

# The Gods of Business: Five Global Views

**Atheistic, Buddhist, Confucian,  
Hindu, and Semitic  
(Jewish/ Christian/ Islamic)**

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# NB: A PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC VIEW (NOT UBS!)

- academic work (still supervise PhDs, research, lecture MBA classes...).
- Wolfsberg (8+ years)
  - NEW BUSINESS IDEAS through Think Tanks
  - Distinguished Speaker series
  - design/ Chair/ speak at INTERNAL and EXTERNAL executive events
  - internal and external projects, challenges and mandates (e.g. from the IFC)

# 3 American Prejudices:

- Religion/belief is irrelevant to business  
*(almost all Americans)*
- Religion/belief is evil - or at least intolerant  
*(the most-educated Americans)*
- Religion/belief is good, but best kept "private"  
*(the rest)*

# THESE PREJUDICES ALL RESULTED

- FROM THE WESTERN ELITE'S IMPOSITION OF BELIEF IN "EVOLUTION-BY-CHANCE" THROUGH EDUCATION AND THE MASS MEDIA

*AS MASS-MEDIA CHARACTERISE  
AMERICA MORE THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY  
IN THE WORLD....*

# ...AMERICANS ARE SINGULARLY BADLY- EQUIPPED TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD TODAY

- we live in an increasingly "religious" world
- Atheism/ materialism/ naturalism began to dominate in the 1950s, and is itself a religion or belief - that is, a commitment made in the absence of proof....
- That atheism/materialism/scientism has been replaced by today's innumerable mysticisms/ fundamentalisms/IRrationalisms...

# ■ **Do world-views matter in business?!**

- **It could be argued that they matter more and more!**
  - **Shell/Brent Spar**
  - **Nike and “slave labour”**
  - **Nestle and “infected milk”**
  - **Corning and breast implants**
  - **Tobacco companies & smoking...**
  - **Enron, Arthur Andersen, Worldcom, Xerox, Reliant Resources, Global Crossing, Tyco....**

# World-views also affect other key matters

- GM foods (personal lifestyle)
- Anti-globalisation demonstrators  
(environment/social justice/global rules)
- America as "the great Satan"  
(the thinking/belief behind the 9/11 and  
other attacks)



# Today, we look at only the five dominant global views:

- Atheistic/materialistic/scientistic/naturalistic
- Buddhist
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Semitic (Jewish, Christian & Muslim)

# Atheistic/Materialistic

- Is relatively new to the world - the vast majority of people through history have always had a commitment to some sort of absolute (God, or the gods, or an impersonal principle such as Marxism (Scientific Materialism) or Yin-Yang or Brahman or Tao or whatever)

# Atheistic/Materialistic - 1

- (a) Optimistic - we can make up our own meaning and purpose, and the meanings that people make up will and should be positive and humane (committed to social justice and environmental concern, for example) - but these optimists are then stunned by things like 9/11 or Hitler or Pol Pot or Watergate....

# Atheistic/Materialistic - 2

- (b) Pessimistic
  - no meaning/purpose, so: commit suicide....

# Atheistic/Materialistic - 2 (contd.)

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  - no meaning/purpose, so: commit suicide....
  - no meaning, so: eat, drink and be merry

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  - no meaning, so: commit suicide....
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  - All "meaning" is determined by our genes or our unconscious or...

# Atheistic/Materialistic - 2 (contd.)

- (b) Pessimistic

- no meaning, so: eat, drink and be merry
- no meaning, so: commit suicide....
- All meanings are determined by our genes or...
- all the meanings that are offered, whether historically or currently, are simply the result of a struggle by some group or the other to impose their will on the rest (so "we" may as well impose "our" will - e.g. the U.S. Supreme Court today)

# Atheistic/Materialistic APPROACH TO BUSINESS

- Some atheists/materialists are therefore highly "moral" (that is, committed to certain principles, even if those principles are immoral from your point of view)
- Others are "moral as long as it is convenient"
- Yet others are only concerned about not getting caught....

THE KEY POINT is that, on an atheistic basis, you cannot fault any of them: each of them has in fact constructed their own "meaning", "purpose or "philosophy"



# Buddhism

- Preoccupied with the question of suffering (we could say that different religions start with different questions, and are preoccupied with answering these different basic questions - e.g. Semitic and early Hindu (how can humans relate to God), post-Buddhist Hindu and Buddhist (suffering), Jain (is there a basic principle underlying the universe?), Confucian (how to organise society in as stable a way as possible?)....

