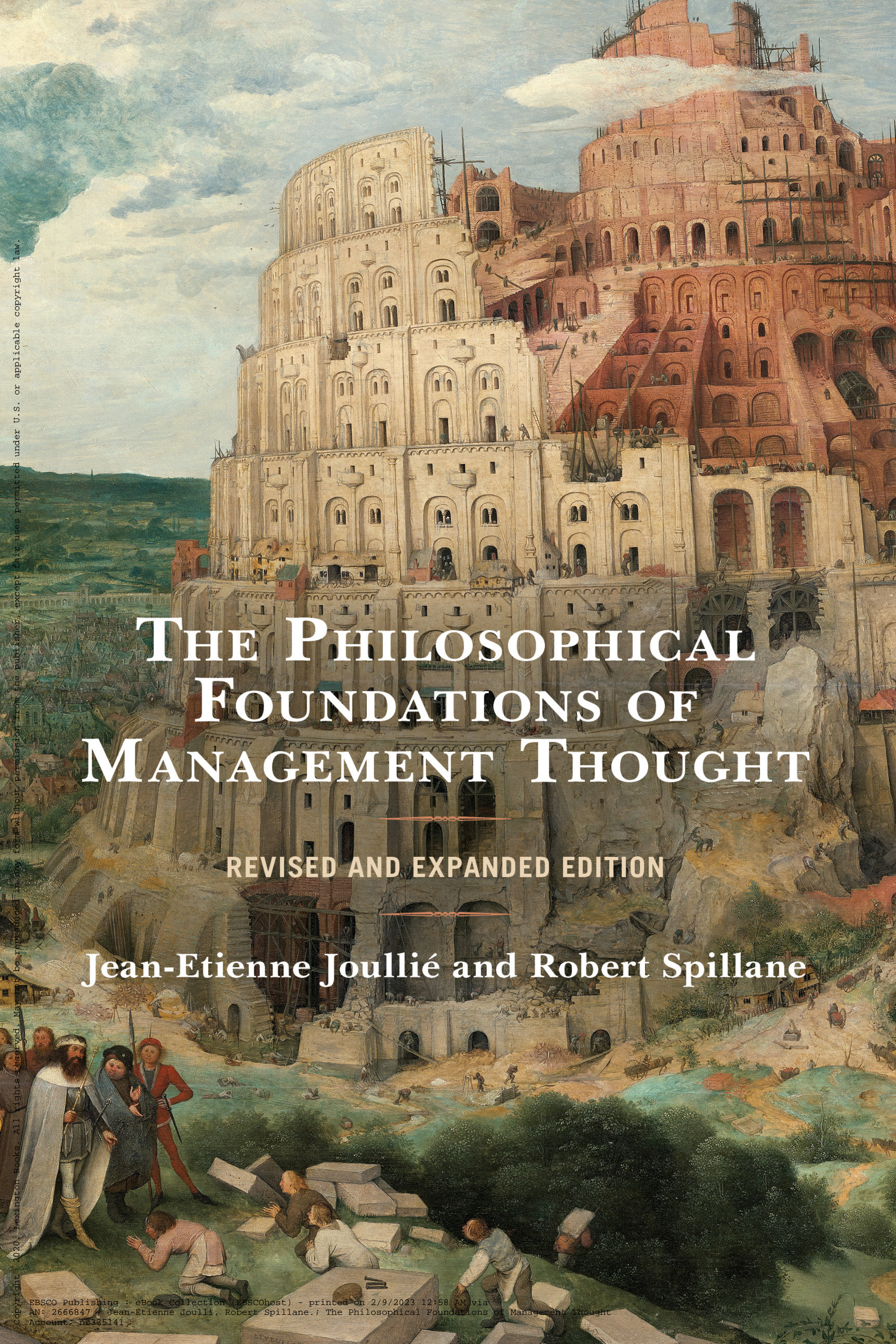

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EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 2/9/2023 12:58 AM via
AN: 2666847 ; Jean-Etienne Joulli, Robert Spillane.; The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought
Account: ns335141

The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought

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The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought

Revised and Expanded Edition

Jean-Etienne Joullié and Robert Spillane

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

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Published by Lexington Books
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

6 Tinworth Street, London SE11 5AL, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Available
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020944696

ISBN 978-1-7936-3015-5 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-7936-3016-2 (electronic)

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For Our Bright-Eyed Students

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Contents

Introduction 1

1 Ancient Heroism: Managing Heroically 7
2 Greek Rationalism: Managing Argumentatively 27
3 Italian Renaissance: Managing by and for Power 47
4 French Rationalism: Managing Rationally 69
5 British Empiricism: Managing without Nonsense 91
6 Positivism: Managing Scientifically 113
7 Critical Rationalism: Managing by Trial and Error 133
8 German Romanticism: Managing Artistically 157
9 Heroic Individualism: Managing Aristocratically 183
10 Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry: Managing Mind 205
11 French Existentialism: Managing for Freedom and Responsibility 229
12 American Pragmatism: Making Management Work 257
13 Postmodernism: Managing without Foundations 285

Epilogue: Philosophy as Remedy 319
Bibliography 343
Name Index 355
About the Authors 359

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Introduction

Like the first edition, this book is a declaration of love to philosophy. It owes its existence to the authors' good fortune in having been invited to deliver a series of university lectures on philosophy to management students. As the students were managers or aspiring managers, the philosophies which dominated the lectures were analysed for their contribution to management thought. After all, for more than 2,400 years, philosophers have been providing political rulers with their main ideas. Plato advised the king of Syracuse, Aristotle was tutor to Alexander the Great, Epictetus worked with Emperor Nero Machiavelli advised Renaissance princes, a professor of philosophy, Martin Luther, invented Protestantism, Thomas Hobbes advised both sides in the English civil war, John Locke provided the outline for the American Constitution David Hume worked with English ambassadors, Voltaire gave intellectual comfort to kings and aristocrats, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the philosophical father of the French Revolution and the Terror, Johann Fichte encouraged Germans to rise up against Napoleon, Friedrich Nietzsche was accused of indirectly starting two world wars, and the influence of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud on Western thinking need no elaboration.

To the despair of the students who attended our lectures, no suitable textbooks could be found. There are, of course, many excellent histories of Western philosophy but, understandably, they are written for a general audience and do not draw implications for the theory and practice of management. Theories of management are usually developed and promoted by academics from diverse disciplines. They rarely, if ever, refer to the philosophical perspectives which underpin their theories. Similarly, a crucial task of senior managers is to offer explanations for present and future actions. Yet, philosophers have long recognised that what really matters about any explanatory framework is not what it explains, but what it *assumes*. In this respect, at

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least, discussions of and arguments about assumptions are at the very heart of philosophy and management.

Although management has been defined in various ways, two perspectives are prominent. Management has been defined, pragmatically, as 'what managers do'. However, a moment's reflection reveals that managers' actions involve other resources, especially human beings. A more convincing definition acknowledges the fact that management is a *relationship* between managers and the resources they manage, without which there are no managers. Management requires a manager and a (subordinate) colleague as anchor points between which the concept has its meaning. Consequently, those who study the managerial relationship give equal prominence to managers and those they manage.

Surprisingly, managers and their educators have favoured the first definition. They have, accordingly, committed themselves to the study of managers themselves, as if management was the sum of managers' personalities or actions. This explains, in part, the popularity of studies of personality, motivation and leadership styles which treat managers as if they possess special psychological qualities that set them apart from their colleagues and justify their power and status. Consequently, the psychology of individual differences has become an important subject in the management curriculum. However, what is significant in psychology has been appropriated from philosophy. For example, Freudian psychoanalysis is heavily dependent on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and existential psychology draws on the philosophies of Heidegger and Sartre.

There is a growing realisation among academics that if managerial psychology is to develop beyond the study of individual differences, it needs to acknowledge that people called managers are enmeshed in social relationships which can and indeed should be studied. That is, management should be studied in terms of the relationships which underpin it, such as power, authority, conformity, obedience, autonomy and authenticity. Such an orientation persists most strongly in social psychology, which, of all the psychological disciplines, draws most heavily on philosophy. Understandably so: descriptions of power and authority relationships are, for instance, found in the works Homer, Plato wrote extensively on conformity and obedience, while Diogenes promoted autonomy and authenticity as noble virtues.

What has been said about the origins of psychology and social psychology applies equally to management thought. When, for example, managers follow economists in assuming that human beings are on earth to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, they draw on British utilitarian philosophy (to which Nietzsche replied 'humans do not pursue pleasure, only Englishmen do that'), itself resting to a large degree on empiricism. When managers claim that truth is 'what works', they repeat a slogan popularised by American

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psychologist and pragmatic philosopher, William James. When management consultants preach ‘emotional intelligence’, they teach the views of ancient Stoic philosopher, Epictetus. When managers sprout obfuscating jargon to pretend that they are profound, they follow Plato’s advice. When managers surround themselves only with colleagues who are competent and loyal, they follow the prescription of Machiavelli.

That philosophy is a source of valuable knowledge for those who direct others was not always ignored. American general George Patton had a copy of Homer’s *Iliad* with him at all times and British defence minister Alan Clarke argued that Machiavelli’s book *The Prince* is *the* primer for politicians. Management writer, academic and consultant Peter Drucker saw in Kierkegaard ideas which managers would do well to embrace. Such examples, which can be easily multiplied, only make the following conclusion more surprising. Few managers, MBA students or those who teach them have read Homer, Plato, Epictetus, Machiavelli, Kant, Nietzsche or any of those thinkers whose ideas have changed, for better or for worse, the course of Western civilisation.

This book aims, therefore, to put before readers a history of the evolution of Western thought and its implications for management study and practice. This revised edition differs from the first edition in three ways. First, the book has been carefully re-edited to clarify important philosophical perspectives and sharpen arguments about them. Second, implications for and application to management of philosophical ideas have been thoroughly re-assessed in line with recent changes in management theory. Third, the authors have responded to requests from readers to include in a second edition a chapter on pragmatism. Although reasons for this omission were discussed in the first edition, the authors have been persuaded that a book on the foundations of management thought will be indeed the better for including an analysis of this American philosophy.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead noted that European philosophy is best characterised as a series of footnotes to Plato’s thought. If so, a short survey of Western thought must include those philosophers who predate (to provide context) agree or disagree with Plato in order to provide an overview of the evolution of Western thinking. To this purpose, chapters 1 and 2 consider ancient philosophies, chapter 3 attends to the Renaissance, chapters 4–9 analyse six modern philosophies and two contemporary philosophies. Chapters 11–13 focus on contemporary philosophies and anti-philosophy. Given its significance for management scholars, two chapters are dedicated

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to philosophy of science. Although not normally included in books of philosophy, psychoanalysis and psychiatry are discussed critically in chapter 10. Apart from their topical relevance to managers, they illustrate tangibly central features of twentieth-century Western thinking which are discussed in other chapters. After a short history of management schools, the book concludes that managers require an education which includes philosophy if they and their educators hope to see their profession develop.

With some exceptions, each philosophy is presented through the works of one author who is an influential representative, or even founder, of a body of ideas which continues to exercise the thoughts of serious thinkers. Although care has been taken to present these ideas as faithfully as possible, a degree of simplification is required for the sake of brevity. A bold selection of philosophers is also necessary to contain the book within reasonable limits. For instance, influential philosophies, including post-structuralism, phenomenology and dialectical materialism have been omitted. Post-structuralism can be considered, with caveats sketched where appropriate, as a path to the postmodernist movement. Similarly, phenomenology is the basis for existentialism as both are grounded on consciousness and intentionality. Finally, allowance is made for the historical and social importance of dialectical materialism (Marxism), but its marginal influence on management education does not warrant its inclusion in this book.

These observations do not apply to the works of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and G. E. Moore. These philosophers have nonetheless been set aside in the knowledge that their ethical perspectives are routinely taught in business ethics classes and widely discussed in the management literature. Besides, this is book which explores the ways in which philosophy informs management thought and not how it should inform it.

The following pages offer more critical discussion of philosophy than of the management literature it has influenced. Indeed, management writers rarely acknowledge their intellectual antecedents, even if they are aware of them. This is not to imply that influential management writers have knowingly engaged in deception or promoted ideas they knew were incorrect. Sociologist Stanislav Andreski argued that renowned authors are rarely, if ever, self-conscious charlatans, even if some of their admirers are. A more likely scenario is that ideas promoted in the management literature have been granted undeserved currency and authority because they appear original, insightful, or serve personal agendas. By reaching back to the intellectual origin of central management concepts and explicating their genuine meaning, this book aims to dispel the conceptual fog that often surrounds them. If it awakens managers and their educators from the intellectual slumbers this fog has induced, it has fulfilled an important part of its mission.

Although this book offers a historical-thematic review of Western philosophy, it is not a general history of Western philosophy. The material retained

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in the pages that follow is, however, adequate for completing the mission the authors assigned themselves. Managers, students, researchers and teachers of management would do well to engage with Western philosophy if they are to make sense of what they do and think. A book by the same authors, *Philosophy of Leadership: The Power of Authority*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, complements the present volume by proposing a review of philosophies, ancient and modern, which are relevant to an understanding of leadership.

Thanks are owed to the publishers for their confidence and encouragement in supporting a revised and expanded edition.

This book would have never come to being without the unquestioning support of our respective partners. The success of this book will be, in large part, theirs.

J.-E. J. and R. S.
Kuwait and Sydney.

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Chapter 1

Ancient Heroism

Managing Heroically

The *Iliad* has been a literary and cultural reference for more than 2,800 years.[1] Although Homer was not a philosopher, his epic poetry is the mandatory starting point for a journey in Western thinking. From the style of his great poem, the story it tells and the actions of its protagonists, readers over the centuries have extracted and reconstructed the ways Homeric men and women conceived of their existence and of the world in which they lived. The world view which the *Iliad* depicts is not limited to ancient Greece. It is also a feature of the civilisations that flourished in sixteenth-century Bushido Japan, Viking-age (seventh- to eleventh-century) Scandinavia and eighth-century Celtic Ireland. Beyond their differences, these societies were all characterised by a dominant emphasis on nobility, that is on courage, fidelity and a rigid adherence to standards of excellence.

If the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which predates the Homeric poems by at least 1,500 years, had been discovered before the middle of the nineteenth century, it might well have challenged the predominance of the *Iliad*. This question is, however, of little philosophical importance because the perspective represented by the adventures of Gilgamesh does not differ markedly from that which emerges from the *Iliad*. Fifteen centuries made no substantial mark on the way men and women understood themselves and their world. This point is worth remembering when pondering the history of Western thinking since the days of Achilles and Hector.

Reading the poetry of the *Iliad* as a philosophical text is, of course, anachronistic and risks the charge of forcing upon Homer ideas which he never entertained. Philosophers and historians are concerned with the logical and empirical status of propositions rather than the grand tragedy of human existence, which is captured by epic poetry. Insofar as some philosophers believe that the limit of knowledge is the limit of language, Homer and his characters

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evaluated themselves and the world in ways scarcely recognisable today. Yet, from Homer a few fundamental assumptions about human existence can be extracted and deserve a hearing since transformations in language are not necessarily for the better. To believe otherwise is to engage in the conviction that new words are necessarily associated with intellectual discoveries when they are in fact inventions with no guarantee that they are either comprehensible or progressive. This observation justifies beginning a book of philosophy with Homer, if only to understand what later philosophers retained, what they rejected, and why. As the book proceeds from Homer's time (around 750 BC) through the centuries, it becomes clear how far from his thinking Western philosophers have travelled.

HOMER'S WORLD

The overall story of the *Iliad* is simply summarised. The siege of Troy is in its tenth year and both sides are weary of fighting. A quarrel erupts among the Achaeans' leaders and Achilles withdraws from battle. Trojans and Achaeans agree to settle the war through a duel between Helen's former and current husbands but, because of divine intervention, its outcome is indecisive. Fighting resumes and each time one side dominates, an extraordinary set of circumstances deprives it of final victory. As an Achaean army bolstered by Achilles' return pushes the Trojans back to their walls, Hector, the champion of Troy, stays alone to face his Achaean counterpart. The Trojan hesitates, fights and meets his fate. The city mourns but still stands. An atmosphere of impending tragedy is palpable throughout the last pages.

Beyond the simplicity of its story-line, the *Iliad* reveals an overall simplicity of a higher order. Homer's language is devoid of abstractions. It relies upon action words (verbs, adverbs), concrete nouns (characters, objects, locations) and adjectives. For the author and characters of the *Iliad*, the world is limited to what they can observe or infer directly therefrom. There is nothing beyond appearances because there is no difference between what is and what seems to be. Although the text occasionally uses such words as 'men', 'horses' or 'ships', these terms refer to people, animals or ships that could be, in principle, individually identified; in Book II, lengthy descriptions of the two armies test the reader's patience. Homer's world is composed of particulars because his language does not embrace universals.

HOMER'S HEROES

Although a war story, the *Iliad* does not glorify death. Rather, Homer glorified and idealised life. Under his stylus, life is to be lived to the fullest. Alive,

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the warriors burst with vitality: fire flashes from their eyes and rages in their chests. When not pierced by spear or arrow, their hearts overflow with indomitable fury. The battlefield constantly resonates with roars compared to those of lions or wild boars, the victorious army sweeping forth like a river in flood. Emotions are always lived with the greatest intensity: night watchmen are subject to 'immortal panic' and 'cold terror'; when in grief, men are 'stricken with great sorrow'; they shake with anger, fear or both. The entire story emphasises the wrath and pride of the warrior. Lust is never far away from love; warriors' moods swing violently between profound nostalgia for peace and utmost determination for battle. Spirits are either at their highest or at their lowest, but never at rest. The protagonists are completely absorbed in the here and now.

To modern eyes, heroism is attributed to individuals or groups who engage in praiseworthy (and generally physical) activities. Sportspeople, firefighters, military personnel are frequently called heroes for doing their job well. A modern hero is an individual whose behaviour breaks the boundaries of social roles and expectations.

Ancient heroism consists in the exact opposite. In ancient heroic societies, individuals are defined by their roles to which are attached expectations of performance, rules of behaviour, and rewards when results are forthcoming. Intentions and feelings are irrelevant, only results matter. Might is right: heroism is a philosophy of power expressed through action where social role defines the characters. In the *Iliad*, the protagonists know where they stand in society, what they owe others and what others owe them. Always proud, they are swift to retaliate when challenged. They deal with others not as they expect others to deal with them, but as their respective social ranks dictate. One acts as one's social position compels one to act. Brave, strong, determined and resourceful in battle, warriors value humour and cunning as complements if courage fails them. Young men are supposed to be impulsive and bold, old men wise and prudent, women beautiful, faithful and loving.

Areté, or virtue, is the ideal of excellence that Homer's main characters strive to attain and embody. It is not an ideal from which they could distance themselves, however. More than duty, *areté* determines behaviour and defines the characters' existence. Heroic existence is defined by the recognition peers afford; those who fail in their responsibilities surrender their right to exist and are dealt with accordingly by friends or enemies. In the *Iliad*, the hero is true to the role his peers expect him to discharge, accepts the demands placed upon him and displays the required virtues in heroic action. To an embattled friend, a Trojan leader enjoins:

> Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle, would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor

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> would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others.[2]

No doubt Leonidas of Sparta spoke in similar terms to his men as they prepared for their last stand at Thermopylae.

Homer's heroes are supposed to comply everywhere and always to the heroic code. They are dissuaded from surrendering to such emotions as fear, wrath or love, which lead them to ignore the rules that define their roles and justify their existence. Nonetheless, they are often tempted to do this. The verses of the *Iliad* are awash with tears as they are with blood. Many a moving scene shows a hero torn between his duties and his longing for the tranquillity of his home, the arms of his wife, or a warm bath. Duties always win, as they must, for without them the hero ceases to exist. Helen lost much or her dignity when she ran away with Paris and reflecting on her betrayal, she is a 'slut', 'a nasty bitch' in her own eyes.[3] Running away from Achilles, Hector has become a 'dog'.[4] When he returns to his senses and attempts to negotiate with the terrifying Achaean that whoever wins their duel will honour the opponent's body, he is angrily dismissed. The heroic code was broken when Hector behaved cowardly. Achilles draws no satisfaction from his victory and fails to gain his just rewards because no one can take pride in slaying a dog. The Trojan, by fleeing, surrendered his warrior status, thereby abandoning any claim he could have had over peers or enemies. One can trade only for so long on past successes; one must always remain ready to deliver in the here and now. Directing his emotions to warlike achievement is the ultimate test of the hero. Hector's inglorious death is a miniature of the heroic code.

If Homeric man knows what he has to do, he also knows how to evaluate his peers' and his own actions. Descriptions of how one person is to act, has acted or failed to act, fall under the sphere of objective, factual statements. In heroic societies, the virtuous is assessable with certainty: empirical methods are the basis for moral enquiries. Actual performances are either praised or blamed, but warriors cannot deflect their peers' judgements by invoking personal intentions or by pointing to factors beyond their control. If their performance fails to meet the criteria of success embodied in their role, they cannot avoid the charge of having fallen short of the expectations and social obligations encapsulated in it. Irrespective of the circumstances that have led to it, failure is a factual and moral error.

In this context, it is only natural that a strong sense of purpose animates the characters of the *Iliad*. The Achaeans are determined to see Troy fall and Helen returned; for the Trojans, the besiegers must be pushed back to the sea. When this clarity of purpose weakens in the face of adversity, even the most formidable heroes call to the gods in despair. This desperation is

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understandable: without an overall goal heroic life becomes unexplainable, even absurd, since the entire edifice of roles, rules and rewards collapses.

HOMER'S MAN

The characters of the *Iliad*, gods as well as men, do not develop psychologically. A one- or two-word outline is the most they receive; Odysseus is said to be 'crafty' or 'resourceful', Achilles and Hector 'brilliant' and many others 'valiant'. Sustained physical descriptions are similarly absent. Instead, the poet never tires of insisting on the defining features of his gods and heroes through expressions that systematically precede their names. These phrases point invariably to an external, directly observable attribute: 'lovely-haired' Helen, 'swift feet' Achilles, 'powerful' Agamemnon, 'gigantic' Ajax, 'warlike' Menelaus, 'tall' Hector 'of the shining helmet', Hera the goddess 'of the white arms', 'grey-eyed' Pallas Athene and so on. Collectively, the Achaeans are 'long-haired' and 'bronze-armoured', while the Trojans are 'breakers of horses'.

More importantly, Homer had no word for the modern concepts of 'self', 'mind', 'soul', 'ego', 'character' or 'personality'. The various terms found in the original text and sometimes interpreted as proxies for them (notably *psyche*, *thymos*, *noos*), point to organs and physiological processes or refer to analogies with them. While *soma* means 'dead limbs' or 'corpse', *psyche* is what keeps the characters alive, the source of their power and the breath that warriors exhale when they die; *thymos* is the seat of their emotions and *noos* is their visual acuity. The notable absence of psychological language is not mere Homeric rhetoric but highlights a deeply entrenched, if never explicitly stated, ontological perspective: ancient heroism's man is body and behaviour. There is no recourse in the epic poem to an internal puppeteer who pulls invisible yet unbreakable strings of actions (usually referred to as psychological 'needs', 'drives' or 'traits'). This is consistent with the observation that Homer's characters do not – cannot – strive for self-affirmation but can aim only at social affirmation. Although heroes are different from one another and are insistently so described, Homer never transformed them into a sort of Russian doll, the inner core of which escapes control. There is no distinction in the text between doer and deed, between action and actor. Homeric man is what he does so that a man and his actions are indistinguishable.

Similarly, Homer had no language for intention and rationality. Although his heroes deliberate, they base their deliberations on practical necessity and not on the careful weighing of contradictory options. Once they have ascertained what is consistent with the heroic code, their decisions are automatic. When they behave unpredictably (as they regularly do), it is because they are

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under divine influence. Gods (fifty-five in all), through the dreams and feelings they induce, make characters break the heroic code, fail in their duties and betray their peers. While this constant intrusion of the gods irritates modern readers, Homer needed them to explain the otherwise unexplainable. Lacking a psychological vocabulary, he had to resort to 'external' entities to describe internal events. All considered, Achilles, Hector and their peers are not fully responsible for what they do because their roles determine their behaviour. The absence of conceptual separation between the characters, their roles and their actions, makes it difficult to attribute personal responsibility to individuals. One does not attribute responsibility to an act, but to a free-choosing actor. Further, having no language for mind or self, Homer's protagonists cannot entertain a notion of personal freedom, the precondition for personal responsibility.

Paradoxically, however, it is still possible successfully to challenge the gods, as Odysseus will do on his journey home. This is the case because the gods of the *Iliad* are human-like entities; they quarrel, plot, fall in love, bleed, engender children, and so on. While immortal and more powerful than human beings, the gods are not without weaknesses and these can be used to defeat their schemes. Victory over the gods and the emotions they insufflate remains within the reach of the determined heroic individual. Resisting the inhabitants of Mount Olympus is the heroic equivalent of today's 'self-control'.

This body of concepts presupposes a clear hierarchy of status and functions. Understanding of that structure and obedience to those above in the social order of rank are two essential aspects of heroic morality. At the very bottom of the social structure are the slaves, superseded by the various non-warring members of the Achaean expedition or the Trojan city, all of whom are barely granted attention in the Homeric poems. At the other extreme stand the warriors, commanded by their respective kings. Transparent throughout the plot is the notion that promotion to the rank of king is open only to the great warriors. Success on the battlefield is heroism's ultimate social value.

The Achaean kings, led by Agamemnon, regularly meet in council. This group is anything but monolithic: stern rebukes and harsh words fly readily. When the Achaean leader, suspecting disaster, proposes to retreat under the cover of nightfall, Odysseus starkly opposes him: 'Son of Atreus, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier? Ruinous! I wish you directed some other unworthy army and were not lord over us [. . .] Now I utterly despise your heart for the thing you have spoken.' At the end of this sharp tirade, Agamemnon can only concede:

> Odysseus, you have hit me somewhere deep in my feelings with this hard word. But I am not telling the sons of the Achaeans against their will to drag

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> their benched ships down to the water. Now let someone speak who has better counsel than this was; young man or old; and what he says will be to my liking.[5]

These internal tensions among Achaean kings, paralleled by similar ones among Trojan leaders, are not incidental distractions superimposed on the main plot of the *Iliad* since they recur regularly throughout the poem. Indeed, the main story is itself triggered by Achilles opposing Agamemnon's decision to keep a woman slave for himself. Angered, Achilles withdraws and pleads to the gods to bring the Achaeans to the brink of defeat so that he may appear as their saviour. In this dispute, both Achilles and Agamemnon behave unpredictably and defy the heroic code.[6] Achilles goes much further than his king, however, since not only does he refuse to fight as he is meant to, but he develops his own agenda, calling for his peers' downfall. By contrast, Odysseus, who also regularly opposes Agamemnon's opinions in unambiguous terms, takes care that cohesion within the Achaeans is not stretched to breaking point. That Achilles is later instrumental to the Achaeans' victory does nothing to alleviate the ominous fact that he betrayed his side and, adding insult to injury, wished its demise. His death before the walls of Troy as the city is about to fall (which occurs after the *Iliad*), prophesised by a dying Hector, is the price he must pay for his unheroic behaviour.

Its overall simplicity and cohesiveness do not render heroism immune to criticism. Heroism makes no room for individualism and little for innovation since it demands that its members adhere rigidly to exacting conventions and standards. Its wholesale reliance on appearances reinforces this phenomenon: heroic man is unlikely to look for anything beyond what immediately appears to be. Science is inconceivable in the heroic world of Homer since nothing substantial happens in the *Iliad* without divine intervention. The price to pay for a culture of excellence according to exacting standards is the unquestioned perpetuation of traditions and because of this heroic societies are inherently stable. Consequently, heroism enjoyed an exceptional longevity: it was the dominating world view from at least the time of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to that of Homer.

The emphasis on performance according to rigid standards that pervades the *Iliad* has other consequences. Although its characters are supposedly different from one another, the weaponry used in the *Iliad* is such that the survival of warriors of weak constitution or short physique is a near impossibility. Homer's recurrent epithets through which his protagonists are distinguished ('shining helmet', 'white arms', 'grey eyes', etc.) confirm this observation; although central to the epic tradition, they all pertain to stereotyped, ornamental physical attributes irrelevant to the unfolding of the story. The emphasis on immediate performance also makes Homer's heroes oblivious to the idea that there could be value in merely trying, or even failing.

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History is replete with examples of failures that later turned out to be, or were reinterpreted as, great successes: the discovery of America is perhaps the most obvious example.

ANCIENT HEROISM TODAY

Karl Marx suggested that Greek epic poetry is alluring to modern man because the world it describes stands to modernity as the child stands to the adult. In Marx's view, this charm is a dangerous one because adults who try to be the children they once were are only childish.[7] Although there may be merit in this piece of Marxist psychology, one of its unstated premises is that modernity is a more mature expression of Western humanity than is ancient heroism. Such an evaluation begs the question; one fails to see why lead, powder and the typing press (items that Marx used in support of his assessment) are signs of civilisation's maturity or even of cultural progress. In any case, the magnificence of the *Iliad* owes nothing to them.

The Homeric poems propose the refreshing simplicity of a language devoid of reifications and abstractions. There is no psychology to be found in the *Iliad*, unless this deficiency is itself a form of psychology according to which whatever happens 'within' an individual is of no interest except for himself. Intentions, psychological motives, personality traits, mental illness, have no meaning in Homer's world view. Individuals are judged by their actions: they are what they do. Strictly speaking, Homer can have no psychology since 'psyche' refers to breath and the notion of 'mind' is yet to be invented. Furthermore, Homer's 'psychology' is free of the circular reasoning, pervasive today, according to which people act greedily because they are greedy (the reasoning is circular because the only evidence for the 'internal' greed is the observed greedy behaviour). As psychological needs or personality traits have neither been observed nor measured directly, they are consigned to the status of (backward) inferences from observed behaviour. In this respect, Homer is the forerunner of those anti-psychologists, known as behaviourists, who argue that all propositions about mental activities are translatable without loss of meaning into propositions about behaviour.

