Can there be a universal ethical basis for management?
Some implications of Levinas

David Weir
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Address for correspondence
David Weir
Professor of Intercultural Management
Ceram Sophia Antipolis
Rue Dostoievski BP085
06902 Sophia Antipolis
France Telephone 33 4 9395 4576
Fax 33 4 9395 4429
Email David.Weir@Ceram.fr
dweir@runbox.com
33 4 9295 1331
Fax 33 4 9364 683
The brief for the Leicester Conference

Call for Papers

LEVINAS, BUSINESS, ETHICS

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In a set of important works Emmanuel Levinas interrogated the limits of Western metaphysics, arguing that it was captured by ontology and with an image of thought as equivalence, of reduction of existence to the Same. Levinas showed not only the limits of such an image of thought, but sketched an alternative project that claimed a return to ethics as first philosophy. Not just any ethics, but an ethics of the encounter with the Other. An ethics arising not from reduction to the Same but from openness to the Other.

In business and management studies and in business ethics, ideas from Levinas have often appeared via Zygmunt Bauman’s argument that bureaucracy constructs moral distance and indifference, and that this results in the effacement of the Other and hence destroys ethics. In this symposium we propose to explore and extend this image, and to see what else might be learnt about business and business ethics after Levinas.

Taking the work of Levinas as a starting point for the analysis of business ethics, we might investigate business ethics generally, or engage with specific practices such as with accounting and accountability, corporate governance, ethics education, information technology and surveillance, marketing and supply chains, corporate social responsibility and corporate legal responsibility. In each of these areas, and in others, we might investigate the implications of Levinasian ethics, an ethics of openness, an ethics of infinite responsibility for the Other, an ethics provoked by the strangeness of the face of the Other, an ethics without code or law, an ethics despite the consequences, an ethics without foundation, an ethics of the future.

The aim of this symposium is not simply to introduce Levinas. The task will be to work with but also beyond Levinas, drawing on what is productive in his work while also being alert to the specific problems that it produces, both in general and also for the analysis of business. In addition to considering business ethics in the light of Levinas, we might also look the other way, and ask if it is not the case that the lack of an analysis of business is one – if not the crucial flaw in Levinas. We therefore propose ways of thinking beyond this omission in Levinas, and to take his work with us in thinking a business ethics of the Other. Which may well mean a quite different business ethics.

Can there be a universal ethical basis for management?

Some implications of Levinas

Abstract

The values of “management” are taken in most of our professional discourse in business schools to be universal. Whether the research preferences of writers on management topics are positivist or critical, phenomenological or statistical, it is an unexamined major assumption that the “management” that is under discussion is inevitably based on those values that underpin the practices of Western capitalism. Globalisation is therefore usually presumed to imply the inevitable spread of Western capitalism, and in some sense to justify these values.

Little attention has been paid to the ethical and philosophical bases of other paradigms than those with which we in Western business schools are familiar. We are thus implicated in a discourse of universality. Levinas sought to redirect European philosophy away from its self-referencing preoccupation with ontological and epistemological issues.
and laid the foundations for a consideration of the ethical as “first philosophy” which also implies a claim for universal reference.

Other philosophical and ethical systems are dismissed in Western managerial discourse with the discourse of “traditionalism” or “underdevelopment”. Nonetheless many of these systems of ethics are embodied in cultural traditions that are older than those of Western capitalism, yet in contemporary societies are transmuting radically. It is unhelpful to see these cultural practices and the patterns of belief embodied in them as merely deviant cases of a fundamentally universal Western paradigm or as unsuccessful attempts to reproduce Western modalities.

This paper first argues that interpreting LeVainas explicitly within the Judaeo-Christian as commentators like Derrida have done omits a major aspect of the relevant philosophical tradition. The paper next reviews the background to management in the Middle East focussing on the defining elements of Islam. We then consider the ideas of LeVainas as a possible basis for re-positioning the discourse of ethical universalism, not in a presumed historically-specific trend towards a global economy but in reclaiming the discourse of management as relating to a structure of roles in which managers in many types of cultural settings occupy a specific position as guardians of typical responsibilities for the Other.

Can there be a universal ethical basis for management?

Some implications of LeVainas

1 Overview

The values of “management” are presumed in most of our professional discourse in schools of business and management to be universal and to be based on those values that underpin the practices of Western capitalism. The discourse of Globalisation is presumed to implicate the spread of Western capitalism, and in some sense to justify the values underpinning these economic and political developments. This assumption seems to be held by mainstream researchers and exponents of the new vogue for Critical Management for the mainstream against which the theorists and practitioners of the Critical movement are reacting is that represented by the theories and practices taught in the MBA curriculum of the “leading Schools”. Equally the internal revolution proposed by Mintzberg and others is all still couched within the frameworks of that classical tradition.

But as there is in the global world of management a diversity of cultures and differing norms of behaviour so there is likely to be more than one “culture of management”. Yet little attention has been paid to the ethical and philosophical bases of other paradigms than those with which we in Western business schools are familiar. Where other
philosophical and ethical systems are encountered by management researchers, they are apt to be dismissed with the discourse of “traditionalism” or “underdevelopment” or stigmatised as inconsistent with the requirements of business efficiency. Nonetheless many of these systems of ethics are embodied in cultural traditions which are older than those of Western capitalism, yet in contemporary societies are evolving and transmuting even more radically. It is incorrect and unhelpful to see these cultural practices and the patterns of belief embodied in them as merely deviant cases or as primitive, part-formed or unsuccessful attempts to reproduce Western modalities.

Levinas has sought to redirect European philosophy away from its self-referencing preoccupation with ontological and epistemological issues. His work has laid the foundations for a consideration of the ethical as “first philosophy” which implies a claim for universal reference. Nonetheless his own work sits quite explicitly in the Judaeo-Christian traditions. Even sympathetic commentators on Levinas have operated within the framework of these assumptions.

This paper draws on extensive research by the author and colleagues in the contemporary Arab world and develops the argument of the paper Some sociological, philosophical and ethical underpinnings of an Islamic Management model in the Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion Vol 1 no 2 (Weir 2005) and also builds on ideas first presented in the author’s inaugural lecture on The Heroism of Mediocrity (1991) and chapter on The Ethical Basis of Management in the collection on The Religious Ethic of Management (Marshall et al1997).

In the first section we discuss some aspects of the background to management in the western European tradition and consider what is missing in our received accounts; in the second we review the defining elements of Islam in the practice of management in the Middle East, examining the impact of a modernity that has not brought a convergence with Western practice that had seemed inevitable. We finally consider the ideas of Levinas as a possible basis for re-positioning the discourse of Universalism, not in a presumed trend towards a global economy in which one version of “management” will operate unchallenged hegemony but in a characterisation of management as a structure of roles in which managers in many types of cultural settings typically occupy a specific position as guardians of responsibilities for a generalised Other.

Management and organisational practices in the Arab Middle East is not much referred to in the Western discourses of business schools and management academies. This is surprising given the immense economic and geo-political significance of this region and the intrinsic compatibility of some Arab management practices with emerging models of networked organisations.

In another paper I have recently reviewed how in much Western discourse the Arab is represented as a “dangerous other”, considering briefly Said’s account of Orientalism, Maalouf’s analysis of Identity and Douglas’s typification of Purity and Danger, before returning briefly to Sharabi’s account of Neo-Patriarchalism and Levinas’ accounts of alterity and the other. (Weir 2005a) I suggested that the typifications of the Arab in Western discourse constitute an identification of the Arab as a “dangerous other”, and that this characterisation enables Western scholars and business-people to evade engagement with the Arab in terms of the criteria of rationality we understand as
appropriate in business and management discourses. In ignoring the opportunities to engage with the “same-ness” inherent in these milieux we have wilfully encouraged the “differences” with which we now have to engage. I therefore argued that in rejecting the Arab we reject an essential aspect of what has made us ourselves.

