

# INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS



Contributions to  
**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, PEACE ECONOMICS AND  
DEVELOPMENT VOLUME 26**

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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, PEACE ECONOMICS AND  
DEVELOPMENT VOLUME 26

# INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# CONTENTS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	<i>ix</i>
FOREWORD	<i>xi</i>
PREFACE	<i>xiii</i>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	<i>xv</i>

## **PART 1 INTRODUCTION**

INTRODUCTION: WHY INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IS NEEDED FOR REFORMING BUSINESS <i>Ove Jakobsen and Laszlo Zsolnai</i>	<i>3</i>
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## **PART 2 SUSTAINABILITY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE**

AUTHENTICITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: THE SEARCH FOR A RELIABLE EARTH SPIRITUALITY <i>Luk Bouckaert</i>	<i>15</i>
SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS IN NATURE <i>Daniel Deak</i>	<i>31</i>
QUALITY OF LIFE <i>Knut J. Ims and Ove Jakobsen</i>	<i>55</i>
FRUGALITY AND THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF NATURE <i>Laszlo Zsolnai</i>	<i>67</i>

**PART 3  
TOWARD INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE <i>Hendrik Opdebeeck</i>	79
INTEGRAL ECOLOGY FROM A FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE <i>Thomas Dienberg, Bernd Beermann and Markus Warode</i>	89
EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY <i>José Luis Fernández Fernández, Anna Bajo Sanjuán and José Luis Retolaza Ávalos</i>	101
REREADING ROBINSON CRUSOE (DEFOE) AND FRIDAY (TOURNIER) – AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH <i>Rita Ghesquiere</i>	123
DEVELOPING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS <i>Manuel Fernandez-Lopez and Octavi Piulats Riu</i>	147
SHAKTHI WORLDVIEW: AN INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE WORLDVIEW FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE <i>V. Adinarayanan and V. Smrithi Rekha</i>	155

**PART 4  
PRACTICING SUSTAINABILITY**

FOR RICHER OR POORER IN SICKNESS FOR WEALTH: WHAT PRICE CONSUMERISM? <i>Doirean Wilson</i>	169
PARTICIPATION SOCIETY <i>Jean-Paul Close</i>	181
MORAL AND VIRTUES-BASED LEADERSHIP FOR ENHANCING INTEGRAL ECOLOGY <i>Mara Del Baldo</i>	203

A NOTE ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY <i>Manas Chatterji</i>	229
REGENERATIVE FIRMS <i>Nel Hofstra</i>	235
THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSHUMANISM IN BUSINESS <i>Hendrik Opdebeeck</i>	251
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	261
INDEX	267

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# **FOREWORD**

In this volume, we address questions pertaining to the relationship between business, the natural environment, ethics and spirituality. While traditional economic theory generally assumed firms maximize profits, it has long been acknowledged that other factors may be important to understanding firm activities. The role of ethics and spirituality in society is clearly significant; yet economists have traditionally had little to say on these topics and how they intersect with economic activity. We present contributions from eminent scholars in economics, philosophy, business and spirituality to try to begin to address this gap.

Manas Chatterji  
Binghamton, NY, USA

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# PREFACE

This book, 'Integral Ecology and Sustainable Business', is a collection of chapters from economists, business scholars, philosophers, lawyers, theologians and practitioners who are working in Europe, North America and Asia. The work sets out to highlight the meaning of sustainability in relation to both human and non-human life. It offers a series of new and invigorating approaches to sustainable business practices and sustainability leadership.

In May 2016, the Annual European SPES Conference on 'Integral Ecology, Earth Spirituality and Economics' met in Bodo, Norway, under the auspices of the Center for Ecological Economics and Ethics of the Bodo Graduate School of Business, University of Nordland, and in association with the European SPES Institute and the Business Ethics Center of the Corvinus University of Budapest.

Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (Praise Be: On the Care of Our Common Home) provided an excellent opportunity and impetus for building a conversation between spirituality, ecology and business. Integral Ecology proposed in the encyclical integrates concerns for people and the planet. Integral Ecology shows a path to sustainable development through frugal consumption, acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature and, for sure, the promotion of social equality.