Heroic life is simple, but not simplistic and does not yield easily to caricature. Homer's heroes demonstrate courage, resilience and determination. They cannot comprehend the acceptance of anything less than the highest possible standards. Confronting their opinions and accepting of harsh rebuke, they value contribution and achievement, respect seniority of age and extol excellence. Often unruly, they know when to yield to discipline and accept fully the consequences of their actions. When they fail to perform to appropriate standards, they do not blame anyone but themselves. They endure their

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existence with tears but without self-pity, take pride in endurance, express no regrets over past decisions and live resolutely with them. Unburdened with guilt, they are acutely conscious of shame. While expressing intense emotions, they strive to dominate and sublimate them to warlike achievement. Represented through epic poetry, ancient heroism is a philosophy for noble living and a lesson for life. Should there be a child-adult relationship between heroic and twenty-first Western man, its direction cannot be as obvious as Marx took it to be.

The legacy of the *Iliad* is perceptible today, especially in settings that glorify honour and individuals who display courage when confronted with towering duties. A modern example of a hero who exemplified the values of ancient heroism is American General George Smith Patton (1885–1945). In 1909, then a West Point cadet, Patton scribbled on the back of one of his textbooks: 'Qualities of a great general: 1) tactically aggressive (loves a fight); 2) strength of character; 3) steadiness of purpose; 4) acceptance of responsibility; 5) energy; 6) good health and strength.'[8] Patton remained all his life an uncompromising stickler for military discipline and traditions. He blended this intransigence with a deep and sincere empathy for the sick, the wounded and the dying. Well known for his impulsivity and fiery speeches, he slapped two soldiers who were resting in a field hospital, claiming 'battle fatigue'. For Patton, this was an intolerable insult to those who were risking their lives in battle and especially to those who were wounded as a result. Criticised by a self-righteous press, these trifling events (in the context of war) nearly destroyed the career of one of the most successful, if controversial, generals in the history of the U.S. Army, perhaps even of recorded military history.

The sports arena is another domain where parallels with heroic life are easily drawn. Within a sports team, players retain their place while they perform as their position and field conditions dictate. Poor performance leads to exclusion; intentions are not accepted as substitutes. Difficult or desperate situations, rather than sources of dishonour, are proving grounds for the best performers; unlikely recoveries create sports legends. As in heroic settings, rules are not open for discussion so that breaking them has serious consequences.

Additional analogies are possible in other domains, with varying degrees of illustrative relevance. It is clear, however, that even in military or sports environments, Hector and Achilles are impossible figures in today's world. Performance expectations within these circles cannot be compared with those that underpinned heroic societies since people today are likely to view with amusement the inflexible sense of duty that Homer's heroes embody. Moreover, holding others accountable for their shortcomings to the exacting degree of the *Iliad* is contrary to modern sensibilities. Nonetheless, Homer proposed insights that can benefit managers, notably his praise of roles,

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performance and standards, his glorification of action and self-control, and his disregard for psychological language. These features and their consequences resonate in the works of a famous management writer.

PETER DRUCKER

In the field of management, one author stands out: Peter Drucker (1909–2005). In the decades that followed World War II, Drucker was the most widely read and celebrated management writer in the world. Born in Vienna, he studied economics and law in Austria, Germany and England before settling in the United States, teaching philosophy and politics at Bennington College in Vermont from 1942 to 1949. From 1950 to 1971, he was professor of management at New York University's Graduate School of Business. He then taught social science and management at what is now Claremont Graduate University in California, lecturing into his nineties. During his long career, he published thirty-nine books and hundreds of articles, delivered thousands of lectures, authored and appeared in educational films on management and still found the time to consult to numerous organisations around the globe.

In his first book (*The End of Economic Man: The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1939), Drucker sought to explain the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and derive from his analysis recommendations for social harmony. He diagnosed Marxism and fascism as the results of the failure of capitalist industrialism to meet its social responsibilities in an era marked by the disintegration of traditional societies and values. Capitalism demanded that non-economic activities be subordinated to economic ones but, in Drucker's view, this hierarchy fed a nihilistic snake in capitalism's bosom. Totalitarian societies of the Marxist or fascist sort, he argued, grew out of the irrational desperation of masses led by elites unable to provide ethical answers to the real and pressing questions of the modern industrial age. A new form of society is required which provides meaningful roles and status for its citizens through economic organisations reshaped as communities. Subsequent works, *The Future of Industrial Man* (1942), *The Concept of the Corporation* (1946) and *The New Society* (1949) developed this view further. Drucker insisted that individuals have inescapable needs for, hence inalienable rights to, autonomy, security, dignity and respect. Work was to provide status and function. When employers took labour as a replaceable commodity, or when workers simply considered their jobs as sources of income, people see each other as merely means to ends and this results in frustration of the kind that leads to totalitarianism. The conflicting agendas of the individual and of economic organisations can be reconciled only through responsible acts of citizenship by employers and employees alike. Drucker believed that a new and developing profession

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– management – occupied an essential role in bringing about this meaningful integration. The role of managers is to make economic resources and workers productive in ways that are rewarding for managers, workers and society.

While developing these arguments, Drucker (in 1943) had the opportunity to study firsthand the internal workings of what was then one of the most successful industrial corporations in the world: General Motors (GM). For two years he sat in meetings, talked to GM's senior managers (including legendary CEO Alfred Sloan) and analysed their political, social and structural relationships.[9] He applauded GM's managers for accepting and enforcing responsibility for contribution, rewarding strong performance, and responding decisively to poor performance. He learnt from GM's executives that management's job is to ensure that workers can achieve to the best of their abilities by making their strengths productive and weaknesses irrelevant. These ideas, outlined in *The Concept of the Corporation*, were to receive their full development in *The Practice of Management* (1954). This work, written after a long professional and personal relationship with Harold Smiddy (acknowledged at the end of the preface as the book's 'godfather'), is for many people the first and final word on management. In any case, the book catapulted Drucker from relative obscurity to worldwide fame within management circles. The later and more widely read *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1973) incorporates elements from *Managing for Results* (1964) to produce an expanded version of *The Practice* with the original theses reinforced.

MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES AND SELF-CONTROL

In *The Practice of Management*, Drucker promotes the popular if widely misunderstood model 'Management by Objectives and Self-Control' (MBO). At the heart of this model is the conviction that managers should focus on what the job, rather than the boss, demands. Amicable communications and job satisfaction are not the drivers of good management but its optional, dispensable results. To require managers to be friends with their colleagues emphasises appearances, inhibits professional development and sabotages contribution to organisational goals. On his view, strong performers earn the right to disagree with their boss, peers or subordinates. Drucker is adamant that disagreement is not to be confused with bad manners. Rather, disagreement means arguing constructively with colleagues. Where managers are distracted by issues of friendship, they are likely to find it difficult to confront colleagues with their malperformance or take corrective action.

It follows that managers should assess behaviour in the workplace in terms of effectiveness rather than friendliness. The key question is not: 'Do they

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get along with each other?' but 'What will they contribute?' Managers sabotage their chances of success when they delve into their colleagues' personalities in a futile attempt to predict their behaviour. Rather, they succeed when subordinates are persuaded that, on the grounds of workmanship, managers earn the right to command and subordinates to be commanded.[10] Besides, Drucker (like many after him) failed to find evidence that job satisfaction predicted work performance. He argued, correctly, that dissatisfied workers and managers are often high achievers since job satisfaction is sometimes a sign of complacency which inhibits the drive to raise standards. Dissatisfaction is merely another and unfortunate name for willingness to achieve.[11]

Drucker argued that treating workmanship standards, practices, tasks and responsibilities independently leads to incapacitating confusion. To bring these matters together meaningfully with workers and managers, a common language is required. This, Drucker held, is possible only through the definition and pursuit of unambiguous objectives. Objectives are the integrating cement of the organisation. Without them, planning, organising, setting of expectations, performance measurement, delegation, employee development, meaningful decision-making and leadership cannot be effectively undertaken. To define objectives is to decide what the organisation is about, what it should be as compared to what it could be. Objectives are not self-evident: they are at the very heart of managing.

Once accomplished at the organisational level, the setting of objectives cascades to all levels of the hierarchy. Managers achieve commitment to individual, team and departmental objectives through clear delineations of responsibilities. These apply to managers as well as workers. Managers are involved in and accountable for the definition of their unit's objectives and subsequent performance. To be a manager means precisely to be responsible for reducing the distance between personal objectives and workmanship standards by clarifying their consistency and continuity. Although they are administrators of the resources under their supervision, managers are not controllers of their subordinates' performance. For Drucker, control in the workplace means self-control.

Managers are to communicate clearly to all employees what is expected of them, how they are to deliver on these expectations and the consequences of malperformance. Enforcing this approach was, for Drucker, the only way to generate accountability at all organisational levels. Employees and managers achieve self-control when they understand the demands of their work and master workmanship standards. While managers must provide transparent and complete feedback on individual performance, employees are to be their own boss, free within the standards of their workmanship.[12] When these conditions are satisfied, managers can enforce discipline, continuous development and high performance. Self-control, for Drucker, is simultaneously

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a basic demand of employee life and the most elementary condition of an organisation's survival.

This emphasis on unambiguous objectives and self-control means that managers can operate as internal entrepreneurs (or 'intrapreneurs') within decentralised organisations. As individual and organisational objectives are consistent, it is possible to devolve decision-making authority to the lowest hierarchical levels. Of special importance to Drucker are the departments that participate in the overarching purpose of all businesses: creating a customer. Departments that contribute directly to this objective are those in which the result-producing activities take place; they are the profit-centres (production, sales and finance). In Homer's language, these are the warrior groups. Departments that are not profit-centres are cost-centres and they exist to support the former through service and housekeeping activities. These are Homer's camp-followers who are never allowed to exercise power over warrior groups. Like Homer, Drucker assumed that contribution determines ranking. Accordingly, managers should never subordinate result-producing activities, or profit-centres, to support units (such as human resources or planning departments). In Homer's time, the leaders of warrior groups only qualified for eldership. In modern times, the heads of profit-centres and cost-centres form the top management of business organisations. Herein lies a problem since managers of cost-centres should, in principle and practice, see themselves as assistants because their job is to support and serve profit-centres. However, as members of top management they are likely to see themselves ranked equally with profit-centre managers. Consequently, they are emboldened to attempt to 'coordinate' profit-centres. Drucker would have none of this insisting that 'coordination' always means 'control' and such attempts to subordinate profit-centres to cost-centres must be vigorously resisted. Legendary CEO of General Electric and Drucker's friend Jack Welch agreed and throughout his tenure fought against the rise and power of cost-centres. Agreeing with Drucker that the ultimate test of management is performance, Welch believed that the top management group needs a captain even if the group collectively takes important decisions.[13] A central part of the captain's role, as revealed in the *Iliad*, is the drawing out from colleagues ideas for discussion and debate.

Drucker believed that MBO reconciles employees' as well as managers' legitimate demands. Through it, organisations reach their objectives and employees achieve meaning in their work and dignity in their lives. This is neither democracy nor permissiveness, but merely corporate citizenship. Crucially, however, this citizenship expands beyond the boundaries of organisations since these do not exist by and for themselves. If managers contribute to their organisation's objectives, organisations themselves contribute to the harmony and stability of the society in which they operate. Drucker believed

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that the public good determines private interests but its achievement rests on private virtue. The ultimate and public responsibility of managers is to make a public good of their self-interest within the limits of their area of performance.[14] Not recognising this responsibility was, in Drucker's eyes, an unforgivable moral failure on the part of managers. Its consequences were nothing short of catastrophic, as the first part of the twentieth century painfully showed: 'Tyranny is the only alternative to strong, performing autonomous institutions. [. . .] Performing, responsible management is the alternative to tyranny and our only protection against it.'[15]

AFTER DRUCKER

Drucker's works have been widely criticised. He was not popular with management academics because they found his prose superficial and journalistic. Some pundits indicted him for a dearth of original research and his multidisciplinary approach, which condemned him to superficiality. Others accused him of distilling the obvious, which both misses and understates the point. While fleshing out MBO, Drucker coined the now pervasive expression 'knowledge worker'. He insisted on decentralisation and privatisation yet held that not-for-profit organisations had insights and practices that are relevant to commercial organisations. He argued that managers should assess organisational activities in terms of their perceived value to the organisation's customers. He urged American managers to consider Japanese management methods as inspirational models. If these themes and countless others sound too obvious to be worth mentioning, it is largely because they were first passionately and persuasively espoused by Drucker. Critics are on more solid ground when they note that Drucker's later books do not compare favourably with the early ones in content and rhetorical power. Recycling old examples and immodestly referring to previous works, Drucker found it difficult to produce new, lasting insights year after year. He has not been alone in this predicament.

Drucker's work can be criticised on two distinct yet related grounds: his conception of people at work and his vision of an ideal society. On his view, people want to work and disintegrate morally and physically when they do not.[16] Employees should be empowered to the maximum of their ability because they constantly seek challenges and freedom at work and accept the ensuing burden of responsibility. All workers have a drive for workmanship and want to develop their natural talents to the fullest. Drucker was disappointed and frustrated by the fact that bureaucratic managers were not ready to empower their employees as prescribed by MBO. Yet he never seriously envisioned the possibility that some people are neither attracted nor

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suited to the kind of work that encompasses high degrees of freedom and responsibility.

Other critics argued that Drucker's vision is too simple and optimistic because he took for granted that good management brings about peace and prosperity. Indeed, his vision of employees becoming knowledge workers and enjoying a middle-class lifestyle looks like naive capitalism without class. Clearly, trust within the workplace is not an implicit precondition as Drucker preached but arises from well-understood interests about which he was rarely explicit. Benevolence is not altruism. It is to managers' benefit to control, encourage and make employees' progression and continuous development a reality whenever possible. In this outline, Drucker's work appears as legitimating not only management as a profession and academic discipline but also corporate capitalism. In this respect and because of his life-long aversion to Marxism and his praise for privatisation, critics dismissed Drucker as an ideologue who denied and systematically understated the negative consequences of management and capitalism.

Drucker was a devout Christian and could not abandon his hope in man. His conviction that people at work want to achieve was not naiveté on his part, however. He held that experience generally confirmed this insight and insisted that no alternative was ethically or practically possible. To assume that employees are immature, lazy or irresponsible is tantamount to believing that managers are psychologically superior to subordinates who deserve to be treated as incomplete or socially maladapted individuals. Management then becomes psychotherapy; manipulation replaces instructions and rewards. Drucker called this psychological despotism. In his view, the main purpose of psychology is 'to acquire insight into, and mastery of, oneself; [whereas] to use psychology to control, dominate and manipulate others [is] abuse of knowledge [and] a particularly repugnant form of tyranny'.[17] Not only is such a practice ignoble and contemptuous, it is also self-destructive for it demands that managers are omniscient psychologists, mastering an infinite variety of theories and techniques. Such managers would become their first casualties, quickly blundering and impairing performance:

> A manager who pretends that the personal needs of the subordinate, [. . .] rather than the objective needs of the task, determine what should be done, would not only be a poor manager; no one would – or should – believe him. All he does is to destroy the integrity of the relationship and with it the respect for his person and function.[18]

The relationships of psychologist and client and of manager and subordinate are mutually exclusive.

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Throughout a long life, Drucker believed that society is not all there is, not even for itself. He was obsessed with the notions of authority and legitimacy beyond the world of managers and corporations. He concerned himself with management as a profession because, from his early foray into the origins of totalitarianism, he remained terrified of what happened when economic elites fail in their moral duties. When they do, they surrender their legitimacy and society collapses. Economics cannot be the last frontier. The profit motive of commercial organisations should not be the dominant one if society is to remain harmonious, stable and peaceful. Profitability, for Drucker, meant responsibility. The urgent and central role of moral purpose within and beyond organisations is a defining feature of his work. In this outline, Drucker can be analysed as attempting either a synthesis of European humanistic, collectivist philosophy and American individualist entrepreneurship, or a modern reassembly of Aristotelian moral philosophy.[19]

MANAGING, HEROICALLY

While there are merits to such views, Drucker's work lends itself to a more encompassing analysis when read through the lens of ancient heroism. The defining features of the heroic world view outlined above appear in his management books. To start with stylistic observations, Drucker's books are not simple although they are simply written. The exemplary clarity of his prose, what has been called his 'discipline of mind', from which derives the persuasiveness of his arguments, reflects his commitment to action words, tangible terms and concepts. Management is all about 'tasks, responsibilities and practices'. The world that Drucker described and the rules he prescribed are easy to understand because the terms through which they are articulated are themselves easy to understand.

The parallels with Homer run much deeper, however. Homer extolled heroic life as a constant pursuit of glory; he never granted his characters the possibility of temporarily standing outside their role or of questioning their worldview, for such questioning would threaten their existence and their society. Drucker tirelessly promoted corporate life and his deepest belief was that people, especially managers, wanted to perform at work and see their organisations succeed within a stable and harmonious society. He could not conceive of any other stance; questioning that assumption would have, in his view, catastrophic nihilistic consequences. In a heroic context, failure is moral failure that threatens the survival of the group. For Drucker, it was executives' inescapable responsibility not only to deliver profits to ensure organisational survival but also to accept that public good conditions private interests. Terms like 'values', 'commitment' and 'common goal' recur in his

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books: behind plain 'business sense' often emerge rigid and heavy-handed prescriptions. Failure to recognise, accept and make good on management's organisational and social responsibilities is a moral failure of the first order. Good intentions are not acceptable substitutes.

Social roles define the *Iliad*'s characters, to which are attached rules, performance expectations and rewards. Homer's heroes recognise only success; warriors form the dominating group from which their kings emerged. Drucker explained that employees and managers have specific tasks and responsibilities: they are to perform to high workmanship standards and are accountable for their results and rewarded or penalised accordingly. Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers need to perform or be removed from their jobs. He defended the superiority of profit-centres over cost-centres and argued that contribution to organisational objectives determines rank and access to top management. Drucker believed that consensus and organisational harmony are distractions that must not influence what employees do: within limits, disagreement is a source of contribution. Achaeans and Trojans know what they have to achieve (defeat of the enemy) and fall into despair when other considerations over-shadow this objective. Drucker's overarching argument was that the setting and cascading of clear objectives are management's core activities in the absence of which organisational survival is impossible. Homer has no psychology or psychological language to offer, except one that disregards the idea of an internal actor in favour of a strict focus on external behavioural standards. Drucker argued that psychology was irrelevant and in fact detrimental to the way employees were to lead, follow and achieve. In the *Iliad*, the hero accepts his role in full and enacts it by recognising that duties take precedence over emotions. In *The Practice of Management*, employees achieve maturity and recognition through self-control; using psychology to control others is ignoble and self-defeating tyranny.

Drucker's MBO inherits Achilles' heel. When Drucker insists that employees desire and can achieve self-control and responsibility, it is because their scope is quite limited. Responsibility, in Drucker's terms, is to remain 'organised'.[20] Freedom is 'under the law' of the organisation and is bound by workmanship standards,[21] which means it is severely constrained. What employees are free to do is exclusively what managers have them do according to criteria they have to accept. Managers separate planning from performing and transfer all responsibility for their organisation's survival to those in charge of defining its overarching objectives. While this sounds trite, the point to note is that, within the MBO perspective, one's career hinges entirely on meeting one's objectives. That these objectives are narrow-minded or inadequate is beside the point. If managers are required to perform according to inappropriate standards, they have few practical opportunities to voice

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concerns, except perhaps to their immediate superiors, who may or may not be prepared to discuss such matters with them. Not every organisation will have the good fortune of the presence of an Odysseus with his loyalty to his king, his long-term vision, his shrewdness, and his rhetorical powers. In a heroic organisation, an Achilles is a more probable figure. Such potentially destructive managers embody the risk that a Druckerian organisation must be ready to face: powerful but protean executives blinded by their own agendas and ready to risk the ruin of their entire organisation, as Achilles does when he withdraws his troops after his quarrel with Agamemnon. For example, after the German surrender, Patton stirred controversy for suggesting in earnest that American troops push their advantage and drive the Red Army back to Russia. Organisational politics and international diplomacy require degrees of subtlety that frustrate heroic managers.

Although Drucker repeatedly emphasised the role of innovation throughout his books, it is difficult to see, given the premises of MBO, how it is possible. Genuine innovation means risk-taking and the possibility of failure which is as intolerable in MBO as it is in the *Iliad*. Even though Drucker insisted that managers strive for effectiveness rather than efficiency,[22] the latter is the more likely outcome of MBO. At best, one can expect small-scale innovation and marginal improvement. As assigned objectives are by necessity short-term (since managers evaluate performance against them in the coming months rather than in the coming years), the organisation inevitably suffers from the travails of short termism. Not every organisation will have a Penelope at its helm, ready to wait for twenty years for a promise to be fulfilled. Critics have similarly accused Drucker of continuing Taylorism and the bureaucratic tradition under a different name, pointing to Drucker's positive comments on Frederick Taylor.[23] His passion for Japan and his persistent praise of Japanese-style continuous improvement tell this story better than a long analysis. If many technological improvements and efficient management techniques have come from Japan, genuinely innovative products or break-through business practices are not features of the country's otherwise rich legacy. This is unsurprising since heroism, Bushido style, still influences Japanese society.

To the readers of Homer, *The Practice of Management* and its sequels have an unmistakeable flavour: the managers that animate Drucker's examples and case studies remind them of the characters that populate the *Iliad* for they share similar attributes. Drucker's MBO is ancient heroism transposed to management. Even the Christian existentialism that emerges from some of Drucker's pages, visible in his life-long obsession with freedom and responsibility, is compatible with this analysis. This is so because existentialism incorporates heroic elements, especially the view that man is what he does (chapter 11 returns to these themes and Drucker's existentialism). Ancient

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heroism is the Ariadne's thread with which Drucker's management writings are amenable to coherent analysis and the solution to what commentators have called 'Drucker's puzzle'. Drucker's management books were allegedly on Jack Welch's bedside table; if this is the case, Homer's *Iliad* should be on any manager's desk.

For more than fifty years, Drucker remained one of the most famous management authors and consultants in the world. Yet he never chose to form 'Drucker Inc'. to cash in on his phenomenal fame as other management gurus have done. He remained all his life a one-man band, delivering orally his wisdom to privileged clients and students, scolding them if they said they learnt anything from him rather than acknowledging that they had previously missed the obvious. If a Druckerian manager's life is enacted Homeric poetry, Drucker's professional life was enacted heroism in modern times.

NOTES

1. This chapter is an edited version of Joullié, J.-E. & Spillane, R. 2015. Heroic Drucker. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 128(1): 95–105; grateful thanks are extended to Springer for copyright permissions.
2. Lattimore, R. 1961. *The Iliad of Homer* (translation). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. See Book XII, verses 322 to 328.
3. III 180, VI 344.
4. XXII 340.
5. The exchange takes place in XIV 82–108.
6. As Thersites holds against Agamemnon (in II 239–40) and as Agamemnon admits later (II 378).
7. Marx, K. 1973. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin Books. Cf. p. 111.
8. von Hassel, A. & Breslin, E. 2010. *Patton: The Pursuit of Destiny*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. See p. 29.
9. Drucker, P. 1980. *Adventures of a Bystander*. New York, NY: Harper and Row. See pp. 256–93.
10. Drucker, P. 1989. *The Practice of Management*. London: Heinemann. See pp. 153–57.
11. Drucker, *The Practice*, 296–97.
12. Drucker, *The Practice*, 133–34.
13. Drucker, P. 1974 [1973]. *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*. London: Heinemann. See pp. 621–24.
14. Drucker, *Management*, 349–51.
15. Drucker, *Management*, ix–x.
16. Drucker, *The Practice*, 266.
17. Drucker, *Management*, 243–44.
18. Drucker, *Management*, 245.

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19. See Waring, S. P. 1992. Peter Drucker, MBO and the Corporatist Critique of Scientific Management. In *A Mental Revolution: Scientific Management since Taylor* (Nelson, D. ed.). Athens, OH: Ohio University Press and Kurzynski, M. 2012. Peter Drucker: Modern Day Aristotle for the Business Community. *Journal of Management History*, 18(1): 6–23, respectively.

20. Drucker, *Management*, 265.

21. Drucker, *The Practice*, 134.

22. Drucker, *Management*, 45–46.

23. See Drucker, *The Practice*, 274ff for an instance of Drucker's praise of Taylorism.

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Chapter 2

Greek Rationalism

Managing Argumentatively

Heroism enjoyed an exceptional longevity. It was the dominating world view from the time of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (around 2500 BC) to the Homeric era (eighth century BC). By the sixth century BC, however, Western thinking embarked on a remarkable philosophical journey which saw the warrior as cultural hero replaced by the thinker. The new age emphasised reflection rather than action, truth rather than power. Thinkers from Thales to Socrates transformed language and asked question which tested the very limits of knowledge. Is the world 'really' the way Homer's character saw it? Is there not more to life than action? Is the world more than the sum of its parts? Are there 'really' fifty-five gods? There is very little written record of answers to these questions before the fourth century BC, when a new philosophical hero takes centre stage. For the next 2,300 years, Plato will retain his reputation as one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Today, he is widely acknowledged as *the* father of ancient philosophy and entire volumes have been written about his works and their significance. Indeed, no account of Western thinking, or management thought, makes sense unless Plato's philosophy is analysed in some detail.

A WORLD IN TRANSITION

In Homer's world, although events are described in human terms, everything happens because of divine (but not spiritual) will, which is unpredictable and beyond human understanding. In seventh-century Ionia (present-day coastal Anatolia), Greek thinkers rejected this world view. They saw the world as a *kosmos*, a natural arrangement the structure of which is stable and intelligible. Thales proposed that the world is really water since almost

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everything contains or can take a liquid form. Anaximenes thought that the world is really air and Pythagoras believed it is number. Such answers sound naive to modern ears, but they attest to a momentous shift in thinking, never reneged since ancient time. The new idea and the beginning of Western philosophy is the view that the world is not what it appears to be: it is unitary. When Thales said that everything is really water, he placed the emphasis on the word 'really'. The world of everyday perception is, therefore, an apparent or illusory world because, for Thales, it is really water. By arguing that of the four elements, three are forms of the fourth, he committed himself to a naturalistic perspective which went beyond the reach of the five senses. Inevitably, other thinkers put forward their dissenting views: the world is really fire, earth, air and so on. Arguments for the status of the 'real' world became more sophisticated and less naturalistic so that Anaximenes could say (and be believed) that everything is really quality. Another, Heraclitus, argued that everything changes and nothing is permanent: 'You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.' Now since change is transition of something into something else, there must be something permanent which persists to make change possible. Parmenides said that 'you cannot step into the same river once' since reality is being which is and not-being which is not'. Parmenides spoke for his predecessors when he argued that true reality 'is' and that even if it escapes the senses, it is accessible to reason and thought. When this line of thinking starts to take hold, Achilles' physical force and warring skills are no longer the appropriate instruments to assert man's existence and place in the world. They have been displaced by intellectual abilities.

In the *Iliad*, the characters do not appear to think and behave of their own volition; what they do and feel comes from without and is ultimately of divine origin. As a result, heroes act without hesitation and invest their energy in their actions. By the year 600 BC, fifty-four of the Homeric gods had been retrenched and could no longer serve as the cause of human action. With the demise of the gods, human beings sought new explanations for their behaviour and unsurprisingly turned their attention inward: the study of the inner life began. Consequently, they began to see themselves as responsible for their actions.

Aeschylus (525–456 BC) is the first playwright to show clearly that when human beings act some mental process is involved. In his plays, personal deliberation and decision are major themes. He was especially interested in those acts of decision which stimulate action. Human action involves an active commitment to goals and purposes. Whereas behaviour can be studied empirically, action involves individuals in moral choices. Nobility and courage do not have causes: they are ideals projected by individuals towards the future. Without the support of the gods, Aeschylus's characters experience

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the burden of personal freedom which depresses the faint-hearted. As personal decisions threaten individuals with the possibility of social exclusion, the tension between personal freedom and social community was to become a major dramatic theme for the next 400 years.

In the plays of Sophocles' (496–406 BC), *psyche* is no longer Homer's breath of life but a living personality which is contrasted with *soma* or body. Taken together, *psyche* and *soma* constitute the complete human being. Sophocles says that *psyche* can address its possessor which is a more complicated way of saying, with Homer, that human beings talk to themselves. For Sophocles, *psyche* meant person or personality but because the complete human being was in the fifth century BC regarded as *soma* and *psyche*, the tendency from then until now has been to translate *psyche* as 'soul' or 'mind'. Some thinkers, however, resisted this body-mind dualism and preferred the earlier view of *psyche* as the living person, or personality. Thucydides (460–395 BC), for example, did not oppose *soma* and *psyche* but contrasted both terms, which denote persons, with inanimate objects.

Confusion about the opposition of *psyche* and *soma* continues in the characters of Euripides (480–406 BC) who struggle mightily to tame their passions by the force of their reasoning. Human beings are responsible through their passions and powers of reasoning for the good and evil they create. Those who blame the gods or other external forces for their evil actions are cowards. Delving into the inner life of human beings, he demonstrated the power of human reason to expose gods as myths and to reject myths as fairy tales. As a rationalist, he believed that knowledge is virtue but accepted the sad fact that knowledge is threatened by the passions. Unlike Homer, he was not especially interested in what people do. Indeed, his prologues betray much of the plot and actions of the characters. Rather, he was fascinated by the ways in which people think rationally about, and rationalise, their actions. That is, to make tragedy reasonable, Euripides allowed his characters to explore their motives publicly and to philosophise.

