted), human's four basic functions (thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition) – for which he is well known. Jung promoted historical roots to the human mind – the idea of a collected unconscious from past ancestry and inherited. Our individual experiences meld into this collective unconscious, which is part of all people. Jung stressed people possess spirit, myths, religion and mythical components in our collective unconscious. We consider some of this collective knowledge next.

3. Socially constructing worlds through words

The names you uncaged primates give things affect your attitude to them forever after (Herschberger, cited in Haraway, 1989).

That we are socially constructed has legacy and a privileged place in critical theory and critical accounting research. Our beliefs, ideas, visions, and thoughts are built and created by the possibilities presented to us. This philosophy recognizes that we are as we are: nurtured, exposed, cared for, abused, taunted, redeemed, constituted, re-constituted, and shaped. Psychologically and socially we are presented with impressions, desires, sensations; we act upon these, we mediate them and we are

mediated by “private” and “public” social practices. Nothing is immutable; all is possible. The re-interpretations of “the world” and of what is “natural” are endless.

For example, in her path-breaking book, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Donna Haraway (1989) presents a fascinating account of how nature is not naturally dominated by a survival of the fittest mentality that has been previously assumed and interpreted by previous (and predominantly male) primate scientists. Rather, scientists went into the field, challenging this orthodoxy, finding that nurturing sickly primates was considered “natural” and that cooperation – not competition – was the prevailing behavior. Caring rather than fighting was observed again and again (see also Coontz and Henderson, 1986; Eisler, 1987; Lerner, 1986).

What constitutes work? How do we describe it? *If Women Counted* (Waring, 1988) reveals the United Nations’ exclusion of “women’s work” in which Waring takes account of the worldwide exclusion of women’s contribution to production in society, in the billions of dollars per year (Waring, as a three times elected member of the New Zealand Parliament, was said to “bring down” the government to force the country to be nuclear free, and continues to be a consultant on economics and global development). Many others provide examples of the long history of redefining the notion of work and productive work by immigrants, “aliens” and “under-classes” (see, for example, DeFreitas, 1999; Foner, 2000; Kessler-Harris, 1982, 1986; Louie, 2001; National Research Council, 1997).

Even the fundamental question who is “a person” – is a contested terrain. What rights are defined as basic for humans – to vote, to obtain an education, to work for subsistence? In the US Constitution prior to revision, voting was for the privileged as per Article I, Section 2, “representatives in the House were apportioned among the states on the basis of population, computed by counting all free persons and three-fifths of the slaves” (Bell, 1987, p. 34). In the early 1900s, UK law did not define a woman as a person for the purpose of practicing in law[6], and human rights organizations today continue to refine language in order to provoke the international community to elevate the quality of life.

Research into the social constitution of accounting has revealed categories, influences by the social environment, and notions of personality images that create broader social consequences. Among the more “memorable” is the image of the tedious green-eye shaded accountant whose persona is unimaginative and timid. Denying the person as creative, acting on the environment, subjectively involved, interested in effects, and proactive, serves to silence the social activist potential in accounting[7].

Ideas that are often promoted in accounting genres concentrate on neo-classicist economics, including survival-of-the-fittest mantras, a reification of rationality as the best of all possible worlds, and a celebration of efficiency as the criteria of a better bottom line (e.g. Lehman, 1992). These views, images, and myths foster a particular socially constructed individual and competitive environment with inevitable social consequences. In the current business environment, responding to indictments of audit abuses, the promotion of the ethical accountant may be viewed as a necessary re-construction, but one that inevitably does not change the status quo, does not challenge the larger questions regarding the distribution of wealth, nor disputes the illusion of accounting regulation as free of conflicts of interests (see, for example, Estes,

1996; Everett *et al.*, 2002; Merino and Mayper, 2001; Mitchell *et al.*, 2001; Neu, 1992; Sawabe, 2005, this issue; Tinker, 1991). Rather, “The state, the media, the business community, and the accounting profession have contributed to, and indeed succeeded, in portraying faithfulness, objectivity, integrity, reliability, and fairness in a world that flaunts under capitalism many of these characteristics, but has the ability to obscure that reality” (Lehman and Okcabol, 2005, p. 24).