This typification of the Arab as dangerous and still more the determination not to learn about the Arab world has inhibited the self-conscious description, research and analysis of this region, its business and management practices and its modes of belief and explanation. Instead we have applied irrelevant and misleading typifications derived from a discredited evolutionism, an unproven dichotomisation of “simplicity” and “complexity” and an unexamined preference for ignoring the global and universalising aspects of the Arab world in favour of its local and regional dimensions. Where empirical research has been undertaken it has too often been within the Western paradigms, testing irrelevant theories on unrepresentative empirical situations. So many of the characteristic processes and situations in these milieux have hardly been studied at all. Per contra, a major problem for Arab and Moslem theorists and researchers in fields like business and management is that in engaging with these topics they have risked adopting the very characterisations of “traditionalism” and “pre-modernism” that epitomise the west’s perception of them. Thus in the absence of a coherent theoretical basis for, in some cases a secular, in others a relevant Islamism, they have risked being doubly alienated from their own cultural roots as well as those of professional managerialism.
The Missing link in Derrida: A dog that did not bark in the night

A widely-cited introduction and critique to the writings of Levinas is the essay by Derrida on “Violence and Metaphysics”. (Derrida: 1964&1978). This provides an important positioning for our argument, not merely by what it says, but (like the dog in the Sherlock Holmes story that did not bark in the night) by what it omits to say. The clue is in the quotation from Matthew Arnold with which Derrida prefaces his article. It is this:

“Hebraism and Hellenism,-between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.”(Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy).

Arnold’s take on the inherent virtues of the classical tradition and its educational virtues in justifying the public school pattern of formation that produced the Masters of Empire is an important topic in its own right of course but here we are concerned with the implicit reasoning behind Derrida’s decision to frame his discussion of Levinas in precisely this way. It is neither necessary or possible given the obvious constraints of time and length to do justice in a short paper to the intricacy and sophistication either of Levinas’ own thought or to the re-construction of it by Derrida, and we can only note in passing the debates with Husserl and Heidegger. But some points are central to our argument. In considering how Levinas has framed his argument Derrida asserts that “The entirety of philosophy is conceived on the basis of its Greek source…simply that the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek.”(Derrida op cit p100).

For the minute (and because I accept fundamentally this emphasis) it is possible to escape the domination of ontology and even agree with Derrida’s over-strident claim that “it is a laughably self-evident but criminal truism, which places ethics under the heel of ontology”.(Derrida op cit p 169). So let us accept the notion of ethics as first philosophy for the present and let us also (because it is obviously correct) accept that among the prime influences on Levinas’ own framing of the agenda are his own Jewish identity, war-time experiences and felt need to reconcile in a non-theological way the traditions of Judaism and of Christianity without necessarily embracing either. The interest for us here lies in what Derrida makes of it all and from where he proposes that philosophy will go to find the materials for a fresh resolution and on what this may indicate for the study and possibly the formation of managers.

At the conclusion of his review Derrida muses on the call in Levinas for “an empiricism which is in no sense a positivism” and on the alternatives to this resolution only occurring in death or in “this experience of the infinitely other Judaism” that can “reawaken the Greek in the autistic syntax of his own dream.”(op cit p190-191). He states “such a site of encounter cannot only offer occasional hospitality to a thought which would remain foreign to it. And still less may the Greek absent himself, having loaned his house and his language, while the Jew and the Christian meet in his home.”

But whose home is this house of theory actually? And where -geographically as well as metaphysically -may such an encounter take place? Which lands are being over-flown by
this creative Icarus? And whose wings may get singed? Which Odyssey should we undertake? That of Odysseus, Ulysses, or Balthasar the seeker after lost knowledge (Maalouf, 2002)

Derrida asks “Are we Jews? Are we Greeks?” and proceeds immediately to the claim that “We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history….Are we first Jews or first Greeks?” (Derrida op cit p192)

I take it that this is much more than a grandiose rhetorical question and that something very precise is implied both for the understanding of Levinas’ position and the implications of his work for the study of management and for a positioning of the arguments for considering a general ethical basis for management.

“True histories” that come to be accepted by the faithful regardless of their credibility are relied on by all branches of science in justifying their existence and management is no exception. Textbook referencing nowadays contents itself with an accepted great tradition in management theory that includes the Wharton Business School, Frederick Taylor and Scientific Management Elton Mayo and the Hawthorne experiments, with side-references for the technically-minded to Gilbreth, Gantt, and the Engineers. HR people implore us not to forget Follett from this canon of the great and the good in our own professional lineage.

In France we privilege Fayol, in the sociological tradition we trace our organisational theories to the bureaucratic type identified by Max Weber as a phase in the cycle of leadership from traditionalism and charisma and if really pressed we nod back to the Industrial revolution, the Factory System, even, God help us (for our Protestant God assuredly did) to the Reformation, the Protestant Ethic and to that marvellously undisputed burgeoning of Modernism in the Renaissance. Weber and Tawney together re-inforce the implicit sense of historical inevitability that shrouds the weaknesses in the chronology. Capitalism was meant to happen -we feel in our bones- even if we are not quite as likely now as we seemed to be a few years ago to embrace with Fukuyama the end of history (which means of course the end of other histories). (Fukuyama1992)

By “business and management” therefore we imply “Western business and management”. We privilege ourselves because that is what we know about.

Well, it’s a good story and it does much to make us feel good about ourselves. But what really happened? And where do our ideas and our philosophy really descend from and through? As Bob Marley reminds us

"If you know your history,
Then you would know where you coming from,
Then you wouldn’t have to ask me,
Who the 'eck do I think I am" (Marley1983)

We do not know or have forgotten our own history and we think we are something special, historically unique and irreplaceably incomparable-which we may not be. But we are becoming increasingly anxious and self-conscious about the clear evidence that the rest of the world does not share our framing of these histories and does not seem to be converging towards our patterns of behaviour. We see the problem as theirs, not as ours.
“Why do they hate us?” we wail when their planes strike our buildings. The standard take
on this is that as they become more like us economically, they inevitably come to
resemble us more ideologically. But this is clearly not so. Osama bin Laden is the highly
educated son of one of the world’s richest business dynasties. He is a joint product of his
cultures and ours. Our history, even our history of management, has gone wrong
somewhere. We need to re-examine where our history has come from. Then, perhaps, we
wouldn’t have to ask “who the ’eck do I think I am?”

Etymology provides some clues indicating an alternative history of management. The
word "management" defines our trade and it is so widely-understood it is tempting to
think that it has been around for ever. The first recorded use of it in its modern sense
seems to come from the Renaissance Italian notion of managgiere. Websters gives these
definitions of managgiere:

"1 a school for teaching horsemanship and for training horses
2 : the art of horsemanship or of training horses
3 : the movements or paces of a trained horse ."

This usage is still alive in the words "manege" or "menage" as in "menage a trois" but its
primary denotation relates to horse-training and running riding stables. Websters'
definitions of management are "to handle or direct with a degree of skill: as a : to make
and keep compliant <can't manage her child> b : to treat with care : husband <managed
his resources carefully> c : to exercise executive, administrative, and supervisory
direction of <manage a business. Lancashire’s lexicographical study shows that the first
English usages of management in this sense occur a generation after the appearance of
the Italian managgiere.

The "managgiere" were members of the servant class, well-paid professionals who
looked after the horses of the Italian nobility. Then as now the most prized bloodstock
came from Arabia. The first "managers" were Arabs teaching Arab disciplines in which
they were the experts.