Here is a selection of the papers presented at our conference in Bodo. We hope the readers will find among them the inspiration to reconsider the role of humanity in nature and to look again, or perhaps for the first time, at the interconnection between ethics, spirituality and ecology, and, hopefully, seeing them in new, creative and progressive ways which will have an impact on their thinking and practice.

Ove Jacobsen  
Laszlo Zsolnai  
*Editors*

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The editors would like to thank *David Beake* for his dedicated work for improving the English of the chapters of the book.

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**PART 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

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# INTRODUCTION: WHY INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IS NEEDED FOR REFORMING BUSINESS

Ove Jakobsen and Laszlo Zsolnai

## ABSTRACT

*Pope Francis' encyclical letter Laudato Si' (Praised Be: On the Care of Our Common Home) is an excellent opportunity for building a conversation between spirituality, ecology, and sustainable business.*

*Integral ecology integrates concerns for people and the planet. It sees the world as systemically linked ecology, economy, equity, and justice accessible through natural and social sciences, arts, and humanities. Integral ecology shows a path to sustainable business functioning through frugal consumption, acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature, and seeking holistic management knowledge.*

*The book collects chapters from economists, business scholars, philosophers, layers, theologians, human scientists, and practitioners from Europe, North America, and Asia and highlights the meaning of sustainability in relation to human and non-human life and introduces new approaches to sustainable business practices and sustainability leadership.*

**Keywords:** Integral ecology; spirituality; intrinsic value of nature; sustainable business; holistic management

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In this introductory section, we summarize the most important issues dealt with in the book. We intend to show the importance of adopting the integral ecology view of business functioning and to demonstrate its far reaching consequences.

In his chapter, “Authenticity and Sustainability: The Search for a Reliable Earth Spirituality,” *Luk Bouckaert* (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium) argues that authenticity and sustainability are seemingly unlinked concepts. While sustainability refers to the ability of ecosystems to endure and flourish, authenticity refers to the ability of the human person to develop his or her “true” or real self. So the question arises: “how can the sustainability of nature be related to our search for an authentic self?” Some would say that nature as a complex, self-organizing system remains indifferent to the subjectivity and self-realization of human beings. But Bouckaert claims, on the contrary, that the modern search for self-realization is one of the causes of the decreasing sustainability of natural ecosystems.

Bouckaert explores how modern concepts of the self and the world have disconnected the human subject from nature. He refers to Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* to show how this disconnection was intellectually organized before being implemented in the real world. This very Cartesian disconnection made it possible not only to transform nature into a mechanical system but also to consider the self as a rational and autonomous being set quite apart. Hence, realizing the self and being authentic in the Cartesian context means our becoming independent from nature and leads to our attempts to be its master.

Bouckaert argues that the Cartesian revolution ushered us all in to a rational, science- and technology-based humanism that intends to master nature with the most efficient practices and results in a never ending overexploitation of the planet. It might well be possible to combine the practices of science and technology with an earth spirituality to bring about a new Renaissance, Bouckaert says, driven by a spiritually based humanism. He presents the life and philosophy of Albert Schweitzer as an example.

Schweitzer’s philosophical work led him to search for a new experience-based foundation for ethics and he conceived the principle of “reverence for life” (*Ehrfurcht fur das Leben*) as an unconditional and inclusive principle for respecting life in all its manifestations. Schweitzer’s principle implies a new sense of authenticity which rejects the modern ego-centric notion of autonomy in favor of an alter-centric notion of respect for life.

In his chapter, “Social Interventions in Nature,” *Daniel Deak* (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary) argues that the essence of the ecological crisis is not that resources are out of reach, but that the relationship between living beings has deteriorated. For this reason ecology cannot simply be seen as a scientific matter but rather as a genuine social problem that requires social actions.

Deak emphasizes that the law in its present form falls short of managing ecological problems despite the fact that the right to a natural environment is recognized in most jurisdictions as a basic one and that international covenants have been created to protect the natural environment. Deak believes that

environmental law ought to bring about a reverence for life and promote the cooperation of biotic communities. A legal system given to innovation could offer foresight-based regulation, integration of the ensemble of living beings, and cooperation in the living world. One of the main challenges the law has to meet is the exploration of a theoretically established and practically viable basis for extending its influence to address the problems of future generations.

