Purification or Pollution? The Debate over 'Workplace Spirituality'

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Abstract
The commentary on 'workplace spirituality' is deeply polarized. Among advocates, the integration of spirituality and work is hailed as the ultimate cure-all for the problems facing the modern work organization. Conversely, critics see it as yet another form of capitalist appropriation. This article advances a neo-Durkheimian cultural sociological analysis of these polarized responses. Proponents espouse a *schema of purification*, which holds that once the moral pollutions of bureaucracy and rationalization are excised from the workplace, the spheres of spirituality and work will be integrated, which will lead to the sacralization of the latter by the former. This is assumed to end the compartmentalization of workers' professional lives and to imbue their workplaces with ethicality and existential meaning. By contrast, critics espouse a *schema of pollution*, which holds that any attempt to integrate spirituality and work is doomed to failure under capitalist conditions, for it will result in workers' spiritual lives suffering from alienation, instrumentalization, and commodification, and their work being oppressive, manipulative, and inhuman. We conclude with a reflection on the implications our analysis holds for future research on 'workplace spirituality'.

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Introduction

The 1980s and 1990s saw a veritable explosion of interest in bringing 'spirituality' into the workplace (see González, 2015; Lambert, 2009). Not only did this genre of book flourish – with titles like *Heart at Work*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*, *True Work: The Sacred Dimensions of Earning a Living*, *Take Your Soul to Work*, and *The Corporate Mystic*, populating bookshelves – but simultaneously there emerged new managerial and organizational practices that entailed 'blurring work and non-work spheres' as well as reframing work 'as a space for self-expression and enchantment' (Endrissat et al., 2015: 1556; see also Du Gay and Pryke, 2002; Zaidman et al., 2009). What is more, this period saw the birth of what advocate David Miller (2007) calls the 'Faith at Work' (FAW) movement – an ecumenical Christian attempt to close what members called the 'Sunday–Monday gap', referring to the supposed spiritual gulf that separates Sunday worship services from Monday mornings at work.

Commenting on these developments, sociologist Catherine Casey (2000: 575–576) writes, 'In addition to bringing one's mind and body to work in service of the organization one is now invited in a growing number of organizations to bring heart and soul as well.' One can see this today in the sectors of healthcare (e.g. Baldacchino, 2017) and education (e.g. Miller, 2000). But the trend extends far beyond these institutional spheres. As astute observer of religious life Paul Heelas (2008: 69) reports, 'spirituality has established a relatively significant presence within the heartlands of "big business" capitalism: corporate cultures, trainings, weekend courses, talks, seminars, and so on'. Moreover, as Dennis LoRusso (2020: 5) observes, managerial common sense increasingly dictates that business leaders and managers have an obligation to attend to the 'spiritual' needs of their employees – a common sense imbibed by companies as large as Google, Nike, and Salesforce, each of which have carved out 'physical spaces where individuals may "recharge" through relaxation, meditation, or engage in daily prayers'. In fact, Google established their own mindfulness-based manager training program (titled, 'Search Inside Yourself'), which has since been exported to business schools around the globe. Thus, Casey (2000: 577) is undoubtedly correct when she writes: 'Religious and affective dimensions of human experience so long omitted from the rational institutions of production and work are now welcome.'

These developments have polarized scholars and public commentators alike. Among popular spiritual writers, as well as members of the Academy of Management's 'Management, Spirituality, and Religion' interest group, 'spiritual practice at work' has been heralded as the 'ultimate panacea for what ails the modern workplace' (Boyle and Healy, 2003: 352). Conversely, critical management scholars, sociologists of work, and religious studies scholars have been unanimously condemnatory. In this article, we advance a neo-Durkheimian cultural sociological analysis of these polarized responses. We start with a historical-cum-cultural sociological account of what we call the *discourse of workplace spirituality*. Popularized during the Romantic revival of the 1960s, this discourse holds that within each and every worker lies an authentic inner self (equated with one's feelings and intuitions) that is the repository of the *spiritual/sacred*, but which is stifled and repressed by the bureaucratic and rationalized character of the modern workplace. In the next section, we explain how a

neo-Durkheimian cultural sociological approach can help us account for the polarized intellectual responses to this discourse. Informed by this approach we conduct an analysis of popular and academic texts which typify each side of the debate to elucidate how their competing interpretations are informed by contrasting moral schemas. We show that implicit in the discourse of workplace spirituality is a *schema of purification*, which holds that once the moral pollutions of bureaucracy and rationalization are removed from the workplace, the spheres of spirituality and work will be integrated, which will lead to the sacralization of the latter by the former. Accordingly, proponents of this discourse contend that workers' professional lives will no longer be compartmentalized, and their workplaces will be imbued with ethicality and existential meaning. By contrast, critics espouse a contrasting *schema of pollution*, which holds that any attempt to integrate spirituality and work is doomed to failure under capitalist conditions, for workers' spiritual lives will be characterized by alienation, instrumentalization, and commodification, while work itself will be oppressive, manipulative, and inhuman. In the final section, we offer a brief reflection on the implications our analysis holds for future research on 'workplace spirituality'.

