# Between Profit-Seeking and Prosociality: Corporate Social Responsibility as Derridean Supplement

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**Abstract** This article revolves around the debate surrounding the lack of a coherent definition for corporate social responsibility (CSR). I make use of Jacques Derrida's theorizing on contested meaning to argue that CSR's ambiguity is actually necessary in light of its functional role as a "supplement" to corporate profit-seeking. As a discourse that refuses to conclusively resolve the tension between profit-seeking and prosociality, CSR expresses an important critical perspective which demands that firms act responsibly, while retaining the overall corporate frame of shareholder supremacy. CSR does this by ambivalently affirming both profit-seeking and prosociality, a necessary contradiction. Attempts to reduce CSR's ambiguity can thus only succeed by undermining its viability as a normative discourse that captures how certain elements of society understand how firms should act. The analysis suggests that greater scholarly attention is needed with regard to the material discursive environments within which discourses such as CSR are deployed. A discursive approach to research could thus benefit future practitioners, who have to act according to fluid standards of responsibility that cannot be authoritatively defined, but which can be better understood than they are at present.

**Keywords** Corporate social responsibility · Différance · Discourse · Jacques Derrida · Supplementarity · Undecidability

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## Introduction

Recent years have brought with them a marked increase of interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR). This interest has emerged in a variety of spheres; from academic study to managerial practice, from non-governmental organizations to concerned consumers, CSR has captured our collective attention. Specifically, some have suggested that CSR may become a significant remedy to the imbalance that many see in our contemporary economic order, where we find it difficult to harness commercial efficiency while minimizing harmful externalities and inequality (Cragg 2000; Epstein 1987, 2000). Similarly, others hope that CSR might enable both managers and activists to better negotiate the business–society interface (Carroll 1979; Tencati et al. 2004; Van Marrewijk and Werre 2003). Just below the surface of this optimism, however, lies a deeper set of conceptual concerns that refuse to go away.

Broadly speaking, many concerns center on two inter-related problems. First, CSR has been poorly defined. This is consistently noted in the scholarly literature (Carroll 1999; Loir 2001; Van Marrewijk 2003). Most researchers who have attempted to define CSR, such as Carroll (1979), have developed very comprehensive definitions, as in his widely adopted four-dimensional conceptual model, which conceptualized responsibility in terms of the "economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations" (p. 500) of society. The virtue in this inclusive approach is that these definitions permit a treatment of most, if not all, of the relevant issues at play. The concern, however, is that this approach operates at such a level of abstraction that it does not necessarily answer many of the difficult questions about how corporate (ir)responsibility will be, or even should be, perceived by observers in specific contexts (McWilliams and Siegel 2001). More tangibly, the

frustrated search for a precise definition with demarcated categories has left ambiguous how different activities (e.g. philanthropy, government-mandated compliance, internal codes of conduct, stakeholder engagement, etc.) all might be (mis)understood in terms of pertaining to CSR. This lack of a tight conceptual center has caused many to criticize CSR, and even to ask if this is really best understood as one concept or instead as rather an umbrella term for disparate normative and non-normative theories (Loir 2001).

A second problem that troubles CSR is closely related to the first—one of the chief concerns regarding CSR is its inability to authoritatively resolve the fundamental tension between the corporate profit motive and normative social expectations. Specifically, throughout CSR's history, theorists and managers have struggled with how to conceptually reconcile demands for prosociality with the requirements of long-term maximization of shareholder's value.[1] This has greatly complicated the search for a proper definition for CSR, as it widens the scope for what might be variously considered either responsible or irresponsible corporate activity. This is not to say that the profit question has been suppressed in the literature. In fact, it is prevalent in the debate, and diverse positions have been proposed on the issue. Some agree with profit's categorical supremacy (Friedman 1970; Jensen 2002; Sundaram and Inkpen 2004), while others firmly dissent (Donaldson and Dunfee 1994, 1999), and observers can find arguments proposing any number of distinguishing categories in between (e.g., Drucker 1984; Lantos 2001; McWilliams and Siegel 2001). Moreover, a significant number of researchers have worked to illustrate how corporate social performance can actually benefit corporate bottom lines in many circumstances (Orlitzky et al. 2003). This subset of the literature not only has returned important findings, but also diverts attention away from the underlying normative question of what firms are to do when social performance and financial performance come into conflict. CSR, as a discourse that seeks greater conceptual clarity on key normative issues, thus cannot draw many conclusions on this normative issue from this descriptive research.

This inability to reconcile profit-seeking and prosociality has undermined CSR in the eyes of many scholars and practitioners. One general perspective dismisses the current

approach to CSR as impractical fantasy (Friedman 1970; Jensen 2002; Levitt 1958). Conversely, another deems it insufficiently critical, as some have recently argued that CSR is actually little more than a legitimating ideology for neoliberal capitalism (Banerjee 2008; Hanlon 2008; Shamir 2005). Rather than trying to resolve this debate, I contend below that CSR's conceptual instability is actually necessary for its functional success as a normative discourse, and that this suggests an amended orientation to CSR conceptual research.

The tension between corporate profit-seeking and prosociality, and thus of CSR's definition as a whole, can be productively unfolded by reading the debate through the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Derrida's study on literary theory and ethics has been noted as a potentially fruitful lens for CSR (Jones 2003, 2007; Rasche 2010; Rendtorff 2008), but to date this has not been fully explored. This article will argue that CSR is a Derridean "supplement," that is, a type of perpetually ambivalent discourse which assists other discourses that seem insufficient and troubled. Supplements do this by simultaneously both adding to those troubled discourses as well as substituting in for them. CSR does this by affirming corporate profit-seeking, but at the same moment, it also demands that firms exhibit prosociality. While problematic in some ways, this internal contradiction between profit-seeking and prosociality reveals CSR's ingenuity and promise because it does not deny the conceptual (and thus ethico-political) importance of either element.

If, as according to Derrida, the meanings of concepts only exist in contested relation to one another, then we should be less concerned than we are about CSR lacking a tight conceptual definition. In fact, it would be foolish to try to suppress this internal tension between profit-seeking and prosociality, because this ambiguity permits us to functionally supplement profit-seeking capitalism with CSR in the first place. CSR can be understood as an attempt to amend capitalism by both adding to it and substituting in for it, as CSR demands attention to social concerns while retaining the capitalist frame of predominantly profit-seeking organizations. In this, CSR simultaneously both affirms and critiques capitalist corporate orientation—a fruitful contradiction that I argue would be undermined should the "undecidable" tension regarding profit and prosociality be decided either way.