If we consider that the origins of our disciplines of management lie in factory
organisation, again there are comforting "true histories" to rely on. The "factories" of
Robert Owen, Samuel Arkwright and the Manchester heroes immortalised by Engels can
be traced plausibly back to the Pepys-built naval shipyards of Greenwich, the model for
Peter the Great's St Petersburg and before all that to the dockyards of Genoa and Venice.
Ah Venice, the epitome of the European tradition, refinement, Vivaldi, Casanova and the
rest… ……But a moment's consultation with the estimable Braudel reveals the evident truth
that the basis of Venetian prosperity was the Eastern Mediterranean trade and the ship-
types preferred were those that had proved their worth over centuries of coastal
commerce between Antakia and Constantinople, Alexandria and Tripoli, Byblos and
Tyre. Arab traders and their mercantile needs created the demand for the mass-production
of Mediterranean ships.(Braudel, 1949)

Well, too bad for history if it doesn't tell us what we want to hear; but one thing is certain
sure in the Western modernist true history. If we did not invent knowledge at least we
invented the teaching of it, the organisation into faculties, the honourable trade of
"Professing" that keeps us and those like us avid clients of the Higher Education Council and customers of the Higher Education Reviews. We can surely trace all that back precisely to Bologna, Salamanca, Paris and Oxford, even to my own former home of Glasgow University, founded in 1451 by Bishop Turnbull after receiving a letter from the Pope enjoining him to found a University "on the pattern of our University of Paris"? But Bologna was following an earlier pattern of students coming to the centres of knowledge to be improved in learning by expert and senior scholars organised in schools like the madrassas around the great mosques of Cordoba, Shiraz and Isfahan.

Of course one "true history" created in this selective way is more or less as good as another and we lay here no claim to absolute historical accuracy or even to privilege one account over another. The point is that the materials for another account do exist and we resolutely choose to ignore them. Certainly the oldest University that I have ever been privileged to visit is in Hanoi and that "Temple of Knowledge" predates even Isfahan by at least a thousand years. And the Chinese according to their own "true histories" invented everything. It is reported that the Arabs' very skill in horse training that was attractive to their Italian and Spanish contacts had derived from Kublai Khan's introduction of Confucian horse-trainers from China. The point is not who was first. It is which links in the story we have selected to discard out of our own "true history" of how and where what we call the knowledge-base of management developed. Western Europe and the civilisation and its representations that we privilege are in part a product of a joint history shared inextricably with the civilisations of the Arab Middle East. However we are typically not aware of this history so that we not merely do not privilege it but in the words of Edward Said we treat it with "patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility."(Said 1997 p Li)

When Derrida polarises our very own Western European philosophical tradition between "the Jew" and "the Greek" he therefore omits the channel through which these ideas were in real chronological effluxion transmuted. Levinas, Russell, Derrida himself have all selectively obliterated that whole middle period that infused knowledge with the attributes that most characteristically denote "modernity" Arguably the most significant conduits for the transmission of knowledge of paper, printing, fire-arms, circulation of the blood and also for theories of organisation has been the Silk Road and the geographically most intellectually-fertile terrains have been the frontiers between East and West inhabited since two thousand years by the Arabs. (Hutchings and Weir, 2006)

Many writers including Hayes and Landau have described the wide range of impacts of the Arabs on European history and their central influence on the most salient aspects of the modern world, the magnetic compass, the numeral zero and the alphabet and algebra are evidence enough of this history and we do not need to rehearse it here (see for example Hayes, 1975 and Landau 2000; see also Arnold 1968 and Hitti 1970). The American Arab anti-discrimination society maintains an active website that links to many relevant materials. (ADC 2005)

This site was originally compiled by Mary Macron, an Arab-American who points out
that the much-vaunted European "discoveries" of Africa and the East in most cases owed their accuracy to their Arab guides. Ibn Battuta a young Moroccan who set off from Fez to undertake the Hajj reached Mecca and kept on going East, visiting China before Marco Polo. Al-Idrisi produced for King Roger of Sicily the first comprehensive modern European world atlas, and as Macron writes "A twenty five year old Arab, captured by Italian pirates in 1520, has received much attention in the West. He was Hassan al-Wazzan, who became a protégé of Pope Leo X. Leo persuaded the young man to become a Christian, gave him his own name, and later convinced him to write an account of his travels on the them almost unknown African continent. Hassan became Leo Africanus and his book was translated into several European languages. For nearly two hundred year, Leo Africanus was read as the most authoritative source on Africa. It should also be remembered that in the fifteenth century Vasco da Gama, exploring the east coast of Africa, was guided by an Arab pilot who used maps never before seen by Europeans. The pilot’s name was Ahmed ibn Majid." (ADC 2005).

Amin Maalouf created one of the great novels of the last quarter of the twentieth-century out of this alternative "true history". (Maalouf 1988). Maalouf has also written an important study of “The Crusades seen through Arab Eyes” that illuminates the ethnocentrism of our Western histories of this period. In Arab sources it is the “Franj” who are characterised as genocidal baby-slaughterers and defilers of the holy places. (Maalouf 1983)

The point is even better taken in the realms of philosophy itself. It is not criminal to be ignorant of the contributions of such Arab philosophers as Al Kindi, Al Farabi, Al Ghazzali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun and the rest. “Nobody's perfect” (Milligan 1953, Wilder 1962). What is almost criminally negligent is to claim post-modern primacy for an orientation to the philosophical project that these scholars had exemplified at a period when Western Europe had been out of the Hellenic loop pretty much altogether. It is through Byzantium and the Arab empires conservation and building on Hellenic knowledge that the Greek tradition came into European thought, not through some self-igniting spontaneous combustion in small towns in Italy.

The Arabic tradition in philosophy is summarised in exemplary fashion by Adamson and Taylor (2005) and one quote from their introduction may stand for many more specific examples "The history of philosophy in Arabic goes back almost as far as Islam itself...Debates and contests on logic, grammar, theology and philosophy by Muslims, Jews and Christians, and Jews took place at the Caliphal court. The structure and foundation of the cosmos, the natures of entities in the physical world, the relation of human beings to the transcendent divine, the principles of metaphysics, the nature of logic and ethics- in sum, the traditional issues of philosophy, old wine albeit in new skins-were debated with intensity, originality and penetrating insight."(Adamson and Taylor, 2005p1)

We argue therefore contra Derrida that in order to more correctly position the arguments of Levinas and indeed of many other contributors to the post-Cartesian philosophical corpus identified characteristically by Russell as “Western philosophy” and in particular to comprehend the immensity of what might be available in undertaking an agenda of “ethics as first philosophy” we need to explore other headwaters of our thinking about management not just in the Judaeo-Christian tradition but as what is characterised in
Islamic management as the third culture of “the book.” (Russell 1945)

This re-consideration is long overdue. In eliminating this linkage in the transmission of ideas and practices we have denied, not merely the Arab’s contribution to history, but an essential part of what has made us ourselves. That is doubtless one of the reasons why we deny the Arabs so bitterly and venomously.

3

The Fourth Paradigm: how managers work in the Arab world

The practices of management are not singular and univocal but comprise historically and culturally-specific patterns, each sui generis and in several publications I have previously discussed the special character of management practice in the Arab world, arguing that it constitutes a “Fourth Paradigm” different in nature to the Anglo-American, European and Asian paradigms that dominate our professional literature. (see for instance Weir, 1998, 2003, 2003, 2004)

Thus the “right” of management to “hire and fire” that is so fundamental in the Anglo-American paradigm hardly exists in the Japanese and is hedged with explicit legal constraints in the European. The very notion of being “hired” is anathema in many Arab practices; the “right” to organise collectively is enshrined in custom and practice in Europe, non-existent in some other paradigms. These differences are not co-incident or random nor do they derive from the different stages of development of these societies and their cultures.

There is no significance in the number four and we now have to distinguish both a Chinese and a South-East Asian paradigm significantly different in important respects from the Japanese. There is current interest in whether a distinctively "Afrocentric" style of management is developing.

The prevailing pattern of belief and the near-universal matrix of explanation within the Middle East region derives from the religion of Islam; itself a diverse phenomenon with as many sub-categories as Christianity, but with distinctive central features. It is important to distinguish within contemporary Islam in particular between ijtihad or individual interpretation and taqlid which is the reliance on the interpretation of authorities. The notion of “fundamentalism” that comes originally from the Christian eschatological tradition does not really define any trend in contemporary Islam especially well. There is a sense in which all Moslems or none are “fundamentalist” in this sense. What is clear is that all Moslems are in terms of the Ummah, “brothers”. But it is possible for non-Moslems also to be counted as members of the Ummah.