Euripides' play *Medea* (431 BC) is a vivid illustration of this transition. Abandoned by Jason the Argonaut, the father of her two sons, for a younger and beautiful well-born woman, Medea seeks revenge. After her failure to dissuade Jason from his venture, she threatens to kill their two children. Like most people, Jason does not believe she would do such a thing. Medea tells the audience that she is fully aware that she has a choice in the matter and that she does not have to use her children as pawns in a power game. She also admits that it would be a sweet revenge because it is the way to deal Jason the deepest wound. She understands the horror of what she is going to do and admits that anger 'masters her resolve'. So, to destroy Jason's plans, she poisons her rival and murders their two sons. Not accepting her fate, Medea sees herself as having choices and accepts the responsibility they entail. Hers

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is a rebellion against the established social and moral orders, a stance beyond anything Homer conceived. On her own volition, she dissociates her freedom from her fate.

When *Medea* was performed, it was an instant success and it is performed to this day. Its significance is due to the response of ancient (and modern) audiences who found Medea a more believable character than those portrayed by Homer. Indeed, whatever the spectators think of her actions, Medea emerges as a more human (though not humane) character than the heroes of the *Iliad* who, by comparison, appear to be little more than pawns pushed around by external forces. Medea tells audiences that she has choices and she can choose to kill her children or desist from such a drastic action. In killing her children, she defies both her biological and social conditioning which means that human beings, unlike animals, cannot be understood as mere puppets pushed and pulled by forces beyond their control. This feature makes human beings very dangerous since they have the power to (and will) kill innocent people for reasons unrelated to traditional warfare.

If in his plays Euripides captured the zeitgeist of fifth-century Athens and offered many stylistic and theatrical innovations, he did not offer ready-made moral prescriptions. This task he left to his contemporaries, including the Sophists. While their Ionian predecessors engaged in disinterested cosmological speculations, these itinerant philosophers inquired into more practical and immediate concerns, preoccupying themselves with the art of living, the necessity of making money included. 'Management educators' before the time of management education, the Sophists instructed the young members of the elite and groomed them for prominent roles in the Greek polis. Citizens in the various Greek city-states could not hope to attain a position of influence or gain a lawsuit unless they were able to speak persuasively in public. As expert rhetoricians, Sophists were thus in great demand. They were ready, for a fee, to help anyone argue a position, regardless of the facts of the matter or the fairness of the cause (a practice at the origin of the ill reputation that is still attached to their name). However, by redirecting thinkers' attention from inquiries into the ultimate nature of the world to questions about human nature and how people should live their lives, the Sophists set the stage for the entrance of philosophy's most famous figure, Socrates.

Of Socrates' life and thought, little is known with certainty since he did not leave any written account of either. What is known of him and of his thought comes from the writings of Xenophon, Plato, Aristophanes and Aristotle although these present different pictures of this philosophical gadfly. The following is uncontroversial: Socrates was born around 470 BC and after a time in the Athenian army in which he was noted for his bravery, he devoted his life to inquiring into such concepts as justice, courage, goodness and beauty. Without an understanding of these essential terms, Socrates argued, human

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life is nonsensical and 'the unexamined life is no life for a human being'.[1] The mere ability to say that something is just or good, he argued, implies that there exists a universal definition of justice and goodness by reference to which such assessments can be made. That the terms in question are variously interpreted (and that their definitions could all be mistaken) is irrelevant and only shows that error is multiple but truth unique. There exists a definition of each of these terms in the same way that there exists a definition of what a circle is even though no perfect circle exists in tangible reality. Knowing these definitions and educating people about them was, for Socrates, a matter of civic priority.

With bare feet and modest clothing, Socrates was a notable if unorthodox figure on the Athenian scene. He had the esteem of a small group of admirers, including young heirs of established families, yet he neither founded a school nor regarded himself as a teacher.[2] He accepted proudly the pronouncement of the Oracle at Delphi who said that he (Socrates) was the wisest of all Athenians because he was the only one among them to know that he knew nothing.[3] For Socrates, knowledge is virtue and ignorance is a vice. The good man is not a heroic warrior, nor is he an influential politician, patrician or wealthy landlord. Rather, good men are the wise men who, through dialogue, logic and rational argumentation, arrive at knowledge.[4]

Walking the streets of Athens, Socrates would challenge an interlocutor to provide a definition of, say, friendship, only to demonstrate the inadequacy of the definition. A second definition would then be proposed (sometimes by Socrates himself) to improve on the first one, against which new objections would be formulated. The discussion would continue until the point where the parties reach a mutually accepted definition of the concept under analysis (a very rare event) or agree that they did not know yet what the term really meant, leaving Socrates' interlocutor exasperated.

The influential and wealthy citizens of Athens tired of a man who punctured their pomposity by making fun of their intellects and undermining self-assurance and reputation. The city had gone through a series of misfortunes (a crushing defeat against Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, leading to the institution of a short-lived Sparta-backed oligarchy that ended up in a civil war and the re-establishment of democracy), and it is understandable that many thought the city required respect for, rather than a questioning of, conventional values. A self-righteous Athenian took upon himself to prosecute Socrates, accusing him of disrupting the social peace of Athens and undermining its morality. The formal indictment included two offences, both carrying the death penalty: not respecting the gods of Athens and introducing new religious practices; and corrupting the young.[5]

Surprisingly, in the ensuing public trial, the great arguer made a poor job of defending himself. If he disposed of the first indictment, Socrates accepted

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rather clumsily the second, arguing that it was for everyone's sake that he had been infusing a spirit of criticism in the citizens of Athens. Found guilty by the Athenian assembly, he then mocked the rule that allowed him to propose a substitute sentence and was condemned to death by a wider majority than had found him guilty. Preferring death to exile or compromise and not wanting to set an example of disobeying the laws of his city, he drank hemlock a few weeks later, assuring his close friends that he was going in peace at seventy years of age.

Socrates' suicide made a lasting impression on those who knew and admired him, especially a young Aristocles who would later go under the name of Plato ('the broad') owing to his wide shoulders. Born in 427 BC to a distinguished Athenian family and destined for political life, Plato disliked the oligarchs who had briefly ruled Athens under Spartan protection in his youth. The Democrats who took over from them were no better, however, since they put Socrates to death. Disgusted, Plato abandoned the idea of a political career and resolved to continue the work of Socrates, which he did until his death in 347 BC, aged eighty.

The scale of Plato's intellectual accomplishment is beyond description. In his works, he leaves no stone unturned and asks innumerable difficult questions. His answers, illuminating for some, toxic for others, changed dramatically the face of Western thinking. Through his many books he is largely responsible for the first great transformation in Western thinking, that from Homer to Plato. Socrates' sacrifice has not been vain: his death was followed by the birth of Western philosophy.

PLATO'S FORMS

Plato believed that knowledge is about reality, that is, about what *is*, yet he recognised that objects of perception are, as Heraclitus said, always transient, in a state of flux. He also thought that knowledge is infallible, for if not, it is not knowledge. The truth about something is only obtainable in reflection, in judgement and in comparison, not in raw sense-perception. True knowledge can be only of universals, not of particulars (objects of sense-experience, properties or moral values as these are enacted in everyday experience).[6] Someone whose only idea of horses is that provided by particular observations of horses does not know what a horse is, but has only an opinion about it. There must be 'something' common to all horses that defines them as horses but since they are all different, then this 'something' cannot be found in material reality. It follows that beyond what can be experienced, the sensible, must lie essence which is intelligible. In Plato's view, particulars are only imperfect embodiments of archetypes or 'Forms'.

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The Forms are perfect, unchanging and timeless universals and their understanding is accessible via the exercise of reason. Existing prior to the world of everyday experience, they are not found in the sensible world, yet their existence is required to explain why people can recognise order from chaos, justice from injustice, beauty from ugliness and so on. True knowledge of the horse is not knowledge of a collection of horses but of *the* Horse, like knowledge of a square cannot be obtained from observations of tangible but imperfect squares but from an appreciation of what the definition of 'square' really means. This mathematical understanding of the Square, although objective and certain, does not come from the senses, but from reason alone. The same applies to Justice, Courage, Beauty and Goodness, which are the absolute concepts through which ordinary actions or objects can be said to be just, courageous, beautiful and good. Since knowledge of these entities is not to be obtained from the world of everyday living, reaching for it requires one to distance oneself from one's material existence: to philosophise is to learn to die.[7]

Plato considered the two most important Forms are the Good and the True. To go past mere opinion and obtain knowledge, which can only be of the Forms, philosophers must aim at Goodness, using Truth as a guide. Through what is probably the most famous parable of the Western philosophical canon, Plato explained in the *Republic* that the relation between everyday concepts and their respective Forms is similar to that between shadows projected on the walls of a cave and objects lit by a fire located at the mouth of the cave.[8] People, in their majority, are chained from childhood in such a way that they cannot turn towards the fire; what they see are only the shadows on the walls but they take these for real objects. When one person breaks the chains and looks towards the fire, he is enlightened. Initially blinded by the glare, he becomes accustomed to it and eventually sees the objects (intelligible reality in this allegory) for what they are. Recognising that his peers are mistaken, he tries to reach back to them in order to educate them. He discovers that he has difficulties finding his ways in the darkness of the cave and is concerned that he now speaks a language his peers do not readily understand. In a transparent allusion to Socrates, Plato averred that if the enlightened one attempts to break the chains of his companions, who have known nothing but the safe obscurity of what they take to be reality, his likely fate is death by their hands.

The highest good for man is, for Plato, to attain *eudaimonia*, a state of flourishing and inner peace that brings about durable happiness. He held that this state of contentment cannot consist only of bodily pleasures, for a life of unmixed pleasurable sensations which makes no place for intellectual joys is not the life of a man but that of an oyster.[9] *Eudaimonia* cannot be a state of wanting nothing at all, for in that case stones and corpses would be very happy.[10] It cannot either consist of a life spent in the pursuit of pleasure,

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however defined, for such a life is in fact the life of a sieve, constantly frustrated because never full, endlessly hesitating between competing stimulations.[11] Rather, the good life is, for Plato, one that mixes innocent and moderate sensual pleasures with intellectual activity, especially the contemplation of the Forms. Plato held that the secret of the blend that makes life good is accessible to wise people, to the person who knows what Justice is since he was convinced that no one does something wrong to oneself or others willingly. When a man does something that is unjust (or unwise, evil or wrong), he does it believing that this thing is, in fact, just (wise, good or right). A man who would know what is truly just but who would nevertheless commit an unjust action would be a man who has allowed his judgement to be, if only temporarily, obscured by passion. The virtues of the good person (such as wisdom, temperance, courage, liberality, etc.) cannot be studied separately because they form a unity which is realised in the knowledge of Justice. This is not a relative notion, but refers to a concept that, like all the other Forms, is absolute and immutable.

In this context, proposing a definition of Justice was central to Plato and the *Republic* opens with this quest. Various definitions are advanced (justice is ‘telling the truth and paying one’s debt’, ‘paying each man his due’, ‘doing good to one’s friends and harm to one’s enemies’ or again ‘self-interest’), but Socrates shows them to be defective because they lead to contradictions. He then argues that, since the just person leads a better life than the unjust one, he cannot fully provide a definition of Justice in the individual in isolation of his environment. Accordingly, he proposes to discuss Justice in the State and see whether and how the conclusions so reached are relevant to the individual. This way of proceeding illustrates a central feature of Plato’s thought: the good for people cannot be divorced from the good for society. Ethics cannot be dissociated from politics.

THE RULE OF THE WISE

Although he entertained no illusions about the Athenian political scene, Plato remained convinced that the city is man’s natural environment. No one can be just or good if one lives outside society which for him is the city-state. There is a Form for the moral and political organisation of the State in the same way that there is a Form for every object or concept and this ideal model is valid for all people and all States. The running of the State is a ‘science’: States can and must be run on a model that can be known with certainty. If actual States did not conform to this model, then so much the worse for their citizens because the ideal society is the only one that makes its citizens truly happy. The blueprint of this ideal community is first exposed in Books II to

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V of the *Republic* and contrasted with contemporary political systems. Later descriptions offered in the *Statesman* and the *Laws*, although offering additional details and colouring the ideal State sketched in the *Republic* with more practical concerns, do not alter radically its main theses.

The first type of State analysed critically in the *Republic* is timarchy, exemplified in the Spartan and Cretan regimes. Sparta was ruled by a hereditary military aristocracy living among a population effectively reduced to slavery (the closest modern equivalent is North Korea). At birth, Spartan children were inspected and left to die if found defective; at seven, boys were removed from their families and subjected to intense military training until they were twenty, not gaining full citizenship before they turned thirty. Membership to the Council of Elders which ruled the city was reserved to those who reached the age of sixty. Spartan women followed a similar training program to the men. When married, they valued chastity but would breed children from men other than their husbands if directed to do so by the Council. Luxury was prohibited and Spartan simplicity was (and still is) notorious. The entire system was intended to produce citizens who would be lost entirely in the State and those who resisted assimilation were dealt with by the secret police.

The Spartan system had admirers in Greece for it was simple, effective and produced what was recognised as a superior army. It also had many critics and Plato's criticisms are not entirely his own. He found that if the timarchic State was decisive (only a few people to convince to arrive at a decision), it was also cruel and divisive and the exploitation of the ruled by the rulers led to disunity (rebellions were not unheard of in Sparta). The Spartan leaders did not value education beyond military training, thought little, and were proverbially stubborn. Although private wealth was in theory outlawed in Sparta, its rulers were known to be greedy and avaricious. It was unavoidable, Plato believed, that a timarchy turned eventually into an oligarchy.

An oligarchy was, for Plato, a society where power and prestige are associated with wealth. Now since wealth is unevenly shared, oligarchic rulership goes in practice to a minority which maintains its control over society through heredity. This arrangement, Plato thought, is inherently inadequate because birth alone cannot justify the right to rule. Moreover, the oligarchs rule not for the benefit of the community, but with a view to maintain and increase their wealth. The oligarchic society is an acquisitive society which leads to disunity, widespread poverty, social discontent and is contained by oppression. If decisive, the bitterness it generates in the lower classes results in revolution when the poor expel the rich and establish a democracy.

Plato thought very little of democratic systems, which he blamed for the death of Socrates. Even if 'democracy', as the term is found in Plato's texts, does not have the same meaning as it does today (in a Greek democracy, only senior male citizens had a say in public affairs), many of Plato's criticisms

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have proved to be uncannily prescient. Plato thought that a democracy amounted to the conduct of the State according to the 'tempers and desires of a mighty strong beast', that is, the whims of the uneducated masses.[12] The democratic ruler, as he depicted it, is versatile and passionate but lacking in principle, easily swayed by the satisfaction of unnecessary desires because of his lowly extraction; once elected, he soon becomes addicted to power and the privileges that obtain. Ignoring advice from former friends and family, he makes himself master by force and turns into a despot under the pretence of championing the people. He obtains special protection and additional luxuries for specious reasons; soon, however, his group of personal bodyguards turns into a private army oppressing the people. When this happens, the despot has become a tyrant, an insane criminal, ruling arbitrarily, eliminating real or imaginary rivals, seeking to satisfy his wildest desires and pleasures, playing with people as if they are toys, and leading his rule to self-destruction. In Plato's view, tyranny is the worst of all political regimes.

The city is for Plato an economic entity and exists to serve the needs and wants of the people who come together and cooperate in the production of the basic necessaries of life. Different people have different abilities and the specialisation of labour (farmers, smiths, merchants, etc.) that ensues enables improvements in the quantity as well as the quality of the city's production. Once its basic requirements have been addressed, the city's population grows and its initial territory soon proves too small. Adjacent territories are annexed: war is inevitable and is of economic origin. This reality demands the existence of a new professional specialisation, the Auxiliaries, whose responsibility is not to provide goods or services but to defend the city. Unable to feed themselves (since they do not produce anything tangible), these 'warrior athletes' have to be fed, trained and looked after by the community.[13] Knowledgeable in military affairs, they are ignorant when it comes to making decisions of political nature. The city must be ruled, however. To that purpose another class of citizens is required, the true Guardians of the State. How these are to be selected and of what their upbringing must consist are crucial matters for Plato. Indeed, in the *Republic*, the stability of the entire edifice rests on the Guardians' shoulders.

Central to Plato's vision is the conviction that an ideal State must be ruled by people who care only for the common good. The Guardians must seek wisdom, justice, peace and harmony, but not affluence because the pursuit of riches is a source of moral and social corruption. As in Sparta, private property is forbidden to the Guardians and to their armed Auxiliaries. In the *Republic*, detailed legislation about the conduct of society is not required because legislation is ineffective if people are inclined spontaneously to engage in correct behaviour. Basic moral education is therefore provided to all, under the strict supervision of the State, which controls what happens in the classrooms and ensures that

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children think in appropriate ways.[14] The Guardians, however, require a specific sort of upbringing: they are to be educated in morality, dialectic, literature, logic, arithmetic, geometry and history. In 387 BC, Plato founded the Academy as a place to lecture and study these disciplines. Its curriculum allowed the Guardians to complete their formal schooling and prepare for rulership with the help of their loyal and brave, if intellectually limited, heroic Auxiliaries. As for the rest of society, the artisans, farmers, tradespeople and merchants, they had better busy themselves with their own affairs. The State would see to this. Plato's texts are clear: the rulers are fitted to rule because they are the most qualified for the task. Like fathers caring for their families and good doctors for their patients, they have their say, by natural right and owing to their expertise, on all aspects of their children's and patients' lives.[15]

Worthy of note is Plato's belief that women are equal to men in merit and ability, except when it comes to the discharge of difficult physical tasks. As far as protecting and ruling the State, women can contribute equally with men: the same education and the opportunities must be made available to them. It follows from this strict egalitarian agenda that, for the Auxiliary and Guardian classes, the traditional family structure is rejected. Women are freed from child-rearing duties which are discharged by State nurseries. In the *Republic*, Plato had Socrates defending a 'community of women and children',[16] explaining that reproductive intercourse is to be permitted only during established mating festivals. Moreover, to produce Guardians and Auxiliaries of the highest quality, the pairing of partners during the mating season, officially random, is in fact rigged so that the best mate with the best and the inferiors with the worst (the off-springs of the latter being eliminated). After all, if this is the way dogs and horses are bred and selected, why should it be different with human beings?[17]

Socrates' interlocutors, although agreeing with his arguments, are unconvinced and astonished by these conclusions. Socrates is forced to admit that this perfect State is only an ideal blueprint that will never be realised in practice. The first step towards it, however, is one he thinks possible, although difficult: the rulers must be philosophers and philosophers must be rulers. Until this condition is realised, 'cities will never have rest from their evils'.[18] Plato must have been convincing, since he was invited in 367 and again in 361 BC to educate Dionysus II, then tyrant of Syracuse, Sicily: the enterprise failed on both attempts.

LEADING FROM THE *PSYCHE*

Missing in Plato's overall argument is a justification that his city is ideal, that it is one that is accepted by its citizens who play their respective parts

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willingly and happily. Plato articulated a twofold answer to this challenge. First, he supported his three-layer model of the ideal State by a corresponding psychological model of man. Second, he sought to overcome obstacles to its implementation through the inculcation of a carefully designed myth.

Unlike Homer and his characters, Plato was a spiritualist who believed that there is more to man than his body. He held that the difference between a living and dead man is the *psyche*, a self-moving, immaterial and immortal entity that moves the body.[19] The *psyche*, Plato argued in the *Republic*, although unitary, is composed of three elements: Reason, Spirit and Appetite.[20] Reason is the rational part and is located in the head; divine and immortal, it is the ability to think logically, to proceed through careful argumentation and calculation towards the truth. Spirit is that part of the *psyche* that can be found in the chest; it enables people to act out of a sense of duty and honour. The appetitive part of the *psyche* is where human instincts and desires are situated in the lower part of body. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato compared the *psyche* to a chariot led by Reason and drawn by two horses, one good (Spirit) and the other bad (Appetite). While the good horse is docile and hard at work, the bad one is unruly and easily led astray by sensual passions; to keep the chariot on a straight direction, the charioteer (Reason) uses the whip when required. Although thirsty, Reason must restrain Appetite when it is known that the available water is poisoned.

Plato thought that wisdom comes from the exercise of Reason, courage is the virtue of Spirit and moderation is achieved when Appetite's demands are limited. People fall into three different classes depending on whichever part of their *psyche* is dominant. The ruler-philosophers are those in which Reason is the strongest: they seek truth and their main virtue is wisdom. Their auxiliaries seek honour, behave according to their Spirit and their dominating virtue is courage. As for the people whose function it is to provide the community with its material goods and basic services, they seek gain and are under the control of their Appetite. While they remain moderate in their demands, all is good for them. Societies in which the spirited element dominates are timarchies and they decompose into democracies which are regimes dominated by appetites and are thereby doomed to degenerate in tyrannies. The ideal three-tiered State, the *Republic* argues, provides a social position to all its citizens that is consistent with their psychological abilities, making them happy and content. The Rulers find happiness in ruling, the Warrior-auxiliaries in warring and obeying and the husbandmen in husbanding. Justice and Goodness are achieved individually because they are achieved collectively and vice versa: the citizens' *psyche's* parts are in harmony because society's parts, to which each citizen belongs, operate harmoniously. Philosophers rule because they are wisest and the others accept to be ruled because it is wise for them to do so: 'The man without understanding should follow and the wise man lead and rule.'[21]

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Plato realised that implementing this model would require some convincing, however, because some people (especially the Auxiliaries) would refuse to bow before the authority of philosopher-rulers. To overcome this resistance and to cement social cohesion and stability, he thought it necessary to resort to myth. On his view, citizens will accept the ideal State if they believe, or want to believe, a false tale, an audacious 'royal lie' that will deceive even the rulers themselves. According to the myth, men are manufactured by the earth mother in different metals to take the roles that the model expects them to fulfil. The Guardians will be told that they were born to rule and have gold in them. Those who enforce their decision and protect the State, the Auxiliaries, are the people of silver, while the other citizens are made of bronze. This, Plato has Socrates openly acknowledge, is pure propaganda, blatant fraud, yet the common good requires and justifies it. All citizens, rulers and ruled, must be persuaded to believe in this fiction to increase the beneficial effect of the three-class system on the city.[22]

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates explains that knowledge is not a good like any other, because its beneficial or toxic effects cannot be assessed before it is acquired. As soon as it is imparted, good or bad knowledge seeps into the core of one's *psyche*; it takes the expertise of a 'doctor of the *psyche*' like Socrates himself (or Plato) to remove evil knowledge and to heal one from its toxic effect.[23] If doing this requires lying, then so be it, but 'if anyone at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the State should be the persons; and they […] may be allowed to lie for the public good. But nobody else should meddle with anything of the kind'.[24] Social peace and individual harmony are therefore best achieved if the men of gold, the ruler-philosophers who seek and value nothing but truth, lie.

PLATO'S LEGACY

With these arguments, Plato introduced ideas which have structured and reverberated throughout the history of Western civilisation. In particular, he confirmed the break from heroism that his Ionian predecessors initiated. For Plato, the exercise of reason leads to knowledge of what is, as opposed to what appears to be. This conviction, combined with the subsequent influence of Aristotle, would eventually lead to the development of science and technology. It also means that some propositions, ideas or concepts that are known to be true must be innate since they cannot come from sense-experience which confines people to a transient reality. The *psyche* has an *a priori* understanding of the Forms and learning is developing pre-existent, if embryonic, knowledge.[25] If he did not single-handedly establish it, Plato played a central role in the development of rationalism, the philosophy for

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which knowledge must be derived deductively, through logical propositions starting from concepts or truths considered to be certain and unchanging.

If he did not invent ethical philosophy, Plato gave the discipline its first credentials when he attempted to anchor ethical judgements to absolute concepts. The distinction he made between opinion (based on sense-experience) and knowledge (which can only be of the Forms) is the expression of the first major epistemological theory. His tripartite model of the *psyche* marks the beginning of psychology and his 'doctors of the *psyche*' are the first psychologists. His classification and criticisms of the various contemporary forms of government and his depiction of an ideal State signal the invention of political philosophy. In the *Laws*, his justifications of a legal system through philosophical considerations represent the birth of philosophy of law. Finally, Plato's ontological and metaphysical dualisms anticipated and prepared the ground for Christianity's metaphysics. It is not an overstatement to assert that Plato's influence is without rival in the history of Western thinking, that he is its inexhaustible fountainhead. Saying this is not saying, of course, that Plato's legacy should be received uncritically.

Plato was an essentialist; he sought to explain every object, property or moral concept in terms, or as emanation, of essence or Form. The Forms, although immaterial in nature, are for him more real than everyday experience which is fleeting and transient. Certainty can be only of Being, which is intelligible, not of Becoming which is sensible. Reality can be known rationally, yet what the Forms are made of, how they can be known, their relationships with each other and with the tangible objects to which they give meaning, are questions that are left unanswered in Plato's works. Plato never clarified these matters with a satisfying degree of clarity and in fact whether he reached a definitive position on these issues remains an open question. What is certain is that Platonism is the prototype of all later dualisms.[26]

All material-spiritual dualisms, such as Plato's, face a difficult (indeed impossible) problem, which is to explain satisfactorily how the two 'worlds' interact. As matter is defined as extension in space, spiritual concepts (which are not in space) cannot refer to material things or objects. Accordingly, questions pertaining to material objects or worlds cannot be asked of spiritual concepts, let alone answered. Yet, Plato and his fellow-travellers believe that the two realms are interactive, even though this is impossible logically. Yet rationalists believe that what is impossible in logic is impossible in every other way: empirically, technically and scientifically. It follows, therefore, that Plato and those rationalists who followed him faced a philosophical problem which requires a 'leap of faith' to avoid. Such a desperate manoeuvre is hardly consistent with a rigorous search for truth. However, since Plato advocated lying for the good of the State, philosophers who followed him can legitimately wonder whether Plato's dualism was also a lie, or a myth.

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To illustrate the difficulties entailed by Plato's dualism, one can note that Plato held that such notions as justice and goodness acquire their meaning in reference to the absolute concepts of Justice and Goodness that philosophers are to discover. However, attempting to provide universal and unchangeable definitions of these terms through references to actual (i.e. transient and imperfect) states of affairs is doomed to failure. Further, Plato was adamant that the meaning of concepts (like beauty) comes from their relation to their corresponding Form (Beauty). That is, one is supposed to know what 'beauty' is because the concept is somehow connected with, or related to, Beauty. At the same time though, one must arrive at an understanding of Beauty by reflecting upon beautiful objects. In other words, one is to know what beauty is because Beauty is itself beautiful. Plato himself seemed to be aware of this crippling circularity in his late dialogues.[27]

Although the idea of an internal struggle between rationality, morality and sensuality is at first sight attractive, Plato's psychology is unconvincing. The only argument offered for the existence of the three parts of the *psyche* is the view that it has internal conflicts. The assumption is that people cannot desire two contradictory things at the same time (to drink and not to drink). On this premise, Plato was forced to assume the existence of two distinct sources of desires in the *psyche* to explain the coexistence of opposing desires. Plato mischaracterised the nature of mental conflicts, however. Not only is the desire to drink water when one is thirsty just as rational as the desire not to be poisoned, but also the incompatibility lies in the possibility of satisfying the two desires, not in having them. It does not follow from the existence of mental conflicts that the *psyche* is made of several components in tension with one another. In any case, since *psyche* is spiritual, it is difficult to see how 'it' can be compartmentalised.

One can further note that the division of the *psyche* in incompatible parts, which are independent and almost equally powerful agents within it, makes de facto the unity of inner experience impossible to explain. If Plato's model were correct, one would have three distinct 'voices' echoing constantly in one's consciousness. Moreover, although Plato insisted that Reason can drive Spirit and overpower Appetite, it is not clear why it can do so. Why does Reason have a 'whip' with which it can control Appetite and not the other way around? Plato conceded that in some people, because of natural defect or poor education, Reason is corrupted and is overwhelmed by Appetite. Without a stable order of predominance, however, sustained, goal-directed behaviour is unexplainable since there is no reason to assume that the competition between the various parts of the *psyche* should have a winner.

Plato's ideal State is a totalitarian regime. Whatever promotes the achievement of the common good is acceptable, including elaborate trickery (in the pairing process of the genitors), elimination of children deemed unfit and

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intrusion of the State in the most trivial aspects of everyday life. Plato promoted censorship and excluded poets and artists from the State because their works stimulate the emotions.[28] Plato went beyond contemporary views of slavery by harshening its condition and increasing punishments.[29] His political vision is a combination of George Orwell's and Aldous Huxley's later dystopias, that is, a State in which man's psychological life and genetic makeup are engineered and controlled to the ultimate degree. In Plato's ideal city, Socrates would have been killed the minute his questioning voice was heard on the *agora*.

Plato argued that neither Guardians nor their Auxiliaries should be allowed private property so that they their rule is not corrupted by material gains. He forgot, however, what Kant would later see: political power, even if conferred on the ground of wisdom, is a material benefit that erodes one's ideals and reason. He was himself its victim, as his repeated engagement with the cruel Dionysus II of Syracuse illustrates. In the name of truth and the power it is meant to confer, Plato was ready to oppress, deceive and manipulate, allowing the rulers to practice rhetoric while officially castigating rhetoricians.[30] In the last analysis, Plato's ideal State is a regime that is morally and intellectually corrupt to the core. Indeed, it is a regime that leaves the definition of the common good to individuals who care first about their own interest but convince themselves that they speak for the public. Socrates died for the truth; Plato lied for political power.

PLATO, C.E.O.

The implications of Platonism for management thought are manifold. To start with the mundane, Plato was the first to suggest that myths and moral values, rather than detailed rules, are effective ways to achieve organisational stability and control individuals who remain unaware of their subjection. This amounts to saying that culture is a controlling mechanism experienced as freedom, an insight later seized by Michel Foucault and which has become commonplace in the management literature. If Plato and his modern followers are right, rather than occupying themselves with the detailed actions and decisions of subordinates, managers should inculcate beliefs and status symbols which reinforce desirable behaviour. Moreover, by proposing and justifying a multilayered model of society in which one's rank is determined by one's function, Plato invented organisation theory. By combining these views with the contention that one's function depends on one's acquired 'personality', Plato adumbrated a form of managerial psychology. His 'doctors of the *psyche*', who help the Rulers assess the psychological makeup of citizens, are the forerunners of today's management psychologists armed with personality tests.