Drawing on the above analysis, this article will seek to make three contributions. First, it will argue that CSR can be better understood through a Derridean lens, which emphasizes a differential account of meaning. Second, this article will argue that we should preserve CSR's definitional ambiguity. Finally, this article will call, in "Discussion" section, for increased future research on understanding CSR as a discursive phenomenon. Structurally, this article will

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[1] I use "prosocial" to denote activities that benefit wider society and not primarily the agents themselves. I recognize the potential problem here of failing to appreciate potential prosocial effects of private interest enterprise, which are important to keep in mind. This distinction is drawn from legitimacy literature, where activities that benefit agents (or those acted upon) are found to be legitimate by those individuals, but in a different fashion than those activities that are commonly believed to primarily benefit wider society (Suchman 1995).

proceed in four parts. In the first section, I will better explore the two interrelated challenges that CSR faces today. In the second, I will briefly introduce the Derridean vocabulary and general approach mentioned above. Third, I will then examine the CSR debate through this Derridean lens. In this context, I will argue that the CSR's harshest critics go too far in their distrust of its critical abilities, and that we should be wary of trying to master CSR through demanding an authoritative definition. I will then conclude with some ideas for further study that might benefit from understanding CSR as a supplement. Specifically, if CSR is indeed a supplement, then we should pay more attention to the tangible ways in which CSR, as a lived discourse, both affects, and is affected by, the contexts within which it is deployed. This type of research is thus more likely to produce insight that both researchers and future practitioners find helpful.[2]

## Problems Defining CSR, and the Profit Question

Members of the academic community, as well as managerial practitioners, have repeatedly expressed concern over the challenges in defining CSR (Okoye 2009). Even proponents of CSR have admitted that there is a striking lack of consensus surrounding what we should include and exclude under the umbrella term of CSR (Scherer and Palazzo 2007). Carroll remarks sympathetically that "the concept of CSR has had a long and diverse history in the literature" (1999, p. 291), while Vogel points out the pervasive "ambiguities" (2005, p. 4) that surround our uneasy use of the phrase. Wood also highlights that extant definitions "are not entirely satisfactory" (1991, p. 691), an opinion that is also found in other, similar, accounts (e.g., Amaeshi and Adi 2007; McWilliams and Siegel 2001; McWilliams et al. 2006).

The principal problem that scholars have encountered is that there is simply an abundance of essentially positive activities (or inactivities) that have been given the CSR appellation, as CSR has evolved out of a variety of contexts of practice. Without an ordering set of principles to guide theory and practice, the result has been that people "present views on CSR that align with their specific situation and challenges" (Van Marrewijk 2003, p. 96). With this, we might consider cultural philanthropy in one situation, labor practices in another, and environmental controls in the third, all under the same term but in slightly different ways that may or may not prove reconcilable. To

conceptualize within this situation, researchers have tended toward large, comprehensive theories (Carroll 1979, 1991; Lantos 2001; Wood 1991). As a result of this, many of the seminal theories in the field have become simply "too broad in…scope" (Banerjee, as quoted in Van Marrewijk 2003, p. 96). In a sense, the literature has tended toward conceptual holism at the expense of theoretical precision.

We can see that the tension in corporate orientation, between profit-seeking and prosociality, forms an essential fault line that runs through many of these definitional issues. CSR, understood as a normative discourse with attending practices, has evolved out of a number of independent contexts, but those contexts share a certain history, where uncertainty about the relative supremacy of shareholder profit alongside other criteria introduces a contradictory set of principles into CSR (and thus into contemporary business). Specifically, the extent to which a for-profit corporation should act prosocially becomes the "undecidable" tension that haunts CSR to this day. This will be better articulated once we introduce Derrida, but it is important to chart this here in everyday CSR practice. For example, should we consider legally mandated diversity or environmental programs to be CSR? Similarly, are profitable public–private partnerships part of a firm's commitment to CSR? (De la Cuesta Gonzalez and Valor Martinez 2004).

The answers here largely hinge both on how we approach the so-called profit question, and, consequently, how we define CSR. For instance, if profit does claim sole priority in corporate orientation, programs such as these would likely form much of what one could expect from a nominally responsible firm. Most treatments of CSR, however, find "win–win" cases like these to be encouraging but insufficient (Donaldson 1983; Matten and Moon 2008). Likewise, managerial questions about how to best rank and then administer a business' social priorities heavily depend on the question of why the firm is engaging in these activities in the first place. These issues are important to many ethical theories, particularly deontological ones, which observers have used to formulate CSR definitions. These cases thus demand at least an implicit treatment of the profit question when considering how best to attend to ethical dilemmas (Donaldson and Dunfee 1994). In this way, how we evaluate CSR programs, as well as the motivations that prompt them, requires that we consider how corporate profit fits alongside other social objectives.

Taken to their logical conclusions, the two apparent positions, namely, an ethical approach to CSR that limits profits and a business case that does not (Jones and Wicks 1999), each result in a heavily criticized theory. In the former, we get accusations of implicit utopianism, whereby corporations are expected to use the capitalist system to

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[2] I use the term "discourse" as per the definition found in Hall (1997), where discourse is "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing—a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (p. 44).

generate wealth, but are then expected to altruistically distribute that wealth to make sure they minimize externalities and promote general welfare (Jensen 2002). According to Van Marrewijk; "too often, CSR is regarded as the panacea which will solve the global poverty gap, social exclusion and environmental degradation" (2003, p. 96). This, of course, is not foreseeable in the near future, and would fundamentally threaten the capitalist order if extensively adopted—thus threatening the very mode of production that is so successful in producing wealth in the first place.

While this first perspective sees CSR as undermining capitalism, CSR has faced criticism from the other side of the debate as well. In recent studies, Hanlon (2008) and Banerjee (2003, 2008) have independently arrived at analyses of CSR that seriously challenge its legitimacy as an emancipatory project. They suggest that we should view "discourses of corporate citizenship, corporate social responsibility, (and) corporate sustainability as ideological discourses that are intended to legitimize the power of large corporations" (Banerjee 2008, p. 52). Central to both accounts are two simultaneous findings: (a) that CSR fulfills a legitimating role for business in society (Banerjee 2008; Hanlon 2008), something that is deemed necessary for contemporary neoliberal capitalism to expand as it has over the recent past, and (b) that there is no reason to expect that CSR will result in any activity that seriously threatens long-term profitability. Rather, all we can reasonably expect are "win–win situations starting with the assumption that it (a given CSR activity) makes good business sense and enhances shareholder value" (Banerjee 2008, p. 61). According to Hanlon, we must recognize that "any managerial radicalism is stillborn" within a CSR paradigm which refuses to consistently challenge corporate profits (2008, p. 160). From this perspective, CSR is a "praxis of evil" (Banerjee 2008, p. 60) that trades upon society's naïveté and ignorance to advance private interests.

How can these general standpoints be reconciled? I argue that elements of either point of view, of CSR as impractical fantasy or pernicious ideology, may well hold depending on the context at hand. That said, neither of the generalized standpoints properly captures the totality of CSR as a lived discourse, nor, as a result, we run the risk of mistakenly dismissing its potential and promise should we find either critical perspective to be unproblematic. CSR seems to work best when we incorporate elements of both perspectives to our understanding of the firm's responsibility. This theory helps us explain why the large majority of CSR theorists and practitioners have struggled with the fundamental question of corporate profit; effectively deferring the decision for another day to keep the question open. Thus, we can start to see how CSR operates as what Derrida calls a supplement, where a confusing (but necessary) concept oscillates between two, internally contradictory, constituent principles.