All the world’s a
stage

681

4. The personal is political

Hobsbawm (1994) provides powerful and troubling linkages of personal and political, of micro and macro, of self and world, of past and present, in his assessment of the rupturing of the twenty-first century. Hobsbawm assesses as perhaps the most disturbing the “disintegration of the old patterns of human social relationships, and with it, incidentally, the snapping of the links between generations . . . particularly evident in the most developed countries of the western version of capitalism, in which the values of an absolute a-social individualism have been dominant” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 15). “Such a society consisting of an otherwise unconnected assemblage of self-centered individuals pursuing only their own gratification (whether this is called profit, pleasure or by some other name) was always implicit in the theory of the capitalist economy” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 16).

He notes that the new and transformed society was operated not by the wholesale destruction of all that had been its past, but by selectively adapting its heritage for its own use. There is no “sociological puzzle” about the society introducing a radical individualism in economics while fearing radical individual experimentation in behavior or morality. “The most effective way to build an industrial economy based on private enterprise was to combine it with motivations which had nothing to do with the logic of the free market – for instance with the Protestant ethic . . . with family duty and trust . . . but certainly not with the antinomian rebellion of individuals” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 16). “Yet Marx and the other prophets of the disintegration of old values and social relationships were right. Capitalism was a permanent and continuous revolutionizing force. Logically it would end by disintegrating even those parts . . . which it had found convenient, nay essential, for its own development” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 16). Without the social maps and guides of necessary and connected social relationships, humanity, he states, must come to terms with where it is going.

In Hobsbawm’s assessment that “The old century has not ended well” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 17), he is reflecting on the violence, catastrophes, and amnesia of “most young men and women at the century’s end grow(ing) up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 3). Of course, how we view our past creates our future, and personally distancing and disconnecting ourselves from the realities of wars and destruction – even in accounting – has implications for the next century. Chwastiak (2001) argues that accounting has played a role in “normalizing war by transforming it from a horrific potential to a series of problems to be solved” (Chwastiak, 2001, p. 504). Demonstrating the profound political consequences accounting can have as part of the planning process whereby quantitative programming and budgets attain the status of authority, and instrumental rationality is seen as ostensibly value-free, accounting transforms “the planning for war into a routine resource allocation exercise, rather

than an insane preparation for genocide” (Chwastiak, 2001, p. 503). She concludes, “If the twentyfirst century is to be a century of peace, then the masks must be removed and war must be recognized for what it is: death, destruction and the normalization of insanity” (Chwastiak, 2001, p. 517).

Similarly, Dillard (2003) challenges the ideology of instrumental rationality in his investigation of IBM and the Holocaust, illustrating the potential for technology to be reified such that ethical and moral dimensions become lost. “Is the distance between the terror and the ordinary narrowed by the application of technology? . . . does this not motivate and facilitate the escalating effect that leads to a juggernaut that careens out of control? The enabling technology can mesmerize the actors, shielding or displacing the moral issues present” (Dillard, 2003, p.14). The unquestioned precept of instrumental rationality and bureaucratic organization “that allowed, even premeditated, the mass murder of millions of noncombatants is strictly modernity’s” he concludes (Dillard, 2003, p. 14), and in contesting such thinking he reflects on the subjective, the emotional, and the suffering.