What is 'Workplace Spirituality' and Where Did it Come From?

Talk of 'workplace spirituality' is notoriously vague (Brown, 2003; Liu and Robertson, 2011). Indeed, a quick glance at the management studies literature – where it attracts the most positive attention within the academy – makes clear that there exist as many definitions as there are advocates. Nevertheless, a closer look reveals a clear unity in this diversity. Thus, in cultural sociological fashion, we propose to think of workplace spirituality as a particular type of *discourse* which gives shape to what is variously called 'workplace spirituality', 'organizational spirituality', or 'spiritual management'. The core of this discourse is aptly captured in David Miller's insider account of the 'Faith at Work' movement:

> If there is one overriding theme or organizing principle that appears to be a commonly held view by virtually all participants in the movement and that drives interest in Faith at Work, it is: *a quest for integration*. There is a shared view that faith and work are not meant to be separated or isolated from each other. Businesspeople want the ability to bring their whole selves to work – mind, body, and soul – and are no longer satisfied with sacrificing their core identities and being mere cogs in the machine, nor do they want a disconnected spirituality. People in the workplace of all levels and types no longer seem willing to leave their soul with the car in the parking lot. (Miller, 2007: 371. Emphasis added)

As Miller makes clear, demands for 'workplace spirituality' can be best understood as demands for *personal integration* within the workplace. Thus, we can think of the discourse of workplace spirituality as positing the following: in overly bureaucratic and rationalized workplaces, workers are alienated from their authentic inner selves, and the reason for this is that they are forced to repress their emotions, disregard their intuitions, and conform to anonymizing external rules and conventions – in a word, they are forced

to be who they are not. Among advocates of 'workplace spirituality', one hears many of the same buzzwords repeated: 'meaning', 'purpose', 'relationality', 'community', and 'growth'. But all of these derive from a shared concern with enabling the full expression of employees' true inner selves – where the *spiritual/sacred* is believed to reside – within the world of work (see Casey, 2004). Indeed, we see this discourse articulated time and again in both popular and academic literatures (e.g. ; Dehler and Welsh, 2015; Delbeq, 2000; Fox, 1994; Giacalone and Eylon, 2000; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Nichols, 1994; Ottaway, 2003; Sass, 2000).

Where did this discourse come from? Although talk of 'workplace spirituality' became popular in the 1980s, we can trace its origins to the 1960s. During this era, across a range of disparate movements there emerged a tremendous yearning among baby boomer youth for personal integration and self-realization. Indeed, as many studies of the era have shown, the 1960s witnessed a revival of Romanticism (see Campbell, 2007; Houtman and Aupers, 2007; Roof, 1999; Tipton, 1982). According to Charles Taylor, at the core of the romantic worldview lies expressivism, the idea that 'each individual is different and original, and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live' (Taylor, 1989: 375). Hence the buzzwords of the decade were authenticity, experience, feeling, self-expression, growth, and wholeness – and each of these was widely considered closely associated with 'spirituality' (Watts, 2018).

The New Age Movement came to represent the institutional centre of seekership (Heelas, 1996). However, this period also saw the rise of the Human Potential movement and the Charismatic Christian movement. Despite their differences, what these sister 'spiritual' movements shared was the Romantic-inspired conviction that within each and every individual lies a 'true self' that is unique to them, and which must be realized if they are to flourish (Watts, 2022). The widespread appeal of this romantic ideal led many during this period to grow frustrated with what they conceived as the overly constraining and conformist aspects of modern society (Roszak, 1969). Indeed, especially among members of the 1960s counter-culture, the primary targets were bureaucracy and rationality (Zaidman, 2020). The reason for this is that bureaucratic and rationalized systems encourage the segregation of work from personal life, and thus the compartmentalization of one's work identity. Moreover, as Peter Berger et al. (1973: 57) remark, bureaucracy and the processes of rationalization intrinsic to it, encourage 'depersonalization' while imposing 'control upon the spontaneous expression of emotional states'.