## Derrida and the Ambivalences in Meanings

Derrida is commonly recognized as one of the leading philosophers of the late twentieth century for his study on the literary theory as well as questions of ethical and political life. Scholars have lamented that Derrida never considered business ethics, and that business ethicists in turn have almost never considered Derrida (Jones 2003, 2007). The principal exceptions in the latter case include Kerlin's (1998) use of Derrida to reinvigorate stagnant business ethics debates, Jones' study (2003, 2007) on Derridean contributions to how business ethicists should reconceptualize responsibility, and Andreas Rasche's study on the limits of CSR standardization initiatives (2010). Notably, Jones suggests that business ethics has to date largely neglected contributions from postmodern philosophers such as Arendt, Derrida, Jonas, and Levinas (Jones 2003, 2007). Jones suggests that these contemporary theorists, including Derrida, provide an essential set of perspectives on business ethics and CSR, which deeply illuminate how our framing of the debates might well be insufficient. Although some disagree with this view (e.g., De George 2008), Jones makes a viable case for drawing more extensively from these scholars. Of particular importance for this article is the Derridean perspective on the social construction of meaning out of difference.

In the current study, I make use of certain elements of Derrida's thought to unfold the issues at play. I do so in such a manner as to be relevant to contemporary CSR theorists by showing how CSR's ambiguity is critical to its functioning as a lived discourse that addresses specific social concerns. The hope is thus to provide a reading that facilitates greater understanding of everyday lived CSR, by highlighting its internal logic and deep ties to the material conditions of local context. Broadly speaking, I do this by making specific reference to Derrida's early study on the social construction of meaning through difference.

In the below subsections, I will briefly introduce some Derridean concepts and vocabulary (i.e., logocentrism, différance, undecidability, and the supplement), so that I can later put them into conversation with debates in the CSR literature. This treatment of the business ethics literature will argue that CSR, as a discourse, is a supplement. As a supplementary discourse, it emerges to aid our continued engagements with the "undecidable" question of the profit-motive's tension with prosociality, where either definitive stance is deemed unacceptable, so a third option that simultaneously affirms both proves conceptually

helpful. Preserving this important perspective requires that we resist the "logocentric" urge to collapse CSR's internal inconsistency, as well as the similar impulse to subordinate CSR to other discourses that have the illusion of greater stability, but which lack the same ability to express what people mean to say. These ideas theoretically overlap in crucial ways, but they all stem from a fundamentally differential understanding of how meaning is socially constructed, which Derrida calls différance.

## Logocentrism and the Critique of Western Metaphysics

Derrida's primary concern is to expose and challenge the unconscious violence that lies within much of the Western philosophical tradition. In a reading that engages with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, Derrida charts a psychological impulse to order and dominance that runs through the canon as far back as the classical Greeks. This impulse seeks to subjectively master the outside world, both intellectually as well as physically (Spivak 1976). This task, however, is ultimately impossible, as the radical unpredictability of the world defies our efforts to construct stable concepts. The disorienting complexity we encounter prompts us to nostalgically seek a return to an imagined prior moment of conceptual origin and simplicity (Derrida 1976).

In this way, our expectations for truth and knowledge work to create certain types of meanings in the world, as stable meaning is derived from these falsely imagined original thoughts that are pleasingly "simple, intact, normal, pure, (and) standard" (Derrida 1988, p. 93). Thus, Western metaphysics understands legitimate knowledge and meaning in regards to this privileged prior moment that never actually existed. Truth is understood to be stable and pure, while instability and contingency are marks of abnormality and mere derivation from true prior concepts.

According to Derrida, this ordering process installs philosophical dualisms that seek to sustain the integrity of some concepts by subordinating others. Thought is thus structured in dualities that privilege purity and presence: being versus nothingness, nature versus artifice, life versus death, good versus evil, truth versus error, etc. In every case, the meaning of the second term exists in subordinated relation to the first, where the first is conceptually prior and deemed to be fully present in the here and now (Cooper 1989). The second term, however, is constructed as merely a derivation or, more properly, a deterioration of the first: nothingness is the absence of being, artifice the corruption of nature, etc. (Derrida 1988). Furthermore, Derrida argues that this dangerous process is often conveniently forgotten so that we come to think of this structuring as natural and self-evident. In fact, neither term is conceptually stable, and even the dominant term can only be understood in fluid

relation to its opposite (Jones 2007). Here, meaning is continually reconstructed out of the differences between terms: being can only be understood if we understand nothingness, just as our understanding of truth depends on an understanding of error. Put differently, evil is the not-good, but Derrida argues that we similarly only know good as the not-evil. Western philosophy often acts to suppress this crucial finding, and thus reifies an untenable image of immediate pure presence as its purpose. Derrida dubs this "logocentrism," after the Classical Greek privileging of speech over the written text due to the former's perceived authority due to its having the speaker present (Derrida 1976).

The problem, in these cases, is that this authority is a false one, as we are in effect privileging one meaning (of the speech or text) at the expense of all the others to feel a greater sense of control. The danger of logocentrism in regards to conceptual CSR research is thus that it might induce scholars to either discard CSR as a useful discourse, or, to inaccurately assert instead one partial understanding of CSR as indicative of the concept as a whole. This drive can be seen in the CSR debate, as its conceptual fluidity frustrates many scholars who crave a simplicity and stability that cannot be achieved, thus threatening the integrity of the concept. To anticipate the analysis below, CSR, as an unclear and ambiguous discourse, thus risks being (falsely) reinscribed as conceptually subordinate to corporate profit-seeking, as some may see its internal incoherence as underlining the profit-motive's relative credibility and authority.

## Difference and Différance

Another important concept in this analysis of CSR is that of Derridean différance, an idea that I draw on in the next section to argue that CSR cannot be authoritatively defined. Drawing on linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida (1976) argues that fundamental to language is an inability to demarcate stable and independent concepts. Saussure finds this through his investigation of language as a system of the signifiers and the signifieds, in that we use words to signify phenomena. The signifier corresponds to a mentally formulated signified, but this process is imperfect, as there is always a conceptual gap between the word that we use and the phenomena that we wish to denote. Even within a single mind, the ever-changing nature of the world demands that every use of the signifier corresponds to a slightly different intended signified, if only because the individual's mind and perspective has changed in the interim (Derrida 1973). In a plurality of minds using language, this lag between what we say and what we mean to say is greatly amplified. Thus, language is perpetually haunted by the imperfections that it seeks to expunge.

These imperfections undermine the authority of signifiers to stable meaning, which leads to conceptual tensions that we are motivated to resolve. In other words, they prompt the metaphysical impulse to order.

Extending Saussure's reasoning, Derrida argues that fields of signifiers are all in fluid tension with one another, as there is nothing foundational about any of them. In this way, signifiers have to be understood as structured by difference both in themselves (the perpetual difference between the signifier and the signified) as well as in between each other. For example, every time we use the signifier "table," we do so with a unique image in our minds as to what we mean. When we communicate with others, our functional use of "table" is usually successful. But this process is never entirely conceptually successful, as each of us has a different image and set of criteria in mind for "table," all of which are held in fluid tension with other signifiers: the signifier "table" at some point emerged as "not chair," "not sofa," and "not bookcase," and this differential process is perpetual as language evolves. Each signifier's meanings can thus only be properly understood in unfinished conversation with the other signifiers with which it lives in productive tension (Derrida 1976).