Shearer (2002) provides a rigorous undertaking, confronting the need for theorizing necessary ethical presuppositions regarding the “moral status of economic collectivities, including the scope of the moral community to which the entity is accountable, and corresponding questions of the good that this community seeks” (Shearer, 2002, p. 543). Shearer’s work, different in scope than this work, provides two relevant caveats mirroring our presumption that the personal is political. First is her presupposition that identity (subjectivity) is a discursive production and thus there are no necessary “natural identities” – the latter being cultural fictions produced and sustained by dominant discursive practices (see Shearer, 2002, p. 545). Second, and relatedly, the production of lived reality is an interpretive process – “the stories we tell give meaning to our experience of reality, and hence shape and constrain what we take reality to be. What we take reality to be in turn influences our actions, and in this way further shapes what reality is” (Shearer, 2002, p. 545). This is powerfully revealed in our next specific example of a personal lived reality and its political consequences.

In a remarkable insight into his own psychological underpinnings, Floyd Cochran, a former Aryan Nation’s (neo-Nazi hate group) spokesperson, who now speaks out against hate observed, “I didn’t just decide one day that I couldn’t make the football team, so I joined the Klan. The Klan came to me and offered me a sense of belonging, unity and authority . . . Don’t you want to be somebody? Don’t you want to be a man, and when I was 14, no one else said that to me, no one from the church. There was no human rights group to say that to me. No one else came and talked to me that way” (National Public Radio, 2002). Illustrating the effect of his personal life, his thoughts began to change in the spring of 1992. At an annual Hitler youth festival he was told that his son – born with a cleft palette – would have to be euthanized because he was genetically defective. In the interest of protecting his son, Cochran began to doubt his own belief that just because someone was different they were inferior. It was this experience and his inner processing that transformed him into an advocate for human rights and a spokesperson for undermining the forces of the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations.

Many of the psychological processes described – suppressing inferiority, identification with authority, desire for community, alleviating frustrations, and so

on – are evident in his prescient remarks. Such a rendering of personal failures, ethical choices, and human dilemmas has begun to emerge in mainstream media regarding recent corporate scandals. One reflection is an entire *New York Times Magazine* issue devoted to business failures in the time of Enron, World Com and Arthur Andersen. Titled: “Money, 2004: the moral quandaries,” the articles include: “When a rich man goes to jail;” “The organic route to riches;” “The immorality to investors;” “Who cheats, and why,” and “Do white-collar convictions make us happy” (*New York Times*, 2004).

All the world’s a
stage

683

In “The Irresponsible Investor” Lewis (2004) reflects on the American investor who does so with the implicit instruction: “Just give me back as much money as possible. Gouge consumers, cheat employees, poison the environment, lie to the public markets – just do it all sufficiently artfully that it doesn’t dent my portfolio.’ Then, when the market falls and one of the people on the receiving end of their beastly demands is caught behaving badly, investors collapse in the floor in disbelief and bay for their money ... they discover the novel idea that businessman in possession of other people’s capital should be held to the highest ethical standards. But of course, now the idea pays” (Lewis, 2004, p. 70).

Lewis asserts that “This sort of hypocrisy is woven deeply into the fabric of American business life. But how deeply I didn’t appreciate until I sat in on some classes in ethics at the Hass School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley” (Lewis, 2004, p. 70). Thinking about the professor’s comments, such as “I get nervous when I hear people say ‘we do this because it’s the right think to do’ ... (because) I don’t think unprofitable corporate goodness is sustainable” (Lewis, 2004, p. 70) Lewis suggests these assumptions offer clues as to how executives wind up in front page shots when the market collapses. If goodness for goodness’ sake has no place in public corporations, “is it any wonder that the people who work for them exhibit less-than-ideal ethical standards? ... The pressure applied to people who run public corporations almost requires them to forget how to be good” (Lewis, 2004, p. 70).

He ponders about the tensions and frictions created by students interacting with a quite well known company, still private, that has been “doing good works, willy-nilly for 30 years” (Lewis, 2004, p. 71). Enrolled in a course “Corporate Social Responsibility” the students visit the company, recommending that it sponsor walks for causes. The cause didn’t matter, they related, as much as the fact that potential customers would see a giant sign with the company name. Listening politely, the CEO later remarked, “I wrestle with the words and phrases they throw around ... ‘Formalize ... standardize ... best practices ... bang for your buck’. Those words don’t live in this organization on a daily basis. A lot of them are words we try to abolish.” Yet, these are the words proliferating in the business ethics class for the reason of the market place, so university students are told in every case they review. Where would different ideas and words emerge for the students? How strong are the forces that limit other criteria? What would be necessary for other values to emerge and be possible?