In their chapter, “Quality of Life,” *Knut Ims* (Norwegian School of Economics, Bergen, Norway) and *Ove Jakobsen* (University of Nordland, Norway) elaborate on the concept of “quality of life” by connecting it to different frames of reference. Quality of life is a relevant concept in philosophy, psychology, and economics. It is also relevant in both Western and Eastern contexts. Distinguished scholars in different disciplines and cultures agree that quality of life is not an ecocentric concern, rather it is a question of being in harmony with something bigger than one’s own self – and that could be nature, humankind, the planet, or the whole universe.

Ims and Jakobsen argue that quality of life is not achievable if the Earth around us is sick and human communities are in distress. In addition to harmonizing the relationship with the outer world, it is also necessary to develop a harmonious contact with the inner world and break out of “ego” and become part of “eco.”

Ims and Jakobsen emphasize that individual change is a prerequisite for change in the economic system. By reversing the tendency to focus on a narrowly defined ego, as in egocentrism, they suggest that the individual should follow a path that leads him or her to what is natural and real. When individuals consider themselves part of nature, and not apart from nature, their quality of life will increase. Scientific research shows that the separation between people and nature is one of the most important obstacles to achieving happiness and meaning of life.

In his chapter, “Frugality and the Intrinsic Value of Nature,” *Laszlo Zsolnai* (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary) argues that frugality means rebalancing material and spiritual values in economic life. This may lead to both the rehabilitation of the substantive meaning of the “economic” and the revival of the corresponding logic of sufficiency. The ecological stance taken in the Pope’s encyclical has close links with Deep Ecology and Buddhist Economics despite their different ontological and anthropological conceptions. Both Deep Ecology and Buddhist Economics point out that putting the emphasis on individuality and promoting the greatest fulfillment of the individual’s desires conjointly leads to destruction. We each need to find our greater self, which is a more inclusive and all encompassing concept than that permitted by the standard approaches to identity. Happiness is linked to wholeness, not to personal wealth.

Zsolnai warns that mainstream economics fails to acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature. Mainstream economics is happy to value environmental goods and services merely on the basis of a market value determined by competing economic actors. But price is an inappropriate mechanism for assessing the

value of natural entities. There simply is no algorithmic solution to economic allocation problems. Decisions and policies related to nature require making qualitative and multiperspective considerations and the proper use of wisdom, knowledge, and experience.

In his chapter, “Integral Ecology and the Anthropocene” *Hendrik Opdebeeck* (University of Antwerp, Belgium) starts from the new reality of the *Anthropocene* in which man tries to dominate the logic of nature itself. So, after nearly 12,000 years living in the Holocene geological age we have now arrived in the Anthropocene. Now, instead of an integral ecology that considers the world as having its ecology, economy, and justice systematically linked, we are confronted with a world dominated by a profit-driven economy.

Opdebeeck examines how, since its very first beginnings, Western philosophy has reflected on humanity’s relationship with nature. Is the history of Western philosophy, then, merely a reflection of the evolution of humanity from the Holocene to the Anthropocene? Or did Western philosophical thought, along with industrialization and economic development, play a far bigger part and was it, indeed, the regulator of this evolution?

Opdebeeck argues that our spontaneous care for nature – not at any price or exclusively – has led to an elegy. Rereading Western philosophy can help us to discover that the evolution toward the Anthropocene could challenge man to discern meaning behind nature. The central problem is that the way man regulates nature can be oriented toward rediscovering meaning behind nature. And the question of transcendence cannot be avoided. Philosopher *Roger Scruton* also stresses the importance of this when he speaks about the experience of beauty, which provides a God’s-eye perspective on reality.

In their chapter, “Integral Ecology from a Franciscan Perspective,” *Thomas Dienberg OFM Cap*, *Bernd Beermann OFM Cap*, and *Markus Warode* (Muenster, Germany) recall that Pope John Paul II named *Saint Francis* as the “heavenly patron of those who promote ecology.” They believe that revisiting the Franciscan values, as lived by St. Francis, could be of great help in solving our ecological, economic, and social problems. St. Francis can show the way to deal with Mother Earth for the sake of the future of the planet. His passionate love for creation, his adoration of seeing God in everything and everywhere, and therefore the adoration of the beauty of creation, his experience of God in the world as an incarnation of a theological principle, and his ways and actions of compassion give witness to a brotherly love toward everybody and everything. The keywords and phrases of a Franciscan approach to integral ecology include vulnerability, being connected, voluntary poverty, compassion, solidarity, contemplation and attentiveness, justice and peace, and prophetic wisdom.