Derrida's différance is a more inclusive approach to meaning that combines these elements of both (a) to differ and (b) to defer. In this way, the multiple meanings that can be found in given words are given room to emerge and be (imperfectly) discovered, as différance recognizes that each use of a word is unique from the instances that preceded it. Thus, the authoritative meaning of a word is continually deferred to make room for the meanings that continue to elude us. Efforts to objectively define, and master, words, such as with CSR, may do so at the expense of this fruitful plurality of meanings (Derrida 1973).

## Undecidability

The notion of "undecidability" is very closely related to différance—indeed, the two concepts often overlap. In both cases we find authoritative meaning deferred to permit us to properly appreciate the multiplicity and impermanence at the hearts of concepts. Returning to the suppressed dualisms mentioned above, where the perception of stable presence is created out of the subordination of one term to another, différance works to expose these false unities for what they are, which is in fact twinned terms that mutually define one another. For example, instead of error being the absence of truth, truth and error should be understood to mutually depend on one another for meaning. Thus, to properly understand either term demands that we recognize this fluid process of give and take (Derrida 1976).

According to Derrida, the undecidable is a moment where these dualisms are further challenged, as an element in the text refuses to conform to either pole in the dichotomy. I argue below that the tension regarding profit-seeking and prosociality within CSR is itself undecidable. The undecidable is something that presupposes the dichotomy yet resists it, as it can not be understood in relation to only one pole, as both polar meanings are contradictorily present in a single term (Cooper 1989). Let us take the example of our determining the supposed naturalness or artificiality of a set of nutritional vitamins. Some cases might appear to be straightforward ones, but in others we might have no principles by which to distinguish between whether or not the vitamin is a natural or artificial one—either decision is problematic and partial. Here, the undecidable oscillates between the two standpoints according to a variety of pragmatic factors:

> Undecidability is always a determinate oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly determined in strictly defined situations (for example, discursive—syntactical or rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc.) They are pragmatically determined. (Derrida 1988, p. 148)

Thus, the undecidable vitamin both problematizes the dichotomy of nature and artifice as well as it helps us explore how nature and artifice are both contested concepts that depend on one another for their meaning.

We can also see how the undecidable is inescapably political, as it helps structure meanings and actions in contexts that evade straightforward analytical language. The undecidable demands a difficult decision and stance based on the context at hand, yet it also demands of us that we conceptually retain both poles of the dichotomy—a given vitamin might be pragmatically deemed natural or artificial, but it is always conceptually both. To categorically deny either pole in a dualism would be to do conceptual (and thus political) violence to the issue at hand, and the undecidable helps us remember this in difficult political discourses such as CSR where theoretical simplicity is elusive but the desire for simplicity remains (Derrida 1992).

## The Supplement

The final concept that is needed for my analysis is the Derridean supplement. Tightly tied to both différance and undecidability, the supplement is a new term (or discourse) that emerges to address a perceived insufficiency in an existing term (or discourse). For Derrida, a discursive insufficiency can prompt a desire, and a supplement will often attend to the desire by introducing a "regulated contradiction" that poses as a troubled unity (1976, p. 246). The supplement does this through a double-movement.

Here, the new term adds to, as well as replaces, the original term. The original term is deemed both deficient (it makes us desire an improvement) as well as indispensible (as the new term is partially derived out from it). Both movements of the supplement are necessary to its operation: a supplement cannot simply act in one fashion or the other, or else it will fail to satisfy the desire. In the analysis that follows this short section, I contend that CSR is a supplement of this type, and its definitional fluidity is due to this perpetual double movement, as CSR serves to both affirm as well as implicitly critique corporate profit-seeking.

It is worth noting that any supplementary process is fiercely contested. This double movement of addition and substitution creates the conditions for an uneasy set of conceptual relationships. The first term (profit-seeking) here has not been discarded wholesale, and so it lives in continual tension with the supplement (CSR). When the supplement acts to extend the original term, it is viewed as a necessary addition. When the supplement seeks to replace the deficient term, however, proponents of that term will label the supplement dangerous and parasitic. This charge can metaphysically resonate due to the fact that the supplement is clearly not an independently coherent concept (Derrida 1981). Returning to the example of the vitamin, or perhaps better the nutritional supplement, we can see that the vitamin can be understood to be both an augmentation of our natural potency, as well as an artificial intervention from outside the body. Both meanings are necessary to understand how vitamins attend to the deeply rooted desire to banish our natural limitations, which requires the affirmation of both our untainted natural vitality as well as of the vitamins' necessity. In this way, the supplement will always play with what constitutes the respective insides and outsides of a term—the vitamin here is an outgrowth of natural health that attends to its deficiencies, but it is also a problematic challenger to it that points out our natural inadequacies (Derrida 1976).

These two movements are often hidden from one another, but it is only by recognizing both sides of the supplement that we can understand how these structures sustain some of our political discourses. The metaphysical impulse to order tends to regard these "contradictory unit(ies)" (Derrida 1976, p. 245) as illogical and frustrating, but this critical perspective can become unhelpful, as without both elements of the supplement the discourse would simply fall apart. This discursive outcome would carry with it certain real-world costs, as we must remember that the supplementary discourse has emerged to attend to a specific desire. Put plainly, the supplement exists for a reason.

Supplementary terms and discourses are complex structures of thought that resist satisfying theoretical ordering, yet to suppress their internal différance would be to simply privilege a certain, partial, understanding of the term at the expense of all others. Supplements have emerged because of desires prompted by deficient discourses, and as such they are observable phenomena that help one regulate certain conceptual fields. In the following section, I argue that business ethics is such a field, and that CSR is a supplement that carries within it a "regulated contradiction" (Derrida 1976, p. 245) which helps one articulate how members of the society expect firms to navigate the business–society interface.

## Corporate Social Responsibility as a Supplementary Discourse

This section will look at CSR through the lens of Derrida's study on the differential construction of meaning, as outlined previously. The purpose here is to illuminate the vital role that CSR's ambiguities actually play in its continuing viability as an ethico-political discourse that many individuals currently find useful. This ambivalence between profit-seeking and prosociality is critical to CSR's functioning in a world that desires that we amend capitalism without discarding its productive powers and competitive advantages. Thus, CSR is what Derrida would call a supplementary discourse; it regulates corporate behavior, although imperfectly, by simultaneously affirming the necessity of both the capitalist profit-seeking as well as prosociality.

Specifically, I first show how CSR has been constructed out of a productive tension between for-profit and not-for-profit approaches to corporate orientation. Second, I argue that CSR should be understood as a supplementary discourse that embraces the contradictions that emerge out of the undecidable profit question. This conceptual ambivalence might well disqualify CSR as a sound concept in the eyes of some theorists, but this recognition of the undecidability of profit is essential to CSR's functional role as a viable ethico-political discourse that delivers concrete results for many activists and concerned businesspeople. I then consider this line of analysis as manifested in a well-known case study of CSR, where all the stakeholders involved find it in their interest to finesse the issue of corporate profit by deploying either side of the supplementary discourse, depending on the expectations of their audience.