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Plato's most durable influence on management derives from his view that senior managers must receive an education that is different from those subordinates who execute their orders. Even though he had little success in Syracuse, Plato was convinced that the cause of social problems is the lack of education of rulers and that rulership is a profession that could be taught. There is a Form of the Ruler and aspiring rulers must strive to embody it. To that end, Plato founded the Academy which is the prototype of Western universities and the first management school. When students enrol in management courses, they pay a deferent, if unconscious, tribute to Plato. Similarly, those who grant authority automatically to management graduates reinforce Plato's view that education, rather than mere experience, is a necessary condition for all forms of rulership.

The magnitude of the gap between Homer's and Plato's thinking cannot be exaggerated and their differences translate directly into management terms. If for the former the world stopped at appearances, for the latter the real world started beyond them. Whereas Homer's language is based on verbs and concrete nouns, Plato's philosophical effort provides definitions of abstract universals. Homer did not know the meaning of reification (turning abstract nouns into concrete nouns). Homer's warrior society pursues power through action and therefore needs clear and urgent communications which are best achieved through verbs, adverbs and concrete nouns. Plato's academics pursue truth through language and use abstract nouns to create objects where there are none because they believe that reification allows people to understand the 'real' world. While heroic managers preoccupy themselves with practical skills and tangible results, Platonic executives value education and knowledge and seek order and structure from chaos. Before committing themselves to action, they look for patterns in seemingly random events in order to offer relevant predictions. Platonic executives face the challenge that management is an activity of *this* world and so risk being outflanked by more resolute, if less thoughtful, heroic competitors.

Chief executives who take Plato's recommendations to the letter quickly become self-righteous autocrats who, because of their belief in their superior education and psychological abilities, are convinced of their right to command. As ethics cannot be divorced from politics, rulers are good people and what is good for organisations is good for its members. Convinced that they know what the common good is, Platonic rulers do not hesitate to use questionable means to secure their rule, for instance, by delving into subordinates' personalities through psychological tests, controlling all aspects of their colleagues' endeavours and removing dissenters, irrespective of their performance.

A pertinent example is Dr Gregory House, the fictional character of the television series *House MD*. Diagnostician in a teaching hospital, House is a

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drug-addicted misanthropic individual, obnoxious with his friends and mean with his colleagues. Sardonic and rationalistic, he is one of the best diagnosticians in the country and performs beyond expectations, repeatedly saving the lives of patients his peers have been unable to help. A heroic organisation would celebrate House; a Platonic one would quickly terminate his contract on the grounds of his unbalanced *psyche* and lack of 'team spirit'. In the improbable event that the senior managers of the latter organisation harbour doubts about this decision, they only need to remind themselves of Plato's 'royal lie' to quell them. In a Platonic outline, Christopher Hodgkingson's witty aphorism, 'leadership is an incantation for the bewitchment of the led', can be completed with: 'and those who lead them'.

Although Plato was Socrates' most devoted disciple and executor, his interpretation of his mentor's teachings did not go unchallenged. Diogenes of Sinope, for instance, held against Plato that he spiritualised philosophy in a way that Socrates would have rejected. Disdaining formal honours, wealth or public approval, Diogenes declared that he valued only courage, independence and endurance. Despite, or because of, his ascetic lifestyle, Diogenes left an indelible imprint on his contemporaries as the most famous member of the Greek philosophical school known as Cynicism. Legend has it that when Alexander the Great met Diogenes (who was sunbathing) and asked what he could do for him, the philosopher replied: 'Get out of my sunshine!' The military leader was so impressed by the insolence that he admitted that given an alternative to being Alexander, he would be Diogenes. Plato reportedly said of Diogenes that he was 'Socrates gone mad' but it is not fanciful to think that it was Diogenes and not Plato who remained faithful to Socrates' ideas.

This possibility is worth pondering when considering Aristotle's incomparable legacy. Indeed, it is Aristotle, not Plato, who provided logic with its formal bases and redirected thinkers' attention from abstractions to worldlier matters, providing empirical science with its foundations. After studying at the Academy under Plato's tutelage, Aristotle hoped to take over his mentor's chair. In the end, an obscure and long-forgotten rival (Plato's nephew Speusippus) was preferred. Not that this memorable blunder prevented the institution from enjoying an enviable legacy. Plato's heroes, the academics, have ever since accepted his challenge and claimed that, if they are not to rule themselves, at least they are to educate those who will, ensuring that education is a highly politicised subject.

NOTES

1. *Apology* 38a. This chapter relies on Benjamin Jowett's classic English translations of Plato's texts made available by the Perseus Digital Library of Tufts

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University (www.perseus.tufts.edu). Referencing is made according to the Stephanus pagination.

2. *Apology* 19d–20a.
3. *Apology* 21ff.
4. See *Apology* 36b ff, *Phaedrus* 279c and *Philebus* 11b ff.
5. *Apology* 24b–c. Coming shortly after the rule of the Thirty oligarchs in which several of Socrates' former followers were involved and the treason to the benefit of Sparta of another erstwhile associate of his, Socrates' trial had presumably political motivations.
6. *Theaetetus*, cf. especially 146ff and 208ff.
7. *Phaedo* 64a.
8. *Republic* 514–18.
9. *Philebus* 21c.
10. *Gorgias* 492e.
11. *Gorgias* 493a and b.
12. *Republic* 493b.
13. *Republic* 403ff; the quotation is from 404a.
14. *Laws* VII.
15. Cf. *Laws* 942a–c for a direct expression of this rule. Earlier in the book (721b–d), Plato stated that expectant mothers are to exercise in the interest of their unborn children. Babies are to be sung to so that they are not frightened, because agitated behaviours signal bad moral beginnings. Education proper is to start when children turn six, with boys and girls separated but taught to use their right and left hands indistinctively. Men must marry between the ages of thirty and thirty-five; if not, they incur fines and loss of status. Worship is to take place every day of the year, for to live well one is to think rightly about the gods. If ordinary citizens are induced to believe in gods, rulers, through their education and owing to intellectual efforts, have acquired entire confidence in their existence. Should a member of the ruling group start harbouring impious or atheist thoughts, the moral rot must not be allowed to spread further. The sentence in that case must be swift and definitive: death (*Laws* 910d; atheism is said to be a 'disease' in 908c).
16. *Republic* 449d; see also 424a.
17. *Republic* 449d ff and 459a ff; the elimination of the inferiors' children is mentioned in 460c.
18. *Republic* 473.
19. Cf. *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. '*Psyche*' (*ψοχή*) in Plato's texts often appears as 'soul' in English translations, more rarely as 'mind'. *Psyche* has been preferred here to avoid anachronistic Christian connotations.
20. *Republic* IV. In the *Phaedo*, this tripartite structure is no longer mentioned; whether Plato has abandoned the theory altogether is open to question.
21. *Laws* 690b.
22. *Republic* 414ff; the quotation is found in 414c.
23. *Protagoras* 313ff.
24. *Republic* 389b.
25. Cf. *Meno*.

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26. In fact, Plato can be said to have invented two dualisms, one metaphysical (material world versus spiritual world), the other ontological (material human body versus spiritual soul or *psyche*). The second dualism is necessary to explain how human beings can become aware of the spiritual aspect of the first.

27. See, for instance, the discussion on the Beautiful in the *Philebus*. Other difficulties about the Forms are offered in *Parmenides*, the unique dialogue of Plato in which Socrates (whom Plato had defending the theory of the Forms) is unable to answer his opponent's counterarguments and is driven to despair. Depending on the dialogue considered, sensible objects are said to embody, illustrate, imitate, exemplify or represent their respective Forms. Sometimes, the Forms are said to 'participate' in sensible objects.

28. Cf. *Republic* 398 and 600ff.

29. Morrow, G. 1939. *Plato's Law of Slavery in Relation to Greek Law*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. See pp. 120ff.

30. Cf. the charge of Socrates against the Sophists in *Republic* 493 as well as the caricature and parody of Lysias in *Phaedrus* 227a–34c; see also the *Gorgias*.

FURTHER READING

Popper, K. R. 1945. *The Open Society and Its Enemies – Volume 1: Plato*. London: Routledge. Some of the criticisms exposed above have been found in Popper's now 'classic' attack on Plato (see Chapter 4 in particular). Popper's own philosophy is explored in a later chapter of the present volume.

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Chapter 3

Italian Renaissance

Managing by and for Power

Although Platonic philosophy exerted a considerable influence throughout antiquity, *The Academy* did not long survive Plato. Historians of philosophy struggle to produce more than a few lines under the names of those who succeeded the illustrious founder at the helm of the institution. Vandalising Plato's legacy, *The Academy* eventually fell prey to scepticism, the philosophy which holds that happiness is to be reached through disavowing knowledge. The destruction of *The Academy*'s premises in 83 BC during the first Mithridatic War only materialised the intellectual demise.

Platonism made a series of comebacks, first at the dawn of the Common Era, then in the fourth century AD under the stylus of Plotinus as a fusion with Aristotelianism and some elements of Egyptian and Jewish theology. By that time, however, the peak of Greek philosophy had passed. Alexander the Great (whom Aristotle tutored as a teenager) had substituted the Greek city-state, the political backdrop of Platonism and Aristotelianism, for an empire that stretched from Greece to Egypt and Asia Minor; after his death in 323 BC, however, Greece became a Roman province. The dissolution of Greek thought in the various philosophies that developed in Rome reflects this political evolution. The same events provided Niccolò Machiavelli with a rich source of inspiration. Although his books are among the most reviled ones of the Western philosophical canon, they are a rich source of practical prescriptions for managers.

ROME AND CHRISTIANITY

The unstoppable rise of Rome, first a small kingdom in the ninth century, then a Republic from the sixth century BC and finally an empire including Europe,

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North Africa and Asia Minor, is the dominating political phenomenon of late antiquity. Philosophically, however, the Romans depended on Greek teachings, concepts and terminology since Latin lacked abstract vocabulary. Although Roman thought progressively incorporated elements of stoicism (from Cicero and Seneca), Epicureanism and Platonism, Rome was marked by its heroic origin. Romans valued nobility, state power, social stability, courage, discipline, hierarchy, physical strength and ardour on the battlefield. The numerous buildings, monuments and statues they bequeathed, as well as Rome's unrivalled military successes, attest to the lasting influence of these characteristically heroic features within Roman ethics.

The other notable development of late antiquity is the birth and rise of Christianity. Emerging in what is today Palestine and Israel, Christianity initially spread throughout present-day Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, which soon became Roman provinces. Roman elites were generally tolerant of different religions and worshipped a variety of local and imported gods. Initially, they treated Christianity as a novel sub-sect of Judaism, but Christians' steadfast refusal to acknowledge Rome's traditional gods, combined with the tensions they generated with the Jews, quickly proved irksome. By the middle of the first century, Christianity reached Rome and in 64 AD Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome, initiating repressive policies that gradually developed into full-fledged persecution. The lowly and the powerless, from which Christianity drew its early converts, had little interest in the well-being of the Roman State. Consequently, they were perceived as a threat to its existence. Persecution of Christians ceased in 313 with the Edict of Milan, which recognised Christianity as a religion and through which Emperor Constantine attempted to pacify the empire. When Constantine asked to be baptised on his deathbed in 337, Christianity was no longer one religion among others. It had de facto become the official religion of the empire. Deposed Greek and Roman gods became inoffensive mythical characters whose believers, the non-Christians, were soon persecuted.

The Roman Empire reached its greatest geographical expanse under the rule of Trajan (98 to 117 AD). This was a short-lived glory, the decline of the empire starting from about 180 with the first military setbacks. Even though Rome celebrated its millennium in 246 under the reign of Philip the Arab, the third century brought about its succession of political, military and economic crises, with many emperors murdered or killed in battle. In 285, the empire was subdivided into two then four autonomous regions, each with its capital and ruler, still officially under the nominal authority of Rome. This arrangement ushered a period of comparative tranquillity, but troubles resumed late in the fourth century and the empire was officially split in 395. The Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476 when Odoacer and his Germanic mercenaries captured its capital Ravenna; the Byzantine Empire (eastern half)

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would last until 1453 with Constantinople (today Istanbul) as its capital. The Barbarian Invasions that followed the fall of Rome led to further political decomposition and left the church as the only surviving pan-European organisation. Antiquity had ended and the Middle Ages begun.

Christianity is a revealed religion, given by the Christ as a doctrine of redemption and love, not as a philosophical system with all its theoretical trappings. Its main values are faithfulness, fidelity, forgiveness, submission, and contempt for earthly possessions. It despises violence and places little value on the human body and physical strength: 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' It presents itself as *the* way to God and salvation, to be enacted on a daily basis in an initially hostile environment, not as an abstract system of thought to be engaged with in lectures halls or in the comfort of one's study. The Apostles, the Church Fathers and their successors were on a mission to convert the world and their message was primarily directed to Jews. As apologists, they were not preoccupied with developing metaphysical, epistemological or logical arguments, but proposed attractive religious positions to counter established ones. Their language was mainly theological and was supposed to quell a desire for faith, not for reason. Further, for the Church Fathers, revealed Truth supersedes whatever results from human speculation and philosophical conclusions must give way to the mystery of Faith. The criterion of truth was not human reasoning, but the word of God as revealed to Christ and expressed in scripture: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

In this outline, it is unsurprising that the medieval era is a period of scant philosophical activity. Great philosophers did flourish during the Middle Ages, but for many centuries Europe perpetuated the traditions inherited from Rome, used Latin as the language for diplomacy, knowledge and trade, and knew very little philosophical Greek literature beyond Platonism's canonical texts. The conditions that resulted in the civilisation-shaping intellectual vitality of fifth- and fourth-century Athens were not reproduced and the filiation that runs from Socrates to Plato to Aristotle, like an alignment of celestial bodies that happens once every thousand years, has not been observed since.[1]

Medieval scholars were not interested in philosophy as such and confined themselves to theological exegesis or, when they were interested, limited themselves to revisiting Plato's works in the light of Christian theology. To the extent that they engaged with the pagan Greek philosophers, these thinkers were principally concerned to show that they could be advantageously replaced by, or made compatible with, Christian texts. St Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) argued for instance that Plato was an unknowing Christian and Clement of Alexandria (St Clement, c. 150–215) considered Plato as Moses writing in Greek, seeing in him a prophet who had either borrowed truths from the Old Testament or independently arrived at them under the guidance

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of God. Platonism's spiritual element and its metaphysical and ontological dualisms explain why the early Christian scholars saw in Plato a forerunner of Christ and in his thought a conceptual bridge leading from pre-Socratic philosophy to Christian truth. The medieval scholars did not deviate from this tradition. When choosing which books to recopy (a task that could take years), the Christian clergy, on which the learning of the period exclusively rested, favoured those with which they could relate directly.

Although John Scotus Eriugena hinted in the ninth century at the superiority of reason over doctrine, it would not be until St Thomas Aquinas that the distinction between theology and philosophy would be clearly articulated and identified as an area worthy of study. Aquinas (1225–1274), rather than seeing divine revelation and human speculation in opposition to one another, believed that they complemented and supported each other. He argued that Aristotle's texts, rediscovered in the twelfth century through the translations from Arabic of Averroes' commentaries, were not only compatible with Christian scriptures but could also be used as a source of inspiration to clarify Christian theology. Moreover, since God created nature, to study it as Aristotle advocated was to study God. Aquinas's efforts were so successful that Aristotle's philosophy was recognised as a body of ideas standing alone, complete and independent of Thomistic theology. Philosophy gained its autonomy from theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the wake of the revival of Aristotelianism that Thomism triggered.

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Presenting history in causal terms inevitably simplifies complex matters. Analysing the transition from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to early Modernity involves scholars in such complexities and simplifications. Historians argue endlessly about the factors which triggered the succession of events that precipitated the end of the medieval era. While some authors define the high Renaissance as a sixty-year, mainly Italian phenomenon spread almost evenly on either side of the year 1500, others argue that the Renaissance is a pan-European movement which started as early as the twelfth century and expanded into the seventeenth. What remains certain is that, from the late eleventh century onward, and despite wars, famines, religious disputes and the Black Death, material conditions slowly improved throughout Europe. Relative economic prosperity saw countries unite, cities prosper and human energy redirected from practical concerns to intellectual inquiries. Manuscripts were bought and copied, finding their place in newly established libraries. The University of Bologna was founded in 1088 and Oxford University in 1096. The Sorbonne in Paris was officially recognised

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in 1150 and Cambridge University opened in 1209. Long-forgotten pre-Christian (Greek) texts were progressively rediscovered through contacts with Arab scholars during the Crusades (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) and the Reconquista of Spain (from the eighth century to the recapture of Granada in 1492). The fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Muslim Ottomans in 1453, which led many Orthodox Christian scholars knowledgeable in ancient Greek literature to flee to Italy, contributed to this renewed and growing interest in classical learning and style. The humanist movement, which started with Dante, Petrarch and Salutati, took its full flight under the pens of Erasmus, More and later Montaigne. The development of the printing press (developed by Gutenberg from 1436) dramatically decreased the time required to produce books and made them more affordable. The phenomenal increase in the number of books that ensued facilitated the circulation of knowledge outside the clergy. Christian and secular scholars found themselves able to access and study troves of ancient literature. In addition to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Virgil, works of Greek poets, philosophers or thinkers including Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, Herodotus, Hippocrates, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Euclid, Ptolemy and Plutarch were actively studied, many of them available in Latin translations. Unconcerned with its compatibility with theological doctrine, these avid scholars came to regard ancient literature as the basis for a liberal education which did not conflict with the practice of Christianity.

Although the fall of the Byzantine Empire made access to the East more difficult to Italian merchants, Northern and Upper Central Italian cities had accumulated great economic wealth by the late fifteenth century. Interest in the world view expressed in pre-Christian texts, combined with the papacy's financial patronage of gifted artists, patricians and wealthy businessmen (especially the Medicis), led to an intellectual, artistic and cultural explosion. Donatello's bronze David, cast in the 1440s, was the first life-size nude since antiquity; Michelangelo's larger marble version, sculpted in the first years of the sixteenth century, is an even more transparent tribute to Roman and Greek sculptors. In 1494, Lucia Pacioli, who taught mathematics to Leonardo da Vinci and translated Euclid's *Elements*, published in Venice his *Summa de Arithmetica, Geometria, Proportioni et Proportionalità* which contained the first description of the bookkeeping method known today as the double-entry accounting system.[2] The use of Latin declined and the languages that would be spoken and written in Europe and later on over the entire world were crafted. Music, painting, architecture, sculpture, literature, rhetoric, and to a lesser extent mathematics and sciences were bursting with new ideas, many of them exhumed or inspired from the ancient world. Josquin des Prez, Donatello, Botticelli, da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Byrd, Monteverdi – the dizzying list of artists, thinkers, musicians and men

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of letters that history has recognised as geniuses is too long to acknowledge here. The innovations were not limited to the arts. Hoping to find a new route to India, the Genoese Columbus crossed the Atlantic in 1492. In his wake, Magellan completed the first circumnavigation in 1522. Truth was no longer revealed but actively sought after; Western humanity was again alive and flourishing. The Renaissance (rebirth in French) as it culminated in northern Italy can be compared, for its scope and legacy, to the golden age of Athens which occurred 1,800 years earlier: it remains unrivalled in modern history. Some scholars, including the authors of these lines, see the Italian Renaissance as one of the greatest achievements of Western civilisation.

The confused political background of the time makes the Italian Renaissance an even more remarkable phenomenon. While such European countries as England, France, Spain and Portugal achieved relative unity and stability in the form of absolute monarchies, Italy did not exist politically in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The peninsula was the stage of incessant warfare between Rome, Milan, Florence, Siena, Genoa and Venice and their provinces. Being wealthy, the Italian cities could mobilise disproportionately large armies of foreign mercenaries of mostly Swiss and German origin led by Italian *condottieri*, whose loyalty often proved versatile. Tensions caused by the protracted war between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire cut across communities; city-states positioned and repositioned themselves on either side of this fracture line, making the situation unstable. External invasions by French forces in 1494 and the Turks in 1499 brought devastation to northern Italy. In 1502, France and Spain marched on Naples from Milan; in 1508, France, the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire confronted Venice. Political chaos reigned as cities split into opposing factions allied with France, Spain or imperial forces. Pope Alexander VI, profiting from this turmoil, decided in 1501 to help his son, Cesare Borgia, recently created Duke of Romagna, carve out a fiefdom of his own with the support of French troops. The young Borgia quickly proved to be a bold and successful military leader and a cunning, cruel statesman. By 1503, the year his father died and his fortunes started to change, his armies had reached the borders of Florence and were threatening invasion. The heartland of the Roman Empire was a shadow of its former self since Italy had become the ground over which her former dominions waged wars by proxy. It is in this confused context that the Renaissance's infamous thinker should be read.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

Born in Florence in 1469, Machiavelli was the son of a modest but well-connected lawyer and received the best humanist education of the day. He learned

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Latin, possibly Greek, read the classics and studied grammar, rhetoric, logic, history and philosophy. Entering the Florentine Republic administration in 1494, he was suddenly elevated in 1498, aged only twenty-nine, to the position of secretary of the Second Chancery of Florence's recently established Republic. As a high-level dignitary of Florence, he reported to the council of the Ten of War and led delicate diplomatic missions to the kings of France and Spain, the forces of the Holy Roman Empire, the papacy and various Italian cities. Later, he was responsible for organising Florence's militia and defence. In 1512, helped by the armies of Pope Julius II, the Medicis regained power and abolished the Florentine Republic. Suspected of conspiring against Florence's new rulers, Machiavelli was jailed, tortured, and released a few weeks later. Retired on his estate on the outskirts of Florence, bored and seeking employment, he wrote over the next few years a political trilogy (*The Prince*, *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy* and *The Art of War*), a history of Florence (*Florentine Histories*), several political or historical treatises, two successful plays, a novel and a handful of poems. He died in June 1527, shortly after witnessing the sack of Rome by Spanish and German troops under the command of the Duke of Bourbon. Continuously listed on the Papal Index of Forbidden Books until its abolition in 1966, the *Discourses* and *The Prince* have aroused the passions of moralists and revolutionaries and captured the interest of diplomats, rulers and philosophers ever since they were published (in 1531 and 1532, respectively). They have proven to be inexhaustible sources of commentary and have earned their author a sinister but undeserved reputation.

Machiavelli dedicated and offered as a birthday present his book *The Prince*, to Lorenzo de Medici, future Duke of Urbino and Florence's new ruler. This short work was intended to prove to the Florentines that as the author is an expert in matters of government, he should be accorded appropriate respect and authority. The book offers a series of historical, political and military discussions in its first half and practical advice to princes in the second. Written in Italian in a consciously unadorned style with rare passages of irony, it concludes with a vibrant 'exhortation to liberate Italy from the Barbarians'.[3] This call is not only the conclusion of the book, however. It also expresses Machiavelli's lifetime obsession: the unification of Italy and the restoration of her status on the European stage. If the Florentine secretary was pragmatic about the means used, he was dogmatic about this end and all his political works are dedicated to it. The depth of his bitterness and frustration at seeing 'Barbarians' sack Rome, Italy's former imperial capital, must have been profound.

Machiavelli's writing is starkly realistic. Before committing himself to writing as a substitute for civil service, he was a man of action. On several occasions he negotiated Florence out of difficult situations. He created and

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organised his city's militia and saw to its defence. Under his command, Florentine citizen-soldiers defeated Pisa in 1509. He was familiar with war and those who fight, which sets him apart from most of the great Western thinkers. Furthermore, he did not consider himself a philosopher, but an adviser to rulers who could draw on his considerable experience based on fifteen years of high-level diplomatic activity.

Machiavelli's texts are delightfully free of humbug and describe how politicians act rather than how they should act. He based his descriptions and arguments on past and present reality as he understood it and wrote of human beings as he saw them through the lens of history and his personal experiences. In this sense, his books are a refreshing alternative to those of moralists who pretend that human beings are basically good and can be trusted to treat others well. A frank assessment of the human condition exposed the Florentine secretary to the wrath of the hypocrites who hate the frank avowal of evil behaviour.

As evidenced by the material he used as basis for the *Discourses*, Machiavelli took Rome and ancient Greece as unrivalled examples of human achievement. 'Those who read of the origin of the city of Rome', he wrote as the first sentence of the *Discourses*, 'of its legislators and of its constitution, will not be surprised that in this city such great virtue [*virtù*] was maintained for so many centuries'.[4] This being the case and since 'everything that happens in the world at any time has a genuine resemblance to what happened in ancient times,'[5] antiquity can be used as a model from which military and political prescriptions can be extracted, in the same way that medical ones can be formed from the study of the experiments of previous doctors.[6]

Given the deplorable political situation of Italy, Machiavelli was not interested in unsuccessful established rulers. His advice is for new princes only, as exemplified by the recently established head of Florence to which *The Prince* is dedicated. Given the circumstances that led to his exile from Florence, Machiavelli did not discuss the legitimacy of these new rulers because as rulers they are, for him, legitimate. He wrote to help them consolidate and maintain their political power and perhaps even unite Italy.

In addition to his conviction that antiquity is a guide, Machiavelli's central premise is that man is *homo homini lupus*: man is a wolf to man, man is man's greatest enemy. 'One can make this generalisation about men: they are ungrateful, liars and deceivers,' he wrote in *The Prince*, 'they shun danger and are greedy for profit; while you treat them well, they are yours. They would shed their blood for you, risk their property, their lives, their children, so long [. . .] as danger is remote; but when you are in danger they turn against you.'[7] Men must, therefore, be protected from themselves: the ideal society is a society in which men are safe and prosperous, governed by a State that is feared internally and externally. This State is embodied by either

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a strong prince (hence the title of his short treatise) or a strong republic (subject matter of the much longer *Discourses*). Although he insisted elsewhere that republics are superior to principalities,[8] Machiavelli considered that the political decomposition of Italy was such that a prince was needed to restore the country's unity.

MACHIAVELLI'S VIRTÙ

Before Machiavelli, the standard view of rulers was that they had to be moderate, wise and just. Plato thought that philosophers should be rulers because ethics cannot be dissociated from politics. Aristotle held that virtues are middle paths between opposing vices so that, say, generosity is somewhere between miserliness and profligacy. In *De Officiis*, Cicero insisted that princes should be trustworthy, generous and unpretentious, that force and fraud are equally unworthy of man because they are typical of the lion and the fox.[9] Seneca, in *De Clemencia*, argued that princes had to cultivate clemency. To these humanistic virtues, Christian ethics added compassion, love and forgiveness, holding that one's fate in heaven depends exclusively on one's intentions and not on their practical consequences.

Machiavelli had no time for such views. Since men are 'wretched creatures',[10] he argued that the traditional princely qualities, although admirable in and of themselves, would spell ruin for the State if the ruler followed them. He was preoccupied not with principles or intentions, but with consequences. His objective was the edification and preservation of a strong State and the consolidation of political power. His decisive break from the traditional view on rulership is confidently announced in the pivotal chapter XV of *The Prince*, worth quoting extensively for its clarity:

> It now remains for us to see how a prince must govern his conduct towards his subjects or friends. I know that this has often been written about before; [allow me, however, to] draw up an original set of rules. But since my intention is to say something that will prove of practical use to the inquirer, I have thought it proper to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined. Many have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation. The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous [*buoni*, i.e. 'good' in the Christian sense]. Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn not to be virtuous [*buono*], and to make use of this or not according to need.

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> [. . .] And then, he must not flinch from being blamed for vices which are necessary for safeguarding the state. This is because, taking everything into account, he will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practises them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity.