The chapter presents a real-life project in the “*Klostergarten*” of the Capuchin-Franciscans in Muenster, Germany. To re-establish biodiversity and knowledge of how to use and preserve rare and old agricultural species, traditional varieties of regional apple trees, a good number of herb and vegetable strains, have been reintroduced in the garden of the Capuchin-Franciscans in Muenster.

The importance of biodiversity and a holistic–spiritual approach toward nature is made clear to people visiting the garden through documentation, guided tours, and educational programs.

In their chapter, “Epistemological Approach to Sustainability,” *José Luis Fernández Fernández* and *Anna Bajo Sanjuán* (Comillas Pontifical University, Madrid, Spain), and *José Luis Retolaza Avalos* (Deusto Business School, Bilbao, Spain) argue that despite the boom corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability are enjoying nowadays in the agendas of both small and big companies, we still have difficulties in providing a clear definition of the concept of sustainability. There is no consensus on the criteria to be used to define and enhance responsible management that creates sustainable development.

After a systematic revision of the literature, authors have been mapping the limits of the research already done at different levels, dimensions, and horizons, so we do have a 360° map of the research on sustainability. Future developments are also explored to enrich and align the diverse approaches demanded to define this wide, complex, and, by now, equivocal concept and the conclusions reveal the many gaps not yet covered in the research field, signposting key issues for further work.

In her chapter, “Rereading Robinson Crusoe (Defoe) and Friday (Tournier) – An Ecocritical Approach,” *Rita Ghesquiere* (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium) acknowledges that the worldwide environmental crisis has also influenced the field of literary studies. *Posthumanism* and *ecocriticism* are new ways of reading in which the anthropocentric approach and the binary oppositions such as human/nonhuman, wild/tame, natural/cultural are overcome. Posthumanism pays attention to all sorts of nonhuman life, animals, for sure, but aliens and robots are included too, while ecocriticism is concerned with the role and function of nature in literary texts.

Ghesquiere offers an ecocritical approach of *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe) and *Friday* (Tournier). Rereading these novels we see that nature, or the elements, makes up an “actant” equal to the human characters and a special interest is created in the mutual conflicts which arise between nature and the human characters.

*Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719) is considered by many as an appropriate book to allow pupils to escape from or be shielded from the negative influence of civilization. Like Robinson on his island pupils should learn from experience. Defoe’s work was so popular it inspired a whole series of imitations called “Robinsonnades” and many of them were edited specifically for children. But is Robinson Crusoe a valuable book from an ecological point of view? How does Robinson relate to nature? Does the novel focus on nature or rather on the human hero seeking to control and tame the environment?

In 1967, the French author Michel Tournier reworked the Crusoe myth in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (Friday or the Pacific Rim), followed by a parallel text for children *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* (Friday or the Wild Life, 1971) In both novels, Robinson’s black servant, Friday, initiates his colonial master into alternative ways of living, dismantling civilization and restoring

nature. That same deconstruction of the idea of Western superiority fits well with the postcolonial philosophy that attacks the logic of domination and its hierarchical dichotomy: white above colored.

In their chapter, “Developing Ecological Awareness and Responsible Business,” *Manuel Fernandez-Lopez* (Nord University, Bodo, Norway) and *Octavi Piulats Riu* (University of Barcelona, Spain) emphasize that emergent practices today in business organizations point toward potential development of ecological consciousness and responsible and meaningful economic activity aimed at finding alternatives to economic growth using the principles of ecological economics.

Fernandez-Lopez and Riu believe that the conception of self offers a basis for introducing a complexity-based understanding and apprehensible knowledge about business actors. The study of the self is connected with a place of agency to shape the future. This is related to the process of development in business leadership involved in driving and changing the business arena toward the development of ecological underpinning in the implementation of responsible business.