The Islamic cultural matrix infuses the management patterns in countries that are Islamic but not Arabic like Indonesia, Malaysia Pakistan and Bangla Desh as well as increasingly in several places in which Moslems are a small minority, for instance in Southern Africa. Not everyone even in the core Middle Eastern region is a Moslem and other cultural traditions have created diversity. Many countries including Lebanon, Palestine, and Iran present multi-stranded histories of religious practice including varieties of Christianity relatively insignificant in the West that have co-existed cheek-by-jowl with Islam. Islam is a religion which claims universal applicability Moslems have no issues about ethical
universalism.

Islam may be characterised simplistically but not inaccurately as a religion of practice and observance rather than of dogma. The basic principles are simple and easily codified consisting of an obligation to pray five times daily, to undertake the pilgrimage to the Holy places, the Hajj once at least in a life-time, to publicly claim that there is one God and that his prophet is Mohammed, to undertake Zakat to share worldly riches with the poor and to follow the way of life understood to be that of Islam. The word “Islam” itself means “submission”.

It is in its universality and simplicity that the behavioural and conceptual power of Islam lies and it infuses the practices of management as all other aspects of culture. This is not necessarily to imply that Islamic principles compel tightly-structured and intractable obligations to manage in a specific way but that the diversity of behaviours and practices which do exist have to be explicable within this framework.

Science, law, inter-personal behaviours and obligations to others are all understood to be aspects of a fundamental reality that has to be understood as far as it is practicable and knowledge and the bearers of knowledge, the scholars, are themselves highly regarded. Knowledge is an obligation. And the realities of social and political obligation are to be respected. Rulers are to be obeyed and duties to be undertaken. Trust is central to all relations including those of business and trade. The prophet Muhammad, who was himself a successful business man was renowned for his integrity. He held the title "al. Amin." the Trustworthy One.

In principle there is in Islam no inevitable conflict between religion and science as exists currently between creationists and Darwinists. Islam positions itself as a final revelation of a continuous tradition that embraces the other religions of “the book” that is the Judaic and Christian revelations. The followers of these faiths are to be respected as “people of the book” and Moses and Jesus are alike respected as prophets in Islam.

This philosophy has emerged historically through the collective experience of surviving hardship and of maintaining social value through periods of threat and challenge in threatening environments rather than privileging the calculus of individual choice under conditions of affluence. But the basic cultural frameworks of Islam derive from the Q’uran and the traditions built up during the periods when Islam was the religion of the Arabs, even though it has been the religion of other hegemonies, the Turks, Persians and Egyptians for example. It is also relatively indifferent to political considerations that are construed as having temporary impact.

The master social structures that support Islam are those of the web of family and kin obligations.. These are networked societies (Hutchings and Weir, 2006) Arabic society is by no means the only one to be structured in this way and many societies bordering the Mediterranean share similar elements (Perisitiany 1966). These structures frame life in city and town alike and are equally powerful elements in family, business and political experience. The great “Cairo Trilogy” of the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz traces the interpenetration of family and kin obligations through periods of radical political change, the end of colonialism and the upheavals of nationalism (Mahfouz,1992

In this region political boundaries and the managerial philosophies of governments are in
some respects surface phenomena compared to the deeper infra-structures of belief, family, kin and obligation.

There is in this system of philosophy no fundamental polarisation of the economic and ethical realms. Tariq Ramadan has elegantly remarked “the particularity of Islamic directives in economic matters is the total, permanent and inclusive link that exists between this sphere and the moral point of reference.”(Ramadan, 2001, p130)

The moral comprises the existential in this philosophy for as Ramadan argues “commercial and financial transactions amongst men are…. encompassed and nourished by the foundation of *tawhid*, the principle of the unicity of God ….It is impossible here to conceive of man as resembling part of a machine and defined, outside of any ethical quality… and whose norm of action is solely quantitative….In fact, the most frequent, simple and natural economic fact is always identifiable by its moral quality…it is from the moral quality that man derives his value and not, in the first place, from his performance in terms of productivity, profitability or profit in the broader sense.”(Ramadan idem)

These practical obligations contain the structural foundations of the ethical basis of all behaviour for a believer including the beliefs and practices of management and business life.

While they may be detailed and specified by subsequent interpretations, behaviours which are incompatible with these foundations cannot be “halal” or acceptable; they are “haram” or unacceptable. Their strength is in their simplicity and incorrigibility; they are universally adhered to by all believers. Thus they condition the content of belief and practice in all areas of life. The distinction met with in Western philosophy between the “secular” and the “sacred” does not obtain in these societies for in principle there is understood to be a common texture to all social life. The realms of science and economics are not exempt from these restraints.

The antecedents of some of the theories and philosophies which affect the practice of management in the Arab middle east therefore are not in practice drawn exclusively, if at all, from the classical Western traditions even when they are practised by modern managers educated and trained in the West. Some concepts which appear to carry the same implications as in western usage derive from different intellectual contexts. Mubarak has shown how even such a familiar concept as ‘motivation’ can be traced to the corpus of Islamic scholarship and located in the writings of Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun as well as Maslow, Herzberg and Taylor (Mubarak 1998). So even where words like “motivation”, “leadership, “incentives, “management” and so on are used in discourse the context and connotation are different from western usage.

A growing corpus of researches reports on the impact of Islamic imperatives, some of them formally embodied in law, on the practice of business and management. A specialized subset of these concerns is represented by the studies of Islamic banking and financial institutions. These are characterized by differing accounting and financial concepts from those that form the basis of Western financial and accounting theory; in particular, the avoidance of interest on financial capital. This is rooted in a basic moral concern to avoid usury.
Another fundamental ethical feature of Islamic finance is that of profit and loss sharing so that the banking and financial systems take responsibility for the conduct of the enterprise, not just for the security of their own investment in it. The rate of interest concept which entitles the original owners of financial capital to earn, regardless of the economic success or otherwise of the enterprise in which they are investing, is regarded as improper in Islam. A general ethical principle enjoins that wealth, which can only be created by God, cannot and must not be diminished by human agency.

The role of management must involve the notion of stewardship, and the role of the financial structures must include maintaining value and minimizing waste of resources. This in turn impacts on financial and managerial concepts of risk, which leads to a greater involvement of financial institutions in the business affairs of their customers and depositors and thus approximates more closely to the German or Japanese model of long-term joint involvement in economic affairs rather than the Anglo-Saxon concept of short-termism and optimization of purely financial returns. It also, when it works efficiently, involves banks and financial institutions in the realities of commercial and industrial enterprise. (see for example Al-Janahi and Weir 2005)

It is impossible to do justice in a short outline to the immense range of Islamic theories of the economy or per contra to the very diverse range of interpretations that are visible in practice and there are many sources of this knowledge. (See for example Ramadan 2001, Haneef (1995), Ghazali, (1989) an-Nabhani 1990)

An important recent book by Abbas Ali, a widely-respected researcher of management in the Arab Middle East based in an American Business School provides a very thorough review of the cultural principles historically underpinning the development of business and management in Islam. (Ali 2005)

The theories we are discussing are not vestiges of some "traditional" or legacy system that is being eroded and bypassed by more orthodox Western theories and practices. Per contra, Islamic finance and economics is a very recent development and practically everything that has been published about it has been written since the late 1940s. Major contributions have been made by scholars from non-Arab countries like Pakistan and Malaysia (see for example Haneef (1995), Ghazali, (1989).

One of the most significant centres of writing on Moslem economic thought is near here at Markenfield associated with Leicester University (See for example Siddiqi 1981)

Secondly these theories are finding an increasingly positive reception in the "real" worlds of global finance and banking. The Islamic Finance Forum, founded in the last five years is a growing forum for bankers and financiers. Islamic finance is a growing element of Western economies and of growing significance in non-Islamic developing economies.

Thirdly the growth of Islamic economics has much to do with an increasing self-consciousness about the Moslem and Arab experience relating to the central significance of being Arab, sharing a common culture and consciousness of cultural difference in their core practice. Arab managers are conscious, sometimes pointedly so, that the generic depictions of the essential lineaments of "management" and the ethical positions embodied in the western ways of doing business do not fit their life-spaces at all points. Sometimes they may struggle, even apologise for the lack of fit but they know, deep
down, that these clothes do not fit them. This is not to be construed as “anti-Americanism” or “anti-business values” or of an atavistic “traditionalism” as it is sometimes crassly characterised.