Concerned with the power of ideas, and the particular dynamics of what he calls “raciology,” Paul Gilroy (Yale Professor of Sociology and African American Studies) urges us to engage the pressure and demands of multicultural social and political life – seeing each of our acts as moral choices, confronting illusions and myths at every turn. He abhors the authoritarian and antidemocratic sentiments and styles that have recurred in twentieth-century ultranationalism, and suggests that “race-thinking is a

powerful, seductive, and destructive force, a form of fascism” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 11). The triumph of “the image” in culture spells death to the finest promises of modern democracy, reducing people to mere symbols. Gilroy’s hope is that race will be denounced as a political language, and he champions instead a new humanism and a new moral vision for what was once called “anti-racism.” It is a prescient commentary of how the small and grand intertwine, influence and create realities.

5. Implications

The great Chinese thinker Confucius is remembered 2500 years after his wisdom was passed to his students. A minor government official in the ancient province of Lu, he lived during troubled times offering many bold ideas for reforming the state – ultimately ignored by the rulers of the day. Today many in the West “often think of him as a comic sage, a loony philosopher whose witty remarks always begin, ‘Confucius say’” (Freedman, 2002, p. 5). Given his sense of humor he “would probably laugh out loud to find that snippets of his ‘wisdom’ are stuffed into fortune cookies, which were invented in America and have never been popular in China” (Freedman, 2002, p. 5).

Asked what would be the first thing he would do if he could take over a government, Confucius replied, “I would start using honest language . . . Without a doubt, I’d want to call things by their right names” (Freedman, 2002, p. 30). Asked for a word to guide a person’s life, he replied using a word that means compassion, open-hearted, or caring for others. “Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself” (Freedman, 2002, p. 30).

One’s image of what human beings – children, students, auditors, shop clerk, fund manager, copy editor, CEO, friend, investor, parent, nurse, regulator – are essentially and characteristically emerges from what is presented to them as possibilities. Resilient. Honest. Good. Responsible. Creative. Humble. Generous. Accepting. Beautiful. Empathetic. Healing. United. Respectful. Lovable. Industrious. Artistic. Funny. Nurturing. Patient. Cooperative. Innovative. Adored. Connected. Wise. Brave. Curious. Adaptive. Loving. Impressionistic. Kind. Soulful. Grateful. Passionate. Peaceful. Compassionate. Evolving. Hopeful.

Recently, for example in the USA, we have seen psychological categories of aggression become political categories of shock and awe, the latter becoming mechanistic and sterile categories to enable human devastation to become a “socially desirable and socially necessary aspirations.” Such ideas are contested as well, to create a reality where the vision is different, and where psychological categories of relatedness and nurturing prevail as a socially desirable consciousness. A highly raised psychological, socio-cultural and political consciousness provides a better life for all humans. But there is much interference with these developments and there are many theories as to why. This *very* complicated question includes our belief of a limiting conception of a world with “winners and losers” rather than one in which all are lifted in transformation.

Events in the social environment have forced humans to psychologically adapt, to emotionally confront, to repress and then express the most painful feelings. Twentieth century and early twenty-first-century tragedies including war, poverty, genocide and earthquakes have also included humane relief efforts and heroism, providing an

opportunity for re-creating and re-understanding the world in a variety of ways. Social environments provide an array of possibilities for the ego's energies, providing new meanings and to be in a better position to "control the world" – as in the cultural evolution of human kind (Hall, 1982, pp. 39-42). This is not to suggest a new ideology should be conceptualized as an illusion or "false consciousness." Althusser (1971) put this aptly in his concept of ideology as the "social cement" – necessary, illuminating, and the way in which we relate to our world – day to day – in a socially significant way, because it interprets and mediates what individuals experience. It is "only through ideology that conscious subjects live" (Giddens, 1979), not mere false beliefs. The stories and researchers we have reviewed above reveal the active presence of ideology, a changing and re-invented part of social practice, shaping expectations and possibilities and incorporated into language, culture, and tradition.