### Corporate Social Responsibility: Constructed Between For-Profit and Not-for-Profit

Is shareholder value supreme beyond basic legal compliance? To what degree should corporate profit be set aside in favor of stakeholder concerns? (Jones and Wicks 1999;

McWilliams and Siegel 2001). The continuing uncertainty concerning the place of self-interested profit has greatly exacerbated the difficulty of providing a clear definition of responsible corporate conduct. Moreover, a differential and fluid account of meaning, such as that which Derrida develops, suggests to us that any effort to develop a stable and authoritative definition of this kind is structurally inclined to undermine the discourse as a whole by falsely privileging either profit-seeking or prosociality. Instead, Derrida's work on the social construction of meaning through difference helps us identify a common theme in the CSR literature that can aid in reconstructing an important aspect of CSR's underlying logic. By unfolding this insight, we can begin to deepen our understanding of how CSR is constructed and then deployed in society. Specifically, we find that the ambiguity created by the productive tension between profit-seeking and prosociality underwrites the logical structure of the CSR discourse.

Returning to the CSR literature, we can see that while CSR admittedly does not provide a set of general principles to authoritatively indicate responsible corporate behavior, we can find instead a consistent set of negative statements: we can see what CSR is not. Namely, the closest thing to an ordering principle in CSR's history has been the statement that it refers to "businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest"[3] (Davis 1960, p. 70).

Here, CSR is organized around a differentiation that contains an implicit negation: CSR is for the corporation to go beyond the already assumed value of shareholder self-interest in its decisions to attend to wider social concerns. CSR is thus to act in some way contrary to the commonly accepted parameters of corporate life; specifically the expectation to relentlessly seek maximal profitability. McGuire similarly finds that social responsibility entails "that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations" (McGuire 1963, p. 144). It is particularly interesting for our purposes how often various prominent scholars employ the specific word "beyond" in their formulations (e.g., Carroll 1979, p. 500; Conley and Williams 2005, p. 1; Davis 1960, p. 70; Davis and Blomstrom 1966, p. 12; Eells and Walton 1974, p. 247; Jones 1980, pp. 59–60; McGuire 1963, p. 144; McWilliams et al. 2006, p. 1). A less relative, more precise, terminology seemingly does not express what they mean to convey.

If CSR means to go beyond profit-seeking, though, then what is the substantive limit on society's expectations for CSR? Are corporations expected to do away with self-interest altogether? The literature here is similarly united in saying no. CSR scholars and activists have been remarkably consistent in accepting the reality of contemporary economic life, where there is a certain appetite for prosociality, but almost none for the conversion of corporations into anything resembling not-for-profits. The expansive articulation of CSR, then, is not corporations as "not-for-profits," but rather the far more limited demand that business should respect prosocial norms expected by wider society, which may or may not impinge on profitability (Carroll, 1979; Sethi 1975; Wood 1991) None of these theorists demand a consistent stance against profit-seeking, but they all require that corporations consider other factors than profitability in their decision-making.

What we have here, then, is a Derridean example of meaning being constructed out of difference. CSR is primarily constructed as "not-just-profit." But it is not "not-for-profit," either—CSR itself presupposes the capitalist corporate frame, which demands that firms should remain commercially viable and thus profitable. Broadly speaking, CSR can be found between for-profit and not-for-profit.[4] It is simultaneously both but neither: corporations must act well and must do well. There is an important school of thought in CSR that has tried to argue that the two strands here go hand in hand; that to act prosocially will generally help profitability over the long term (e.g., Pava and Krausz 1996). This argument, however, generally evades CSR's central concerns and conceptual history; if a given ethical practice is good for the bottom line, then it will presumably be adopted as everyday practice without much struggle. CSR has emerged out of the expectation that socially acceptable outcomes are often at odds with shareholder supremacy, and while the convergence of the ethical and business cases for various good practices is to be hoped for, this does not undermine the finding that CSR often demands choices between maximal profitability and maximal prosocial outcomes. CSR aims and hopes for both, but it realistically expects neither. The question then becomes: what could be the purpose of such an incoherent discourse?

## Corporate Social Responsibility as a Supplement to Profit-Seeking Capitalism

In his history of CSR, Hanlon makes an important observation: CSR might have been coined in the 1950s, but it only gained critical mass somewhere around 1980 and then really came into its own in the 1990s. What could explain this slow rate of public acceptance? According to Hanlon, this lack of interest in CSR through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s corresponds closely to the relative successes of

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[3] The gendered language here is from the original.

[4] Derrida's mechanisms importantly work through negations, but given that these negations then produce (misleadingly) positive signifiers, it would be unhelpful to continue with these double-negatives. I will therefore change not-"not-for-profit" to simply "for-profit," thus reflecting common usage of these terms.

Fordist capitalism. Fordism held that the firm and labor should be placed opposed to one another, but within a strong state structure that would order the economy and adjudicate grievances. In this way, the Fordist state could guarantee a generally successful economic arrangement, as the disruptive radicalism of early twentieth century labor was constrained. In exchange, firms were compelled to be relatively generous to unionized labor, and the state stood comparatively ready to intervene against corporate abuses. This structural triad of capital-labor-state thus achieved a certain level of social cohesion and legitimacy in the developed world from the 1930s to the 1980s (Hanlon 2008).

That arrangement has been destroyed through globalization. In a world of liquid capital and transnational production processes, the state's ability to direct the economy has been heavily undermined (Sassen 1996). There are now consistent worries about the state's ability to regulate corporate behavior, as aggressive regulation that is perceived to threaten profitability will threaten foreign direct investment and thus national economies' international competitiveness. With this we have seen the fall of Fordism and the rise instead of neoliberalism, where surplus wealth and aggregate individual welfare are sought through the elimination of barriers to productive self-interested activity (Hanlon 2008).

The global ascendency of neoliberalism has brought in lockstep with it the public's increased interest in CSR (Hanlon 2008). Despite its many successes, neoliberalism has also fostered numerous destabilizing social effects, including widening inequality, stagnant wages, and a sense that the average citizen increasingly lacks protection from the dangerous vagaries of the system (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Fraser 2009) Concerns such as these have led some to cry out for revitalized state intervention, but this remedy appears increasingly unlikely to materialize. Neoliberalism has its advantages and disadvantages, but what is most striking about our current dilemma is that we have so few structural alternatives (Kerlin 1998). The welfare state is imperiled, communism is dead, and there are no viable challengers to neoliberal capitalism on the scene. There is simply no evidence of widespread appetite in most states for a different production regime.[5] There is indeed evidence, however, that people are worried about the excesses of the regime we have (Hanlon 2008). I argue that CSR,

understood both as an increasingly popular discourse and as an attending set of new practices, is a manifestation of this growing concern; a finding that other scholars, using separate but parallel analyses, have noted as well (Scherer and Palazzo 2007).