As we have noted above Islam does not separate religious and state authority in the way that is normal in the West. Above all, Islam is a religion of practice and publicly visible behaviours, rather than merely of private inner belief. The public manifestations of business and management are as much governed by the precepts of this belief-system as any other sphere of behaviour. Islam is a religion that claims extensive and intensive universality. It is comprehensive and coherent.

The unity of Islamic involvement is expressed in the concept of the “Ummah”. This identifies the community of all believers who are joined as they touch the ground during prayer. The Ummah is universal and indivisible, representing in a real sense a “body” in which the individuals who believe inhere. Thus to attack the Ummah at any one point implies damaging all of it. This idea clearly posits a different positioning for individuals in relation to other individuals in a collectivity compared to the western conceptualisation of individuals as ends of moral actions in their own right. Value comes from participation in the Ummah, rather than from individual essence or original rights. This conceptualisation impacts quite directly on the presuppositions which under-pin the differing bases of economic science in the West and in the Islamic worlds.

Economics is treated in the former as a division of positive science in which the units, the economic actors, are individuals; it is they who have tastes, wants, desires and can express demand and offer supply; it is these specific actions which can be particularized and identified as “economic. In the latter, economic actions are governed by the implacable philosophy of Islam which applies to all social behaviour; some actions are permitted and are “halal”, others are not permitted and are stigmatised as “haram”. Economic and ethical are sides of the same coin in this philosophy.

In the conceptualisation of the Ummah we enter again into a curious ontological realm. What, really, is the Ummah? How and where is it revealed in action?

Hooker gives the following description:

"The sacred text of Islam, the Qur'an, uses term, Ummah, to refer to the community of believers. The term is used to describe both individual communities, both great and small, of faithful Muslims and to refer to the world-wide community of believers—in the latter sense of the term it is synonymous with dar al-Islam, or "The House of Islam," which refers to the world Islamic community. In its widest sense, however, the term, both in the Qur'an and in Islamic tradition, sometimes refers to all believers in monotheistic religions (including Christians and Jews) and sometimes to the entire human community. Strictly speaking, however, the Ummah almost always refers to the Islamic community in either concrete reality or in the abstract. Since Islam was inaugurated by Muhammad, it is Muhammad that is the founder of the Ummah. Islam is a societistic religion; both the revelations of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition stress the social life of humanity and the ethics and mechanics of human society. This societistic focus is not secular; by ordering society along the ethical lines prescribed in revelation, human beings enter into a more proper relation with God."
While only believers are necessarily part of the Ummah, admission into this community is available to all human beings. Theoretically, then, all human beings are potential members of the community. Admission into the Islamic community carries with it obligations to follow the Islamic sacred law, or Shari'ah, and also confers certain privileges, such as immunity from the tax imposed on non-believers in Islamic states.

In Islamic social theory, the Ummah is formed from the threefold consensus of its members: consensus of the mind, consensus of the heart, and consensus of arms. The Ummah is formed from the consensus of minds in that all the members of the society share the same view of reality. It is formed from the consensus of hearts in that all members share the same values. It is formed from the consensus of arms in that all members exert themselves to actualize or realize their values. While Islamic social theory holds that all communities are formed in this way, the Qur'an states clearly that the Islamic Ummah is the best of all human communities given to humanity by God.

The antithesis to the Dar al-Islam is the Dar al-Harb, the "House of Warfare," or the non-Islamic world. This is the world of non-believers and must be struggled against by the faithful until either it is islamicized or it allows for the free practice of Islam and the free commerce in ideas and values. "(Hooker 2005)

It seems that the "other" in Islam is in principle quite well defined as the occupants of the Dar Al-Harb or house of warfare; but it is not quite so straightforward. In prayer, when the faithful physically participate in the Ummah, the believers claim that "we believe in God and in the Revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac Jacob and the Tribes. We believe in the Revelation that was sent to Moses, Jesus and all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and to Him we surrender." (3:83; 2:136) Furthermore it is written that "He has revealed to you (O Muhammad) the scripture with truth, confirming that which was revealed before it even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before as a guide to mankind and has revealed the Criterion (for judging between right and wrong). All of them called humanity to the way of the Lord, the way of submission to God. All of them gave the same message, and all of them stood for the same cause: Islam" (3:3-4)

So it is intrinsic to Islamic declarations of faith that the Judaeo-Christian prophets are equally the embodiments of a unilinear tradition of revelation subsumed in Islam.

Other aspects of managerial practice in the Arab tradition especially are worth our attention. A concise overview of the impact of Arab culture on Arab management practice is Al-Faleh’s (1987) article on cultural influences on Arab management development in Jordan. He identifies the importance of status, position and seniority as more important than ability and performance. The central control of organizations corresponds to a low level of delegation. Decision-making is located in the upper reaches of the hierarchy, and authoritarian management styles predominate. Subordinates are deferential and obedient, especially in public in the presence of their hierarchical superiors. The consultation, which is widely practised, is done, however, on a one-to-one, rather than a team or group, basis. Decisions tend to emerge rather than to be located in a formal process of decision-making. Prior affiliation and existing obligation are more influential than explicit performance objectives.

The formalities of social, family and political life are strictly preserved, even in
managerial settings. Thus it is impossible to undertake any kind of meeting in an Arab organization without the ubiquitous coffee or tea rituals. But the most significant cultural practices are those associated with the “Diwan”. This is a room with low seats around the walls; it is found in one guise or other in every Arab home. It is a place of decision as well as of social intercourse. In the Diwan, decisions are the outcome of processes of information exchange, practised listening, questioning and the interpretation and confirmation of informal as well as formal meanings.

Decisions of the Diwan are enacted by the senior people, but they are owned by all. This ensures commitment based on respect for both position and process. Seniority and effectiveness are significant, but to be powerful, the concurrent consent of those involved has to be sought, and symbolized in the process of the Diwan. Decisions that emerge from the Diwan are accepted because they emerge from a process of inclusion, not as in the West from a process of exclusion. The process does not necessarily conform to what we in the West understand by "democratic process" but this is not the defining characteristic quality of the good decision that in the Arab world tends to be outcome-oriented. The concept of the "just ruler" is central in this thinking. The just ruler makes good decisions because people have been listened to, arguments heard and sources of claims respected. If it all goes horribly wrong, the remedy is to change the ruler, sometimes by the method of killing him.

The role of the stranger as guest is especially privileged in Arab society. Guests are accepted as "the angels who come to dwell among you" but in other circumstances may be treated as enemies. This ambivalence about the role of the stranger permeates many aspects of Arabic and Islamic social structures. Simmel points to the necessity of trading societies to have strong rules for dealing with strangers, when he says "Throughout the history of economics the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger. As long as economy is essentially self-sufficient, or products are exchanged within a spatially narrow group, it needs no middleman: a trader is only required for products that originate outside the group. Insofar as members do not leave the circle in order to buy these necessities--in which case they are the "strange" merchants in that outside territory--the trader must be a stranger, since nobody else has a chance to make a living." (Simmel in Wolff 1950)

None of the above implies any privileging of these ways of managing or these cultures of business, or (and it should not need to be said) any statement of preference for one way of managing over another whether justified by criteria of efficiency, productivity or any other measure of business performance, still less in any comparative calculus of moral virtue. But neither should it be taken as licence for the imputation that the Arab world or that of Islam is incapable of self-critique. Dadfar, Ali, Sharabi, Ramadan and Said are among many internal critics whose contributions are vital to understanding the internal vitality and diversity of these traditions.(Sharabi 1988: Dadfar 1993 Ali op cit, Ramadan op cit, Said op cit). But we should know more about them before we indulge in the generalisations about "globalisation" and the like. The apparently iron laws of economics are always mediated by culture.

Levinas and the manager
This paper is not about Levinas in a technical philosophical sense; still less does it attempt any engagement with Levinas' own complex theologising or to deal at all with that version of his conception of alterity that involves transcendence. There is some warrant at least for that in Levinas himself when he speaks of the need to work around a transcendence “that can be stepped over like a fence” (Levinas 1996). That is for better brains. Levinas is hard going.