Rulers, then, must set Christian values aside, for they are an obstacle to political success. Rather than generosity, they should promote parsimony, because generosity is expensive and unsustainable while frugality is cheap and sustainable.[11] Rulers who are short of funds and decrease their generosity are called misers and are despised by their subjects. Genuine loyalty cannot be bought but can only be earned through acts of courage: 'Friendship which is bought with money and not with greatness or nobility of mind is paid for, but it does not last and it yields nothing.'[12] Similarly, the choice between love and fear is an easy one. Since it is impossible to be loved and to be feared at the same time (which would be ideal), Machiavelli believed that rulers must choose to be feared if they want to be respected, for rulers who want to be loved will be taken for granted.[13] To be truly compassionate, rulers must know when to be cruel: 'By making an example or two he will prove more compassionate that those who, being too compassionate, allow disorders which lead to murder and rapine.'[14] If cruel, action must be swift and decisive, however: 'Men must be either pampered or crushed, because they can get revenge for small injuries but not for grievous ones.'[15] Rulers must not be afraid to break their promises if it is in the interest of the State to do so: 'A prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage [. . .] no prince ever lacked good excuses to colour his bad faith.'[16] Encapsulating all this advice through an allegory which reverses Cicero's, Machiavelli noted that the ruler must be half-man, half-beast: a ferocious lion to frighten off the wolves and a cunning fox to recognise the traps.[17]

Upon these assumptions Machiavelli developed, in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, his central conception: *virtù*. Although he never provided a formal definition of the term, its general meaning can be safely outlined. By *virtù*, Machiavelli meant the set of qualities that enables princes to build, save and maintain cities, earn respect, win lasting glory, and achieve enduring, reliable political power. The qualities required to possess *virtù* are manly courage, fortitude, audacity, valour, determination, tough-mindedness, prowess, and good judgement. As the foundation of Rome required the murder of Remus, success can require extreme sacrifice. Cesare Borgia, for all his cruelty, was a man of great *virtù* because 'this cruelty of his reformed the Romagna, brought it unity and restored order and obedience'.[18] *Virtù*, then, implies civic spirit. It is *virtù* to defend a city but it is not *virtù* to kill fellow citizens recklessly, betray friends pointlessly, or be irreligious for the sake of

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it, as did Agathocles of Sicily, for 'these ways can win a prince power but not glory'.[19] People of *virtù* seize the moment, act opportunistically when necessity commands, understand the political situation, and are willing and able to take risks and make the most of one's circumstances. This last aspect is paramount to Machiavelli: his texts abound with warnings about the danger of procrastination and the folly of being irresolute.[20] Moses, Cyrus the Great (founder of the first Persian Empire), Hiero II of Syracuse and Romulus were men of exceptional *virtù* because they had the qualities listed above and put them to productive use at the right moment.[21]

Virtù is the only way to confront fortune. In Machiavelli's texts, fortune is this dimension of existence that is ever changeable and unpredictable and which makes beggars kings and kings beggars: it is 'the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves'.[22] The most favourable situations never remain stable for long and can quickly escape one's grasp. Accordingly, princes must be aware of and remain on their guard against it. Fortune is, for Machiavelli, like a violent river which, when in flood, sweeps everything away. It can be resisted, though never completely, by dykes and embankments, if these are built when conditions permit. Even when precautions have not been taken, extraordinary feats of *virtù* can still save the day. Luck can be forced for it smiles to those who are bold. This is because

> fortune is a woman and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her. Experience shows that she is more often subdued by men who do this than by those who act coldly. Always, being a woman, she favours young men, because they are less circumspect and more ardent, and because they command her with greater audacity.[23]

A crucial aspect of *virtù* is manliness, a reference to gender rather than sex, applicable to both males and females. Machiavelli praised many women (notably Catarina Sforza of Forlì and Giovanna II of Naples) for their *virtù* by which they achieved great things and made spectacular recoveries in desperate situations.[24]

Virtù is, then, the capacity and willingness to beat the odds by acting confidently, brazenly, and using lies and deceit when necessity commands. Machiavelli insisted that if subjects develop hate or contempt for their ruler, the demise of the latter is unavoidable.[25] Goodwill and admiration of the people is a ruler's most solid and enduring protection; rather than living isolated in citadels or fortresses, princes should live among their subjects, seeking their respect and devotion through acts of exemplary valour and courage. When unpopular actions are needed, they should be delegated to others, so that a prince's reputation is not tarnished.[26] Moreover, princes must surround

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themselves with people who are competent and loyal. 'The first opinion that is formed of a ruler's intelligence is based on the quality of the men he has around him. When they are competent and loyal he can always be considered wise, because he has been able to recognise their competence and keep them loyal.'[27] Princes must shun flatterers and advisers are to be told that their ruler values honest opinions. The privilege of speaking openly must be handed over with care and parsimony, however, for 'if everyone can speak the truth [. . .] then [princes] lose respect'.[28] Ministers and victorious generals who receive honours and riches must remember that their positions depend on the prince; if they become too powerful or ambitious, they must be dealt with before they turn against their ruler.

Men must be won over or destroyed: this principle applies to individuals, provinces and cities. Machiavelli held that the surest way to control a newly acquired province is to destroy it, scatter its inhabitants and populate it with people who are loyal to the new prince. Men do not forget the taste of freedom and will rally in its name against the new ruler at the earliest opportunity. Conversely, if the new province was previously under the authority of a prince, then the family of that prince is to be wiped out so that no surviving member can seek revenge. Its inhabitants, however, should be spared because they are used to being ruled and will soon forget the old prince and accept the new one.[29]

Mercenaries must be avoided at all costs because they chase bounty and their interests are different from those who employ them. If they are not successful on the battlefield, mercenaries cause disaster; if they are successful warriors, emboldened by their success, they soon rise against their employer, using threats and coercion to extract more wages or advantages.[30] Rather than relying on fickle soldiers of fortune, a wise prince gathers soldiers from his own people because they fight proudly for freedom, survival with the interest of their country at heart.

From a chronological perspective, the rise of Christianity cannot be dissociated from the fall of the Rome. For Machiavelli, this synchronicity is no accident because there is a causative relationship between the two events. In his analysis, the price Italy paid for Christian truth was too high for it brought about the downfall of the Roman Empire. Christianity has demoted 'worldly honour [and] glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action', whereas, in antiquity, 'religion did not beatify men unless they were replete with worldly glory'. While Christianity 'has assigned as man's highest good humility, abnegation, and contempt for mundane things', the religions of Rome, Athens and Sparta promoted 'magnanimity, bodily strength, and everything else that conduces men to be very bold. And, if our religion demands that in you there be strength, what it asks for is strength to suffer rather that strength to do bold things.'[31] *Virtù*, then, is synonymous

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with heroic virtue, *aretê* as Homer's warriors understood the term. That is, *virtù* comes with bravery, excellence, skilfulness, boldness, strength, and the means to obtain and preserve worldly power.

In summary, not only is Christian ethics an impediment to good statesmanship, it is an obstacle to powerful and stable societies. This much would have been enough to earn Machiavelli vigorous condemnation from the church. The Florentine secretary went much further, however. By insisting that rulers' knowledge of the past can influence the future and *virtù* can coerce fortune, Machiavelli indirectly argued that God was irrelevant to worldly and political success. When humans fail, they have no one to blame but themselves. Moreover, success is to be measured in *this* world, not in a spiritual one. Machiavelli remained silent about the safeguarding of the soul or the possibility of rewards in heaven. Worldly power is a means as much as an end and God cannot help. Furious and indignant, Cardinal Pole saw in Machiavelli an author inspired by the Devil himself, whose views, if widely accepted, would destroy the church and the very notion of Christian virtue.

MACHIAVELLI'S SHADOW

The charge stuck. After Pole, it quickly became commonplace to dismiss Machiavelli for his alleged immoralism, with 'Machiavellian' used as a synonym for devilish, dishonest or devious behaviour. Thus, in *Henri VI*, Shakespeare had one character speak of the 'murderous Machiavel'. These qualifiers are undeserved since Machiavelli's overall objective was merely to analyse those successful political and military practices in antiquity which could be adopted by the Florentines. He neither wrote against the private respect of Christian virtues nor denied that what Christians consider good is indeed good.[32] If he opposed Christian graces to heroic *virtù*, it was to emphasise that Christians seek purity of conscience at the risk of coercion by those unconstrained by such concerns, whereas the latter seek the glory and power of the State. Similarly, Machiavelli was not opposed to religion as such but considered that its task is to cement social cohesion. To ensure a strong and feared community, religion should promote v*irtù*, as the creeds of antiquity did. Morality and religion must serve society, not the reverse.[33]

If morality and religion are to serve society, however, then attempts to idealise society, in the manner of Plato, are doomed from the outset. Machiavelli's arguments treat morality as a set of beliefs and customs which enables societies to prosper, rather than a body of values of divine origin. In this sense, he promoted a non-Christian morality. Furthermore, if morality is the expression of society and not the reverse, then there are as many moralities as there are societies. Attempts to bring them to accord through peaceful

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negotiation are bound to fail since a blueprint would be required with which citizens have to comply. However, this is precisely the sequence of events that Machiavelli's arguments rule out. In the final analysis, the belief in a common ground for universal peace is a delusion. Machiavelli did not explicitly propose this sobering conclusion, but it follows from his stark realism.

Commentators have argued that Machiavelli provided the ideological arsenal for modern-day terrorists, Nazis and Stalinists. This is a gross misrepresentation of Machiavelli's thought since he did not write, either in his books or official and private letters, that the end justifies the means. The closest he came to expressing this view is found in a well-known passage of *The Prince*:

> A prince, especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which give men a reputation for [Christian] virtue, because in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, of religion. [. . .] he should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary.[34]

'Evil' means are justified, but only if they are used to achieve the common good, namely the edification and preservation of a strong and safe society. Moreover, these 'evil' means must be used sparingly. Machiavelli often noted that whenever drastic action is taken, the prince should hurt as few individuals as possible, so as not to turn the people against him.[35] He believed that rulers cannot bring about and sustain the 'common good', however defined, by killing innocents randomly in the name of a cause.

As Pole found, it is difficult to criticise Machiavelli because his most obvious starting point, *homo homini lupus*, seems beyond question. The inconvenient validity of the Florentine secretary's arguments and the truth of his descriptions of human nature explain why people have slandered him. Outraged by his conclusions but unable to oppose his premises, logic and evidence, critics resorted to unfair, yet successful, *ad hominem* attacks. That said, Machiavelli is vulnerable to criticism on two grounds: his unstated premises and his method.

A central assumption, never explicitly stated, underpins Machiavelli's writings: the good society is a society that is stable and safe. Social stability is the highest value because it necessarily brings about happiness for its citizens. Community first, individuals second: 'It is not the well-being of individuals that makes cities great, but the well-being of the community.'[36] Machiavelli took this point for granted for he nowhere argued it. In *The Prince*, the strength of the State starts with that of its ruler, while in the *Discourses* it rests on the laws and institutions endorsed by the people.[37] For the Florentine secretary, the stronger the State, the freer its citizens. Furthermore, republics that are based on absolute power are more powerful than principalities.

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The title of the discourse in which this last argument is proposed is explicit: 'Dictatorial Authority did Good, not Harm, to the Republic of Rome.'[38] Social peace and stability depend on the *virtù* of rulers and citizens, but when lacking, they can be forced upon the people, as Numa did at Rome.[39] There is thus in Machiavelli's thought a lingering authoritarianism that cannot be explained away. Although he valued freedom highly and can thus be legitimately called a philosopher of liberty, the freedom he pursued was of the heroic, collective type. Man, for Machiavelli as for Aristotle, is a political animal, not an individualist. Protestantism, which largely invented and promoted individualism was but a few decades away. In any case, Machiavelli's preference for 'collective freedom' over individual versions, especially when social peace is threatened, has not lost its appeal; it is detectable today in the challenges to individual rights enacted in Western democracies as part of the so-called War on Terror.

If Machiavelli wrote honestly of man as he saw him, his arguments offer little in the way of improving the human condition. According to him, that man has marked predispositions towards violent, murderous and opportunistic behaviour calls for drastic solutions to recalcitrant problems. If so, the exercise of Machiavelli's *virtù* is likely to intensify the human tendencies he lamented, especially when the darker sides of the ruler's *virtù* come to light. Not only will the ruler be taken as an example to be imitated, but state-backed violence will feed social violence. In this outline, Machiavelli's recommendations in *The Prince* are effective but short-term tactics which reinforce the problems they are meant to solve. Other, non-violent ways to ameliorate personal and social problems deserve to be explored. As the Florentine knew, religions are among these alternative means.

Finally, if Machiavelli is widely seen as a political theorist, he is neither a political scientist nor an historian. His method was eclectic and unsystematic. While he studied history thoroughly and read ancient authors carefully, he used his sources selectively, taking from history and the classics whatever suited his theories and conclusions, setting aside what did not. For example, he praised Rome's tradition of granting citizenship to anyone who recognised her gods and laws as legitimate because he saw in this liberality a source of her greatness (as exemplified in the rule of Philip the Arab). Yet, elsewhere, he blamed the same custom for leading to the corruption of the customs that made Rome great.[40] He often engaged in unverifiable and purely rhetorical speculations. For instance, he asserted that Caesar would have been less generous had he lived longer and Scipio would have ruined his glory if he had remained lenient.[41] Last but not least, his indictment of Christianity as leading to the downfall of the Roman Empire is disingenuous and based on a partial reading of history. If the thesis has some validity for the Western Empire, it does not hold for its Eastern part since Byzantium, although also (Orthodox)

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Christian, outlived its Western brother for a thousand years, showing that Christianity by itself is not incompatible with imperial rule.[42]

As Maurizio Viroli argued, Machiavelli is better read, like the Roman statesmen and legislators he admired, as a classicist who conceives political life as a rhetorical practice. Machiavelli did not write as a philosopher or as an historian, but as a master rhetorician who sought to convince his contemporaries of his views with eloquent sentences and vivid illustrations. If these are sometimes biased or incomplete, it is because Machiavelli was not teaching history but constructing persuasive arguments. *The Prince* is a political oration which respects the Roman canon of rhetoric and ends, like any speech that aims to be persuasive and memorable, with an exhortation that speaks to the heart, rather than the head. If this is the case, then Machiavelli's claims to originality must be re-qualified. In true Renaissance style, he believed that politicians should emulate the creativity of artists and men of letters who reached back to antiquity for inspiration. Surprisingly, however, he makes no reference to his brilliant Florentine contemporaries in these fields.

MACHIAVELLI IN THE EXECUTIVE SUITE

Although he wrote for heads of state, Machiavelli's lessons can be transposed to the management of private interests, especially when these take the form of large corporations. This is so because states and corporations share defining attributes: they are large organisations of people seeking the effective employment of resources to provide safety and prosperity to those who form them (citizens for states, shareholders and employees for corporations). They compete with similar organisations, enforce internal rules and are governed by a small number of people. Further, if management is getting things done through people and if power is the ability to bring events to pass, then management cannot be dissociated from the generation and exercise of power. No manager can do without understanding how power can be secured and how it can be maintained. In this respect, *The Prince* is *the* primer for managers who want to climb the corporate ladder. The list of recommendations for managers that can be extracted from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* is lengthy; the following prescriptions and proscriptions are among the most transparent ones.

First, if Machiavelli is right, managers must come to terms with the fact that the workplace is not a just space where people are trustworthy, respect each other, and have the organisation's interests at heart. Such employees do exist, but they are overshadowed by those who rate competition above friendship. Managers, especially if new to their role, will not be handed the keys to their jobs without meeting resistance from those who competed unsuccessfully for them. Legitimacy requires success and success requires power. The control

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of resources (money, space, knowledge, labour, access to the board or other senior executives) must not be squandered but carefully exploited to secure it. Insights of this nature were not lost on Vladimir Putin. Determined, from 2005, to renegotiate natural gas prices to his advantage, Putin did not hesitate to impose his views by ignoring previous agreements and cutting the supply of gas to Eastern Europe mid-winter.

Machiavelli insisted that true protection of employees is not a display of Christian empathy but the rigid demand of organisational discipline and performance. Poor performance and lack of discipline are unacceptable: a manager who tolerates a free rider or allows safety procedures to be ignored jeopardises his organisation. Genuine compassion and generosity for one's subordinates are long-term concerns; as such, they demand drastic actions that often pass for short-term cruelty. Punishments and rewards are effective tools to shape individual and collective behaviour and must be used liberally if required. In this respect, friendship in management is more than a self-defeating mistake: it is contradiction in terms. The manager-subordinate relationship demands that feelings are set aside in the name of effectiveness. Performance cannot be exacted from an employee with whom one entertains personal sympathies because the language of friendship and of management are mutually incompatible. One does not rate the performance of one's friends.

Managers must surround themselves with a loyal team and remove anyone upon whom they cannot rely. They should not become too trusting of those around them, however. If managers protect those who can help them, they must always remain on their guard and be ready to part company with their successful subordinates when they become too ambitious. When blows are to be dealt, they must be of such a nature that the injured one will never retaliate. Men must be won over or destroyed.

History is written by the winners and nothing must be allowed to interfere with success. Managers should choose their battles carefully but, once committed, they must fight to win, irrespective of moral considerations. While executive failure is held in contempt and often attributed to irresolution or lack of courage, much is forgiven in retrospect to those who succeed. Apple's founder Steve Jobs is considered by many to be among history's most successful and influential CEOs, ranked with Jack Welch (General Electric), Alfred Sloan (General Motors), Thomas J. Watson (IBM's founder) or John Pierpont Morgan (J.P. Morgan & Company). If all these men took their organisations to extraordinary heights, none is remembered as a boss with whom it was easy to work.

Managers of departments which have been recently merged should remember Machiavelli's advice to princes. If the new department used to operate autonomously, most of its employees must be removed because they will

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resent the loss of the 'old ways', question the authority of their new bosses and sabotage their efforts. If the employees of the acquired unit are used to complying with central authority and if their operating procedures are compatible with those of the acquiring organisation, then only their managers will need to be removed and replaced by people from the new headquarters. After all, the incumbent managers failed since they allowed their organisation to be taken over in the first place. Corporate history is littered with mergers and takeovers which failed because executives blamed 'cultural incompatibility' for the failures. If two corporate cultures are incompatible, however, then one must be eliminated. Machiavelli would have had no time for 'cultural incompatibility', seeing this lame excuse merely as another name for executive irresolution. There are many examples of conglomerates which have had notable and repeated success with their acquisitions. Like United States's General Electric and Australia's Wesfarmers Limited, they are not known for their permissive management style.

Women in management will find much support in Machiavelli's writings. As the Florentine secretary saw it, sex (male versus female) has nothing to do with gender (masculine versus feminine). While he expressed this distinction differently, Machiavelli considered sex a biological contingency and gender a chosen behaviour. Anyone can choose to be masculine: assertive, aggressive, dogmatic, a risk-taker and tough-minded. If equality between the sexes is (or should be) a given, gender equality is a delusion: effeminate males and females are bound to be passed over for promotions in organisations where positions of power are few and candidates many. What matters is *virtù* and according to Machiavelli masculine females can be as successful in political affairs as masculine males. Researchers in the field of gender studies would do well to read Machiavelli, if only to avoid the feminist criticism that Machiavelli wrote for males and favoured them for executive positions. A cursory reading of Machiavelli invalidates this criticism since his books contain many examples of successful female rulers.

American soldiers sent to the Western front to fight Nazi Germany knew they would not return home until the war was won; their sons sent to Vietnam were rotated every two years or so. The former understood well why they had to prevail; the latter did not and tried to survive their time. America's engagement in Europe was short and successful; in Indochina, it was protracted and ended in humiliating defeat. Machiavelli understood that half-hearted efforts in politics and war end in failure and that when rulers rely on mercenaries, they run great risks.

Manager should be wary of consultants because their interests are not those of the organisation that requires their services. Consulting companies are the corporate version of the mercenary troops used in Renaissance Italy. Their interest is not, or not only, to complete the project for which they were hired.

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Rather, it is either to make it last as long as possible, or to be so successful in what they do that the host organisation finds itself unable to operate without them. Instead of consultants, managers would be wise to use their employees as 'soldiers', demand loyalty, self-sacrifice and competence.

In recent history, U.S. president Abraham Lincoln emerges as one of the political figures most faithful to Machiavelli's ideal ruler. Committed to reuniting a nation torn apart by the Civil War and ending slavery, Lincoln used all means available to him to prevail. Although a lawyer by trade and a committed democrat, he did not hesitate to suspend the writ of habeas corpus and command the arrest and temporary detention without trial of thousands of suspected secessionists. He was an extraordinarily astute politician who excelled at manoeuvring his allies, dividing his adversaries and making ambiguous statements or promises when these suited his purposes. Determined to win the war against the South, however high the casualties, he took direct executive control of military operations and removed incompetent army commanders. Finally, Lincoln was an immensely gifted rhetorician and orator, capable of galvanising the energy and fervour of his audiences in legendary addresses and speeches. Executives of troubled organisations should turn to Lincoln when looking for inspiration or for a modern embodiment of the characters praised in *The Prince*.

Whether one admires or condemns him, Machiavelli left a durable imprint on the history of Western thinking. He showed, contrary to doctrine but supported by abundant evidence, that to follow principles rigidly is to follow a path that leads to individual and collective ruin. In the last analysis, Machiavelli's message is that reality, of which human nature is a central aspect, is to be received for what it is and not what it should be. Rather than lament the deplorable state of their environment, Machiavellian managers confront it directly. They do not pray or wish it were different but act as necessity commands. The value of an action can be assessed only in the light of its goals and purposes – if it achieves them, that is. Although not a scientist, Machiavelli can be credited with inventing political science as a body of knowledge which is distinct and independent of ethical philosophy. In this respect, he made a decisive contribution to the invention of Modernity for he helped dissociate knowledge of the world and of human affairs from religion. Many others embraced and amplified this dissociation.

NOTES

1. Heraclitus (philosophy), Phidias (sculpture and architecture), Herodotus (father of history), Aeschylus (tragedian), Euripides (tragedian), Sophocles (tragedian) and Aristophanes (comic playwright) were all contemporaries; why this is the

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case remains a standing mystery, perhaps the biggest of all in the history of Western humanities.

2. Gleeson-White, J. 2012. *Double Entry: How the Merchants of Venice Created Modern Finance*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company. See chapter 4.

3. Title of the last (and twenty-sixth) chapter, George Bull's translation (1995, London: Penguin Classics). Machiavelli justifies *The Prince*'s unembellished prose in the Preface, wishing the work to be remarkable only because of its contents.

4. *The Discourses* I 1; (Walker, L. J. trans., revised by Richardson, B. London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

5. *Discourses* III 43.

6. *Discourses* I Preface.

7. *The Prince* XVII.

8. *Discourses* I 58: 'Government by the populace is better than government by princes.'

9. Book I 13 of *De Officiis*: 'Wrong may be done, then, in either of two ways, that is, by force or by fraud, both are bestial: fraud seems to belong to the cunning fox, force to the lion; both are wholly unworthy of man, but fraud is the more contemptible. But of all forms of injustice, none is more flagrant than that of the hypocrite who, at the very moment when he is most false, makes it his business to appear virtuous' (1913. Miller, W. trans., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. See p. 41).

10. *The Prince* XVIII.

11. *The Prince* XVI.

12. *The Prince* XVII.

13. *The Prince* XVII.

14. *The Prince* XVII.

15. *The Prince* III; the motto is repeated in chapter VII.

16. *The Prince* XVIII.

17. *The Prince* XVIII; see also XIX.

18. *The Prince* XVII.

19. *The Prince* VIII.

20. Machiavelli dedicated an entire discourse to argue that half-measures must be avoided at all costs (*Discourses* II 23).

21. *The Prince* VI; *Discourses* III 6 and *Florentine Histories* I 38.

22. *The Prince* XXV.

23. *The Prince* XXV.

24. Machiavelli's books offer thirty-four examples of such women, not including mythological figures and deities; cf. Clarke, M. T. 2005. On the Woman Question in Machiavelli. *The Review of Politics*, 76(2): 229–55.

25. *The Prince* XIX.

26. *The Prince* XX; chapter VII provides an illustration of this recommendation.

27. *The Prince* XXII.

28. *The Prince* XXIII.

29. These recommendations are expressed in *The Prince* V.

30. Machiavelli's comments of the demerits of mercenaries are expressed in *The Prince* XII and XIII.

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31. *Discourses* II 2.
32. 'I know everyone will agree that it would be most laudable if a prince possessed all the [Christian qualities that] I have enumerated' (*The Prince* XV).
33. *Discourses* I 2, I 11 and II 2 are largely dedicated to this theme.
34. *The Prince* XVIII.
35. *The Prince* XVII for instance.
36. *Discourses* II 2.
37. *Discourses* III 1.
38. *Discourses* I 34.
39. *Discourses* I 11.
40. *Discourses* II 3 and III 49, respectively.
41. *The Prince* XVI and XVII, respectively.
42. As Machiavelli himself acknowledged in *Discourses* II 2. The Eastern Roman Empire is barely mentioned in the *Discourses* (only one fleeting mention in the Preface to Book II) and receives no attention at all in *The Prince*.

FURTHER READING

Jay, A. 1970. *Management and Machiavelli*. London: Pelican Books.
Skinner, Q. 2000. *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Chapter 4

French Rationalism

Managing Rationally

During the Middle Ages, theology, philosophy and science supported each other. Early medieval thinkers were scholastic theologians who made no formal distinction between philosophy and their own discipline. It was only after Thomas Aquinas showed that Christianity could benefit from Aristotelianism that other philosophies emerged as subjects worthy of interest. In particular, science, as the study of nature, was released from its medieval bonds by the rediscovery of Aristotle's texts and their study of worldly matters. However, when philosophers and scientists no longer acted as handmaidens of religion, they triggered a series of questions and problems that Western thinkers could no long ignore. By the late sixteenth century, the relevance and urgency of these questions were such that the intellectual edifice of Western humanity was threatening to implode. The way philosophers sought to address them was to have a decisive influence on modernity.

THE NOMINALIST CHALLENGE

Traditional scholasticism held that God is omnipotent but intelligible.[1] Scholastic thinkers believed that there is an order in nature because it has been created according to universal ideas in the mind of God. These universals have a quasi-tangible existence since they are embodied in the beings that populate nature. God created human beings according to His idea of Man, making them all essentially the same; creation itself was the result of a free yet ordered and benevolent act of God. Originally sinners, individuals can redeem themselves and remain responsible for their actions for they have been gifted with free will. Respect of the word of God assures the salvation of one's soul. Indeed, according to Pierre Abélard (1079–1142),

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God has no option but to reward the faithful, because He is infinitely good, just and wise.

Aquinas completed this traditional scholastic outline by arguing that God was rational and created perfect laws for all times. Nature and logic reflect one another so that one can understand God by describing the relationships that exist between nature and the universals that structure it and between the universals themselves. Philology, the study of the Bible and more generally the analysis of language, is instrumental in this enterprise because however imperfect and incomplete, human ideas are reflections of God's perfect universals. If this were not so, the concepts people use to communicate between themselves and reflect upon God and His word would be empty. Language, then, would be meaningless and the exegesis of scripture a pointless exercise. In Aquinas' vision, philosophy and theology merge in a coherent effort.

William of Ockham (c. 1285–1349) realised that if traditional scholasticism were correct and God created the world according to His universal, perfect and eternal ideas of it, it follows that God's freedom and power would be severely constrained. If nature is logically ordered, intervening in it necessarily violates a principle that presides over its creation, since it means interfering with the processes that have unfolded. Similarly, if individual beings have been created according to their divine essence, God cannot annihilate one completely without annihilating the entire species, since all members of the same group have the same essence. God cannot even annihilate one species without annihilating them all, since all species share the concept 'species'.

Ockham would have none of this. God is for him omnipotent and cannot see His powers limited in anyway, except by the principle of non-contradiction (that is, God cannot do or will one thing and its opposite at the same time). God is free to do whatever He wishes, even if this means negating His own word. Further, God does not make promises. As making a promise means constraining oneself to a course of action or preventing oneself from taking a course of action, it is self-contradictory for an omnipotent God. God's omnipotence also means that He is not influenced by what humans do since that would imply that God and His actions are contingent on human deeds. God is not man's debtor: good Christians do not have a claim on Him which assures the salvation of their soul. Since God can do whatever He wishes, He can annihilate one member of a species without annihilating the rest. Contrary to what Plato and the scholastics maintained, there cannot be essences or eternal ideas in either nature or in the mind of God. There are only existents: absolute individuals, radically independent from one another. Human beings can know and should comment only upon the particulars they experience. So-called universals do not exist, they are only names (Latin: *nominis*, hence the term 'nominalism' to refer to this philosophy) used by humans. They do not point to anything tangible for they are no more than

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ways of conceiving and categorising particulars. Consequently, statements about the world must remain simple and contain the fewest generic terms possible because the more generic concepts they rely on, the more they depart from what there is. This is Ockham's well-known 'razor principle', according to which the number of explanatory principles is be kept to a strict minimum.

In Ockham's nominalist outlook, reality as a stable and permanent substratum is an empty concept. To date, objects have fallen whenever they have been released. If this were a universal idea of God, then, according to scholasticism's view, God would not be able to make an exception to that rule without contradicting Himself. Ockham rejected such arguments. Nothing happens because it must: there are no necessary or permanent relationships between events or objects because such relationships would encroach on God's omnipotence. Similarly, no being exists because it must: God is the only necessary being. Even the actual existence of one being cannot be established, for God can generate the experience of a being in the minds of human beings without committing to its real existence. The world humans know is merely a manifestation of God's will. It is not governed by immutable laws but by whatever temporary necessity God has imparted to it to suit His purposes and which He can change at any moment without warning. Although uncertain, this world is the simplest of all possible worlds, because it is merely a collection of absolute beings unconnected to one another except in the fact that they are all contingent on God's all-encompassing will.

Ockham's work was a frontal attack on traditional scholastic theology from within it since he rejected the intertwined notions of a rational God and His well-ordered creation. Nominalism, therefore, rejected the arguments of scholastic philosophers which grounded religious doctrines on reason. Unsurprisingly, nominalism was resisted and Ockham was excommunicated in 1328. Good arguments, however, acquire a life of their own and nominalism spread and quickly took a firm hold within medieval Europe. By the mid-fifteenth century, it was the dominant view in almost all the universities of the continent. The scholastic marriage of faith and reason – natural theology – which had remained strong for more than a thousand years, was finally over. It is, in large part, due to Ockham's writings that natural theology was abandoned. Understandably, philosophers who were determined to study nature without the intrusion of religion received some of Ockham's arguments sympathetically.

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

In a nominalist outlook, there cannot be any knowledge of objects prior to their empirical investigation, since their existence is not necessary and cannot

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be inferred before they can be experienced. As for the parsimony principle that Ockham promoted (his razor), it can be easily translated into the view that one must not accept anything until one is compelled to do so by experience or reasoning therefrom. Understanding of the world thus starts with the careful study of independent facts, free from prejudice or theological interference. In this sense, nominalism prepared the ground for the explosion of scientific knowledge which followed the Renaissance.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, great discoveries occurred at an unprecedented rate. Copernicus (1473–1543) replaced geocentrism (the view according to which the Earth is the centre of the universe) with heliocentrism. After him, human beings are no longer at the centre of God's creation but inhabitants of a mere satellite of the sun. Galileo (1564–1642) argued that the laws of nature can be expressed mathematically and that science's method combines experimentation with mathematics. Observing the phases of Venus, he confirmed Copernicus' heliocentric model, discovered the four large moons of Jupiter and contended that the Earth spins on itself. Kepler's (1571–1630) three laws of planetary motion vindicated and improved upon Copernicus' and Galileo's models. Coming after Vesalius' (1514–1564), the anatomical studies of Paré (1510–1590) Colombo (1516–1559), and Harvey (1578–1657) proposed a unified model of the circulatory system that replaced Galen's (129–200) ancient theory of arteries and veins as two separate networks. The body is no longer despicable ('weak flesh') but worthy of serious study. Mechanism (the view according to which the world operates as an immense machine) and atomism (the view according to which the world is ultimately made of small particles) slowly displaced Aristotle's esoteric physics and its associated theory of the four elements (earth, water, air and fire). Predictably, these developments incurred the wrath of the church. In 1616, Galileo was pronounced heretic and condemned to house arrest for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, in the spasms of these debates and within the confused and violent background of the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance gave birth to an era characterised by the popular belief that science and philosophy would lead human beings to a better future.