Given the widespread concerns about capitalism, along with the lack of viable challengers to it, we thus arrive at a critical juncture. The question becomes less which arrangement to choose, and more how to best live with the one we have. CSR emerges here. A Derridean reading of this situation would argue that the neoliberal capitalist system lacks the stability and prosocial bona fides of its predecessor, and this has prompted newly widespread concerns and thus a desire. This aspiration is not for a new arrangement, but rather for an amendment of the one we have. CSR is an expression of the desire for a more humane capitalism. That desire was present but largely suppressed under Fordism, and it has greatly intensified under neoliberalism.

According to Derrida, instabilities and insufficiencies in discourses prompt desires (Derrida 1976). The insufficiency in neoliberal capitalism is not so critical as to prompt society to discard it in the near future for an alternative, but the widespread desire for better corporate behavior remains (Kerlin 1998). This desire is problematic, though, because it contains contradictory demands. We wish to employ neoliberal capitalism's productive powers in a fiercely competitive world, but we also want corporations to work toward prosocial outcomes. Both of these demands are widely observable phenomena, as neoliberalism's ascendency continues while calls for CSR and business ethics continue to grow (Hanlon 2008).

Observers sometimes lament CSR's conceptual incoherence, and there is much to these criticisms. It might be worth asking, however, if it is similarly incoherent for communities to demand both the current production regime, which provides a competitive stance for local firms on the world market, as well as a greater sense of corporate prosociality. Given the dearth of plausible structural alternatives and the documented inability of states to substantively intervene in the market (Fraser 2009), it is not clear that it is. This is not to say that either demand will be easily satisfied, but these twinned political goals are likely a reasonable aspiration given the contemporary situation. In this sense, a responsible approach to the business and society interface will likely eschew idealism, as well as the metaphysical impulse to conceptual simplicity, for an attention to specific dangers or opportunities in particular contexts (Geuss 2008). Does a given corporate practice threaten the local community? Does a given activist demand threaten local economic activity? Are given compromises acceptable to both the firm and its stakeholders? What can and should be done if they are not?

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[5] For instance, at the moment of writing, in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, this remains very much the case. Apart from minor adjustments to certain securities regulations, the much vaunted coming state backlash against neoliberal auto-regulation seems to have almost completely dissipated. This is a far cry from the first half of the twentieth century, where similar banking crises led to sustained calls for widespread changes in the economic architecture (Galbraith 1997).

Corporate social responsibility as a Derridean supplement works in just such a fashion. CSR is a supplement that has emerged to attend to this desire for a more humane capitalism by simultaneously affirming both capitalist profit-seeking as well as prosociality. Derrida reminds us that apparent contradictions are easily accommodated in our minds "as soon as it is a matter of satisfying a desire" (1976, p. 245). Society wants vibrant capitalist economic activity, and society wants corporations to act more prosocially. CSR is a discourse that brings these two demands together within a single supplementary signifier. Firms in various contexts are thus required to work toward relatively prosocial outcomes, within a capitalist frame, by acting "responsibly."

That said, supplements are always ambiguous at their core. Supplements are ambivalent in that they are always both an addition to the prior term (here, profit-seeking capitalism) as well as an implicit substitution for it. Capitalism can be seen here to be indispensible but flawed. CSR, as a supplement, works to add to capitalism but also to implicitly substitute in for it. As an addition to, and thus extension of, profit-seeking capitalism, CSR presupposes the importance of corporate activity, and prosociality is demanded within that given arena. It is in this sense that CSR often acts as a legitimating force for capitalist corporations (Banerjee 2008; Hanlon 2008; Shamir 2005). As a substitution, however, CSR also works to implicitly condemn capitalism, as a more prosocial attitude to decision-making is demanded of firms.

For CSR to remain viable, as a discourse, it must always be both this addition to capitalism as well as this implicit substitution in for it.[6] Should either conceptual pole be suppressed, the supplementary discourse will fail, and the most likely outcome will be a situation where the prior discourse (in this case capitalist profit-seeking), is temporarily reinvigorated by the failure of its supplement, which highlights the prior discourse's relative stability and solidity. As such, CSR's supplementary logic carries within it the significant possibility that it could be recycled back into a hierarchical dualism with profit-seeking, which would thusly temporarily benefit from demonstrating how

its various problems (including social disapproval) are matched by similar concerns about competing discourses, including CSR. That said, however, the profit-motive's socially perceived insufficiencies remain, and it is only with a fluid and supplementary treatment of CSR (or another supplementary discourse like it), that those concerns can be addressed directly.

## Corporate Social Responsibility as Contextually Determined: The Necessity of Definitional Ambiguity to CSR's Functionality

The tension between profit-seeking and prosociality, with which we began the article, thus becomes the irresolvable issue around which CSR organizes itself. This is not to say that people do not make decisions regarding the relative supremacy of corporate profit-seeking, but it is to say that any such decision is partial, incomplete, and tied to the context at hand. Given that society desires both neoliberal capitalism as well as prosociality, any given decision regarding the role of corporate profit-seeking will appear problematic from at least one, and probably both, of these two conceptual poles. Everyday life, however, will of course demand decisions of just this sort, and this helps explain the existence of many different understandings of what it means for firms to act responsibly. In these situations, it is not that the supplementary discourse is confused, but rather that it operates in a determinate oscillation between the two poles of the undecidable—in this case corporate profit-seeking and prosociality (Derrida 1988). Different people in dissimilar contexts will arrive at diverse determinations of what CSR is, or should be, based on the situation at hand. These individual decisions will be made according to pragmatic determinations: the discursive environment, political or economic forces at play, local power relations, etc. With this, the perceived suitability of calling a given practice CSR, or, conversely, of demanding a certain practice under the banner of CSR, will be socially constructed based on material contexts, in keeping with how CSR is always a lived discourse.

The problem with supplements, such as CSR, emerges when a given decision is reified and deemed authoritative, as it actually does not represent the discourse as a whole, but rather the discourse as manifested in a particular context. If any given decision is insisted upon as legitimate and authoritative, then the supplementary discourse falls apart (Derrida 1976). To illustrate, let us take a well-known, and controversial, example of CSR.

Of particular recent interest has been the role of CSR in attending to dangers found in global clothing supply chains. For instance, Nike, a wildly profitable company that heavily depends on inspirational branding campaigns, had sales decline following accusations that its subcontractors

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[6] This double movement, of both addition and substitution, marks how Derridean supplements function differently than standard accounts of supplements, which focus solely on how they act by addition. By way of contrast, see Rasche's (2009) account of CSR as supplement to legal regulation, which specifically rejects that CSR has a substitutive function, at least in relation to the law (p. 522). I rather move the focus of analysis from regulation to corporate orientation, adopting a Derridean framework, to capture why many pro-business observers (e.g., Friedman 1970; Sundaram and Inkpen 2004) see CSR as corrosive to traditional corporate values. Rasche later adopts an explicitly Derridean lens toward supplementarity (2010), but the analytic focus there is on ethical standardization initiatives and codes of conduct, not CSR in and of itself.

exploited workers (Locke et al. 2007; Vogel 2005). There, the context dictated that Nike's resources and high margins should permit the absorption of the costs of substantial remedies, which activists insisted upon and the firm agreed to. It remains uncertain, however, that Nike's CSR programs have proved financially beneficial to the firm in the end (Vogel 2005).