In principle I accept the sense of the claim for ethics as first philosophy and I argue that this is in practice the basis for philosophy in the Islamic tradition. That is why Islamic philosophy has for about five hundred years appeared a rather strange taste for our increasingly refined Western palates. It is not that Islamic philosophy has better arguments in relation to ontology or epistemology because in many ways it simply ignores the provenance of these issues at all. Thus the answer to Levinas’ question “is divinity possible without relation to a human other?” (Hand, p247) is that divinity may be possible but is not necessarily to be interrogated, nor is it necessary to interrogate in order to reach an acceptable and viable answer to the question “what, then, shall we do?”

But when Levinas writes that “ethical responsibility is …a wakefulness precise because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort that can never slumber” (Cohen,1986p30) he speaks to the condition of the general manager. There is a striking resonance it seems to me between the way Levinas characterises “that which cuts through and perforates the totality of presence and points towards the absolutely other”(Cohen 1986 p21) and the experience of being a manager. But when the manager experiences “the state of “vigilant insomnia” where the other haunts ontological existence and keeps us awake” (Veling 2005) it is not because with St Mark he fears the imminent arrival of the Deity it is because he knows that something in the factory is going horribly wrong and that he will be blamed for it.

I do not see in Levinas, at least the way I interpret him, any great concern to over-define transcendence either or to seek it in exoticisation of conventional experience. I tend to agree with Veling when he writes “what matters is not so much our separation from God and the desire for mystical participation; rather what matters is disregard for each other, and the desire for sociality, for ethical responsibility.” (Veling 2005 p6)

Rather I see the way Levinas identifies ethical experience as lying at the heart of the way we have to account for behaviour in situations where as managers we have responsibility but we are not sure precisely for what and in the experience of knowing that we have power but we are not certain precisely over whom or what. When Levinas writes “it is impossible to evade the appeal of the neighbour, to move away”(Levinas 1991) he speaks for managers who have to face the consequences of other peoples’ lack of sociality or failures of ethical concern.

But the “other” in Levinas it seems to me may be non-human, rather than transcendent. Hence the cri de coeur of Pirsig’s “Zen and the Art of Motor-cycle maintenance when he bewails the lack of a proper concern for machines and the inability of colleagues who are not technically competent to understand, to see, to feel the beauty of a shim improvised from a Coke can. Hence probably the current vogue for actor network theory that offers a framework for the understanding that computers can indeed have it in for you.(Pirsig,
This paper is a response to the request by the organisers of this conference that we should consider “an ethics of infinite responsibility for the other” and possibly “an ethics for the future” and to start to engage with what this might entail for an ethics of management.

I wish to engage therefore with the question posed by Islam in a review of the ethics of travel when he asks “how can one respond to the other without compromising its otherness?” (Islam 1996 p87). In this sense Levinas’ treatment can be very relevant to the study of management because it has implications for what managers do. So my task in this last section is to try to bring these various strands together to ask whether it is worth while at all to try to reposition our accounts of the processes and activities we call "management" in another more accessible tradition. I will approach the matter obliquely starting first with a very brief review of what it is that managers actually do.

How do we characterise the essence of “management”? Who are the “managers” and what is it that they do? I have suggested elsewhere that we should essentially consider management as a moral enterprise, and that we need to stake a claim for a new academic ground, that of the ethics of management as distinct from the area we teach in courses on “business ethics” (Weir 1990)

The basis of this claim lies in our understanding of the nature of managerial work and its responsibilities for the life-chances of others. Good managers are those who make good judgements and these judgements are typically about other people. Managers are people who occupy privileged positions in organisational hierarchies in terms of access to resources but principally in terms of their opportunity to exercise legitimate power over others. Managers therefore occupy a special place in the organisational terrain that is not easily reducible to spaces occupied by “workers”, ”capitalists” or those contemporary heroes of the scene, the ”entrepreneurs”( for whom according to George W Bush, the French “have no word”!).

If someone explains “I am a general manager”, the listener tends to nod vacantly and follow up with "and what is it you do exactly?”. The concept is hard to explain to those who have not experienced it but once you have done it you know what it feels like. It is hard work and when things go wrong it is you who will be blamed.. Usually you feel that the criticism is unfair because you have "done your best". So the imputation of merit and desert is implicated with concepts of justice as well as rewards.

As a matter of fact research seems to show that managers are typically more concerned about the former than the latter. But managers are suspicious in their gut about apparently perfectionist concepts that invoke "total" quality or "best" practice because they know that these concepts belong to realms that they do not inhabit. So Simon’s resolution of the problems of economic behaviour in terms of satisficing rather than the maximising predicated by classical economic theory makes sense to them.

Managers tend to be pragmatic rather than essentialist and not to concern themselves with general theories that might not have reference to their particular case. If managers are driven by philosophers to put themselves in one ontological camp or another and stop being a nuisance, they therefore probably go with Heidegger, sensing that "we cannot have direct access to something called 'Being' per se, but to the 'Being-there,' a
dichotomous union between Sein and Dasein.” (Naranjo 2001). Was it Heidegger or Peter Sellers? Was Peter Sellers actually Heidegger in disguise? Who was there? Who was? Send for a manager! This thing needs sorting out. Someone must take responsibility, and for the general manager it is likely to end with Dostoievski’s cry that “each of us is guilty before everyone and everyone, and I more than the others” (Dostoievski 1992) for the manager cannot gain an easy cop-out of the piss-leg warmth of original sin. The job has to be done. The manager has to get on with it.

A commonly-quoted lay definition of a “manager” heard when I were a lad was that he was “someone who can keep three balls juggling together in the air with one hand, while protecting his own two with the other hand”. Nowadays the implicit insensitivity to gender in that definition may offend but the dictum shows that management at any rate is an “action”, not a “being” word, implying difficulties to be overcome, paths to be made and problems to be solved. This take on management has probabilistic, not deterministic implications.

Mintzberg showed that whatever the variation between one industry and another the work of the general manager is characterised by a number of features. It is episodic. The average length of episode with which a manager has to engage in the course of a day is of the order of nine minutes. A half-hour meeting is a long event. A manager’s day is characterised by constant interruption from people and from the telephone. A general manager has to understand not just the basics and the broad overview of this array of tasks but the precise detail of the practical problems which are brought to him. General management is a people-rich set of experiences. (Mintzberg 1973)

All of this is far removed from the MBA model of the manager as strategic planner, thinker, long-term decision maker. The manager actually spends most of the day solving specific problems. Management as it occurs in real time is bitty, episodic, involves the use of responsibility and is based on considerable knowledge and experience, much of it local to the specific enterprise or industry.

Among other tasks of course we currently need to develop a more grounded theory of management based on what it that managers do, how they perceive it, frame it and explain it and we can gain more insights from studying what happens when management goes wrong. What are the consequences of bad management? What are the symptoms? Can we tell something about managers by studying situations in which systems deteriorate and finally break down due to lack of appropriate management? The manager knows that experience teaches that someone will be blamed and has a very shrewd suspicion of who is vulnerable. The manager is vulnerable.

All managers know that it is the natural state of systems, however well planned, however well programmed, to operate in degraded mode. The degradation may be elegant or awkward but it is the essence of the manager’s task to deal with things that are inevitably going wrong. In the minds of managers the most widely attested law of management is likely to be Murphy’s Law, that if a thing can go wrong it will. (It is only shaded by its corollary, O’Brien’s Law, which states that Murphy was an optimist.)

Some of the best known of management aphorisms deal with this. Don Marquis wrote “An optimist is a guy who has never had much experience.” Lao Tzu noted “He who laughs out loud has not yet heard the dreadful news.” Inevitably there is a Yiddish
proverb … “Don’t worry about tomorrow, who knows what will befall you today?” Managers find that these aphorisms resonate with their experience.