A common cultural critique was therefore born in the 1960s: by forcing employees to compartmentalize and repress key aspects of their selves – their emotional and intuitional lives in particular – the modern industrial world, youth of the era declared, left people internally divided, emotionally repressed, and spiritually disoriented (Houtman and Aupers, 2007, 2010). This basically romantic critique was echoed by various New Age teachers, counter-cultural Christian writers, and more secular thinkers such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Bell and Taylor, 2004). Indeed, Maslow, the father of the Human Potential Movement, popularized one of the most notable 'spiritual' critiques of the modern workplace. In *Eupsychian Management* (1965), he argues that work, properly understood, is a primary means by which individuals self-actualize. In fact, he contended 'not only that work can be intrinsically rewarding but that it should be understood as an inherently spiritual activity' (LoRusso, 2017: 29). However, the

problem with the modern workplace, Maslow lamented, is that it has lost its sacred status, for it has been cut off from the worker's sense of their authentic self.

Maslow's thought presaged many of the subsequent developments in management studies (Burack, 1999: 81). For instance, only a few years later, management guru Peter Drucker penned *The Age of Discontinuity* (1969), wherein he contended we should think of work as a sacred activity. And a decade after this, Willis Harman, a seeker and management scholar, wrote *Higher Creativity* (1984), in which he criticized the institutional separation of spirituality and work in modern life. These management scholars paved the way for the scholarship which today falls under the rubric of 'Spirituality Management Development', which holds that 'meaningful work' is 'essential for the spiritual growth of employees' (Chawla and Guda, 2013: 63), and that 'Worker's spiritual needs' should 'be addressed for the sake of the organization's goals' (Pina e Cunha and Rego, 2006: 218).

Central to this scholarship is a particular conception of the history of work in the 20th century: the shift from industrial to post-industrial is generally framed as one of liberation from the excessively bureaucratic and rationalistic aspects of the old model of work – embodied in the scientific management approach of Frederick Taylor – which demanded that workers compartmentalize and alienate their true selves, toward an era of 'spirit-driven business' where organizations laudably embrace 'the whole person' (Mitroff and Denton, 1999: 84). Thus, management scholars Gordon Dehler and M Ann Welsh (2015: 63) write: 'Emotions, feelings, and spirituality are foreign to the traditional understandings of work life driven by rationality'. Jeffrey Pfeffer (2015: 30) reports:

> The advent of bureaucracy and scientific management was designed to separate ascriptive, personalistic dimensions from the workplace. People were to be judged on what they did and how they performed, not who they were [. . .] [T]he result of modern control practices came to be the requirement for people to leave part of themselves at the door and to become someone else at work.

And Donde P Ashmos and Dennis Duchon (2000: 135) write: 'In the bureaucratic and scientific management models of the workplace, rationality and legality provided the bounds for workplace behavior'. They therefore conclude, 'The spiritual dimension of human beings [. . .] was not yet welcome in the workplace' (2000: 135). Needless to say, this 'not yet' is somewhat misleading, as the discourse of workplace spirituality continues to evoke polarized responses from scholars and commentators. In the next section we discuss how a neo-Durkheimian cultural sociological approach can help account for this polarization.

Durkheimian Cultural Sociology: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Mundane

It is increasingly recognized by scholars that there are, in fact, two different Durkheims (see Smith, 2020). The first is the early Durkheim, the one foregrounded in introductory sociology textbooks and understood as one of the founders of the discipline. This is the Durkheim of *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964 [1893]), *The Rules of*

Sociological Method (1964 [1895]) and *Suicide* (1951 [1897]). The second is the late Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]). While obviously not neglected altogether, the latter receives far less attention in introductory sociology textbooks than the early Durkheim, and has traditionally had less of an influence within the discipline. The sociological Durkheim is thus very much the early Durkheim, while anthropology, on the other hand, has been deeply influenced by the later one. Even though the two Durkheims overlap in key respects (e.g. in postulating that the social precedes and shapes the individual), they differ profoundly in their treatment of religion, culture, and meaning.

In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964 [1893]) the early Durkheim critiques Auguste Comte's notion that in modern industrial societies solidarity can be based on religion and shared moral norms and values (Gouldner, 1958). Rather than via cultural similarities between people ('mechanical solidarity'), he argues, solidarity can be brought about in modernity only by awareness of economic interdependencies created by the division of labour ('organic solidarity'). However, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912], Durkheim changes his tune, championing the position he initially dismissed in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964 [1893]). No longer a relic of the past, incapable of sustaining the modern social order, Durkheim here contends that religion remains a quintessential source of cohesion in all societies, pre-modern and modern alike. Thus, by the end of his career, he had fundamentally revised his understanding of religion.