It is difficult to overestimate the consequences of the publication of Kepler's three laws (from 1609 to 1619). Working from observational data collected by Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Kepler showed that the movement of the planets can be expressed through compact formulae. If the first law established that the Earth and the other planets orbited the sun not circularly (as Copernicus thought) but elliptically, the second specified that a line joining a planet and the sun sweeps out equal areas during equal intervals of time. The third law, perhaps the most mysterious and fascinating of the three, stated that the square of the orbital period of a planet is exactly proportional to the

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cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit. The cosmos is gigantic yet predictable clockwork, its working codifiable precisely and elegantly. As Galileo argued, abstract algebra and tangible astronomy were coming together in a seemingly perfect marriage. Mathematics is the key to the structure of reality, as Pythagoras believed. It did not take long to realise that, if the world of celestial bodies was akin to an enormous machine, then the world of human beings was also mechanistic.

This was a conclusion too significant to ignore. For the early moderns, a mechanical world view irresistibly replaced a magical or religious one. The price to pay for this transition appeared exacting, however, for the more science advanced, the more the world was explained causally and captured in precise mathematical formulae, the less space remained for chance and freedom. Astronomy chartered the world above, physiology the world below and humans as free beings were crushed in between. It seemed that the day would soon come when human behaviour would be codified and predicted as accurately as that of the celestial bodies. However, if humans are not free but merely the embodiment of mathematical equations as immutable as they are uncontrollable, then the very concepts of sin, merit, salvation and damnation are meaningless.

On this account, science's developments fuelled long-standing theological debates and rendered them more acute. If God is omniscient, then He knows the past, the present and the future. This implies that the human decisions are inscribed in a predetermined order and their actions are already decided, even if they believe otherwise. Further, their fate in the afterlife (salvation or damnation) is decided at birth. Such arguments led some theologians to deny free will and develop predestination doctrines of the Augustinian, Jansenist and Calvinist types. These doctrines would remain marginal within Christian theology, however. Since late antiquity, free will was a central and relatively secure component of Christianity, required to secure personal responsibility and account for the existence of evil. The Church Fathers saw that God cannot have benevolently created a world that contained evil, unless He is Himself both infinitely benevolent and infinitely evil – an impossible contradiction. The source of evil on Earth can only be external to God and must be man. The possibility of evil and the hope of salvation hinge, therefore, on human freedom and personal responsibility. God's omnipotence somehow stops at, or at least authorises, freedom of the human will.

By the dawn of the seventeenth century, then, early modernity as it emerged in the wake of the Renaissance was edging towards an acute crisis. On the one hand, a nominalist God appeared to render Christian faith and empirical knowledge pointless. Indeed, why should one study the world if, after God made it behave in constant ways, He decides whimsically to change it completely tomorrow? On the other hand, science was making its first

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great strides and as it progressed the more it pointed to the inadequacy of the Christian religion. Further, if the 'truths' of religion contradict the 'truths' of science, both cannot be simultaneously true, although both can be false. If this is the case, how can one justify commitment to religion and to science? What can be known with certainty?

By the late sixteenth century, these questions were asked with a renewed urgency. Many thinkers convinced themselves that religion offered the best path to the truth. Predictably, others voted for science. A few rejected both religion and science as truth-bearers although this view was not to become popular until the late twentieth century. It is in this uncertain period that the work of the thinker known today as the father of modern philosophy must be received. This scholar attempted to square a philosophical circle by accepting the truths of *both* the Catholic religion and of science.

RENÉ DESCARTES

René Descartes was born in March 1596 in a small city of Touraine, France, which has since been named after him. The third child of a wealthy family, he was sent to the newly founded Jesuit College of La Flèche in 1607, where he remained until 1615. Although deemed to be of a fragile constitution, he was an extraordinarily gifted student. Driven by an 'extreme' desire to learn, he read avidly all the books on which he could lay his hands.[2] After La Flèche, he was advised to become a lawyer like his father and so studied law at the University of Poitiers. Descartes never practised law, however. Rather, he opted for the next few years for the life of a gentleman soldier and joined the Army of Breda under the command of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, where he studied military engineering. Descartes believed that to learn, one must expose oneself to as many different people and ideas as possible. After travels in France and Europe he lived in Holland from 1628, where he studied and later taught mathematics in various universities. In September 1649, he was invited to the court of Queen Christina of Sweden who wished to be instructed in his philosophy. Unaccustomed to the Swedish winter and exhausted by the queen's instructions to teach her at five in the morning in her private library, Descartes eagerly awaited the return of spring to leave Stockholm. This was not to happen: after contracting a respiratory infection and weakened by the cold and lack of sleep, he succumbed to an attack of fever on February 11, 1650.[3]

Descartes was a considerable mathematician (he invented the system known today as analytic geometry) and an accomplished natural scientist. He advanced laws of motion that can be read as precursors of Newton's and held that the amount of energy (which he called 'quantity of movement') is constant

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in the universe. He co-discovered the sine law of refraction (also known as the Snell-Descartes law), proposed an influential study of the rainbow and developed a natural account of the formation of planets that prefigured the now widely accepted nebular hypothesis. In 1637, Descartes published his first philosophical work *The Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. In 1641, the *Meditations on First Philosophy* were published in Latin; a French translation, including six sets of objections and replies, was made available in 1647. *Principles of Philosophy*, mostly a summary of *The Discourse on the Method* and of *The Meditations* intended as a textbook, appeared in 1644 in Latin and in French in 1647. Descartes's last complete philosophical treatise, *The Passions of the Soul*, was published in French in 1649. Additional works and Descartes's abundant correspondence, which clarify aspects of his thought, were published posthumously. The *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, often quoted for its brevity and clarity, was composed in 1626–1628 but left incomplete. It was first published in 1684 in a Dutch translation and in its original Latin version in 1701.

The novelty and boldness of Descartes's ideas in diverse fields ensured that he was a well-known, if controversial, figure on the European intellectual scene. It is with philosophy that his name is most associated today, however. Descartes would have been thrilled by this outcome. Following three dreams on the night of November 10, 1619, which he interpreted as a divine call to rebuild all knowledge and establish a universal science, he decided to commit himself to philosophy. Descartes believed that philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular support all other sciences in the way that the roots and trunk of a tree support its branches and allow them to bear fruits useful to men.[4] He thought that Galileo failed to gain approval from the church because he did not develop his science on metaphysical foundations that were firm enough to fight off misguided theological arguments.[5] Anxious not to repeat Galileo's unfortunate experience, he postponed the publication of his own treatise of physics (*The World*). When he later published studies in optics, physics and geometry, he was careful to introduce them by the *Discourse on the Method*, in which the philosophical principles that presided over their realisation are exposed. In his eyes, the need to develop an appropriate philosophy extended well beyond science since it was required to build and maintain a nation. Descartes, in true Platonic fashion, believed that philosophers are the best rulers for a State. Civilisation needs philosophy to secure its foundations.[6]

CARTESIAN DOUBT

Although doubt is perhaps the best-known aspect of his philosophy, Descartes was not a sceptic since he did not reject claims to truth as a matter

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of principle. If he doubted, it was to seek certainty because he held that anyone who begins a scientific study on false conceptions ends it less knowledgeable than someone who does not study at all.[7] Doubt is not an end, but a means: if one cannot obtain truth, at least one can avoid error. Moreover, like Plato, Descartes was a rationalist. He believed that knowledge is certain cognition obtained through reason. The possibility of knowledge is not in doubt since God assigned Descartes (or so he thought) the mission to refound it in all of its forms.

Descartes's methodical doubt has three distinct origins. First, he acknowledged that although he had an excellent education, many of the opinions and principles that he imbibed were dubious or uncertain.[8] Theologians, philosophers and scientists disagree vehemently with each other. When two men disagree, Descartes noted, at least one of them is wrong. Worse, it is probable that both are wrong, for if one were right, he would have been able to convince the other of the validity of his arguments.[9] Descartes was forced to conclude that nothing that he had studied at school or university represented certain knowledge.

Second, Descartes acknowledged that the senses are eminently fallible and easily deceive. Statues that look small when seen from a distance are in fact colossal.[10] It is not that the senses constantly deceive or cannot be trusted at all, but since they have deceived and can do so again, prudence demands that one doubts their accuracy.[11] In the quest for certain, indubitable knowledge, information from the senses is to be discounted. Sense perception is thus no argument against scepticism.

The third source of Descartes's doubt is the deepest. It is the recognition that God can do anything. In his *First Meditation*, he admits:

> Long-held in my mind [. . .] is the opinion that there is a God who can do everything [. . .]. Now, who could assure me that this God has not seen it that there is no earth, no sky, no extended body, no shape, no dimension, no place, yet that I have the impression of all these things and that they do not exist but in the way that I see them? Moreover, as I believe sometimes that others are mistaken, even when they insist that they are not, it is possible that He wants me to be deceived every time that I add two and three or that I count the sides of a square or that I judge of even simpler matter, assuming there is such a thing.[12]

In this passage, the influence of Ockham's nominalism is plain to see. When studying in La Flèche (hence the 'long-held' opinion), Descartes must have been exposed to nominalist arguments. The powers of a nominalist God are limitless. Since He allows that men are sometimes deceived, He can allow that they are constantly deceived. Such a God could hardly be called benevolent. Therefore, Descartes wrote in the conclusion of his *First Meditation*:

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> I will therefore suppose that there is, not a true God who is the supreme source of truth, but an evil genius, not less clever or deceitful than he is powerful, who has invested all his energy into deceiving me. I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, the colours, the shapes, the sounds and all external things that we see are only illusions and deceptions that he uses to trap my credulity. I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, no senses yet wrongly believing having all these things. I will remain obstinately committed to that thought; and if, by that means, it is not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, at least it is in my power to suspend my judgement. This is why I will be very careful not to believe in any falsehood and will prepare my mind against all the tricks of this great deceiver, so that, for powerful and clever that he may be, he will never be able to impose anything upon me.[13]

The deception of which the evil genius is capable knows no limitation. People may believe in the existence of beings although there are no such beings because the evil genius can generate all the impressions that normally ensure their existence. Even the simplest arithmetical or geometrical truths can be false. If Descartes's doubt was limitless, so was his resolution to overcome it, for he still believed in the possibility of absolute knowledge and of a universal science. Anything about which the slightest doubt can be entertained must be rejected as false, at least provisionally. If nominalist deception cannot be penetrated, methodical doubt allows that illusion is not taken for reality. One must set aside even the most obvious convictions, make complete abstraction of one's body and 'prepare one's mind', that is, respect a method which is robust enough to resist the powers of the evil genius.

It is to the exposition of this method that *The Discourse on the Method* is dedicated. Although fertile in philosophical and practical consequences beyond measure, this method is simply summarised. According to Descartes, one can obtain (certain) knowledge if one respects four principles: (1) nothing is to be accepted as true until it is recognised as self-evidently so by the mind; (2) problems under examination must be divided into as many simple parts as possible; (3) matters must be considered in an orderly fashion, starting from the simplest ones, which, once clarified, are to be grouped to form opinions on more complex issues; and (4) enumerations and general reviews of one's work must be regularly conducted to ensure that nothing is omitted.[14]

The operations described in *The Discourse* are, in this order, analysis (decomposition), intuition, synthesis and review. Descartes believed that mathematicians apply these operations when they solve arithmetical and geometrical problems. Since arithmetic is the most certain science, then it must be considered the foundation of the universal science that he was looking to establish and its methods must be taken as models in all the other sciences.[15] Moreover, all sciences are ultimately one science.[16] By founding analytical

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geometry, Descartes showed how geometrical problems could be solved arithmetically (more precisely: algebraically), something Aristotle himself had declared could not be done.[17] When his method is applied, Descartes held that sterile and misguided theological speculations of scholasticism (which he referred to as 'The Schools') can be safely set aside. Practical sciences can then be developed and knowledge of a sort that will allow men to make themselves 'masters and possessors of Nature' can be produced.[18]

Implicit in Descartes's method, but central to it (as in mathematics generally), is the role of deduction. Once the matter under examination has been decomposed into elementary statements, propositions that are more complex can be deduced from simpler ones, starting from those that are self-evident, until a complete and certain synthesis is achievable.[19] Deduction is not as certain an operation as intuition, however, for a statement that has been deduced from another is by definition not as self-evident as that upon which it rests and the more remote from self-evident truths a statement is, the greater likelihood that it is incorrect. This justifies Descartes's insistence on regular and complete reviews to minimise the possibility that the mind has erred by way of false or unwarranted deductions since it left the territory of plain certainty.

THE COGITO

The territory of plain certainty is intuition. This is so because the senses are fallible and often mislead; the mind, however, when it presents to itself 'clear and distinct' ideas cannot be mistaken.[20] This ability to recognise self-evident truths, which Descartes called the 'natural light' of the mind, was for him a gift of God to man.[21] These clear and distinct ideas must be innate, produced from within, by an inborn capacity of the mind (Descartes wrote of 'seeds of truths which exist naturally in our souls'[22]). If these ideas originated from sense-experience, their truthfulness could not be guaranteed. It is upon these innate, self-evidently true propositions that knowledge is to be rebuilt deductively and a universal science constructed.

The entire Cartesian enterprise rests on the existence of self-evident, clear and distinct truths or ideas, propositions that cannot be doubted. To validate his method and begin his project of building a universal science, Descartes needed an indubitable truth in the same way that Archimedes needed a fixed point to move the world.[23] This fixed point, Descartes found in what is arguably Western philosophy's best-known argument:

> Finally, considering that the same thoughts that we have when we are awake can come to us when we sleep without any of them being true, I resolved to pretend that all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true that the

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illusions of my dreams. Immediately afterwards, however, I noticed that, while I wanted to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, had to be something. And noting this truth: *I think, therefore I am* [alternative translation: *I am thinking, therefore I am existing*], was so firm and so assured that all the extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I judged that I could receive it without hesitation as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.[24]

Cogito, ergo sum.[25] As his method required, Descartes found his starting point in himself. Even if he was mistaken about what he thought was true, he could not doubt that he was doubting. As doubting is a form of thinking, he could not doubt that he was thinking. However much he doubted, he existed; however far his methodical doubt was extended, his own existence was not in doubt. No nominalist God, no cunning evil genius is capable of misleading Descartes in reaching this conclusion:

But there is some very powerful and very clever deceiver, who employs all his energy in always deceiving me. There is then no doubt that I am, if he deceives me; he may deceive me as much as he wants, he will never be able to cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. So that, after having thought well and examined everything, one may conclude and hold for constant this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it or that mentally conceive it.[26]

Descartes's arguments are not as original as he claimed them to be. Plato wrote of a superordinate 'knowledge of knowledge' as the most valuable form of wisdom.[27] Aristotle explained that 'whenever we think, we are conscious that we think and to be conscious that we are perceiving or thinking is to be conscious that we exist'.[28] St Augustine, in his *City of God*, declared that 'I am most certain that I am, [. . .] if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am'.[29] Descartes's originality, however, lies in the fact that he held his *cogito* as the shield with which the evil genius, the nominalist God of Ockham, can be resisted. Not even God can deceive Descartes about his existence. It is based upon this privileged certainty than his philosophy proceeds.[30]

Descartes could not allow his senses to bear on the *cogito*, since they are fallible. He rooted the certainty of his own existence in his inner encounter with his self-awareness and in his ability to distance himself from his bodily perceptions.[31] Having established his existence through a purely mental experience, he concluded that he was an 'immaterial thing that thinks', a soul which is distinct from the body and capable of existing without it.[32] The body is not ignored, but its value is secondary: man is a thinking thing to which a

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body is attached contingently.[33] Unlike animals, human beings have souls and this spiritual 'entity' accounts for all intellectual activities, including volition and (self) consciousness. The human body is, then, a soulless machine.[34] Descartes did not accept Plato's ontology completely, though. Whereas Plato decomposed the *psyche* into three parts which are in tension with one another, Descartes' thing that thinks, 'I', is unique. While Plato's psychology could not explain the unity of self-consciousness, Descartes's is built upon it.

The immaterial 'thing that thinks', 'I', mind or soul, is free because it is a pure thought: it is not an object of thought. It is not caused or moved by anything because that would limit its freedom. 'I' is not an object of consciousness; it is the subject of consciousness. 'I' moves the body and is therefore the uncaused causal mover. The body, like the rest of nature, is its mirror opposite: material, extended, ruled by the laws of physics and not free. As an object of the world, the body can be studied like any other object. It is possible to say: 'I think of me', but not 'I think of I', for 'I' is transparent to itself and cannot be an object of study (since it is the subject). Therefore, science can say nothing about the workings of 'I'. Whatever name is given to it, this spiritual 'entity' escapes empirical observation. It falls, then, under the authority of theology.

DESCARTES'S THEOLOGY

At this point, Descartes had formally established only the existence of his 'I': if the *cogito* allowed him to defeat the nominalist God internally, it is ineffective externally. That is, even armed with the certainty of his 'I', Descartes was still a long way from being able to carry out his grand project, the edification of a universal science. To do this, Descartes must disprove formally the possibility that the world is only the product of his imagination, otherwise he falls into solipsism. If the *cogito* made it impossible that Descartes's self-consciousness was itself a dream, it did not carry over that certitude to the rest of his experience. If solipsism cannot be rejected, Descartes's mission to reform and secure knowledge must be abandoned. Further, the dismissal of solipsism must be done 'from within', since Descartes has not yet established anything about the external world.

Descartes overcame this obstacle by proving (at least to himself) the existence of God. His proofs combine the traditional ontological argument of Anselm of Canterbury with the causal argument of Aquinas to take the following form:[35] since God is perfect by definition and since inexistence is an imperfection, then God must exist and this is itself a clear and distinct idea.[36] Further, Descartes noted that since he did not know everything with certainty, he was not perfect and could not be God.[37]

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Irrespective of what one thinks of these arguments, they show that Descartes was not a solipsist. He thought he had reached out of his *cogito* and proved the existence not only of himself but also of God. Descartes believed matter to be made of small entities infinitely divisible and that motion can be explained in terms of bodies moving from one neighbourhood of entities to another.[38] He was also committed to a mechanical view of the material world and thought that there are immutable laws of nature which apply everywhere and always.[39]

Descartes further held that God's perfection means that He is without defects because deception is a moral fault.[40] This non-deceptive God is crucial to the Cartesian project and receives further development in the *Meditations*. According to Descartes, man needs his self-consciousness to prove that he exists. That he must rely on his self-consciousness to establish his existence is a sign that he is limited, for an unlimited being knows that he exists. Therefore, man is limited because he is self-conscious. Since God exists and is unlimited, it follows that He is not self-conscious. Not being self-conscious, He cannot make choices at all. He consequently cannot deceive, for deception involves the conscious pursuit of objectives.[41] Moreover, one deceives only when one has interests to protect or an agenda to further. God does not recognise anything that is not His and so has no reason to engage in deception. Further evidence for His non-deceptive nature, God has given man the natural light of his mind, that is, the ability to recognise self-evident truths.[42]

This non-deceiver God is Descartes' answer to Ockham's nominalist God. In both cases, God is omnipotent, but while the latter condemns man to theological study and the contemplation of absolute singulars, the former authorises man to study the world methodically, codify its workings in mathematical laws and establish a universal science. Rather than dismiss the relevance of universals, Descartes affirmed their existence. Ultimately, the existence of universals rests on that of self-evident truths, the seeds from which Descartes's universal science grows. God's perfection means that His creation is perfect and does not need to be corrected in any way.[43] Making objects fly tomorrow would be deception: it would mean that, after having implicitly convinced human beings of a particular natural order and have them rely upon their understanding of it, God decided to change it suddenly, ruining their expectations of continuing regularity. A non-deceiver God would never do this. Thanks to the light of his reason bestowed upon him by God, man has left behind the darkness of the Platonic cave.

To avoid the fate of Galileo, Descartes sought to present his arguments in terms that would not attract disapproval from theologians. This was not mere placating on his part. Descartes claimed to be a committed Christian and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his faith. Nevertheless, his philosophy

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had controversial, if unintended, consequences which theologians could not ignore.

They are easily exposed. Although infinite and omnipotent, Descartes's God created a world that human beings, armed with his method and the natural light of their minds, can analyse because it operates in ways that God's non-deceptive nature makes regular and dependable. This amounts to saying that, after creating the world, God withdrew and merely watches indifferently, making man master and possessor of nature. God has, in effect, transferred His potency to man. That potency ultimately rests upon man's ability to recognise self-evident truths and proceed methodically therefrom. As the prime example of a self-evident truth, the *cogito* is a conviction so solid that even a nominalist God is unable to shake it. In the Cartesian ideal, God has been demoted to the role of spectator of man's irresistible conquest of nature.

CARTESIAN CIRCLES

God is demoted to an indifferent, indeed impotent, spectator of man's unstoppable rise. One can understand why, despite Descartes's precautions, the church condemned his conclusions and listed his works on the Papal *Index* of Prohibited Books in 1663. Theologians were not the only ones unconvinced, however. Since their publication, Descartes's arguments have been subjected to intense scrutiny and critique, even by thinkers unconcerned by his treatment of God.

The most obvious problem with Descartes's philosophy is that which relates to his dualist ontology: his vision of man as 'I' (soul, mind) and body. For example, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, with whom Descartes exchanged numerous letters from 1643, failed to see how an immaterial mind can interact with a material body. In the moral treatise that emerged from this correspondence, *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes proposed that, although the mind is united with the entire body, the two interact through the pineal gland because it is a central part of the brain.[44] This, to put it mildly, is not a satisfying answer, especially from a philosopher who wanted to break away from the scholastic-Aristotelian tradition for which thinking was a physical phenomenon. If 'mind' refers to a concept that is immaterial, it is not in space, being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Not only is the mind's interaction with a material body unexplainable, but also speaking of 'my' (or even 'the') mind is logically invalid. The body-mind problem, as it emerges from Descartes's texts, is a logical impasse that cannot be overcome in the terms in which it has been framed.

As Descartes himself acknowledged in one of his replies, the proposition 'I think, therefore I am' is not syllogistic logic.[45] Indeed, Descartes did not

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establish its implicit major premise: he did not demonstrate that everything that thinks, exists. It is presumably to address this difficulty that in the second *Meditations* the *cogito* is proposed as a simpler assertion ('I am, I exist'), true every time it is pronounced. What this means is that the *cogito* is not Descartes's universal, self-evident truth. If it is true only when it is pronounced, then it is a contingent truth. Worse still, as Pierre Gassendi (and Friedrich Nietzsche later) argued, the most that Descartes could claim is: 'There is thinking.'[46] This finding is not enough to conclude that there is a thinker engaged in this activity, let alone that one is in control of it, as 'I think' implies. When Descartes moved from the recognition that thinking is taking place to the conclusion that his 'I' was thinking, he assumed what he set out to prove, taking for granted that his 'I' was the entity doing the thinking. Committed Christian that he was, Descartes reified an activity (thinking) into a substance (first 'thinking thing', then 'I' or soul), the existence of which he never doubted despite his allegiance to methodical doubt. This is an example of begging the question on a grand scale.

Further, as Descartes proceeded systematically to doubt everything, including his own body, it seems never to have occurred to him that he was doubting in a language – French or Latin – which he learned in a linguistic community. On pain of self-contradiction, he could not doubt the existence of that community. If he were to argue that a linguistic community can indeed be doubted, he would have been forced to the conclusion that his doubting is undertaken in a private language and later translated into French or Latin. In the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein (in *Philosophical Investigations*) and philosophers known as logical behaviourists offered convincing arguments that a private language not parasitical upon a community language is an impossibility.

Although Descartes insisted that the *cogito* is the first principle of his philosophy, his primary data are the soul or 'I' and its relative freedom. His awareness of free will precedes the *cogito*: it is only because he was free to doubt that Descartes had the power to reject everything that he did not recognise as self-evidently true. Little surprise, then, if the conclusion of the *Meditations* vindicates this assumption.

Questions regarding the *cogito* are only manifestations of a much more serious problem at the heart of Descartes's project. Plato argued that knowledge is only knowledge of the Forms, arrived at rationally through argumentation and independently of sense data. By insisting that his method was modelled on that of geometry and arithmetic, Descartes did not deviate fundamentally from this view: the world as perceived by the sensory apparatus loses its relevance. In the Cartesian vision, the world can be reduced to a set of formulae, the validity of which can be established logically from self-evident truths by physicists in the way that mathematicians arrive at their theorems

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from axioms. If so, then the learning of all sciences is already included in the axioms upon which they rest. Whatever Cartesian scientists claim as 'discoveries' are merely as-yet unknown consequences of the self-evident truths from which they started. No experiment is required to establish the validity of Descartes's scientific propositions, only mathematical demonstrations. This is consistent with Galileo's view that nature can be 'mathematised', but not with Descartes's view that information from the senses is necessary for the establishment of knowledge.[47] If metaphysics supports physics as Descartes would have it, scientists must start from metaphysical statements. Yet Descartes started from an experimental and quasi-empirical statement (the encounter with his own self-consciousness) to arrive at a metaphysical one, such as that affirming God's existence. In effect, by saying that the *cogito* was the foundation of his philosophy and universal science, Descartes violated his own method.

This contradiction is an illustration of what is known in philosophy as the 'Cartesian Circle'. It was first proposed by Antoine Arnauld, author of the fourth set of objections that are attached to the *Meditations*. Arnauld's indictment is as simple to expose as it is damning. According to Descartes, some propositions can be held to be clearly and distinctly true because God exists and has provided man with the natural light of his mind. Yet the existence of God is itself proposed as a clear and distinct proposition, true by necessity and recognised as such by the mind. In other words, Descartes argued in a circle. Arnauld's charge is a devastating one because it goes to the core of the Cartesian project. Descartes's reply need not be exposed here since it has been widely regarded as inadequate.

What is at stake in this debate is not simply the validity of the *cogito*, or even Descartes's vision of a universal science, but something more fundamental to human existence. From Plato through antiquity to the Middle Ages, thinkers were concerned with truth. This was conceived as a philosophical, scientific or theological notion: an absolute, extra-human concept, arrived at through dialectical enquiry, empirical study, or analysis of authoritative texts. Descartes abandoned these approaches and instead of objective truth sought inner conviction. He replaced the traditional means of enquiry by an individual quest for human certainty, conducted according to a method that repudiates tradition, theology, and data of the senses as sources of reliable information. If this project can be justified, if Descartes's vision can be rescued from Arnauld's attack, human beings can decide self-consciously what is certain, declare what is true for them and shape the world accordingly. That is, if Descartes is right, man has become God.

Descartes's extraordinary accomplishment is to have proposed a system of thought which secures both science and religion by simultaneously separating and reconciling them. As it is based on doubt, Descartes's philosophy rejects

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appeal to authority and tradition. The Aristotelian tradition fused physics and ethics by holding that bodies behave according to their final causes, the ends towards which they strive. This world view was already under increasing challenge by the early seventeenth century but Descartes, by dissociating and juxtaposing freedom and causality, ethics and determinism, dealt it a fatal blow. Although initially controversial, Descartes's philosophy served as a launching pad for the phenomenal expansion of scientific knowledge that unfolded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In its broad functions, it has survived to this day and justifies the claim that Descartes is the father of modern philosophy.

MANAGING RATIONALLY

Beyond its considerable influence on Western philosophy, Descartes's philosophy has notable consequences for managers. Descartes held that the mind is infallible when it operates according to the fundamental operations that he formulated. His method prescribes that complex problems are first considered in their entirety and then analysed into smaller ones until these can be ordered and handled with confidence before being brought together to re-compose the initial problem. This outline is, of course, the basic principle underpinning all methods of project management that rely on a breakdown of work structure in order to produce an overall work plan, timeline and budget. As project managers know, no endeavour is impossible if it can be decomposed to elementary tasks that can be assigned to specific individuals. When this decomposition is completed and work agreed upon by relevant parties, assessing the time required of the overall project and the resources it will absorb is a matter of simple additions.

For the same reason, Descartes is the forerunner of those countless authors who argue that work can be analysed into a succession of small events. Athletes and sport scientists have made much of this principle. In the management literature, the earliest and best-known advocate of Descartes's insight is Frederick Taylor. In *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), Taylor argued that complex jobs are accomplished efficiently when they are decomposed to a succession of tasks that are so elementary that anyone can execute them. When applied to the building of such complex objects as automobiles and computers and combined with an assembly line, Taylorism delivers significant improvements in productivity. The mass manufacture of goods, which is perhaps *the* characteristic of developed economies, is a distant legacy of Descartes's method.

Scientific management accelerated the mechanisation of the means of production, the deskilling of jobs and the rise of the professional manager. After

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Taylor, line workers lost their status to the benefit of production engineers who derive authority from their education in Taylor's techniques. Taylorism has since been subjected to intense criticism and some of its aspects have been abandoned. Yet the idea that management can be systematised and there are, therefore, general methods and recipes available to managers through which they can make their organisation more successful, lives on. This is the Cartesian dream of a universal science applied to management: a management science universal in its reach and mathematical in its methods. Elusive as it has proven to date, this ideal has formed the overarching agenda of management academia for the last century.

Descartes's influence on management thought is detectable in the body of knowledge that he made indirectly possible and without which today's management schools would be unrecognisable. In Descartes's vision, 'I' is sovereign. Not only does 'I' encapsulate personal identity, but it is also the pure thinking mind: reason uncompromised by physical necessities, moral or cultural biases and bodily influences. By elevating 'I' above worldly matters, Descartes defined humans as rational beings capable of overcoming the constraints of their environment to become 'master and possessor of nature'. This is an optimistic and reassuring picture of humans: everywhere the same, in control of themselves, able to ponder arguments, think logically, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions that reach beyond the requirements of their immediate situation. This vision underpins the model of *homo sapiens* which is central to game theory, economics and other social sciences for which humans are disembodied rational beings, constantly maximising their individual or collective well-being. This creature is an international one, for it knows no culture and no borders, only pure reason. Even in Herbert Simon's model, in which human rationality is said to be 'bounded' by factors such as lack of time or resources, economic agents remain rational: they make decisions with the view of optimising their situations. In his various disguises, *homo economicus* is Descartes's often unattributed yet recognisable brainchild.