In Islamic thinking it is taken for granted that things will go wrong for that is the inevitability of fate. It is not the acceptance that is problematic; rather it is the unlikely belief in Western management stories that good managers can somehow control the inherently uncontrollable. Only God knows what will happen. Perhaps it is not so important then that in Western management we make claims to knowledge when the only certainty is uncertainty. Managers who come to terms with this insight tend to survive.

This orientation is neither relativist nor absolutist but comes close to that identified by Blackburn as “quasi-realist”. (Blackburn 2005) It does not come quickly and superficially to conclusions about the unknowable but it does not pretend either that these significant concerns are merely adventitious products of discourse.

Managers operate in close organisational proximity to others and the ability to be a team-worker is usually highly-prized, possibly more than the capability to manage teams. One aspect of our research-based understanding about how teams work is that teams of completely like-minded people do not necessarily work more successfully than teams in which there is a balance of diverse capabilities. Janis’ study of Groupthink was derived from his analysis of the decision-making that led to the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. (Janis 1972). But most such studies have been conducted in mono-cultural environments and it is not yet clear whether we know whether the same is likely to be equally as relevant in poly-cultural environments.

Research shows that managers in Arab organisations do much the same as managers in Western ones, but they do it according to our perspectives completely differently also because the cultural frame is different. Thus decision-making is of the essence but the nature of decision-making is different. In our business schools we find these differences hard to cope with and usually conclude that we are right and they, the other, will come to terms with our ways. Egoistically we other them and opportunities for comprehension are passed by.

Traditionally much writing on organisations has implied a bipolar model of affiliation, deriving from a vulgar Marxism in which the main organisational protagonists are the capitalists who own and control the means of production and the proletariat who participate in neither way. The managers are a muddle in the middle according to this theory and have ultimately to be assimilated to one side or the other.

Revisionists of various kinds have tried to fill the gap. We are in such a phase of revisionism at present in management theory at present and large audiences of hopeful scholars are predicted for seminars that offer the warm dampness of Criticality, Post-Modernity, even Art, Poetry... and hard philosophy. But these underlying restraints operate at a deep cultural level in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and the English tradition especially celebrates Craft and Status, Country and Town, Capital and Labour not the processes which vivify, organise and animate them. The English tradition tends to be reactionary, conservative, and comfortable, concerned with a limited range of themes and rooted in conventional bi-polar rhetorics of class, age, religion and rurality. We find it hard in our philosophical traditions to embrace both truth and falsehood, self and other, what is known and what is not within the same frameworks. Bi-polarity is our way of
making sense. But Arabs do not have the same conceptual or behavioural constraints. The Diwan is not a bi-polar setting. It is a horse-shoe space or it may be simply a whirl of consultative activity operating discontinuously through virtual terrain.

We now require to characterize management within its authentic tradition, which reveal more diversity as well as more emotion, morality and passion than are implied in the abstracted positivistic discourses of economics and rational decision-making that have hitherto dominated these topics.

For the essential tasks of management are to do with contextualizing the situations of others, defining their patterns, creating their texts, and framing their life-chances. The manager is a stranger even in his own mirror because each day, each set of decisions exposes the intrinsic ambiguity in the act and the knowledge that all outcomes may be equally flawed, but not equal, because who sets the parameters of quality?. The morality lies in the striving for the perfection of that which is in principle imperfectible. There is thus always room for improvement. But the manager must add to this need for persistence what we may call “The joy of responsibility”. (I owe this beautiful phrase to my son, James, who took charge of my random drivelling on this subject one evening and put it in a four-word nutshell). But the joy of responsibility is all –encompassing and never-ending. Managers cannot in principle say “That is not my job”. The job’s worth mentality does not have much attraction for the good general manager.

While the manager deals in principle and to a greater extent than many other social types with reality, it is not necessarily easy to determine in what precisely that reality inheres. Fleming puts this very neatly in a neglected comic masterpiece describing his involvement in a failed mission to the Amazonian jungle to locate the fate of the explorer Colonel Fawcett in the 1930s, when he says “Reality is a commodity hard to come by; and, when found, not easily recognisable. One gropes for it through a fog of misconceptions, misled by other people’s labels.” (Fleming 1933 p 312).

Schutz characterises the whole process of learning in society in terms of the requirement to resolve the tension between Self and Other. (Schutz 1943, Barber1989, Wagner1983). The manager is in many ways in our epoch a stranger to him/herself, but in the words of poet Derek Walcott he must become “the stranger who loves you.” (Walcott1976)

There is a conscious crisis in the theory of management at present, and an even more visible one in the practice of management. Many certainties have gone by the board and many isms have become wasms under the relentless critique of post-modernity. Yet comprehending the manager remains a serious project and it is revelatory of our failure to challenge it on comparative theoretical grounds in our own culture that the most precisely authentic and widely-owned texts in our canon may be those of cartoonists and comedians. Dilbert appears in the perceptions of many middle managers to be rather closer to their experienced reality than either Peters or Covey. “The Office” is popular with many middle managers precisely because its mélange of broad humour and self-lacerating insight speaks to their experience. Ricky Gervais is it, all right. Think back to the scene in which David Brent “leads” the office in a training session, “facilitated” by a Bradford graduate. Oh Yes.. I know that man: I was that man.(both of them, at different times).

But Ricky Gervais and Dilbert as well as empirical commentators within the business
school trade all speak to the despair at the heart of the condition of the contemporary manager. The essence of the job lies not in its definition but in its lack of it, not in its boundaries but in its boundary-lessness, the condition that as described by (Mizruchi 1964) leads to alienation and its anomic and this is because the essence of management lies in its care for the life-chances of others and as Levinas points out, such commitments are in principle indeterminate. The responsibility for the other is boundless but under conditions of late capitalism these responsibilities cannot be delivered. The other for whom one is responsible cannot be captured by egoistic taxonomy, characterises the whole process of learning in society in terms of the requirement to resolve the tension between Self and Other.(Wagner 1983) The manager is in many ways in our epoch a stranger to him/herself, but to succeed in complex organisation in the words of poet Derek Walcott he must become “the stranger who loves you.”(Walcott1976). David Brent embraces this duality but his love is un-self-conscious and lacks insight so we laugh both at him and ourselves. But he has tried. He is worthy and shameful.

Mitchell Aboulafia in the Cosmopolitan Self writes thus of Levinas' characterisation of the relation of ego to other "If I am to contribute to the creation of a truly plural order, I must meet my obligations to the other, I must allow myself to be exposed to the other, but in a passive manner, even a hyper-passive manner. There must be no mediation here, no intervening activity that allows me to keep my distance from the other while simultaneously gathering the other into some larger whole, a whole in which the present subsumes the past. I must come close to the other, but my proximity to the other should not be seen as a joining in spirit. No, this proximity should be a paradoxical one. The closer I come to the other, the greater should be the alterity of the other. If there is no greater alterity, then the other becomes ripe for inclusion within my narcissistic horizons." (Aboulafia ch 4)

This seems a pretty good specification of what is meant by such maxims as “Management by Walking About” and of how the learning takes place. The manager smokes but usually does not inhale. But he has done so, he knows how and he is prepared to compromise again to get the job done.

Later in the same chapter Aboulafia offers more specification when he argues that "It is out of my responsibility for the other that the me is born, the unique subject that I am. It is not in what I say but in the saying itself that I approach the other. In saying I leave myself vulnerable before the other. My concern is not to be heard but to stand before the other, open to other in my "willingness" before there is a will to substitute myself for him."

The manager must be open and available for learning and the outcome of the learning is that when he returns to the place where he has to operate, to do things, to take responsibility for things he will, with Eliot “know the place for the first time”(Eliot 1943)

Aboulafia distinguishes Levinas' other from that of Kierkegaard thus "The Other who should not (or cannot) be incorporated into my system, my world, is the "catalyst" who allows me to become me, that is, a self, a subject. For Kierkegaard, we cannot forget the Teacher who brings us the condition for the Truth; for Levinas we cannot forget the other who brings to us a veracity more urgent than conceptual truth."
This does not imply that managers self-consciously consider their responsibilities in this light at all turns and twists of the wheel. It is to imply that this wheel is not a wheel of fortune and still less does it require the evocation of transcendence to interpret it. Where Levinas talks in “The Trace of the Other” of saints as exemplary people whose lives are full of insatiable compassion supporting lives of responsibility, service and answerability he comes very close to Fayol’s definition of what general management is all about. Levinas’ “here I am” is not so much a metaphor for the gates of transcendence as a simile of “the buck stops here” that sat on Harry Truman’s desk and one every general manager’s shoulder.

