



# Conclusion

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*Listening to the beautiful truth of the nightingale, we are 'tolled back' to our true selves. We can wind up the golden bird of short-term profit maximisation, or welcome back the nightingale of long-term economic value rooted in the social good. Which will it be?*







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## Conclusion: The Restored Corporation in the New Millennium

*The servants entered the room to look at their dead master. There they stood gaping when the emperor said: 'Good morning!'*<sup>1</sup>

At the end of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Nightingale', the shock is palpable when the emperor's servants see that their dying ruler is alive after all – and well enough to bid them good morning. We readers, however, are not surprised. The emperor has regained his health, we know, because he has reconciled two very important aspects of the human universe – the mechanical and the natural.

We understand that the golden bird that entertained the court with its logical and predictable songs will continue to have a place of honour, but from a high perch far removed from daily life. It is the natural bird, the spontaneous nightingale, who will enjoy a regular audience with the emperor, thus connecting him to his people.

In a similar fashion, this book has painted an optimistic picture of the future of humanity in reconciling two aspects of the corporation: the mechanistic and the dynamic. As previous chapters of this book have asserted, corporate life has two distinct aspects. One aspect is the corporation's basic drive toward limitless life, size, power, and license; this is the corporation's basic programming, its systemic reality. But corporations are not only



'systems', they are complex adaptive systems open to renewal – and this is their saving grace.

The basic program of corporations as self-seeking entities wars against the interests of human beings. Yet the living 'complexity' of corporations – their tendency toward multiplicity, spontaneity, accommodation, adaptability, transformation, and metamorphosis – links corporations to us humans. It makes them capable of serving our purposes, and it makes them more akin to us – for we, too, are alive, complex adaptive systems, and superior ones at that! Through our human ingenuity we can see what is missing in the corporate system today. And that missing element is accountability. By restoring accountability in each and every corporation, one corporation at a time if need be, we can ensure that the corporations in our lives adapt not only to the environment in general, but to us humans as well.

It is a fearsome thing to behold the corporation as a leviathan – a vast system with a lifelike force. But we cannot wish the beast away through panaceas such as philosopher-kings or councils of expert advisors. Our best hope is to recognise the corporation for what it is, both in its mechanistic aspect as a profit machine and in its larger nature as a living entity, and to learn what we must do to live with it – and through it – accordingly.

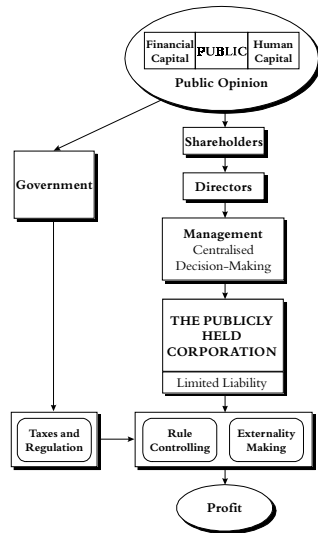
## CHOICE

This book has brought the reader on a long and sometimes winding journey. In Chapter 1 we met Andersen's nightingale and contemplated the paradox of the mechanical versus the natural. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4 we saw how the fundamental drives of the corporate form can threaten human welfare. Then, in Chapter 5, we saw that corporations are not only systems, but complex *adaptive* systems capable of creativity and change.

In Chapter 6 we continued to describe corporations as complex adaptive systems, rejecting common notions of corporate philosophy and offering a new model in their stead. This model, the centrepiece of our work, represents a real advance in corporate theory and potentially practice. In Chapter 7 we ventured into the realm of simile, comparing the corporation to the 'Class IV' of the cellular automata so popular among scientists who study complex systems. In Chapter 8 we used these insights to profile a company in the throes of change. The key to change, we found in Chapters 9 and 10,

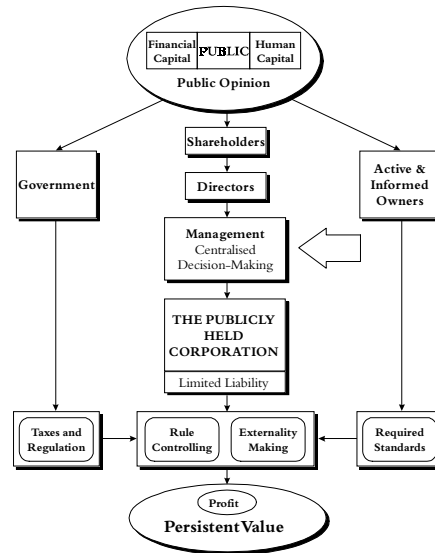
is a New Owner and a New Language. In particular, we saw the importance of compliance, disclosure, and last, but not least, political restraint.