The study of the self allows us to identify emergent ethical considerations in relation to a long-term future. Long-term perspectives of the individual allow us to explore the commitment and motivational basis for alternative ways for economic development in line with responsibility for change. Those are grounded in technological development for wellbeing of communities both from a local and a global perspective beyond mainstream strategies based on economic growth

In their chapter, “Shakthi Worldview: An Inclusive and Expansive Worldview for a Sustainable Future,” *V. Adinarayanan* (Anaadi Foundation, India) and *Smrithi Rekha* (Amrita University, India) observe that more and more people are realizing that the problems facing us in current times are systemically interlinked. A compartmentalized approach to solving each problem has given way to looking at it as a whole system. This change in both vision and approach has a fundamental transformative effect especially when the worldview is inclusive and holistic.

Adinarayanan and Rekha present thoughts and frameworks which they call *Shakthi Worldview* and this sees the interconnectedness of things and events around us thereby making us conscious of how we interact with the environment and how we should take decisions that lead us firmly towards a sustainable future. In an Indian context, “shakthi” refers to the fundamental energy that permeates all things around us, be they animate or inanimate. Being in tune with this energy has been a way of life for many indigenous cultures. The chapter highlights the aspects of Shakthi Worldview and how the actions that come from this worldview can create a sustainable future.

In her chapter, “For Richer or Poorer in Sickness for Wealth: What Price Consumerism?” *Doirean Wilson* (Middlesex University Business School, London, UK) starts with the observation that affluence and material goods of



varying types are portents of the *millennium age's consumer culture* which encourages the masses to participate in the need to buy, buy and buy! This trend creates a purchasing fervor that preoccupies many consumers with the ongoing yearning to shop until they drop. Clever marketing tactics such as enticing smells, catchy jingles, prize-draw entries, bargains, discounts, and the recruitment of celebrities to advertise a range of different wares are just some of the ploys adopted by vendors and retailers to maintain the sustainability of this cycle of consumer-spending. This scenario – Wilson warns – promotes what could be perceived as a never ending desire to procure yet more products and merchandise which can create social dilemmas such as personal debt due to, for example, impulse buying, excessive spending, and unnecessary borrowing.

Wilson argues that retailers and manufacturers are driven by a quest to sell so constantly that they tout their goods to tempt consumers – including those who really need to consider their personal and social position – to take the bait and keep on buying. This, coupled with the rapid advances in technology over recent decades, has made it easier for consumers to shop, order, obtain, and pay for their goods from the comfort of an armchair or via handheld devices and all at a tap of a button. In essence, technology has added to or even exacerbated the materialistic consumer trend as witnessed across many global societies today. But what impact does consumerism have on the well-being of humankind, and, in turn, the environment? Wilson investigates the devastating impact of consumerism on the environment and on the finance, health, and well-being of the customers.

In his chapter, “Participation Society,” *Jean-Paul Close* (STIR Foundation, Eindhoven, The Netherlands) argues that the mechanisms of all life and ecosystems on Earth have a spiritual dimension of interconnectedness. He considers patterns such as the process of dynamic, awareness-driven clustering which applies as much to the microscopic molecular world of energetic connectivity that formed the earliest and smallest forms of life, as it does to the complex world of DNA-programmed species which include human beings. This clustering subsequently develops beyond the definition of the molecular composition and behavior of any living creature. Each human being consists of billions of interrelated life forms which sustain the person through symbiotic interaction within. In fact, we can consider any human being as a uniquely clustered living universe of its own.

Close insists that, in a broader context, every human being itself relates to its environment with the same awareness-driven dynamic clustering principles as our inner world. Through this natural activity we feed, grow, protect, procreate and evolve. Most of the clustering we do is a natural condition of our being. Our conscious world of cognitive perception, auto-reflective awareness, interpretation and communication, has made us a unique self-reviewing, learning, creative species, capable of organizing itself. Close emphasizes that this unique evolution has brought us where we stand today, the sixth force of mass

destruction of all life forms on Earth. He believes that the extremely dangerous paradox of wit versus destruction is giving rise to a new evolutionary, spiritual breakthrough with newly oriented awareness-driven dynamic clustering, and the participation society or awareness-driven human ecosystem.