We see in the Nike case an interesting example of a firm reacting to CSR activism with fairly robust CSR programs. But what would happen should we insist that the decision in the Nike case is authoritative and should act as an exemplar to CSR as a whole? The discourse would fall apart, and the specific manner in which it failed would depend on how we think the CSR programs influenced profitability. If we believe that the benefits that accrued to Nike through its CSR programs did not outweigh the resulting costs, and thus presumably that other firms must act similarly benevolently irrespective of the circumstances, then CSR is open to charges of unreasonable idealism. On the other hand, if we think that Nike's CSR policies led to a net profit through positive publicity and increased operational efficiency, then this becomes yet another "win–win" scenario that Banerjee (2008, p. 61) warns us against. Specifically, he argues that if that sort of activity is supposed to be emblematic of CSR, then it is not clear how much emancipatory potential the discourse would have left. In that case, the discourse would suffer from critics correctly dismissing it as little more than a convenient public relations strategy.

These two contrasting possibilities are of course the problems with which we began our analysis. Crucially, they only emerge if we insist on authoritatively deciding the undecidable profit question—as opposed to understanding that each decision is pragmatic, contextual, and ultimately problematic. Leaving the Nike example's profit question ambiguous permits us to hold it up as an impressive instance of a corporation doing good and doing well under the banner of CSR. In fact, we can see that while the Nike example cannot satisfy critics' conceptual concerns, the Nike case does in fact continue to succeed on functional grounds, as people continue to happily use "CSR" as a productive way to denote a certain type of corporate behavior that is imperfectly exhibited by Nike.

For example, Nike continues to be cited as an important CSR case study in both the academic literature (e.g., Lim and Phillips 2008; Werther Jr. and Chandler 2004) and popular press (e.g., Murray 2010). More importantly, both practitioners at Nike (2010), as well as the activists who continue to challenge them (e.g., Knorr 2007), feel comfortable communicating their relative positions in the language and vocabulary of corporate social responsibility. Theoretical demands for an authoritative definition of CSR thus run the risk of disrupting the functional uses of CSR

mentioned here, as the variability of the discourse is what permits agents to creatively contest what it means to be socially responsible in a given context.

Specifically, it is not clear how those connected to the Nike situation would benefit from greater clarity on the issue of corporate profit, as it serves the best interests of all the stakeholders involved to keep the profit-question ambivalent. For instance, activists might well hope, and demand, that Nike exhibit various moral values, but they also want the firm to react to pressures on revenues (Knorr 2007). Similarly, Nike's social responsibility report (Nike 2010) walks the habitual fine line by simultaneously endorsing both prosociality and profit-seeking, if only because if forced to openly choose a position, they would suffer either way. On the one hand, if Nike were to widely acknowledge that CSR is a strategy intended to defuse activist pressure, it would lose much of the credibility and goodwill that, for Nike, could presumably be the whole point of the endeavor. On the other hand, it is understandably rare for executives to freely publicize that large CSR outlays are not expected to be worth their cost to shareholders. Examples to the contrary do indeed exist, but most managers and firms generally hope to finesse the issue by selectively emphasizing either the business, or ethical, cases for their policies, depending on their audience (Conley and Williams 2005). CSR, which both affirms and undermines profit-seeking, facilitates this process by providing the supplementary vocabulary needed to leave the question of profit deferred for another day, while also permitting the vigorous contestation of corporate behavior.

## Discussion and Implications for Future Research

This article started by considering a set of definitional concerns in the CSR literature, on the one hand, and a related set of diametrically opposed, yet potentially valid, critiques on the other. Given the situation, it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars in the CSR literature have called for concepts or theories that might better synthesize and organize the competing issues at play (McWilliams and Siegel 2001, 2006; Wood 1991). To a large extent, this can indeed be helpful and constructive, as placing theories in conversation with one another has paid important dividends. That said, however, a Derridean analysis suggests that we should resist the impulse to try to intellectually master the business–society interface by creating an artificially stable concept or theory that offers all of the answers.

CSR's ambiguity is often frustrating, but the alternative is to excise either profit-seeking or prosociality from its meaning. Either result of this process would be

unsatisfactory given the widespread contemporary demand for both. In addition, of these two contrasting prospects, it is far more likely that prosociality, not profit-seeking, would be excluded from the definition of a simplified CSR. When supplements break down under the gaze of logocentric scrutiny, they overwhelmingly tend to revert back to the (misleadingly) original term, in this case self-interested profit-seeking (Derrida 1981).

It is not clear at all what CSR is, or even should be, given the harsh realities of contemporary economic life. With this, both theorists and practitioners have implicitly settled on understanding CSR as contested between for-profit and not-for-profit. In this way, by simultaneously affirming both corporate profit-seeking as well as prosociality, CSR can imperfectly attend to society's desire for more benevolent corporate behavior. It is only if we insist on a concept free of incoherence and contradiction that we end up abandoning that desire. In fact, from a Derridean perspective, CSR's ambiguity is exactly what permits CSR to achieve results as a powerful emancipatory discourse that implicitly condemns the status quo and thus demands that corporations do better.

It is important to note, however, that this line of thinking is not entirely new. Scholars working on parallel lines of inquiry, using different theories as lenses, have recently come to some of the same conclusions. Specifically, Okoye's (2009) work on conceptual debates in the CSR literature finds that definitional diversity is critical to CSR's continued functioning in society, as CSR's use lies in its ability to represent different things to different people under a single label. This thus provides the vocabulary for everybody in a social context to contest corporate conduct as either responsible or irresponsible. This account dovetails remarkably well with a Derridean approach. Somewhat similarly, a growing school of CSR theorists, inspired by Habermas, have begun to explore CSR as socially constructed out of political processes of communication (Scherer and Palazzo 2007), a project with parallels with recent efforts to build CSR theory around the organizational sensemaking literature (Basu and Palazzo 2008). These both resonate keenly with a Derridean approach, as they pay careful attention to how communication and linguistic frames affect both the substance of ideas as well as subsequent (un)ethical behavior.

The Derridean perspective outlined here, however, departs from these accounts in important ways. These differences coalesce around two of the intended contributions of this piece; namely, to argue for CSR's continued definitional ambiguity as well as to call for further research that seeks to understand CSR as a lived discursive phenomenon. All the three of the above accounts are, broadly speaking, in favor of these two scholarly projects. That said, however, the different underlying theoretic frameworks result in importantly different conceptual outcomes, and in ways that might prove to matter.

It means that a Derridean understanding of CSR, which holds that CSR is a supplementary discourse, would be occasionally wary of the above projects, despite the fact that they clearly share a generally pluralist perspective on what constitutes CSR. Specifically, CSR's underlying ambiguity in this Derridean reading is much more radical, due to the differential theory of meaning, where ideas are created out of negation, communication is frequently frustrated, and definitions are perpetually fluid. Moreover, this radical ambiguity is necessary to preserve CSR as a functional supplementary discourse, which is presumably a good thing given that society currently finds it useful. For instance, in contrast to this differential model of meaning, the Habermasian approach to political communication, as used in Scherer and Palazzo (2007) is frequently described as holding an implicitly unitary understanding of meaning, where the political (and scholarly) objective is to eventually reconcile different parties to a single ideal viewpoint (Young 1989). Elements of this tendency can be seen to the extent that cognitive and rationalist inputs are disproportionately important in both the Habermasian and organizational sensemaking (Basu and Palazzo 2008) accounts, suggesting that greater communication and knowledge transfer could greatly reconcile a tremendous amount of CSR diversity, with advantages to both political actors as well as scholars. In both cases, diversity and ambiguity are features of the most lived CSR, but are considered neither inevitable nor particularly advisable in and of themselves.