Central to Descartes's philosophy is the notion that elementary ideas, when sufficiently clear and distinct, are certain. Like axioms in mathematics, they are the starting points of all Cartesian investigations which are themselves little else than enterprises in deductive logic. The conviction that deduction from axioms is the way to reason runs through all rationalist authors after Descartes. Harvard Business School's Michael Porter, for all his careful dissection of markets and industries, did not defend the structure of his successful 'five-force' framework beyond his assertion that competition in markets or industries is so structured and must be so analysed. 'The five competitive forces […] reflect the fact that competition in an industry goes well beyond the established players' is the closest to an argument that one can find in his

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influential book, *Competitive Strategy*.[48] That is, Porter's model, taught in *all* management schools as part of their Strategic Management courses, has been deduced from an intuition taken to be self-evident and axiomatic – unsurprisingly for an author trained as an economist and, as such, committed as a matter of principle to Descartes's model of man. Worthy of note is that Porter further followed Descartes when he proposed his 'value chain' model, also popular with management students and consultants. This framework requires that one analyses in elementary stages the succession of activities that take place within organisations, with the view of locating the source of the value they propose for their customers and the direction of investments.

If Descartes's clear and distinct ideas are the self-evident certainties upon which thinking begins, then managers must ultimately deduce their decisions on insights received as axioms, not on a careful analysis of their environment. In a rationalist outline, success in management springs from the mysterious inner world of executives. If this is the case, the study of successful practices of organisations can serve as a useful guide, but only in the way that artists study the work of other artists, in the hope that doing so will help them find inspiration. Despite Descartes's insistence that the natural light of the mind cannot fail, experience shows that success cannot be guaranteed: in art as in management, the validity of an insight can be found only in its practical realisation.

On the face of it, much of modern psychology seems indebted to Descartes's body-mind dualism and view of the mind or soul as the source of free will. Psychology goes further, however, for it decomposes the mind to drives, motivations, needs, personality traits, defence mechanisms, conscious or unconscious motives, and so on. At this point, Descartes and psychologists part ways: if the term 'psychology' is taken to mean 'science of the psyche', Descartes would have dismissed it as an oxymoronic expression. Observing or analysing 'I' is, for humans, impossible (only God can read their souls and decide of their fate in Heavens). Those who attempt to chart Descartes's 'I' commits the sin of vanity on the grandest scale.

While Descartes today occupies a commanding place in the pantheon of Western philosophy, his authority is not uncontested. The most illustrious critics of Cartesian rationalism came from the north of the English Channel, where Ockham once lived. It is to these thinkers that the discussion now turns.

NOTES

1. Gillespie, M. A. 1996. *Nihilism Before Nietzsche.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. Cf. pp. 12ff to which the beginning of this chapter is indebted. The expression 'nominalist God' is Gillespie's coinage.

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2. *Discourse* I, paragraph 6. For this chapter and except when noted otherwise, the authors have relied on the French texts as published by the European Graduate School on www.egs.edu/library/rene-descartes/articles (for the *Discourse* and the *Meditations*) and by the Académie of Grenoble (www.ac-grenoble.fr/PhiloSophie) for the *Rules*, the *Principles* and the *Passions*. References are made via chapter, main section and paragraph numbers as they appear in these editions. All translations from these sources are the authors'.

3. The circumstances of Descartes' death have long attracted questions. Some authors believe that Descartes was poisoned to protect the Queen from controversial ideas that could have jeopardised her planned conversion to Catholicism.

4. Prefatory letter to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy*, paragraphs 11 and 12.

5. Cf. Descartes's letter to Mersenne dated October 11, 1638. In a letter to Mersenne dated April 1634, Descartes reported his astonishment at seeing a man of the church daring to say anything about the Earth's motion.

6. Prefatory letter to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy*, paragraph 3.

7. *Rules* 2, first paragraph.

8. *Discourse* I, paragraph 6.

9. *Rules* 2, second paragraph.

10. *Meditations* VI, paragraph 6.

11. *Meditations* I, third paragraph.

12. *Meditations* I, paragraph 8.

13. *Meditations* I, paragraph 11.

14. *Discourse* II, paragraphs 7–9.

15. *Discourse* II, paragraph 10; see also *Rules* II, last two paragraphs.

16. *Rules* I.

17. See Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Book I, part 7.

18. *Discourse* VI, second paragraph.

19. The crucial role of deduction is explicit in *Rules* II, paragraph 4.

20. Descartes defined these terms as follows: 'I call [a perception] clear one that is present and manifest to an attentive mind; [. . .] and distinct one that is so precise and different from all others that it contains in itself only that which appears manifest to whomever considers it adequately' (*Principles* I, section 45; cf. also section 46).

21. *Principles* I, section 30; see also *Meditations* IV, first paragraph.

22. *Discourse* VI, paragraph 3; see also *Meditations* III, second to last paragraph.

23. *Meditations* II, first paragraph.

24. *Discourse* IV, first paragraph, emphasis in original.

25. The *Discourse on the Method* (1637) was written in French and the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) in Latin; the '*ego cogito, ergo sum*' (Latin for 'I think, therefore I am') only appeared in the *Principles of Philosophy* (part I, section 7), published in Latin in 1644.

26. *Meditations* II, third paragraph.

27. See *Charmides*, 170a–72c.

28. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170a 29.

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29. Book XI, Chapter 26, as translated by Philip Schaff in *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*. New York, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890, pp. 317–18.

30. *Discourse* IV, end of first paragraph.

31. See *Meditation* IV, first paragraph.

32. *Meditations* II, paragraph 5; VI, paragraphs 8 and 9.

33. These arguments are developed in the Sixth Meditation.

34. Cf. *Discourse* V, paragraph 9, *Meditations* VI, paragraph 13 or *Passions* 6, 7 and 50 for instance.

35. Descartes's arguments are notably offered in the fourth part of the *Discourse*, the Third and Fifth Meditation and in an appendix to the reply to the second sets of objections to the *Meditations* (see also the *Principles*). For Anselm, since God is greater than all beings that can be thought and since existence in reality is greater than existence in thought, then God must exist in reality; for Aquinas, since everything that exists has been caused, there must be a first cause, which is God.

36. *Meditations* III, paragraph 17.

37. See the end of the Third Meditation.

38. *Principles* I, 23 (75) and II, 25.

39. *Principles* II, 37ff.

40. *Meditations* IV, second paragraph.

41. *Meditations* IV, third paragraph.

42. See the second to last paragraph of the Sixth Meditation.

43. *Principles* II, 36.

44. *Passions*, articles 30, 31 and 32.

45. Cf. the reply to the third criticism exposed in the second set of objections.

46. Gassendi's rejoinders are expressed in the fifth set of objections appended to the *Meditations*. Nietzsche's critical comments are expressed in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 16.

47. *Rules* XII.

48. Porter, M. E. 1998 [1980]. *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors.* New York, NY: The Free Press. See p. 6.

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Chapter 5

British Empiricism

Managing without Nonsense

Despite its critics, Descartes' rationalism made a lasting impression on his contemporaries. By delineating the authority of science and religion, it safeguarded each from the attacks of the other. Furthermore, Descartes legitimised philosophy as a worthy endeavour capable of providing answers to theoretical and tangible questions. In the Cartesian outline, humans emerge as rational beings, confident in their intellectual abilities and determined to become masters of nature. All human beings are 'I' and thus share crucial attributes. As they have the same basic needs and are equally sensitive to reason, it is possible for them to share the same vision of a just, peaceful and prosperous society. Descartes' rationalism is infused with an optimism that proved contagious. Modern enlightenment awaits.

The major challenge to Cartesian philosophy came from across the English Channel where English, Irish and Scottish philosophers rejected his rationalist axiom that theories are derived from innate ideas. Known as British empiricists, these philosophers argued that theories are inferred inductively from facts. These arguments go back to Aristotle who believed that the deductive reasoning of Socrates and Plato needs to be combined with the patient accumulation of facts to produce inductive inferences from facts to theories. The British empiricists were to change the philosophical landscape in ways even they did not anticipate. Indeed, as a result of their philosophising, Western philosophy faced its possible demise.

BRITISH EMPIRICISM

The father of modern empiricism is Englishman Francis Bacon (1561–1626). In *The New Organon* (1620), Bacon argued that scientific knowledge

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represents power over nature. On his view, this objective demands the development of a new 'organ', a philosophy of nature that ignores 'idols and false notions' and emphasises the role of observation, experiment and inductive inferences therefrom. He saw that induction and deduction proceed in opposite directions. Deduction moves from universal to specific statements, while induction moves from specific to universal statements. Induction consists in patient and prudent generalisation from careful observations. Induction is the process through which the forms of nature, the unchanging features that govern natural change and give structure to nature, can be discovered and codified. Bacon's advocacy stands at the beginning of modern philosophy of science and guaranteed his promoter an enviable place in the history of philosophy.

In 1690, John Locke (1632–1704) published two influential works: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government*. The former is an inquiry into the origins and limits of knowledge and offers the first comprehensive development of what is today called modern empiricism. The latter is a study in political philosophy which provided the intellectual framework for the American Declaration of Independence. Locke is remembered also for his *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), in which he argued for the separation of Church and State.

Locke rejected the notion of innate ideas. If there are innate ideas, they would be agreeable to all human beings. This not the case since there is no moral principle which is consistently endorsed across all societies and ages. Furthermore, ideas cannot be contemplated and manipulated by the mind without logical concepts and the means to process them. Human beings do not have these means and concepts until they learn and assimilate them and doing so requires the use of language. In other words, without language there is no knowledge. This led Locke to conclude that if knowledge is not innate, it must be acquired:

> *All ideas come from sensation or reflection*. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: – How comes it to be furnished? [. . .] Whence has it all the *materials* of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself.[1]

Ideas are 'the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding'.[2] They are simple when received passively (through sensation) or complex when they are actively framed by the mind (by combining simple ideas, like hardness and sweetness into the idea of a block of sugar). Whatever is known comes either from direct experience or through reflection upon it: 'No man's knowledge [. . .] can go beyond his experience.'[3] Locke thought that even

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abstract concepts (such as that of substance or relation) are arrived at from experience, through reflection upon and comparison of complex ideas.

Locke did not draw a precise boundary between knowledge and ideas. This is because all knowledge is ultimately experience, perception, idea: 'The mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, has no other immediate objects buts its own ideas.'[4] Whatever is known can, in principle, be decomposed to elements that originated from sensation. This also means that the mind has no direct knowledge of the world but only ideas of it: 'The mind knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them.'[5] Human beings cannot be sure that the ideas they form of the world correspond to what is the case. To address this difficulty, Locke argued that there are primary and secondary qualities. A primary quality is a characteristic of an object that is inseparable from it: shape and texture are examples. In contrast, a secondary quality is a feature that does not inhere in the object beyond the object's power to generate it. The colour white, for instance, bears no resemblance to whatever is in the object that makes it appear white. On Locke's view, since perception of qualities is not an act of choice, perception of a primary quality is sufficient to establish the reality of the object that generates it: 'The actual receiving of ideas from without [. . .] makes us know that something does exist at that time without us.'[6] This 'something' is 'an unknown substratum, which we call substance'.[7] This inference is not possible with secondary qualities, however, since they exist only in the mind of perceivers.

Locke's distinction of primary and secondary qualities does not address the problem of finding a secure basis for knowledge. As Irishman George Berkeley (1685–1753) pointed out, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is untenable, because the latter cannot be conceived without the former. It is impossible to think of a shape or texture without associating it with some colour. If perception is the source of all knowledge, primary and secondary qualities alike demand that someone is doing the perceiving since they are ideas in the mind and not real properties of objects. Berkeley pushed this line of thinking to its logical conclusion by arguing that the proposition 'this object exists' means 'this object is perceived or is perceivable'. Existence, then, means perception or possible perception.[8] Perception does not warrant the existence of an 'unknown substratum' because all objects are ideas in the mind. This does not imply that knowledge of the external world is impossible, however. On Berkeley's view, ideas are not ideas of things: they *are* things. The world exists *only* as an idea.

Philosophers have long debated whether this conclusion secures human knowledge or is merely the absurd result of a series of clever but misguided arguments. Whatever the case, Locke's and Berkeley's critiques of Cartesian dualism are notable because they owe nothing to theological considerations.

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Locke was unconcerned by Descartes' demotion of God and elevation of man. He opposed Descartes' notion of innate ideas and wanted to find a sensible alternative. At birth, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate which is etched by experience. Philosophy and science should be an exercise in the collection of facts and inductive inferences therefrom. Knowledge is not to be reached from within, as Plato and Descartes argued, but from without, by reading the book of nature.

On the face of it, empiricism is science's best ally since it rejects as a matter of principle the possibility that people can know more about the world than that which can be experienced. Unless one accepts Berkeley's extreme solution, however, Locke's efforts appear to undermine precisely what he set out to affirm, knowledge of the world of objects. Indeed, according to Locke, there are only experiences and experiencing subjects. Consequently, the independent existence of experienced objects and the nature of their inherent properties cannot be determined. Now if knowledge of objects is impossible, it is debatable whether knowledge of experiencing subjects is possible. If this is the case, then it will be possible to return to the study of objects. A Scot, David Hume, took up this challenge.

DAVID HUME: THE STUDY OF HUMAN NATURE

David Hume was born in Edinburgh in 1711. Although his family wanted him to become a lawyer, he opted for the study of literature, philosophy and science. With little financial means to support this ambition, he moved to France in 1734, settling in the small country town of La Flèche, known for its Jesuit College (where Descartes studied) and its library of 40,000 books. There, he lived frugally, read widely and composed the philosophical work for which he is known today, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume returned to England in 1737 to attend to the publication of his *Treatise*, which 'fell dead-born from the press'.[9] In 1740, he published anonymously *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published* (his *Treatise*). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* appeared in 1751 but attracted few favourable comments (and indeed it is mostly a summary of the first part of the *Treatise* with the most interesting parts left out). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (a rewriting of the third part of the *Treatise*) followed the same year. In 1745, Hume applied unsuccessfully for the chair of Ethics and Pneumatic Philosophy at Edinburgh and in 1751 for the chair of Logic at Glasgow. It is an indelible stain on academic philosophy that the philosopher who is for many the greatest to have written in the English language was passed over for justly forgotten mediocrities. After various jobs in England and overseas (including a diplomatic position in Paris), Hume was appointed librarian of

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the Faculty of Advocates of Edinburgh. Between 1754 and 1757, he published a multivolume *History of England* to modest success. Hume died of bowel cancer in 1776 in his native town.

Hume's major philosophical work is the *Treatise*. The ambition which sparked its composition is no less than grandiose since the work is meant 'to propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only upon which they can stand with any security'.[10] This foundation is the study of human nature, described as the 'capital or centre' of all sciences.[11] Although the concept of human nature is as old as philosophy itself, Hume thought that the time had come for philosophers to apply to the science of man the methods of the natural sciences: experience and observation.[12] Once achieved, the science of man will secure all the other sciences, because to study human nature is to discover 'the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations'.[13] Like Newton, who advanced a general theory for the movements of objects based on careful observations, Hume sought to provide a general framework which, based on the same methodological principles, would explain the various aspects of human existence.

Like Locke, Hume was committed to the view that knowledge comes from experience, but whereas for Locke the objects of the mind are ideas, they are for Hume perceptions which form two classes: impressions and ideas. Impressions are distinct and immediate data of experience, such as sensations, passions or emotions, whereas ideas are memories of impressions. An impression is generally compelling, while an idea, being a recollection of an impression, is usually faint; even the most vivid idea is faint compared to the faintest impression.[14] Impressions and ideas can be either simple or complex when made of several simple ones, but to a simple idea there always corresponds a simple impression. Hume believed these contentions to be self-explanatory. Emotions and passions are classified as impressions, yet they do not seem to originate in sense perception. To be legitimate, ideas must be traceable back to impressions, otherwise they are vacuous.[15] Momentous conclusions follow from these seemingly sensible considerations.

If all that is known ultimately springs from perceptions, then it is impossible to go beyond perception. This being the case, the uninterrupted existence of objects that are not perceived cannot be established formally, because such proof would demand that the senses operate when they do not operate, which is self-contradictory.[16] For Hume, the problem of establishing the independent and continuous existence of objects, which Locke and Berkeley thought they had solved, is beyond the scope of serious philosophy. The uninterrupted existence of objects must be assumed although it is indemonstrable.[17] Accordingly, Hume investigated why the belief in the continuous existence of unperceived objects is so strong and widespread.

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On Hume's view, the belief in the independent existence of objects is uniformly accepted because it is impossible to do without it. Even the most resolutely sceptical philosophers accept this belief when they cease being philosophers. Philosophers and laypeople alike agree that there are independent and continuously existing objects which give rise to subjective, interrupted perceptions. This agreement is absurd since it amounts to assuming the existence of perception when there is no actual perceiving. For all that, people have an irresistible natural propensity to believe that objects exist even when they are not perceived by anyone.[18] Similarly, objects are believed to be what they are perceived to be. Yet, there is no rational justification for this belief.

The same corrosive scepticism applies to 'self', 'mind', 'soul', 'psyche', 'ego' or 'person' in the moral sense. 'Self' is an illegitimate idea because it cannot be traced to a prior impression, either through perception or introspection. Indeed, such an impression, Hume argued, would 'continue invariably the same, through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner'.[19] Introspection reveals that this is not so: 'When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.'[20] Emotions, passions and sensations follow each other but never all exist at the same time. Sleep and death remove perceptions, but then nothing remains. Hume's concluded that the self is a fiction. There is no such entity. Furthermore, it is a superfluous notion since perceptions can be described without referring to it. The statement 'I see the desk in front of me' conveys the same information as the statement 'there is a desk in front of me.' The self or 'I' accounts for nothing in experience that could not be known without it. Individuals may lack confidence in personal relationships, but they can never lack *self*-confidence (i.e. they cannot lack confidence that they, as selves, exist).

Whereas Descartes based the certainty of the existence of 'I' upon an internal encounter with his self-consciousness (as manifested by his ability to think), Hume was committed to the empiricist premise and refused to grant this awareness epistemological status. Self-consciousness is on his view the succession of perceptions that people experience.[21] As for the impression of personal identity, it is merely the result of a natural tendency of humans to bundle together separate perceptions that are related because they occur in the same body. Identity is confused with a succession of connected experiences; it does not inhere in perceptions but is a quality which is ascribed to them when they are recalled by the memory.[22] Personal identity is not human nature because it is meant to make men different from each other while human nature is what makes them essentially the same. On purely empiricist grounds, however, personal identity is an empty illusion. There remains only

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human nature manifested as the human propensity to believe in objects and in personal identity. If what people know is only the sum of their experiences, then human existence itself is nothing but a succession of experiences, inscribed on a page that is blank at birth. 'I' does not do the writing (or the thinking) as Descartes believed, but the writing of experience generates the illusion of 'I'.

In summary, applying rigorously the notion that ideas come only from experience leads to two extraordinary yet unavoidable conclusions. First, the existence of objects cannot be established formally. Second, the notion of self is an illusion. One must acknowledge Hume's philosophical courage in publishing these arguments. More seemingly outrageous implications follow.

HUME'S FORK

For Hume, to reason is to establish connections between impressions or ideas. Consequently, as he expressed it, 'All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of Fact.'[23] Relations of ideas concern memories of impressions, while matters of fact originate in impressions. Relations of ideas are not innate in the Cartesian sense that Locke opposed, but their truth neither depends on nor can be refuted by sense perception. Their validity hinges on the usage of the symbols or terms upon which they rely. Once one understands the meaning of the symbols '2', '+', '=' and '4', the validity of the affirmation '2 + 2 = 4' follows automatically and does not rest upon the existence or non-existence of what is counted. Similarly, once it is agreed that 'East' refers to that part of the horizon where the Sun rises, the truth of the statement 'the Sun rises in the East' does not need to be established empirically since it is true by virtue of the meaning of the terms employed. The verification of relations of ideas rests solely on logical demonstration. This also means that their denial inescapably involves a logical contradiction: if one knows what the terms mean, one cannot reject the proposition that 1 + 1 = 2 without incoherence.

Hume's 'matters of fact' are of a different nature since their truth or falsity rest solely on empirical verification. Whether or not adding two litres of water to two litres of alcohol results in four litres of the mixture cannot be decided without experiment. Similarly, only experience can tell if 'the cat is on the mat'. The truth of this statement cannot be decided solely by analysing the meaning of the terms that compose it. It is either true or false. This is so because propositions of this kind convey information about the world and do not merely express internal logic. Moreover, their contrary does not involve any contradiction. Unless some additional information is provided that would make such a conclusion impossible, the object on the mat can be a rat. As

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Hume put it, 'The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible [. . .]. *That the Sun will not rise tomorrow* is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, *that it will rise*.'[24] Saying that it is logically possible that the Sun will not rise tomorrow is not saying that it will not rise. Rather, it is only saying that the truth of the statement 'the Sun will rise tomorrow' cannot be established formally, either in logic or experience.

Hume was clear about the status of statements which do not fall into either of the above categories. The concluding sentence of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is memorable:

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[25]

In other words, any proposition that is neither a relation of ideas nor a matter of fact must be dismissed because it is not a truth-bearer. In this category are metaphysical propositions, value judgements, descriptions of intangible entities, and all statements that do not point to sense perception (impression) or to ideas (memories of impressions). These statements are, for Hume, empty of content.

Hume's dismissal as nonsensical statements that are neither relations of ideas nor statements of fact is not original. Medieval nominalists, such as Ockham, had argued that universal truths have no tangible existence, that only matters of fact exist and that statements not reducible to either of these categories do not deserve consideration. Hume's lasting merit, however, is his clear articulation of these typologies. His classification has proven to be a major contribution to philosophy, for it is a tool with which statements can be classified and their epistemological status decided before their truthfulness is ascertained. The terminology has since changed ('relations of ideas' are now called analytic propositions or tautologies and 'matters of fact' are known as synthetic statements), but the typology has survived and became one of the foundations of logical positivism. It is often referred to as 'Hume's Fork' and to this day figures prominently in those philosophies that are devoted to the analysis of language.

CAUSATION AND INDUCTION

Armed with his 'Fork', Hume inquired into the validity of propositions about matters of fact. On his view, synthetic propositions are true for two reasons:

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either they call upon perception or they require reasoning which includes explicit or implicit causal inferences. Physical objects are known because sense data reveal them. This conclusion is immediate and does not involve any form of reasoning. The situation is different when it comes to statements of fact which go beyond sense perception. According to Hume, all reasoning concerning matters of fact hinges on a causal inference if they are true.[26] Causation plays for matters of fact the role that demonstration plays for relations of ideas.

Noting that all causes are different and do not have anything in common, Hume concluded that causality must be a relation. Contiguity is essential in establishing that relation for there cannot be action at a distance. Furthermore, causation demands temporal priority. For some event to be regarded as the cause of another event, the former must exist before the latter. However, if contiguity and priority are necessary in establishing a causal relation, they are not a sufficient condition. One object can be prior and next to another without being considered its cause. The notion of causation arises from a *necessary* connection that is made between what is deemed the cause and what is deemed the effect. This connection does not arise from anything but experience.

The basis for causation is neither contiguity nor succession. It is neither logic nor mathematical demonstration. It is not a quality inherent to causes or effects: it is experience and experience alone. The constant observation of one event taking place after another, combined with the expectation that this pattern will continue in the future, because the past is a reliable guide for the future, is the essential condition for establishing a causal inference. The supposition that the future will be like the past is neither certain nor demonstrable, however, because it is not an analytic statement. It is a synthetic proposition, the contrary of which is not self-contradictory. Descartes could rely on a non-deceiver God to make the world behave tomorrow as it behaved today, but this argument is not available to a philosopher committed to accepting only the evidence of the senses. Hume's conclusion is unavoidable: 'Even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience.'[27] Causation can be no more than an expectation born out of habit the validity of which cannot be established formally.

With these arguments, Hume revived the ancient 'problem of induction' (an expression not found in his works). It is easily exposed. Deduction is the logical derivation of statements of particulars from statements of universals. Conclusions arrived at deductively are true if their premises (the universals from which they have been deduced) are true. For instance: 'All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.' Induction, however, proceeds in the reverse direction. An inductive inference is an attempt to

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generalise a series of particulars to form one or more universals. For example: 'This philosophy lecture is boring; therefore, all philosophy lectures are (or will be) boring.'

Until Europeans saw black swans in Western Australia in 1697, they were convinced, based on inductive inference, that all swans are white. Inductive inferences can thus never be certain but are at best probable. Furthermore, an indeterminate number of inductive inferences, including incompatible ones, can be derived from the same set of particulars. In summary, since deduction is logical and since induction is not deduction, it follows that induction is not logical. Empirically, the past is not a certain guide to the future because the future escapes observation. No description of the future is possible, even though predictions can be offered.

Causation, then, is incapable of demonstration. Having arrived at this conclusion, Hume sought to explain why human beings believe so firmly in causation. He held that such belief is a result of habit. As he put it, 'The supposition that the future will resemble the past' is one that 'is not founded on arguments of any kind, but is derived entirely from habit, by which we are determined to expect for the future the same train of objects to which we have been accustomed.'[28] Or again: 'Tis not [. . .] reason, which is the guide of life, but custom. That alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable to the past.'[29] Humans believe that objects will continue to fall whenever they are released because such has been the case in the past. Through sheer repetition, the mind is conditioned to believe that nature is uniform in its behaviour and the course of the world will continue unchanged tomorrow. Humans cannot do without this assumption, even if it is irrational.

HUMEAN NATURE

A Treatise of Human Nature is subtitled 'An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.' Book I is devoted to knowledge, reasoning and related matters and Books II and III to that to which Book I was only a preparation,[30] namely the study of passions and morals, respectively. By 'passion', Hume meant all emotional aspects of human existence, considered as sources of action. He believed that since human beings are sufficiently similar a systematic study of their emotions is possible, and he intended to explain them with as few psychological principles as possible.[31] The first of these principles is the absence of free will. Since all physical events are caused by some other event, the same must apply to volition and behaviour: 'In judging of the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects. [. . .] No union can be more constant and certain, than that of some actions with some

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motives and characters.'[32] This is so because 'the union betwixt motives and actions has the same constancy as that in any natural operations'.[33]

Hume believed that psychological events arise necessarily out of antecedents. That sometimes a human action remains unexplained does not mean that it has no cause, but merely reflects incomplete knowledge of the situation at hand, as can happen with the behaviour of objects. The actual outcomes of a roulette's spins are unpredictable, yet nobody would deny that they are caused by the initial impulse conferred to the ball, the rotation of the wheel, the laws of motion and friction, and so on. On Hume's view, it is only because an action is caused that it can be explained. Absence of causality on this account would not only leave behaviour as something unintelligible but would also vitiate any possibility of a science of man.

At first sight, it appears that Hume was committed to the view that liberty and necessity are incompatible. This is not so. Indeed, he held that liberty requires necessity. For Hume, there is liberty of indifference and liberty of spontaneity.[34] The liberty of indifference is the possibility of going against causal determination, which is, on Hume's view, a contradiction in terms. If free will is the possibility of uncaused (or chance) action, then humans do not have free will. By contrast, the liberty of spontaneity is the possibility of resisting violence or threats, of 'acting or not acting, according to the determination of the will.'[35] That is, the possibility of choosing to do this or that when neither appears forced, demands that the will causes behaviour. On Hume's view, people believe that liberty and necessity are incompatible because they do not distinguish between the two types of liberty.

Irrespective of their merits of Hume's arguments on the compatibility of free will and determinism, what is notable is that he dismissed the possibility that reason has a causal bearing on behaviour: 'Reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will [and] can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.'[36] Reason can be exercised and plays a part in active life but cannot produce action, emotion or volition. Indeed, reason cannot shake the natural and necessary belief that objects continue to exist when they are not perceived. Reason cannot eradicate the natural disposition to believe in personal identity. Reason cannot justify causation. It has nothing to say about the natural desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain. Even after a million experiments, it remains a mystery why fire burns and it is irrational to believe that it will continue to do so.[37] It so happens that believing otherwise is just too painful. Reason, then, does not decide which objectives humans pursue but is merely concerned with the calculation of means. In Hume's words, 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.'[38] Human beings are not cold, rational calculating machines. Rather, their behaviour is determined by their passions which are emanations of their human nature.

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Hume's dismissal of the power of reason to guide human action extends to morality. Moral judgements are not factual statements. Rather, they are expressions of personal feelings about how people should conduct themselves. Virtuous action elicits praise and vicious action provokes moral rejection, but neither virtue nor vice can be found in the action itself.[39] The jabbing of a needle into someone's arm can be either praised (a nurse administering a painkiller to a patient) or condemned if done with intention to harm. Moral evaluations do not spring from *a priori* reasoning, disconnected from experience. For instance, incest is a criminal offence in the case of humans but acceptable for animals.[40] Further, normative statements cannot be inferred from descriptive statements, since that would amount to reporting an experience where there is none. In other words, from 'is' one cannot move logically to 'ought'.[41] Hume's conclusion is clear: 'Reason is wholly inactive and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.'[42]

If moral statements are neither matters of facts nor tautologies, they cannot be true or false and so belong to the category of 'sophistry and illusion'.[43] Moral sentiments are mere expression of approbation or disapproval and these cannot be justified beyond the feelings of pleasure or pain they generate: 'The case [of moral judgements] is the same as in our judgements concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is implied in the immediate pleasure they convey to us.'[44] Simply put, one's moral values are whatever makes one feel good. They are an expression of one's human nature or, more accurately, the expression of one's Humean nature.