# Buddhism: The 3 Illusions that Lie at the Root of Suffering

- The world is real (that is why we grasp and aspire)
- "You" and "I" are separate from each other and from the world (that is, our individuality is equally illusory)
- Morality, meaning, and religion - which are all red herrings or diversions from the real solution, which is mystical "illumination" through meditation

# The incantation recited for becoming a Buddhist is

- Buddham sharanam gachhchhami,  
dhammam sharanam gachhchhami,  
sangham sharanam gachhchhami
- "I seek the refuge of the Buddha,  
I seek the refuge of the Teachings,  
I seek the refuge of the Community  
(Monastery)"

# The 3 paths (Sadhana Marg) for people who want to devote themselves to "religious" goals

- 1. Shravak Yan: learning meditation from an experienced teacher (Guru) and aiming to attain the state of 'Arhat' (having learned all the techniques).
- 2. Pratyekbuddha Yan: Gaining independence from the guru, meditating alone to achieve Bodhi or 'Parmarth Jnana' (knowledge of eternal truth) and free himself from all miseries and sorrows. Does not involve reaching out to the multitudes to impart knowledge or to encourage them on the path of Boddhimarga. Indifferent to preaching or to Bahariya (external) Karma.

## The 3 paths (Sadhana Marg) for people who want to devote themselves to "religious" goals

- 3. Bodhisattva Yan: aiming both to attain Bodhi and to encourage others to follow the similar path for their emancipation:

"I shall enlighten myself and also help others to emancipate and enlighten themselves. I shall attain salvation and help others in their liberation. I shall cross this ocean of miseries (mundane or ordinary life) and help others to do so."

If EVERYONE wants to become  
a monk, society will collapse -  
there will be no one to give alms  
to the monks!

So what about "ordinary" people  
who do not want to become  
monks???

# A lay follower should

- acquire wealth only by legal means, without violence, honestly, in ways which do not harm others.
- spend it to provide for one's own household, one's relatives and children; to make gifts to friends, to entertain them, to give them presents; to protect and repair one's property and dwelling; to pay taxes and make obeisance to the deities; to offer alms and requisites to the monks and priests.

## The Buddha's advice to a group of lay people

- be energetic and diligent in performing your job
- take care of your wealth
- associate with true friends, wise and virtuous people who will help you and protect you, and guide you in the path of morality and religion
- don't be too bountiful, spending more than your means allow, but don't be niggardly either, clinging to your wealth. Avoid these extremes and spend in proportion to your income.

# The Buddha's Economic Advice to Governments (as enunciated by Bhikkhu Bodhi)

- For a people to be capable of personal and spiritual progress, the economic foundation has to be secure: poverty can lead to the decline of moral values - to stealing, lying, murder, etc., and eventually to complete social chaos.
- Therefore, government has a responsibility to correct any extreme economic injustice. Kings should give seed to the farmers for their crops and feed for their cattle, capital to the merchants and businessman to conduct their business, jobs to the civil servants, and so on.

# In general:

- Everyone should practice giving, and be generous. The wealthy in particular have an obligation to give to the poor, to help and assist the poor.
- The things that can be given have been minutely classified as follows: Food, Clothing, Dwelling places, Medicine; Vehicles, Books, Utensils, lights, seats etc.

# Modern Western dilutions of Buddhism: Geshe Michael Roach

- the first American to complete the 20 years of study and examinations required to become a geshe, or master of Buddhist learning.
- the business principles outlined in the book can be briefly summarized as: "developing compassion with and for all people"
- "if you feel connected with everyone, you will never be alone" (!!!)

# Modern Western dilutions of Buddhism:

## Jim Schaffer

- Slow Down (versus Speeding Up).
- Surrender (versus Taking Control).
- Your Natural Rhythm (versus Time Management).
- Present Moment Focus (versus Extensive Planning).
- Plateau and Rise (versus Constant Rise). Stop striving.
- Hi-touch (versus Hi-Tech) relationships still drive the world.
- Non-judgment (versus Constant Judgment).
- Beginner's Mind (versus Being an Expert).
- Focus on "Being" (versus Focus on "Having").
- Intuition & Trust in People (versus Strategy, Tactics, Technique).



# Confucian - SOCIAL

- *Li*: respect (including religious ritual)
- *Hsiao*: family love (the centre of life)
- *Yi*: mutual commitment & reciprocity among friends
- *Jen*: “all the good things that happen when people meet”; wishing others well - welcoming the stranger - hospitality
- *Chung*: loyalty to the state
- *Chun-tzu*: outgoing, generous, liberal (“the great ocean conquers by bowing low, letting all things flow into its embrace”)



# Hindu Ethics - RELATIVE

- *Dharma* is dependent :
  - on which of the four castes you are born into, and
  - in which of the four stages of life you are (student, householder, retirement, renunciation)

# Indian Caste System

- *Brahmin* - priests
- *Kshatriya* - warriors/administrators
- *Vaishya* - artisans **AND BUSINESSPEOPLE**
- *Shudra* - menial workers
- (outcaste)

# Comparing Buddhist, Confucian and Hindu

- Buddhist and Confucian: universal Hindu: caste-based.
- All are concerned primarily to maintain the social order
- Buddhist and Hindu make meditation and withdrawal from the world a "superior" virtue
- None has anything "more than commonsense" to say about business (the Hindu sanctions a "total free market" to the business caste!!!)