In *The Elementary Forms* Durkheim defines religion as a group-based 'unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden' (1995 [1912]: 44). It follows that Durkheim conceives of religion in terms of (1) collectively held beliefs about what is 'sacred' and what is 'profane' – that is, about things that are considered so special and important that they need to be set apart, venerated and protected; and (2) the ritual practices aimed at celebrating the sacred and protecting it from the profane. Cultural sociologists like Jeffrey Alexander, Phil Smith and others associated with the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology have extended and refined what they call Durkheim's 'religious sociology' to devise a distinctly neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology (Alexander, 1988a; Smith, 2020; Smith and Alexander, 2005). According to this school of thought, anything can be sacralized – be it, a person, a place, or even an idea – thus we should think of culture as itself 'religious' in the Durkheimian sense. Accordingly, Alexander (2003) has shown how everything from political discourse, social performances, and historical narratives presupposes the binary distinction between the sacred and the profane. As he explains: 'Symbols [. . .] have their own autonomous organization. They are organized into the sacred and profane, the latter being mere signs, the former being symbols redolent with mystery, and this symbolic division constitutes authority' (Alexander, 1988b: 188).

Interestingly, although sociologists increasingly appreciate that lay understandings of the sacred and the profane play a pivotal role in shaping social life, relatively scant attention has been paid to the role this symbolic classification schema plays in sociological theorizing itself.[1] However, an important exception to this rule is the work of economic sociologist Viviana Zelizer. Across a range of works (for an overview see Bandelj et al., 2015) Zelizer has demonstrated that, within the scholarship on the social impacts of money and economic exchange, scholars regularly espouse what she calls

'separate spheres/hostile worlds' thinking, which assumes a priori that there exists such a 'profound contradiction' between the spheres of sentiment and economy that 'any contact between the two spheres inevitably leads to moral contamination and degradation' (Zelizer, 2011: 182). Thus, employing a neo-Durkheimian analysis, Zelizer usefully highlights how scholars have conceived of the sphere of sentiment as sacred, while considering the sphere of monetary transfers as profane – and in so doing, demonstrates the constitutive role of moral schemas in shaping social theoretical interpretations (see Smith, 2020).

While Zelizer's 'hostile worlds/separate spheres' schema is different from the ones we discuss later in this article, we argue that disagreements between proponents and critics of workplace spirituality are similarly informed by contrasting conceptions of the sacred and the profane. However, in developing our argument, we build on a significant amendment to Durkheim's conceptualizations of the sacred and the profane, suggested by critics who have pointed out that the latter are less clear than they could be.

In *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim (1995 [1912]: 34) remarks, 'The sacred is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity' (38). Thus, according to Durkheim, communities and persons constantly strive to keep the sacred and profane separate from one another, and the reason for this is because of the 'extraordinary contagiousness that sacredness has'. He writes: 'Even the most superficial or indirect contact is enough for it to spread from one object to another' (1995 [1912]: 322). However, near the end of *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim (1995 [1912]: 412) complicates things by suggesting that the sacred actually comes in *two* forms – one 'benevolent', the other 'evil and impure'. 'Between these two categories of forces and beings', he writes, 'there is the sharpest possible contrast, up to and including the most radical antagonism. The good and wholesome forces push far away from themselves those other forces which negate and contradict them [. . .] Any contact between them is considered the worst of profanations' (412–413). Unfortunately, Durkheim does not elucidate the conceptual ambiguity this introduces into his analysis (see Riley, 2005). For at times, he speaks of the 'profane' as a kind of 'evil-sacred', whereas at other times, he uses the notion of the 'profane' to refer not to evil things, but rather to the routine, or the ordinary – neither sacred, nor evil. For Durkheim then, the 'profane' operates as a kind of residual category that holds multiple meanings (Lynch, 2012: 26). To deal with this issue, Gordon Lynch (2012) has introduced a triadic rather than bipartite cultural classification schema. Thus, Lynch does not simply distinguish between the sacred and the profane, but between the *sacred* (which symbolizes what is pure and good), the *profane* (which is impure and evil, and thus to be excised and avoided), and the *mundane* (which belongs to everyday life, and which is neither good nor bad). Still, it remains an open question whether we should think of the sacred (good) or the profane (evil) as contagious. Given the opacity of Durkheim's original analysis, the answer is unclear. But it seems to us consistent with Durkheim's thought to suggest that *both* are capable of contagion – that is, the sacred (good) can *purify* the mundane (neutral), while the profane (evil) can *pollute* it – however, if the sacred and the profane come in contact, moral pollution results (Douglas, 1984 [1966]). In what follows we apply these schemas to make sense of the debate over 'workplace spirituality'. But before we do, we briefly outline our methodological approach.