Meanwhile, Okoye's account is more steadfastly pluralist and "open in character" (2009, p. 620) than those alternatives, but it ultimately has to ground itself by our defining certain core CSR traits or practices around which the definition may fluctuate. For a Derridean, this is fraught with difficulty, as any chosen definition will inevitably marginalize certain aspects of CSR that were not deemed important at the time, but which might be in the future. This perspective would thus point out that Okoye's eventual minimal core ground for CSR, the "tradition of attempting to discover and identify a social role for corporate power" (2009, p. 621) is itself still too narrow. Specifically, despite being as broad as Okoye can design it, this positive definition still leaves out such instances as when firms are made to withdraw from a given market and to thus cease a given set of operations; here there may well be no social role for corporate power, but rather the expectation of either a limited economic role or no role at all. A Derridean frame, which works out of difference, helps avoid this sort of dilemma. It thus helps keep open the diversity and ambiguity that permit both comprehensive scholarship as well as the continued functioning of the overall supplementary discourse, which will not prove

viable if individual cases are held up as falsely authoritative exemplars.

A Derridean account of CSR also offers rich new areas for future research. Specifically, in adapting the lens of CSR as Derridean supplement, certain types of conceptual and empirical research are likely to prove increasingly fruitful. Namely, this analysis would suggest that any future discussion should increasingly focus on how discourses interact with the tangible conditions within which business ethics is conducted. To focus on the conceptual purity or synthesizing power of a given term or theory is likely to miss the point. Rather, future research would do well to examine how CSR or other competing discourses influence the discursive, and thus political, environments within which CSR encounters take place.

Seeing CSR as essentially supplementary, thus shifts our attention from developing an authoritative definition of CSR to the way that CSR, as a discourse, interacts with the material forces in the economic environment. This suggests that much extant conceptual research on CSR ignores important research questions. According to Lockett et al. (2006), a survey of the literature suggests that it is heavily tilted toward quantitative empirical work and well as non-normative theoretical scholarship, which they describe as "the integration of concepts and paradigms, framework building, explanation and application of deductive techniques" (2006, p. 118). However, if CSR is a fluid discourse that is both determining of, and determined by, its context, then this scholarly emphasis is limiting in terms of the research questions it allows us to pursue. To ask these questions requires research that treats CSR as first and foremost a discursive phenomenon. Discourse analysis can, and does, draw a great deal from both quantitative empirical study as well as conceptual theoretical study, but most discourse analysis takes a different strategy, which is to look behind the stated and apparent problematic to ask why certain actors are discussing certain issues in specific ways. With this, the emphasis moves away from "what" and "ought" questions to ask "how" and "why" a given issue is being approached in a given way in a given context. With this approach, the ultimate research objective is greater understanding, based on a better accounting of how the material circumstances of a context interact with the ideas and discourses of that context. This perspective thus tends to dovetail best with qualitative work in general, and discursively focused work in particular, and more of both could thus be of tremendous value (Titscher et al. 2000).

To a certain extent, we can see that a disconnect between theory and practice already exists. These analytic models and attending theoretical frameworks have borne fruit in a scholarly sense, but research shows that activists and managers are not generally interested in the conceptual literature beyond the adoption and contestation of broadly used terms (Conley and Williams 2005; Waddock 2004), possibly because people tend not to use complex models and formal codes to conceptualize and articulate normative claims (Habermas 2000). In this sense, most CSR theory does not speak to the concrete experiences that practitioners have to be conversant with.

Given that CSR is a supplementary discourse, then this disjuncture between conventional CSR theory and everyday practice makes sense. Supplements such as CSR are used precisely because they evade precise definition while retaining an internal logic that encapsulates what speakers want to convey, however contradictory that might be. Given this situation, research on CSR would do well to focus on building our understanding of CSR as a fluidly discursive political phenomenon. If we do this, we can perhaps then start to ask the questions that activists and managers are interested in our answering, as we will be able to shed some new light on the various contexts in which they operate.

CSR is by turns both materially determined by its contexts, as well as partially determining of those contexts. This embedded contextuality means that there are both the ways in which we can better understand CSR as a lived discourse, as well as the ways in which we can better understand its effect on the business and society interface. Instead of trying to understand what CSR ought to be in certain contexts, more research is needed into what sort of pragmatic conditions make the greatest difference in determining how CSR is constructed, and then perceived, in the real world. For example, are certain organizational structures conducive to managers understanding CSR in certain ways? Are specific cultural contexts more or less favorable to more expansive understandings of CSR? Are various institutional settings more or less interested in granting activists full standing in normative dialogue? How do certain types of power relationships affect how claims are both made and heard? There is indeed some fascinating recent research on these types of questions (Conley and Williams 2005; Joutsenvirta 2011; Waddock 2004), but much more is needed, particularly research that keeps the expectation in mind that CSR is contested and conceptually fluid. Of particular interest could be work that moves beyond an implicitly rational or cognitivist frame, to consider how non-rational modes of communication, such as rhetoric, narrative, and storytelling, might impact CSR actors in unique ways, resulting in potentially fascinating insights into how CSR is perceived in various contexts. If conducted carefully, then this in-depth research would presumably secure findings that could not be secured using either analytic theoretical tools or standard quantitative methods, as it would take investigating the discourse itself to reflect important conditions "on the ground" that might not manifest themselves openly.

Similarly as discussed above, we would do well to pay greater attention to how CSR, as a discourse, itself affects the environment in which we find it. Within Derridean theory, ideas themselves form part of the material context of a situation—they matter in themselves because they have a tangible effect on society, and should be studied as such. For example, does the rhetorical deployment of CSR in internal organizational debates make a significant difference in outcomes? Does CSR, as Hanlon (2008) and Banerjee (2008) suggest, often act as a constricting political discourse that deprives activists of the ability to reasonably refuse corporate overtures? Is CSR a particularly effective way of framing various types of stakeholder claims, or are other frames, such as Corporate Citizenship, more powerful? When we ask these sorts of questions, we can begin to better study how CSR, as an idea deployed by societal actors, has a tangible effect on management outcomes. A full accounting of CSR's discursive impact on the corporate environment remains to be done, and indeed far exceeds the scope of this article. That said, increased research here could prove to be of particular benefit to future practitioners, as it would better attend to the key questions of how to understand, and potentially predict, CSR's effects on their operations. Furthermore, this emphasis on CSR's being a lived discourse would help both managers and activists identify the material circumstances necessary for successful CSR claims, which would crucially aid in efforts to bring such conditions about.

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