*Compliance, disclosure, and political restraint.* These values bear repeating day in and day out. They should be inscribed on every corridor of corporate power – or better yet, in every conscience. Are these values achievable? It is up to you. As a corporate director, employee, or owner, which path do you see in your future? Will you stand by and let the corporation in your life seek unlimited life, size, power, and license, or will you do what it takes to enable your corporation to fulfil its broader, better nature? To help you visualise the difference, consider these two diagrams: the Existing Corporation (Fig. A) and the Restored Corporation (Fig. B).



Existing corporations wield great power over the public economy by externalising costs and exerting undue influence over government rulemaking to maximise profit.

**Fig. A** The Existing Corporation.



In the restored corporation a new equation is written between persistent value and the interests of the public through the mechanism of active and informed owners.

**Fig. B** The Restored Corporation.

## GRAVEN IMAGES

Throughout this book, we have put forth certain values. Chief among these are legal compliance, disclosure, and restraint in politics. These by definition will foster greater accountability and, eventually, economic wealth for corporations and for society.



Resistance to these values is understandable. They are not neat and pretty. It is not always easy to predict them or make them add up. And as a race, we humans like things to be orderly. We are driven to construct artificial entities in order to minimise our sense of being alone in a world where neither origin, nor purpose, nor end can be known. This need also expresses itself in quantification – our arrangement of reality into category, language, and number. The ‘artificial’ in this sense provides a framework for the human drama; for the expression of beauty and the fulfillment of personal relevance. But it can also protect us from the vagaries of consciousness and intuition – depriving us of precious gifts.

As human beings, we must live with the artificial; it is a part of our life. It takes courage to accept a quality that one does not like about oneself or ones own creations, but as psychologist Maria von Franz has noted (writing about fairy tales), ‘If one does not accept the quality, then it functions behind one’s back.’<sup>2</sup> We cannot ignore the mechanistic nature of corporations. As the same time, we cannot let the mechanical take over our lives. While the motive to reduce anxiety by providing an appearance of beauty is understandable, the reduction of human essence to a mechanical process seems akin to the conduct proscribed in sacred texts banning the worship of ‘graven images’.

## CONCLUSION

Humankind must never allow itself to lose sight of the real conditions under which we live – uncertainty at best. We must never tolerate domination from a system that is based on demonstrably false mechanical premises. We need to insist on human-scale accountability.

The beautiful jewelled bird need not be smashed into a thousand pieces or banished from the empire. After all, it ‘did the best it could’. But its time is up. Never again should its wheels turn; never again should its voice inspire imitation. It is a kind of static in the continuing effort to develop the ability to listen. It does not deserve a central place in the world of people, for it has no respect for the individual human being and the human condition.

Human beings must accustom themselves to the coming and going of the nightingale, the cycle of its life, the genius of its song ... its mystery and its infinitely beautiful insistence on raising the real and eternal questions of human existence.



In the words of John Keats, writing over a century ago,

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown.  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.  
Forlorn! The very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!*

The poem says so much, but above all it urges us to live our human condition. Cleanth Brooks, commenting on 'Ode to a Nightingale', makes this crucial point: 'The nightingale symbolizes the immortality of nature, which, harmonious with itself, remains through all its myriad changes unwearied and beautiful.' Keats does not see 'the particular biological mechanism of flesh and bone and feathers as deathless ... Keats has clearly specified the sense in which the bird is immortal; it is in harmony with its world – not, as man is, in competition with his.'<sup>3</sup>

We may protest that we are not 'in competition' with our world. Yet we continue to work for and invest in corporations that operate according to these dynamics. It is time to change; it is time to listen, to be tolled back to our true selves.

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In this book, we have relied on the language of story and poem to make fundamental statements about our lives with corporations. I hope that our lyrical medium has not obscured our simple message. If I had to summarise this book in once sentence, it would be this: *Corporations are living systems that can either oppress or foster human life – the choice is ours.* We can wind up the 'golden bird' of short-term profit maximisation, or welcome back the 'nightingale' of long-term economic value rooted in the social good. Which will it be?



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In my view as both observer and participant, there is no contest. We can and must always choose the future. Only that far horizon can guide us as we collectively strive to understand and improve our tenure on this planet.