Methodological Statement

Inspired by Richard Biernacki (2014), we approached this cultural sociological study in humanistic fashion – that is, instead of methodically (some might argue, positivistically) seeking out a representative sample of texts, we instead reviewed the debates on 'workplace spirituality' within the fields of management studies, sociology, and religious studies, with an eye to identifying the prototypical cultural meanings that structured them. As Biernacki explains, there exists an 'unworkability of sampling in the world of texts' (2014: 175) because cultural meanings are such that they cannot be reduced to statistical averages. In fact, any attempt to produce a 'representative sample' of texts will always involve a process of *re*interpretation, which may ultimately distort the original textual meanings. Thus, following Weber, Biernacki maintains that 'Meanings in operation remain tied to concrete prototypes' (2014: 179). Heeding this insight, in our review of the disparate scholarship on 'workplace spirituality', our aim was less identifying representativeness than identifying 'prototypical concept[s]' (2014: 178) and 'case exemplars' (2014: 184) that illustrated the ideal-typical moral schemas commonly operationalized. Accordingly, because our study is an instance of what Biernacki calls 'humanist interpretation', we do not claim that our analysis captures the *entirety* of the intellectual or moral positions that constitute the scholarship on workplace spirituality (a claim that, according to Biernacki, would be absurd, given the 'radically individual' (2014: 178) character of individual cases). However, we do believe that our analysis usefully illuminates a significant portion of the debate over 'workplace spirituality'. For as our analysis makes clear, we find the moral schemas of purification and pollution recur over and over again across disciplinary fields, suggesting that these meaning systems have, as it were, deep roots.

Proponents: A Schema of Purification

We argued in the first section of this article that the discourse of workplace spirituality posits an ideal of personal integration, whereby overly bureaucratic and rationalized workplaces are alleged to alienate workers from their authentic inner selves. When reframed in neo-Durkheimian terms, we can see that this holds that the authentic inner self – equated with one's emotions, intuitions, and individuality – is the locus of the *spiritual/sacred*; work is conceived of as *mundane*, while the *profane* is symbolized by bureaucratic and rationalized systems. In other words, implicit in the discourse of workplace spirituality is what we call a *schema of purification*, which holds that once the moral pollutions of bureaucracy and rationalization are excised from the workplace, the spheres of spirituality and work will be integrated, which will then lead to the purification or sacralization of the latter by the former.

Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from popular spiritual writer Matthew Fox's *The Reinvention of Work*: 'If work is sacred – and I believe it is – and we have been living, during the Newtonian era, in a nonsacred, secularized, and manmade machine, then the desacralization of work lies at the heart of our alienation' (Fox, 1994: 12). As Fox makes clear, the benefit of integrating spirituality and work is that internal division and alienation in professional life become a thing of the past – no longer will workers be

forced to 'be who they are not' while at work. Why is this important? Jeffrey Pfeffer puts it this way in the *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*:

> Trying to compel people to be 'different' from who they are on the job not only is stressful and uses energy, but essentially sends a message that who people really are is not what the organization wants or needs on the job. Such a message obviously contradicts people's desire for self-enhancement and their drive to maintain self-esteem; and the message is quite *destructive of the human spirit* [. . .]. (Pfeffer, 2015: 30 emphasis added)

As Pfeffer makes clear, compartmentalization at work is 'destructive of the human spirit' because it stifles and alienates workers' true selves (their emotions and intuitions). Thus, integrating spirituality and work means that workers' authentic selves are no longer confined to a single social sphere ('home'). What is more, once a worker's true self is given expression in the workplace, advocates allege, work itself becomes a sacred activity, as the sacredness of the former will spread to the latter.