# Judaism - Moses...

- the minimum distinctive
- describing each worldview (not criticising it!)
- so that we are comparing the best of each with the best of the other, and not the worst of one with the best of another!

# Judaism

- **The Ten Commandments  
(PLUS...)**

# Judaism

- **The Ten Commandments  
(PLUS...)**
- **"Have a character like Mine",  
says God; "be like me - like I  
am revealing myself to you -  
justice, mercy ...."**



# Islam: The First Pillar

- Shahada, the Muslim profession of faith, to be said on waking and sleeping: : "I witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah"

# Islam: The Second Pillar

- Salat: the rather precise prayer ritual to be performed 5 times a day by all Muslims over the age of 10, possibly individually but preferably communally:
  - Between first light and sunrise
  - After the sun has passed the middle of the sky
  - Between mid-afternoon and sunset
  - Between sunset and the last light of the day
  - Between darkness and dawn

# Islam: The Third Pillar

- **Sawm:** Abstaining each day during Ramadan, the 9th Muslim month, not only from food but from all bodily pleasures between dawn and sunset.

# Islam: The Fourth Pillar

- Zakat: Giving alms to the poor. Minimum of 2.5 % of one's savings each year, plus anything else voluntarily (Judaism has 10% of income as the minimum - carried over into Christianity of course)

# Islam: The Fifth Pillar

- Hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca that all physically able Muslims should make at least once in their life. Mecca is the most holy place for Muslims

# Comparing Judaism & Islam

- Very similar! - belief in God, prayer, philanthropy...
- One key difference: the principles of life/business for Hebrews/Jews arise from the character of their God (are necessarily consonant or in line with God and with reality), the five pillars arise from the will of the Muslim God (are arbitrary).



# Christ the Lord

- **REVOLUTIONARY LOVE**
- **He modelled it...we can do it only if He comes to live within us (He wants to and is waiting to...)**
- **there is a body of believers with whom followers are to work to transform the world - & business**



# Usury (Earning money by charging a "rent" on money)

- Forbidden in Islam and Judaism as well as in Christianity
- though the Roman Catholic Church rescinded the ban in the 12th century, and Lutherans and Calvinists followed
- However, some of force of the ban on usury continued (interest rates on private borrowing were kept low) till the 1950s, when Evolution-by-Chance was preferred by the Western elites...

# Semitic

## (Moses/Mohammad/Christ)

- Universal (applies to all)
- Absolute (in theory, no concessions are possible; in fact, one recognises the impossibility of doing/being some of these things, but that is always regarded as "sinful" or "wrong")

- **From an ethical point of view the world now exists in a multiple tension between:**
  - **traditional Judeo-Christian values**
  - **thorough pragmatism/  
unethical materialism**
  - **reviving fundamentalist values among Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and other communities belonging to New and Fringe Religions**

- **From the viewpoint of international business, the world exhibits a tension between:**
  - a **Shareholder** view of the purpose of companies and those who have the **Stakeholder** view of the purpose of companies, or...
  - between those who take the broadly **christian-moral-humanist** position and those who take the **bottom-line materialist** position.

# A cross-cultural view - 1

- Task Cultures vs Relationship Cultures

# A cross-cultural view - 2

- Task Cultures vs Relationship Cultures
- Cultures built on Absolutes versus  
Cultures built on Relativism

# A cross-cultural view - 3

- Task Cultures vs Relationship Cultures
- Cultures built on Absolutes versus Cultures built on Relativism

(as cultures lose belief in their Absolute, they also lose cultural cohesion, producing sub-cultures that are mutually uncomprehending and opposed to each other - as is happening in the USA today)

# A cross-cultural view - 4

- Guilt Cultures vs. Shame Cultures:
  - proportionate penalties vs. token/disappropriate
  - “pay and go free” vs. “a black face”

There is an emerging international acceptance of Biblical ethics

- *something in the human heart recognises what is right, regardless of the system of belief in which one is brought up*

# Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India

- "I am a Hindu by birth..."

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- "I am a Hindu by birth, a Buddhist by philosophy..."

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- "I am a Hindu by birth, a Buddhist by philosophy, a Muslim by culture..."

# Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India

- "I am a Hindu by birth, a Buddhist by philosophy, a Muslim by culture, and a Christian in ethics"

# Emerging areas of concern

- Business and the increasing gap between rich and poor
- Business and environmental sustainability
- Business and human rights
- Business and international peace

# Areas for action

- articulating standards & consequences
- external (at least internal) monitoring and reporting of customers & suppliers
- hot lines / whistle-blowing
- co-ordinating policies for promotions/bonuses/penalties
- ethics testing for candidates?
- training and benchmarking
- communications system (Who are the heroes? What is best practice?)
- implications for corporate structure/ policies...

At any level (individual, group, company, government or globe), one needs to be:

- motivated to struggle against lack of values, or wrong values
- prepared to pay the cost of the struggle
- equipped...
- trained...
- supported...
- have the right strategy