The media, educational institutions, and an array of practices including accounting contribute to the creation of reality and they can illuminate, suppress, control and shape ideas, beliefs, and knowledge (Barsamian, 2000; Chomsky, 1992; Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Many realities exist, despite the suppression and silencing of certain alternative ideas. These interpretations, stories, and creations of social and economic experiences stand against poverty[8] and racism, and they address the effects of a society separated by race, class, and opportunity. When the environment provides stimulation to re-create the world, then there are new forms of signification and through this, humans can re-conceive new social realities. One concern, reflected in this work, is that when psychological energies are unable to alleviate negative energies, such as insecurities, frustrations, hopelessness, inhibitions, etc., prejudice and injustice may be the unfortunate path to homeostasis. Our task is to re-direct our human energies by providing the unlimited possibilities of alternatives, and to prevail on highly raised socio-cultural and political consciousnesses, providing a better life for all.

Notes

1. On the 50th floor of a "highly regarded" *Fortune* 500 corporation, elite seminar facilities – overlooking New York City's financial district and skyline – are given the names war room 1, war room 2, etc.
2. Although the West presents life as a global marketplace, we know this is a lopsided and late capitalist view, and resistances to these forces abound. Much of the world's population expresses different views of the globe and its energies. As historical resentments of western expansions resume in new forms, we find that traditions, beliefs, and practices collide with imposed ones. Even within its own domain, Western ideas remain a contested terrain; apparent in the European and US protests to the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the unprecedented turnout (in recent times) opposing US and UK forces entering Iraq in spring, 2003.
3. It is not necessary that these categories be ubiquitous or "correct;" we are interested in the insights and implications for social practices in his exposition of these systems.
4. If one object is not available the *cathexis* – urge – can shift from it to one that is available, in an infinite number of ways, meaning that psychological energy has the characteristic of being "displaceable." The process by which energy is re-channeled from one object to another object is called displacement.

6. The importance of race in distinguishing among the rights and privileges in US history is undeniable. "Library shelves creak under the weight of serious studies on racial issues" (Bell, 1987, p. 8).
6. When, in 1913 a woman, Miss Bebb, sought to be declared "a person" in order to practice law, the judge rules that she was not "a person" and that it would take an act of Parliament to make her "a person" (*The Accountant*, 1913.)
7. While the image often fosters the auditor as asocial and thus not-legally-responsible, at other times an image emerges of the accountant as uniquely capable of creating and implementing the rules necessary for a functioning economy, and to protect investors (e.g. the US Financial Accounting Standards Board mandate, and the profession's involvement in responding to the current financial debacles, for example in the USA in the Sarbanes Oxley acts). The image waxes and wanes, changing and reconstituting, responding to various economic, social, and political crises and concerns.
8. The ubiquity of economic practices, the mal-distribution of wealth, and the effects of corporate practices extends far in our global environment. For the world populace, over the past decade the number of people living on less than two dollars (US\$2) a day has risen by more than a hundred million, to three billion (Rosenberg, 2002). For 1.2 billion people, their income is less than what \$1 a day will buy in America (Madrack, 2003). The gap between rich and poor countries has turned into a chasm states Stiglitz (2002), observing that globalization is not working for many of the world's poor (to us, an understatement; see Cooper, 2005, this issue). And within the world's rich countries, the gap between rich and poor is illustrative of an "accumulation fetish." In the past three decades the top 100 CEOs' average real annual compensation climbed from 39 times the pay of an average worker to more than 1,000 times the pay (Klugman, 2002).