What follows when work is transformed from mundane to sacred? The schema of purification posits the following positive outcomes: First, workers will feel a deep sense of meaning while at work and will therefore be happier (Parboteeach and Cullen, 2015: 100). Moreover, because their work will be purposeful to them, harmonized with what they consider their authentic selves, they will be more economically productive (Hoffman, 2015: 156). Third, workers who feel they can be their 'whole selves' will be more open to forming positive relations with their fellow employees. Or, as Robert Kolodinsky et al. (2007: 468) put it: 'Workers who view their organizations as more spiritual will feel less friction and frustration at work'. Fourth, since workers are happier, more congenial, intrinsically motivated, and more productive, profits are bound to soar. Consequently, Ian Mitroff (2003: 377) maintains that 'spiritual' organizations have a 'lasting competitive advantage'. While Robert Giacalone and Carole Jurkiewicz (2015: 6) contend that workplace spirituality confers 'organizational dominance in the marketplace'. In short, from within the schema of purification, integrating spirituality and work is a win-win: workers are able to realize their true selves, while organizations benefit economically – that is, the sacralization of work is necessary in order to realize not just the full potential of individual workers, but also the full production-potential of work organizations.

Because the discourse of workplace spirituality conceives of bureaucracy and rationalization as evil or profane forces, from proponents' points of view, once these morally polluting forces are excised, spirituality is freed to purify the mundane world of work under capitalism. Indeed, this explains Ian Mitroff's claim that,

> Perhaps the most significant finding of all was that those organizations that were perceived as 'more spiritual' or 'had a greater spiritual orientation' were also perceived as being significantly more profitable. Not only did such organizations allow their employees to bring more of their total selves to work, but, as a result, both the employees and their organizations were able to 'develop ethically' to a much greater degree. (Mitroff, 2003: 377)

According to Mitroff, then, once bureaucracy and rationalized systems are removed, and the authentic inner self within each worker is given free expression, the pursuit of profit – intrinsic to the world of work under capitalism – will lose its amoral character,

and instead take on a *sacred* quality, becoming moral in the process. Hence why Luc Bouckaert and Laszlo Zsolnai's (2012: 490) insist that 'business ethics needs a more spiritual foundation to solve the business ethics failure'. Indeed, proponents of workplace spirituality do not worry about the structures of capitalism (e.g. the pursuit of profit, private ownership of the means of production, etc.): in their view, these are simply mundane – part of the everyday world, neither good nor evil – and thus open to being either polluted or purified. And once the realm of work is sacralized, what results is not only greater personal integration for employees, but, paradoxically, a higher degree of ethics *and* increased profits. In short, within the schema of purification, once the profane and evil forces of rationalism and bureaucracy have been removed, 'business needs and personal self-development happily coincide' (Ackers and Preston, 1997: 687).

Critics: A Schema of Pollution

Advocates of the discourse of workplace spirituality have championed it as if in possession of the ultimate cure-all for the problems facing the modern work organization. However, their vision is coherent only if work under capitalism is coded as *mundane* (neutral) rather than *profane* (evil). This vision contrasts starkly with the view of critics – most of them situated in fields ranging from critical management studies to the sociology of work, to religious studies and theology – who adopt a diametrically opposed stance by condemning the call to integrate spirituality and work. The coherence of their vision rests on a conception of capitalism as an evil and contagious source of moral pollution. So, despite their disciplinary and methodological differences, critics of business spirituality espouse a cultural *schema of pollution*, which presupposes a configuration of the sacred, the profane, and the mundane that differs drastically from the one invoked by its advocates.

   Critics of workplace spirituality see capitalism, understood as the pursuit of profit and private ownership of the means of production, as an inexorable source of moral pollution that must be excised. In their schema, then, capitalism is framed in just the same way that proponents of workplace spirituality frame bureaucracy and rationalization. From within the critics' schema of pollution, then, spirituality is conceived as *sacred*; work is conceived as *mundane*; while capitalism is conceived as the epitome of evil, or *profane*. What follows from this is that, to the extent that workplace spirituality demands the integration of spirituality and work under conditions of capitalism, both will inevitably be polluted – that is, workers' emotional and spiritual lives will be characterized by alienation, instrumentalization, and commodification, while work itself will be oppressive, manipulative, and inhuman.

   Consider how these scholars write about what happens to spirituality when integrated with work under capitalism. Religious studies scholars Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005: 23) contend in *Selling Spirituality*, 'The "spiritual" becomes instrumental to the market rather than oriented towards a wider social and ethical framework, and its primary function becomes the perpetuation of the consumerist status quo'. Similarly, Ronald Purser (2018) contends that any attempt to incorporate the spiritual practice of mindfulness into the modern work organization (such as in Google's 'Search Inside Yourself' program) should be thought of as nothing less than 'Neoliberal mindfulness'.

Accordingly, critical management scholar Emma Bell (2008: 293), concludes that the discourse of workplace spirituality reflects 'an ideological attempt to capture the power of religion for the purposes of supporting capitalist interests'.