In her chapter, “Moral and Virtues-based Leadership for Enhancing Integral Ecology,” *Mara Del Baldo* (University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”, Italy) starts from the premise of the Encyclical Letter “*Laudato si*” and discusses the role of leadership models based on virtues and moral constructs promoting a new business culture. Which leadership models and which business models are necessary to guide companies toward the *integral development*?

The chapter traces the framework of leadership theories connected with the emergence of sustainability oriented business models. Del Baldo explores and analyzes three cases of exemplary Italian companies, namely *Brunello Cucinelli Spa*, a large-scale, listed company producing high quality clothing, shoes, and accessories; *Loccioni Group*, a family owned medium-sized company active in the electronics industry; and *Mercurio Net*, a small-scale “Economy of Communion” company specializing in information technology. The case studies show how entrepreneurs promote cultural reorientation and help others to unlearn the bad habits of “turbo-capitalism” and instead value humanity, relationships, and the love of the place in which they do business.

Del Baldo argues for the development of leadership approaches and models which incorporate an orientation toward the common good. Accordingly, she highlights the “roots” of entrepreneurial and managerial behavior which appear to inspire a profound rethinking of business conduct. Through these analyzed business examples, the chapter shows models that make the realization of integral development possible.

In his chapter, “A Note on Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Manas Chatterji* (Binghamton University, NY, USA) discusses the relationship between philosophical and business ethics and CSR. Business ethics questions, particularly in international business, arise for a variety of reasons – including differences in culture, religion, values, and standards in different societies. Cultural differences depend on social organization, group affiliation, mobility, and the hierarchical structure of the society. Chatterji argues all these factors are affected by the process of globalization and international business practices.

Leadership characteristics and the organizational culture of the business also affect ethical behavior. Business ethics determine CSR. CSR, in turn, is related to corporate values, the market value of the corporation, cost of capital, and the business leaders’ demand for image reinforcement. All these factors vary in different countries. Chatterji suggests that we should try to formulate an index which combines and collates the philosophical ethics, business ethics, and CSR of business. This index could be used to rank companies in terms of ethics and CSR.

In her chapter, “Regenerative Firms,” *Nel Hofstra* (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands) discusses two aspects of the theory of the firm. Among these discussions is the question of defining a regenerative firm, and

how the traditional view of the firm changes when one adopts an integral trans-disciplinary view.

Hofstra argues for the necessity of transforming anthropocentric business models into more ecocentric ones. Business models in which nature has an intrinsic value have fundamental consequences for the theory of the firm.

Hofstra compares “creative destruction” in which the value creation follows from the destruction of other values with the “law of seed,” whereas the natural cycles of continuous creation and regeneration carry out life. The latter can contribute to the creation of value-based spiritual economic structures which bring together the rich diversity of man and nature. Hofstra argues that the regenerative firm could be an important driver for building an integral transdisciplinary world.

In his chapter, “The Challenge of Transhumanism in Business,” *Hendrik Opdebeeck* (University of Antwerp, Belgium) states that technology is one of the crucial topics for the understanding of the content and meaning of creativity in management. More than ever knowledge and science determines technology and in turn technology determines the economy and management. The range of necessary creativity therefore risks to be highly determined by the evolution of technology. This will bring us to the crucial question whether in the future the diffusion of creativity is still possible when human-made environments more and more are determined by technology. Opdebeeck argues that the question about transhumanism and posthumanism on the relationship between technology and the enhancement of the human person is crucial for humanity and nature as well.

Opdebeeck agrees with German philosopher Jurgen Habermas that the problem is not modern science and technology per se, but that the reified models of the science and technology migrate into the management life-world and gain power over our self-understanding. The solution must, therefore, rather be sought in keeping the distinction between the sphere of science and technology and the sphere of the human person.

We, as editors of the volume “Integral Ecology and Sustainable Business,” firmly believe that without reforming business practices there is no hope for a sustainable and peaceful Earth. One of the biggest obstacles to the much needed business reform is the lack of imagination and courage to initiate change. By means of the messages of the chapters collected here, we wish to make a contribution which may uplift and inspire the readers to the enormous but vital task which lies ahead and confronts us all in our journey toward sustainability.

## REFERENCE

Defoe, D. (1719). *Robinson Crusoe*.