References

- (*The Accountant* (1913), "Women in the profession II", *The Accountant*, July 19, pp. 79-82.
- Althusser, L. (1971), "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses", *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Allen Lane, London.
- Arnold, P.J. (1999), "From the union hall: a labor critique of the new manufacturing and accounting regimes", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 399-424.
- Arrington, C.E. and Puxty, A.G. (1991), "Accounting, interests, and rationality: a communicative relation", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 31-58.
- Barsamian, D. (2000), *Eqbal Ahmad, Confronting Empire: Interviews with David Barsamian*, South End Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bell, D. (1987), *And We Are not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*, Basic Books, New York, NY.
- Boynton, R. (2004), "In the Jung archives", *New York Times Review of Books*, January 11, p. 8.
- Briloff, A. (1990), "Accountancy and society: a covenant desecrated", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 5-30.
- Broadbent, J., Jacobs, K. and Laughlin, R. (2001), "Organisational resistance strategies to unwanted accounting and finance changes: the case of general medical practice in the UK", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 5, pp. 565-86.
- Chescheir, M. and Schulz, K. (1989), "The development of a capacity for concern in antisocial children: Winnicott's concept of human relatedness", *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 24-39.
- Chomsky, N. (1992), *Chronicles of Dissent*, Common Courage Press, Monroe, MN.

-
- Chua, W.F. (1986), "Radical developments in accounting thought", *Accounting Review*, Vol. LXI No. 4, pp. 601-32.
- Chwastiak, M. (2001), "Taming the untameable: planning, programming and budgeting and the normalization of war", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 26, pp. 501-19.
- Coontz, S. and Henderson, P. (1986), *Women's Work, Men's Property*, Verso, London.
- Cooper, C. (1992), "The non and nom of accounting for (m)other nature", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 16-39.
- Cooper, C. (2005), "Accounting for the public interest: public ineffectuals or public intellectuals?", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 592-607.
- Cooper, D. and Sherer, M.J. (1984), "The value of corporate accounting reports: arguments for a political economy of account", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 9 Nos 3/4, pp. 207-32.
- DeFreitas, G. (1999), "Fear of foreigners: immigrants as scapegoats for domestic woes", *Working Paper*, No. 8, Center for the Study of Labor & Democracy, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, April, pp. 1-10.
- Dillard, J. (2003), "Professional services, IBM, and the Holocaust", *Journal of Information Systems*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 1-16.
- Dillard, J.F. and Nehmer, R.A. (1990), "Metaphorical marginalization", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 31-52.
- Eisler, R. (1987), *The Chalice and the Blade*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Estes, R. (1996), *Tyranny of the Bottom Line*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- Everett, J., Green, D. and Neu, D. (2002), "Independence, objectivity and the Canadian CA profession", paper presented at The Critical Perspectives on Accounting Conference, New York, NY, April.
- Foner, N. (2000), *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Freedman, R. (2002), *Confucius: The Golden Rule*, Scholastic Press, New York, NY.
- Freud, S. (1933), *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY.
- Gallhofer, S., Haslam, J. and Roper, J. (2001), "Applying critical discourse analysis: struggles over takeovers legislation in New Zealand", *Advances in Public Interest Accounting*, Vol. 8, pp. 121-56.
- Giddens, A. (1979), *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Gilroy, P. (2000), *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hall, C. (1982), *A Primer of Freudian Psychology*, Mentor, New York, NY.
- Hammond, T. and Streeter, D.W. (1994), "Overcoming barriers: early African-American certified public accountants", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 271-88.
- Haraway, D. (1989), *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Herman, E. and Chomsky, N. (1988), *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY.