What these statements make clear is that, for critics, if spirituality is allowed to mix with the profane force of capitalism, it is destined to be desacralized and commodified. Indeed, it is almost a truism among critics that spirituality at work must be inauthentic or superficial (Possamai, 2003; York, 2001). And the reason for this is that the schema of pollution holds that a truly pure spirituality would be one that plays a significant role in *challenging* capitalism. Or, as Emma Bell and Scott Taylor (2004: 449) put it, the problem with the discourse of workplace spirituality is that it 'situates the project of realizing the authentic self in the context of the workplace', and thus 'implies that the having mode can be overcome without necessitating a complete rejection of the capitalist structure'.

It follows that what proponents of the discourse of workplace spirituality conceive as a process of purification – whereby, owing to the dismantling of rationalized orders and bureaucracy, workers' authentic inner selves are able to break out of a state of compartmentalization and become fully realized – critics conceive as a despicable process of pollution, whereby the sacrality of the authentic inner self is corrupted and degraded, owing to its entanglement with the profaning forces of capitalism (Bloom, 2016; Boyle et al., 2003). Or put another way, what proponents see as personally integrated and fulfilled workers, critics see as alienated, manipulated and deluded cogs in a capitalist machine. Indeed, this code-switching is captured succinctly in the following excerpt from Dennis LoRusso's *Spirituality, Corporate Culture, and American Business*:

> The entanglement of religion and business [. . .] is not an indication of a new religious movement in the business world, or of some intrinsically 'spiritual' dimension to work. In addition, it is not an extension of 'religion' out of the church and into the business world, or a lay-driven movement for those who wish to express their 'faith at work.' It does, however, reveal a story about the growing cultural authority of business, and the tendency for all aspects of culture – religion being no exception – to be put in the service of neoliberalization. (LoRusso, 2017: 165)

So, among critics of workplace spirituality, the forces of capitalism must inevitably profane or desacralize spirituality. Indeed, given their moral schema, even contemplating the idea of integrating spirituality and work under a capitalist system is ethically questionable; as Peter Ackers and Diane Preston (1997: 695) illustratively assert: 'There is something disturbing and unauthentic about finding deep personal meaning inside the walls of the modern business organization'.

But what of work? Work is also believed to be contaminated by the forces of capitalism within the critics' schema of pollution. Thus, Peter Bloom (2016: 591) laments the 'capitalist and quite managerialist assumptions about what constitutes work' found within the discourse of workplace spirituality. While Marjolein Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009: 292) similarly contend that the 'nature of work has been slowly replaced with the more materialistic and prosaic aim that dominates business thinking today'. Accordingly, the schema of pollution holds that, to the extent that a work organization (mundane) is

embedded within a capitalist system (profane), it will be polluted, and therefore characterized by injustice and oppression.

So, here again we can see how the change in moral schemas leads to a drastically different assessment of the discourse of workplace spirituality. For instance, rather than assuming that the authentic inner self will sacralize mundane work, imbuing the pursuit of profit with an ethical dimension, critics conceive of the pursuit of profit as inherently profane, and thus fundamentally polluting. Rather than seeing the spiritual workplace as a site of community and collegiality, where workers are able to realize their true selves, critics instead see it as a 'repressive' (Bell and Taylor, 2004: 462) place, with the practices concerned serving as 'processes of regulation, discipline, and control of employee selves' (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009: 290). And rather than seeing workers' intrinsic motivation and sense of meaningfulness as positive outcomes of integrating spirituality and work, critics view these as 'mask[ing] [the existence of power structures] while at the same time reinforcing hierarchy, power and privilege' (Kamoche and Pinnington, 2012: 505; Karjalainen et al., 2019: 23).

This last point is crucial. Because the proponents' schema of purification does not code capitalism as evil, but rather as mundane, they can offer the following praise: 'workplace spirituality seems to counteract a lot of the negative attitudes and behavior that bedevil contemporary work organizations' (Pfeffer, 2010: 28). However, from within the schema of pollution, the positive valence of this claim is absurd, if not morally reprehensible, for it overlooks the fact that, in countering such attitudes and behaviour, workplace spirituality 'fails to encourage employee-based resistance' (Nadesan, 1999: 9), and thus insidiously legitimates 'the metarationality of capitalist production and economy' (Casey, 2000: 583).