What has this to do with the manager? How can we understand the manager either in the Judaeo-Christian or in the Islamic world or more generally through these notions of alterity? And is it worth our while trying to make the efforts?

My answer to the latter provocation is that the answer is implicit in the question. If we do not make these efforts we run the risk of Armageddon, of the kind prefigured by Robert Oppenheimer for our positivistically-delimited egoistic contemporary management of the Western capitalistic sort is both technically-competent enough and - when infused by the Evangelical embodiments of the Judaeo-Christian Apocalyptic tradition -also motivated to become "Death, the destroyer of worlds".

The generic discourse of much current discussion of "Western values", "Clash of Civilisations", "War against Terror" and the like is infused with a confrontational strand in which violence is endemic. The framing of the “war on terror” implies bi-polarity and neglects the alterity of terror in ourselves. Osama’s rhetoric is fundamentally simpler. He promises “if you destroy our cities, we shall destroy yours.” That is clear enough. God will understand that even if it leads to the destruction of his creation.

So Yes it is worth the effort and in Aboulafia's formulation: "We typically use representations to bring the past into the present, to give ourselves an identity in the present, to give ourselves a gift of the present. Philosophers have time and again promised us that through the active efforts of our intellect….Once the pre-eminence of technological man has put an end to the visionary, we are confronted by a potential absence of any unified vision – either of Being or of the world. By the work of our will we can overcome alterity. Perhaps we can even transform the planet into our own garden. Even thinkers who seek to escape promises of this nature, such as Heidegger, do not realize that they are committed to an ontological mode of thought that fosters the dismissal of alterity. And if alterity is dismissed, then violence will follow, for there will be little or nothing to prevent the ego from privileging its own needs." (Aboulafia ch4)

That there is a crisis of managerial theory is not in doubt, but I wonder if the despair need be as great as that reflected by Naranjo's comment that "Once the pre-eminence of technological man has put an end to the visionary, we are confronted by a potential absence of any unified vision – either of Being or of the world." (Naranjo op cit). This may be so only within the attenuated remains of our Western philosophical tradition that has consigned ambiguity, alterity and acceptance to the conceptual dustbin and less to do with vision than with the practicality of having to get on with finding solutions for situations that are in principle insoluble because people, other people are involved. That is the world inhabited by managers in East and West.
At least three aspects of the Fourth Paradigm cultures of management found in the Arab Middle East seem to offer possibilities for the application of Levinasian thinking.

Firstly, the basis of decision-making and its concern for what we can characterise as “consultative autocracy” appears to strongly exemplify the type of responsibility for the other “that is in principle infinite”. The Diwan offers an organisational form that is co-extensive with the universality of interests in relation to any particular decision: Its criteria are inclusive, not exclusive. What is lost in focus is gained in acceptance. The operation of Wasta and network-based models of exerting managerial power and business influence are not vestiges of legacy systems that are irrelevant to modern management: they accord very well with modern concepts of influence through social networks and what is lost in directionality is gained in extension. Wasta-based obligations are in principle infinite.

Secondly, the ways in which Islamic financial institutions operate to conserve wealth and maintain the reputations of business managers even when they have produced difficulties in their organisations and compromised the bank’s wealth contrasts with the blame- and punishment-based routines of Western ways of handling business failure. The Islamic approach to wealth seen as a collective and community asset within the responsibility of the Ummah chimes well with current notions of ecological and environmental concern and extends them into the economic sphere basing them on a coherent economic philosophy, exemplifying the generality of the infinite other.

Finally the essence of Islamic philosophy is its concern to comprise self and other, ego and alter in one frame from which ontology is explicitly excluded because certain knowledge is not available to humans without the intervention of God, and in principle God does not intervene. Therefore the ontological and epistemological issues are framed in a manner that permits science but does not accord it absolute primacy And that brackets Divine Revelation in a way that permits business people and organisational managers to accept prayer and submission as an integral part of business life without concerning themselves with dogmatic anxiety. This orientation comes close to contemporary concerns in management theory with complexity and diversity. Unifocussed, uni-linear theories are regarded as unlikely sources of explanation in Islamic business thinking and the Western notion of the “best” way or Japanese notions of management perfectibility are alike eschewed.

There are many other points at which I think scholarly thinking and our research agendas in the West and East alike can benefit from considering the Levinasian framework. One such area is that of “face” which is important in understanding Chinese and “Asian” business behaviour but of course has application more generally especially to consider how face works in the social and business networks of Guanxi and Wasta. (see Hutchings and Weir 2006). We need to consider the implications of what Levinas characterises as “being faced” and not necessarily to go down the route of reconstituting it as Veling does as the experience of “facing being”.(Veling, op cit p7)

My final thought therefore is that in Western scholarly life we have been systematically and quietly othering the Islamic tradition that we are pleased to denigrate as "fatalism", or even generically as "fundamentalism" and their discourses that we are pleased to note as
"non-scientific" (even as atavistic and pre-positivistic). Sometimes this othering is undertaken by those who are recognised in our traditions of scholarship as experts in theirs like Bernard Lewis whose knowledge is indisputable but whose analysis is fundamentally suspect because he ultimately defines their outcomes in terms of our expectations. (Lewis 2002) Lewis is savagely criticised by Said who comments that “using the authority of his status as a senior Orientalist, Bernard Lewis has carried out his tendentious and general attacks on “Islam” throughout the 1980s and 1990s” (Said 1997 p92)

But in returning to these roots from which we have divided ourselves for five hundred years we may provide a way back to a new discourse of management that comprehends the questions from which as Levinas claimed the "first" philosophy flows. I submit that management is indeed a universal activity, present, recognised and honoured in all societies that we know of and that stripped of its temporal baggage of late-capitalist trappings can be understood as essentially what Aquinas knew as "the cure of souls" or in Levinas’ catechism the responsibility for others that stretches into unpaid overtime and extends beyond specific prudentiality for the owners' financial interests into the unrestricted care for all stakeholders that is not in practice constrained by organisational or even professional boundaries but extends infinitely to recognise that unreachable other for whom the manager's responsibility is infinite.

We now require our scholarship to comprehend the various ways of managing, that do exist and to move away from the flaccid and tendentious othering implicit in terms like “development”, “modernisation” and “globalisation” that has bemused us with its apparently ethics-free positivism and its serious elision of the diversity of relationship and practice. These traditions need respect even if we do not go all the way with Woodruff and demand "reverence". (Woodruff 2001).

Levinas might be a better place to start a new basis for a coherent philosophy of global management than Descartes. This is not to attempt to answer the question in the title of this paper “Can there be a universal ethical basis for management?” Quite possibly, in Islamic economic thinking it is possible to say that the basis for “a quite different business ethics.” already exists.

The answer or answers to this question will, then, not be achieved easily. But as we have not found answers to this question easy so far within our own traditions it is probably time that we looked at others. In particular we have to recognise that in proposing “ethics as first philosophy” Levinas was proposing an agenda that implies returning to other roots than the Judaeo-Christian and the Hellenic that so enthralled Matthew Arnold and Derrida alike and that could promise at least to re-unite at least all three strands of the philosophies of the people of the book. Then perhaps as managers operating in a transnational context we shall then empathise with Maalouf’s self-referencing claim, marking his peregrination through the history of one family that implies that all history is the history of family and that the families of history have throughout recorded times from the Mediterranean basin and outwards become intertwined in a complex heritage of discourse and experience be prepared to conclude that “je suis d’un tribu qui nomadise depuis toujours dans un desert aux dimensions du monde.” (Maalouf 2004)
Perhaps also we may be able with Walcott to accept that:

"You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you."
(Walcott op cit)

END
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