- Hobsbawm, E. (1994), *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*, Random House, New York, NY.
- Jung, C. (1953), *Psychology and Alchemy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Jung, C. (1976), *The Visions Seminar*, Spring Publications, Zurich.
- Kessler-Harris, A. (1982), *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the US*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kessler-Harris, A. (1986), "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company: a personal account", *Radical History Review*, pp. 57-79.
- Kirkham, L.M. and Loft, A. (1993), "Gender and the construction of the professional accountant", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 18 No. 6, pp. 507-58.
- Klugman, P. (2002), "For richer", *The New York Times Magazine*, October 20.
- Lehman, C. (1992), *Accounting's Changing Role in Social Conflict*, Markus Wiener Publishing, Princeton, NJ.
- Lehman, C. and Okcabol, F. (2002), "The global audit", *Accounting Forum*, Vol. 26 Nos 3/4, pp. 291-319.
- Lehman, C. and Okcabol, F. (2005), "Accounting for crime", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 613-39.
- Lerner, G. (1986), *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Lewis, M. (2004), "The irresponsible investor", *New York Times*, Magazine Section, June 6.
- Louie, M. (2001), *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory*, South End Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Madrick, J. (2003), "Economic scene", *The New York Times*, August 2.
- Marcuse, H. (1966), *Eros and Civilization*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- Merino, B. and Mayper, A. (2001), "Securities legislation and the accounting profession in the 1930s: the rhetoric and reality of the American dream", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 501-25.
- Mitchell, A., Sikka, P. and Willmott, H. (2001), "Policing knowledge by invoking the law: critical accounting and the politics of dissemination", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 12 No. 5, pp. 527-55.
- National Public Radio (2002), "All things considered", *Transcripts*, February 15.
- National Research Council (1997), *The Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC.
- Neimark, M. (1994), "Regicide revisited: Marx, Foucault and accounting", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 87-108.
- Neu, D. (1992), "Reading the regulatory text: regulation and the new stock issue process", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, December, pp. 359-88.
- New York Times* (2004), Magazine section, June 6.
- Oakes, L.S. and Hammond, T.A. (1993), "Biting the epistemological hand: feminist perspectives on science and their implications for accounting research", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 49-75.
- Okcabol, F. (2002), "Auditors' compliance with employment eligibility verification form I-9 of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986", *Advances in Public Interest Accounting*, Vol. 9, pp. 166-80.

-
- Parker, L.D. (1986), "Polemical themes in social accounting: a scenario for standard setting", *Advances in Public Interest Accounting*, pp. 67-93.
- Rosenberg, T. (2002), "Globalization: the free trade fix", *The New York Times Magazine*, August 18.
- Sawabe, N. (2005), "Accounting for the public interest: a Japanese perspective", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 631-47.
- Shearer, T. (2002), "Ethics and accountability: from the for-itself to the for-the-other" Accounting", *Organizations and Society*, Vol. 27, pp. 541-73.
- Smith, C. and Elmes, M. (2002), "Leading change: insights from Jungian interpretations of *The Book of Job*", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 448-60.
- Stiglitz, J. (2002), *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Norton, New York, NY.
- Tinker, T. (1991), "The accountant as partisan", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 16 No. 3.
- Tinker, T. (1999), "The Hegelian logic of critical research: understanding Professor Yoshinori Shiozawa", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 39-46.
- Waring, M. (1988), *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*, Macmillan, New York, NY.
- Williams, P.F. (1980), "The evaluative relevance of social data", *The Accounting Review*, Vol. LV No. 1, pp. 62-77.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965), *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment*, International Universities Press, New York, NY.
- Zastrow, C. and Kirst-Ashman, K. (2001), *Understanding Human Behavior*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

This article has been cited by:

1. Catriona Paisey, Nicholas J. Paisey. 2012. Whose rights? Professional discipline and the incorporation of a (human) rights framework: The case of ICAS. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* **23**:1, 17-35. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Pauline Weetman. 2006. Discovering the 'international' in accounting and finance. *The British Accounting Review* **38**:4, 351-370. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Dean Neu and Cameron GrahamNorio SawabeGraduate School of Economics, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan. 2005. Accounting for the public interest: a Japanese perspective. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* **18**:5, 631-647. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]