Conclusion

Proponents of 'workplace spirituality' espouse a *schema of purification*, according to which work is purified and personal integration is achieved insofar as the evils of bureaucracy and rationalization are removed from the workplace. This is because such a move liberates the authentic inner self of workers – conceived as the repository of the *spiritual/sacred* – from its subjection to alienating compartmentalization, which thereby enables sacrality to flow into the mundane workplace, leading to the sacralization of work. Critics of workplace spirituality, on the other hand, espouse a contrasting vision of the relationship between spirituality and work, which we have called a *schema of pollution.* From within this moral schema any attempt to integrate spirituality and work is doomed to failure under capitalist conditions because the contagiousness of the evil of capitalism inevitably profanes or desacralizes spirituality and degrades and corrupts work.

LoRusso (2017: 9) writes that the workplace spirituality movement, 'on one hand, can be seen as a movement calling for the moral reform of business or, on the other hand, can be understood as simply another example of capitalist exploitation'. The side one chooses in this debate depends on which of the two moral schemas one subscribes to. Among those who endorse a schema of purification, the integration of spirituality and work will seem like nothing short of a best-of-both-worlds scenario, in which personal integration and self-realization go hand-in-hand with increased performance and profit. Among

those who endorse a schema of pollution, any integration of spirituality and work within a capitalist system is bound to lead to moral and political disaster.

One way of locating these schemas is to see them as particular versions of what Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy refer to as the 'liberal dream' and 'commodified nightmare' views of capitalism. The former conceives of capitalism, done right, as a key source of goodness and justice in the world, whereas the latter sees it as a central source of evil and injustice. In their review of these cultural structures, Fourcade and Healy (2007: 302) remark that:

> social scientists have themselves been deeply involved in the moral evaluation of markets and their alternatives. Critics remind us that the market is a profoundly political institution and routinely use the language of commodification and power to convey moral outrage. Advocates of markets deny this and suggest more or less explicitly that the rationale of the market is deeply ethical.

With this in mind, we offer two concluding reflections. First, it should be clear by now that the meta-discourse on 'workplace spirituality' is profoundly 'religious' in the Durkheimian sense. That is, both proponents and critics have assessed the proposal to integrate spirituality and work according to their own conceptions of the sacred, the profane, and the mundane. Of course, this is not peculiar to this subfield, but rather captures a basic cultural sociological insight into the practice of social theorizing: as Alexander (2003: 193) remarks: 'Intellectuals divide the world into the sacred and profane and weave stories about the relationship in between'. Intellectuals do this because, like the human subjects they study, they are cultural-cum-moral beings, who depend upon cultural discourses, scripts, and schemas to distinguish right from wrong, central from peripheral, good from evil.

Still, once we acknowledge this fact, it raises a second issue: how should the study of 'workplace spirituality' proceed? One option is to continue repeating and thereby reifying these two tired moral schemas, replaying the same old songs over and over. However, if we are interested in learning something new, then a more appealing alternative is to study how managerial elites and various classes of workers and employees invoke and apply these same schemas in different types of workplaces and cultural settings, and how the resulting organizational dynamics and conflicts play out on the ground. This is not to suggest that, as researchers, we cannot take an evaluative stance. Indeed, given the nature of social theorizing, this is to some extent inevitable. But the problem with the commentary – be it descriptive or normative – on 'workplace spirituality' at present is that it resides at the level of abstract discourse, rather than social interaction (cf. Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003). Thus, when advocates applaud the integration of spirituality and work, while critics denounce it, we learn more about their moral presuppositions than we do about social reality. Thus, we envisage an approach to the study of workplace spirituality which examines how social actors and groups in specific contexts negotiate the boundary between the spiritual and the economic, how they distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic, or the ethical from the unethical, and how they differentiate between a workplace that is just and one that is not. Furthermore, we would encourage scholars to investigate empirically precisely how the ideal of integration at the heart of the discourse

of workplace spirituality is realized or practised in social context. As neo-Durkheimians would stress, to celebrate or critique a discourse without attending to its socially contested and contingent character is to miss much; so, we need to move past the impressionistic polemics and study how the integration of spirituality and work are conceptualized, justified, and maintained by specific actors in different organizations and institutions. In short, we propose that future studies of workplace spirituality attend, more or less critically, to the various ways people on the ground draw distinctions between the sacred, the profane, and the mundane, not in the abstract, but rather in the messiness of ordinary life.

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Note

1. Of course, we can think of Weber's (1949 [1904])) account of the role of intellectually arbitrary moral values in steering sociological research (self-citations omitted). And another example is Gouldner's (1970) analysis of the role of sociologists' metaphysical beliefs about social reality in accepting or dismissing sociological theories. Yet neither of these employs the Durkheimian distinction between the sacred and the profane.

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