HUME'S CRITICS

It is difficult to overstate the contrast between Descartes the philosopher of reason and Hume the philosopher of human nature. Whereas for Descartes man is an immaterial 'thinking thing' somehow attached to a body, for Hume man is nothing but the sum of his bodily experiences since his existence cannot be conceived without them. The Frenchman held that ideas come from reason and knowledge is deduced from self-evident truths; the Scot argued that ideas come exclusively from experience and knowledge is inferred inductively therefrom, with all the uncertainty that such a process involves. Man is, for Descartes, in control of his intellectual existence and has reasons for acting as he does, while for Hume man's passions, values and objectives are not rational propositions, since they are the product of his human nature. Human behaviour is a response to man's environment: it is not chosen but caused. As Hume acknowledged, the victory of sceptical empiricism over rationalism is a Pyrrhic one.

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Western philosophy could have ended with Hume. Continental European rationalism had been already wounded by Locke and his followers, but Hume exposed the fatal flaw in its main rival, empiricism, namely the inability of impressions to give valid knowledge of the reality of the external world. 'As to these impressions, which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason.' This staggering conclusion applies also to the human body: 'We may well ask', Hume wrote later in the *Treatise*, 'What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? But 'tis vain to ask, whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must be taken for granted in all our reasonings.'[45]

At times, Hume seems to be retreating to Berkeley's view that there are minds but no bodies. Yet, his scepticism had already eliminated knowledge of minds. He was thus left with free-floating experiences and nothing else. In other words, Hume drove himself into a solipsistic position since he was unable to account for anything except his ideas. He could not countenance impressions because he had argued that they 'cause' ideas and yet he had dismissed the notion of causation as fictitious. He could not, therefore, validate the causal relationship between impressions and ideas. Consequently, he was unable to account for human existence. After Hume, empiricism doubted everything, including itself.

After wrestling with Hume's scepticism, Thomas Reid (1710–1796) asserted that the time had come for philosophy to revert to common sense. In a dedication to Hume in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), Reid conceded that Hume's philosophy is coherent and validly deduced from principles that are widely accepted by philosophers. However, he added that he never thought of calling these principles into question until the conclusions Hume drew from them in his *Treatise* made him suspect them. Reid was determined, therefore, to confront Hume's philosophy with Scottish common sense.

The problems begin with the notion of philosophical ideas. Reid simply rejected the existence of 'ideas' as Locke, Berkeley and Hume defined them. Clear-thinking people should reject philosophers' fantasies and follow their common sense which tells them that what they perceive exists. Accordingly, Reid rejected Hume's scepticism and argued that his sense data were 'senseless data'. He believed that Bacon's sense data opened the door to knowledge of the material world, whereas Hume's 'senseless data' closed it. Reid was adamant that if philosophers arrive at paradoxical conclusions that contradict common sense, there must be something fundamentally wrong with their reasoning. It seems never to have occurred to Reid that common sense is neither common nor always sensible.

Hume's articulation of the problems of induction is devastating for science and philosophy. Yet, Hume himself did not see his conclusions as reasons

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for despair. Scepticism, he thought, must be kept in check. Indeed, beliefs in objects, self, causation, or in the regulating power of a rationally derived morality, although unfounded, are tangible signs that human nature is everywhere prevalent. Human beings have no choice but to follow the inclinations of their nature, which 'is always too strong for principle'.[46] Rather than lament this conclusion, it should be acknowledged, even celebrated: 'Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.'[47] Cautious optimism and hope in human nature must prevail over radical scepticism.

In *Scientific Irrationalism*, Australian philosopher David Stove argued, against Hume, that there *are* good reasons to believe propositions that are derived inductively. Hume's scepticism amounts to the view that since induction is illogical, it is irrational and thus unreasonable. Hume's basic proposition is that since inference from experience is not deductive, it is an irrational process (based on the repeated association of ideas). That inference from experience is not deductive is irrefutable. 'Some managers are aggressive, therefore all managers are aggressive' is an invalid argument which highlights the *fallibility* of induction. However, the conclusion that Hume drew (that induction is unreasonable) is untenable because it assumes that all reasonable inference is deductive. This assumption reveals Hume's rationalist credentials. 'Rational' means 'agreeable to reason' and reason often ignores deduction and emphasises the facts of experience and inferences therefrom. That readers of this book believe that day will continue to follow night is not an example of deductive reasoning, yet it an entirely acceptable one which follows from repeated observations. To be sure, inductive reasoning is not certain, but rejecting it altogether is unreasonable.

Stove argued further that scepticism about induction obtains from combining the thesis of the 'fallibility of induction' with the assumption that deduction is the only form of acceptable argument. The result is *inductive scepticism* which claims that no proposition about the observed is a reason to believe a contingent proposition about the unobserved. The fallibility of induction on its own does not produce inductive scepticism since from the fact that inductive arguments are invalid it does not follow that observation is not a reason to believe something which has not yet been observed. If all experience of flames is that they burn, it is reasonable to assume that holding a hand into some unobserved flame will be painful. This is not a logically deducible conclusion, but it is still a good reason. Similarly, there is good reason to believe that the next raven in the backyard will be black and there is no good reason to believe it will be yellow. Of course, it is possible that it will be yellow, just as it is possible that all humans will be dead tomorrow. However, these are not possibilities that people live by. On his deathbed in a conversation about immortality, a friend asked Hume if it was possible that there is a future state. Hume replied that it was possible that coal put on the

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fire would not burn. He then added that it was a 'most unreasonable fancy' that he should exist for ever.

Although Hume's presentation of his Fork is persuasive, he did not apply it to itself. That is, Hume did not inquire whether the proposition according to which knowable propositions are 'relations of ideas', 'matters of facts' or 'sophistry and illusion' is itself a relation of ideas, a matter of fact or nonsense. The proposition is not analytic since it is not true by definition or by virtue of the words that comprise it. For it to be true, therefore, it must be synthetic. If so, it is contingently true since it could be false. Now Hume did not propose criteria by which its truth or falsity could be established. If such criteria do not exist, the proposition establishing Hume's Fork would belong to the category of sophistry and illusion. As Hume's Fork is presented as a tool with which knowable propositions can be distinguished from nonsensical ones, critics need to show that the two categories of knowable propositions are inadequate, or that nonsensical propositions can be true or false. Hume's followers to the present day have generally taken the position that Hume's Fork is a useful and valid tool for rejecting metaphysical propositions as meaningless because they are incapable of delivering logical or empirical truth or falsity. They concede, however, that nonsensical propositions, such as expressions of feelings, desires, hopes, value judgements, or religious pronouncements can convey meaning to people and as such are valuable even though they are neither true nor false.

A technical discussion of the logical status of Hume's Fork does not belong in this book. The fact is that any theory of knowledge, of which Hume's Fork is an exemplar, is vulnerable to the charge of circularity, since it must assume knowledge of the conditions in which knowledge is possible. Of greater relevance to the current discussion is application of Hume's Fork to the language of management. If managers seek a tool by which they can identify true or false propositions and separate them from useless jargon, Hume's Fork is there for the using. Like any tool, the value of Hume's Fork can be judged by its effectiveness in the work for which it was developed. As will be shown in the following, Hume's Fork can be used to reduce hundreds of pages of management literature to a few pages of tautological and empirical truths.

MANAGING WITHOUT NONSENSE

Riding on the back of the boom in management education in the last decades, the management literature has established itself as a profitable and growing industry. Management books have long left the dark corners of specialised bookstores to reach the brightly lit shelves of international airports. Management gurus tour the globe for high fees while their latest printed

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words of wisdom sell in the hundreds of thousands. Even textbooks produced by obscure management scholars are sometimes unexpected successes and find a readership well beyond academia.

Management books which are destined for uninitiated audiences are replete with jargon and rarely propose more than common sense packaged in catchy phrases. As for the specialised literature, articles in academic journals are rather abstruse. Leading management journals have for instance proposed contributions entitled 'Beyond stakeholder utility function: stakeholder capability in the value creation process', 'Does evidence of network effects on firm performance in pooled cross-section support prescriptions for network strategy?' or 'Avoiding the trap of constant connectivity: when congruent frames allow for heterogeneous practices.' Their relevance to practising managers, a relevance which is claimed by all management journals, appears distant, not to say dubious. It is thus easy to understand why the management literature has been frequently derided as gobbledygook which no self-respecting manager would be caught dead reading.

Before explaining why so much of the management literature is vacuous (a task that later chapters of this book will fulfil), it is more immediately useful to know how to recognise a senseless piece of management writing. Hume's Fork is of great help here for it is a two-pronged attack on language, a tool with which the management linguistic garden can be weeded to remove its undesirable outgrowths. Indeed, if management is 'getting things done through people', then the litmus test of management is performance. Managers are, or should be, primarily concerned with practical issues, with what Hume called 'matters of fact'. They should accept and propose only synthetic propositions, dismiss tautologies as irrelevant to experience, and avoid 'sophistry and illusion'. Unfortunately, most of the management literature falls into the last two categories. The dedicated reader will know how easily the following examples can be generalised and how rife are the problems to which they point.

In the opening chapter of his successful *Good to Great*, Jim Collins wrote, 'We believe that almost any organisation can substantially improve its stature and performance, perhaps even become great, if it conscientiously applies the framework of ideas we've uncovered.'[48] The various qualifiers ('almost', 'perhaps', 'conscientiously') make the sentence tautological. This is the case because if an organisation does not improve its performance (let alone become great) even though its executives have taken Collins' advice to heart, it must be because they did not apply his book's ideas conscientiously enough, or because the organisation was one of the few unfortunate exceptions to start with. In either case, managers be warned: the book is not at fault because the statement is analytic, which means that it conveys no useful information about what organisations should, or should not, do. The same comments apply to 'technology and technology-driven change has virtually nothing to do with

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igniting a transformation from good to great' and to 'greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice'.[49] The adverbs 'virtually' and 'largely' make the statements fail-safe and they transform them into trivial tautologies.

Collins is not alone among management writers in resorting to analytic statements. In their preface to *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal announced with a degree of grandiloquence:

> If an organisation is overmanaged but underled [*sic*], it eventually loses any sense of spirit or purpose. A poorly managed organization with a strong, charismatic leader may soar briefly only to crash shortly thereafter. Malpractice can be as damaging and unethical for managers and leaders as for physicians. Myopic managers or overzealous leaders usually harm more than just themselves.[50]

Well, yes: anything can happen eventually (if it has not happened yet, it is only a matter of waiting), malpractice is damaging by definition, and any organisation may (or again may not) soar, crash or turn itself into a flying saucepan. Any sentence with the verbal auxiliary 'may' is, by definition, necessarily true, since it also implies the opposite of what it says. The liberal use of that word has become *the* bane of the management literature, even of that proposed by the most serious management journals (charity requires that none is mentioned here). When it is combined, as it frequently is, with oxymoronic expressions like 'objective perspective' or 'organised confusion', catch-all phrases like 'positive attitude' or empirically unverifiable value judgements and expressions of feelings, one can only but sigh. As a relief, one can think of the Scot's recommendation upon finding a volume that failed his Fork: 'Commit it to the flames.'

Rather than befuddle people with jargon, some managers prefer to use Hume's Fork to identify and eradicate nonsense from written and spoken communications. For instance, 'Leaders influence people' is true by definition and thus necessarily, but trivially, true. As can be expected of any analytic statement, its negation, 'Some leaders do not influence people' is self-contradictory. 'Leaders are tall' is not true by definition and its negation is not self-contradictory since the statement can be (and indeed is) false. Similarly, tautologies are merely redundant, verbal truths, and provide no information about the material world of facts. For example, 'managers are paid professionals' is true since 'professional' entails 'paid'. Furthermore, this statement is true even if managers are not professionals.

Nonsensical propositions are neither analytic nor synthetic. Value judgements, such as 'Managers should be leaders', are nonsensical because they merely express personal feelings about a specific topic. Examples of popular nonsensical propositions in management are: 'Managers need to take the temperature of the organisation'; 'Effective managers have outstanding flashes of vision'; 'This

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organisation believes in excellence'; 'Managers should project charisma in times of uncertainty'; 'My manager has higher moral standards than I.'

Hume's Fork is a reminder that descriptive statements which involve a pleonasm (a two-word phrase in which one word is redundant) are tautological nuisances. Examples include 'reverting back', 'ATM machine', 'four quadrants', 'future potential' and 'forward progress'. 'Strategic management' is pleonastic because 'strategic' means goal-directed and managing is impossible without goal-direction. The emptiness of the expression is revealed when one translates it into the following tautology: 'If management is goal-directed, it is strategic (goal-directed).' Other popular tautologies in management include the following: 'Improving staff morale is an on-going process', 'This organisation will increase its standards going forward', 'Managers may be more effective if they have an MBA' and 'Peter Drucker was born at an early age and died in 2005.' While it is possible to write a book on management which includes only tautologies, that is, one in which every proposition would be trivially true, it would tell readers nothing about the facts of managing.

Variously described as 'managementese', 'bureaucratese', 'guff', 'wank words', 'weasel words' and 'twaddle', management jargon is comparable to George Orwell's 'newspeak' as a language of authoritarian manipulation. As such, it makes the bad seem good and the unpleasant appear tolerable. Management jargon is a hybrid language of euphemisms, platitudes and meaningless abstractions which is, to paraphrase Australian poet Alec Derwent Hope, pretentious, illiterate verbal sludge. Listening to managers speak publicly, one is justified in wondering whether something has gone wrong with their thinking. That something is seriously wrong with philosophical thinking is the basic proposition of Hume's philosophy, as it will be for the logical positivists of the twentieth century, discussed in chapter 6.

The nominalism implicit in Hume's Fork is once again of assistance in the case of managementese. Indeed, managers constantly treat abstract nouns as if they were concrete nouns. They not only reify 'mind', but treat thoughts, feelings, values, motives and ideas as concrete nouns. Yet, when managers and their favourite psychologists talk of thoughts, feelings and motives 'in the mind', they are talking nonsense (if 'mind' is immaterial, then nothing can be in 'it'). Furthermore, managers reify such nouns as 'organisation', 'team' and 'culture' and treat them anthropomorphically. For example, they talk of organisations having temperatures, purposes and other human qualities. Similarly, abstract nouns as 'excellence' and 'commitment' are used in half-sentences – 'we believe in commitment' – rather than informing listeners to what the words refer. Managers cannot be committed, although some of them, and especially their psychologists, can be committed to mental hospitals. However, while they cannot be committed to excellence, managers can commit themselves to excellent performance standards.

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Hume's nominalism has further implications for managers. For example, when conducting performance appraisal, nominalist managers reject such abstractions as personality, psychological needs, attitudes, beliefs, values, feelings, and other internal forces that no one has or ever will observe. 'Personality' was originally an adjective. In law, a person had a personality as a property. Today, people claim to *be* a personality which implies that there is something which is their personality. This has led to the further assumption that personality can be measured. Accordingly, managers have assumed that employees can be understood by reducing their personalities to specific, measurable traits. Nominalists will have nothing to do with these assumptions and practices.

More generally, if thinking is, as Socrates maintained, talking to oneself, then reasoning is defective in proportion as one's self-talk is confused by linguistic nonsense. A general insensitivity to language is an indicator of relatively low intelligence (language use being the main distinction between humanity and animality). In management, however, it is an indicator of the dominance of rhetoric over logic. Those who want to resist management consultants' and managers' rhetoric will thank David Hume.

AFTER HUME

As outlined by Hume, Western thinking as it evolved since Plato and culminated in the Enlightenment dream started to look like a misguided effort. Indeed, if one accepts Hume's arguments, metaphysics is an exercise in sophistry and illusion, science's laws are derived irrationally, and moral values are arbitrary. How then is it possible for civilised people to agree on a general moral covenant for a peaceful and just society? Whatever people know (or believe they know) about the world which is not an account of immediate experience is the result of habit or custom. No formal knowledge of the world is possible. Further, inscribing man entirely within nature comes at a hefty cost: 'I' or 'self' dissolves into the body and reason plays a minor role in everyday affairs.

If philosophy is to continue, it must answer Hume's challenge. Little wonder, then, that when Western thinking finally addressed Hume's arguments (the *Treatise* remained without a proper response for almost forty years), philosophy changed its course, as the following chapters illustrate.

NOTES

1. *Essay*, Book II, Chapter I, 2, emphases in original.
2. *Essay*, Book II, Chapter VIII, 8.
3. *Essay*, Book II, Chapter I, 19.
4. *Essay*, Book IV, Chapter I, 1.

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5. *Essay*, Book IV, Chapter IV, 3.
6. *Essay*, Book IV, Chapter XI, 2.
7. *Essay*, Book IV, Chapter VI, 7.
8. These arguments are developed in the first sections of Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, published in 1710.
9. *My Own Life*, paragraph 6.
10. *Treatise*, Introduction, end of paragraph 6.
11. *Treatise*, Introduction, paragraph 6.
12. *Treatise*, Introduction, paragraph 7.
13. *Enquiry*, Section I, paragraph 15 (9).
14. *Treatise*, Book I, Part I, Section I, paragraph 1; see also *Enquiry*, Section II, paragraph 1.
15. *Enquiry*, Section II, paragraph 9.
16. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section II, paragraph 11.
17. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section II, paragraph 1.
18. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section II, paragraph 44.
19. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, paragraph 2.
20. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, paragraph 3.
21. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, paragraph 4.
22. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, paragraphs 6–18.
23. *Enquiry*, Section IV, Part I, paragraph 1, emphases in original.
24. *Enquiry*, Section IV, Part I, paragraph 2, emphases in original.
25. *Enquiry*, Section XI, Part III, paragraph 34, emphases in original.
26. *Enquiry*, Section IV, Part I, paragraph 4.
27. *Treatise*, Book I, Part III, Section XII, paragraph 20.
28. *Treatise*, Book I, Part III, Section XII, paragraph 9.
29. *Abstract*, paragraphs 15 and 16.
30. Cf. *Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section VI, paragraph 23.
31. *Treatise*, Book II, Part I, Section IV, paragraph 1. The assumption that human nature is something stable enough to warrant systematic study of man is at the core of Hume's project; it is regularly stated throughout the Treatise (for an example, see *Treatise*, Book II, Part II, Section I, paragraph 10).
32. *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section I, paragraph 12.
33. *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section I, paragraph 14.
34. *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section II, paragraph 1.
35. *Enquiry*, Section VIII, Part I, paragraph 23.
36. *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section III, paragraph 1.
37. *Enquiry*, Section XII, Part II, paragraph 10.
38. *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section III, paragraph 4.
39. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section I, paragraph 26.
40. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section I, paragraph 25.
41. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section I, paragraph 27.
42. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section I, paragraph 10.
43. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section II, paragraph 1.
44. *Treatise*, Book III, Part I, Section II, paragraph 3.

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45. The quotations are from *Treatise*, Book I, Section 3, paragraph 5 and Section 4, paragraph 2, respectively.

46. *Enquiry*, Section XII, Part II, paragraph 23.

47. *Enquiry*, Section I, paragraph 6 (4).

48. Collins, J. 2001. *Good to Great*. New York, NY: Harper Collins. See p. 5.

49. Collins, *Good to Great*, 11.

50. Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. 2003. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 3rd edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Blass. See p. xvi.

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Chapter 6

Positivism

Managing Scientifically

At the beginning of his *New Organon* (1620), Bacon argued that scientific knowledge derived from experience gives human beings power over nature because to know a cause allows them to produce an effect. Bacon's optimism was unwarranted, however, because it is impossible to be certain of causes since they cannot be experienced. Scientific theories are generalisations inducted from facts which project the past into the future. As such, they move beyond facts. It follows that scientific theories cannot be shown to be true. Moreover, theories of any sort can be inferred from the same facts, including conflicting ones. In other words, no accumulation of empirical knowledge can produce necessity. Even science's most admired conclusions, like Newton's, remain vulnerable to new observations. Albert Einstein admitted that he did not have the courage to challenge Newton until he encountered this Humean insight.

If Hume is right, scientists' attempts to establish general truths about the world exclusively from experience must fail. If they are true, scientific statements must be true a priori: they must be disconnected from experience and established by reason alone. It follows that an empirical science cannot be justified on its own terms but must be taken on faith. Developed to its logical extreme, empiricism brings about a self-destruction of empirical knowledge. Empirical science is, then, a secular religion ruled by causation. Hume's sceptical conclusions mean that scientific pronouncements are but 'sophistry and illusion'. Although science is useful, it cannot reach or preach the truth. Philosophers who want to promote the scientific method as superior to the methods used by religious and superstitious folk find themselves facing two possible, but sceptical, conclusions. Their arguments lead to the conclusion that there is a scientific method but, because of the problem of induction, it is irrational and thus not superior to other methods. Alternatively, they

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conclude that there is no flawless scientific method. That science is allegedly self-correcting is no argument to the truth of its theories.

When Enlightenment thinkers finally appreciated the significance of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, they realised that, contrary to Hume's intentions and understanding of his own work, its conclusions undermined their optimistic belief in scientific progress. An answer to the *Treatise* had to be formulated if the dream of a just and prosperous society in which reason and science ruled men's affairs was to be realised. At this point, Western thinking moved in two major directions: positivism and romanticism. This chapter discusses positivism which is an attempt to rescue empiricism and the Enlightenment dream from within, by refining Hume's premises. Romanticism is discussed in chapter 8.

THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTE COMTE

Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier in January 1798. A brilliant pupil, he was admitted in 1814 to the École Polytechnique, then as now France's most prestigious engineering school. Comte did not complete the school's curriculum because the institution was closed for a year for political reasons. In 1817, he met Henri de Saint-Simon (French aristocrat and socialist theorist whose ideas were to influence Karl Marx) and became his personal secretary. From 1824 to 1842, Comte developed and lectured publicly on a *Course of Positive Philosophy* which absorbed most of his energy to the point of psychological collapse. He then formulated foundations for ambitious social reforms and published various books to that objective, among which is the *System of Positive Polity*, published between 1851 and 1854. These efforts did not gain Comte academic esteem and his last works were not dignified with informed reviews. Overworked and tormented by conjugal and financial problems, stubborn and difficult to get on with, Comte never held a stable occupation. In academia, his most senior position was that of a casual examiner. Comte's works did win him a growing circle of disciples and supporters, however. This included a group of thinkers, led for a time by English philosopher John Stuart Mill, who provided regular if meagre financial support. Comte died in 1857 having failed to complete the grand work he had envisioned. His legacy survives as Comte is widely recognised as the first modern, influential philosopher of science. Even if what is today called positivism is quite removed from the positive philosophy he developed, it owes a great deal to its initial formulation.

Like most of the thinkers of his time, Comte was much impressed by the lasting success of Newtonian physics. He was convinced that all physical and social phenomena are facts ruled by invariable natural laws and that it is up

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to scientists to discover and codify these laws in the way Newton codified gravitation.[1] Society itself is an object of scientific investigation and forms the field of a new science. Comte first called this new science 'social physics', later to coin the name under which the discipline is known today, sociology. Importantly, Comte held that science, being itself a social phenomenon, develops according to historical laws.[2] These contentions have momentous consequences that Comte spent his life expanding, first in their philosophical and then in their social and spiritual aspects.

If the evolution of human knowledge mirrors that of society, what science is at any given historical period can only be determined by analysing what scientists do in that period. According to Comte, society advances along three stages of evolution: theological, metaphysical, and positive. In the theological era, humanity progresses from fetishism to polytheism to monotheism.[3] Explanations of natural phenomena are given in terms of supernatural beings interacting directly with the world of everyday living: first spirits, then gods and ultimately God. This primitive stage of development is not to be ridiculed, for it offers a genuine, if embryonic and rudimentary, attempt at knowledge. Without the data first collected by astrologers and alchemists, astronomy and chemistry would not exist. Superstition is not the anti-science that the Enlightenment thinkers liked to belittle. Rather, it represents the natural starting point for scientific enterprise. Similarly, the Middle Ages was not a period of absolute darkness, since the monotheism of the medieval era required and bequeathed the Western world its first libraries and universities.

When people are mature enough to be dissatisfied with superstition, they reach the metaphysical stage of evolution. They still want to know 'why' events happen the way they do but replace the supernatural beings of the theological stage with natural powers. That is, in the metaphysical stage, phenomena are no longer accounted for by calling on spirits, gods or God, but by way of abstract natural forces, qualities or properties ascribed to the phenomena they purport to explain. Chemicals are, for instance, said to interact with one another by virtue of 'harmony' or 'antipathy', living beings are alive because of their 'vital principle', plants gyrate because of their hidden 'animality' and (if one is to believe Descartes) bodies are sentient due to their 'animal souls'. Even though Comte approved of Molière ridiculing those who invent occult faculties to justify events they do not comprehend,[4] he insisted that such inventions represent scientific and social progress. The natural powers of the metaphysical age, although as mysterious as the theological supernatural ones, are necessary steps for the formation of a secular monotheism which considers nature as an encompassing concept that explains all the facts.[5]

In the last and positive era, scientists recognise the purely verbal character of explanations based on a 'vital principle' or 'animal soul' and accordingly

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do not inquire beyond observable phenomena. The positive scientists dismiss the 'why' questions which tormented their theological and metaphysical predecessors and replace them with 'how' inquiries. Positive thinkers no longer try to understand the hidden nature of events. Positive sciences, although shaped by the peculiarities of the diverse fields of study, share the same overall method.[6] This method assumes and begins with the existence of facts. Positive scientists collect and submit happily to facts when these are described in terms that do not refer to unobservable forces, occult qualities, or other metaphysical preconceptions. Through careful and systematic observation and calculation, theories are inferred inductively from observations and then confronted with new facts by way of experiments. Only those theories that are borne out by these new facts belong to science proper.

Their systematic and prudent method enables positive scientists to discover and codify the invariable and universal laws that rule all phenomena. Although knowledge of these laws remains for some time imperfect or approximate, there is no need to be sceptical about the regularities underlying them. Once they have been repeatedly and successfully tested, the laws of positive science encompass the totality of what there is to know about the regularities they capture.[7] Positive science delivers the certainty and immediate applicability that the theological and metaphysical stages of evolution could only promise. Although insisting on this unity of method, Comte rejected reductionism because he did not believe that the basic concepts of a science can be expressed in terms of a more fundamental science. He rejected, for instance, the view that chemistry can be explained through the equations of physics. Although all positive sciences are unified through their common method, all phenomena cannot be explained by one single law.[8]

According to Comte, positive scientists must not speculate about unobservable powers but must satisfy themselves with codifying the way nature operates, free of moral or cultural preconceptions. The world is not the visible materialisation of a hidden substratum but forms a stable and predictable whole that is entirely reducible to its observable phenomena. Reality it is not ruled by mystery or magic, but by universal laws which manifest themselves through the phenomena they determine. In other words, theological and metaphysical causality must give way to phenomenalistic laws the existence of which is taken for granted. These laws reveal themselves through observation and experimentation. Complete description is therefore both explanation and understanding. Positivism confidently casts aside Hume's sceptical arguments as belonging to the metaphysical period of evolution in which science and philosophy were dissociated and an underlying but invisible (and thus indemonstrable) power called causation was assumed.[9]

Comte's philosophy of science is inconceivable without determinism, not because it assumes some hidden causes or nature of things, but because it

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assumes that all phenomena are ruled by and are the manifestations of universal and invariable natural laws. Events take the course they do because they must. There is no room in positivism's world view for chance or freedom. This applies to the march of science and society which follow the historical law of evolution outlined above. The march of science is unstoppable and the various positive sciences will converge towards a unified understanding of everything there is. This determinism notably translates into Comte's insistence on objectivity and dismissal of subjectivity. For him, things simply are what they manifest themselves to be and must be received as such. Positive science reads the great book of nature objectively without moral prejudice. It reports only factual statements and ever-finer descriptions of phenomena. A central objective of Comte's project is, therefore, to explore the ways in which this knowledge is put to practical use.

THE SCIENCE OF SOCIETY

In Comte's vision, the interlocked advancement of science and of society lead inevitably to the positive era in which knowledge is complete. There is some overlapping in the three eras of development, however, because sciences do not progress at the same rate.[10] Comte explained this difference by ranking the sciences along an axis of increasing complexity and decreasing generality. Mathematics, being the least complex and the most general in its applicability, reached the positive stage first. After mathematics come, in this order, astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology and then social physics, or sociology. Positive scientific knowledge is not unlike a Russian doll set, in the sense that each science relies upon that which is less complex and more general and makes use of its results. According to Comte, sociology, as the most complex science and the narrowest in scope, was in his time still in its infancy and would be the last one to reach its positive stage.[11] All the same, since facts form the primordial reality and all sciences are themselves social facts, sociology sits atop the hierarchy of sciences. Although the last science to appear, sociology alone will eventually provide meaning to all other sciences and locate them in the greater positive epistemological scheme.

Interestingly, Comte made no room in his classification for psychology. This was no oversight of his part because he refused to consider the individual *qua* individual as a subject of study.[12] Descartes' insistence notwithstanding, 'I' for Comte, as for Hume, must be ignored since its existence cannot be established scientifically. 'I' is the secular remnant of the soul, inherited from the theological stage of evolution.[13] Whatever needs to be said about the phenomena it encapsulates will come from physiology and sociology.

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Each stage of society's evolution is for Comte associated with a distinct form of social organisation, with the positive one yet to be implemented fully. Reaching the positive stage requires knowledge of the laws of society obtained by sociologists and this knowledge will come in two forms: social statics and social dynamics. Social statics studies the general laws that structure, order and make the existence of society possible. It is very close to biology ('social organism' is a recurring expression in Comte's works) and becomes inseparable from it.[14] Social dynamics, however, is concerned with the laws that determine society's evolution and progress. In this respect, it is akin to ethics.[15] Social reformers need to understand the two branches of sociology for order without progress leads to stagnation or even decay, while progress without structure leads to anarchy.

Comte sought to elevate women in society and reform education. He wanted art to receive recognition for its social role and to base ethics and politics on positive principles. He even envisioned a regrouping of the major European countries in one Republic centred on France. Although wide-ranging, these reforms were conservative as they were primarily meant to remedy the overall moral confusion which developed in the wake of the French Revolution. Comte abhorred social unrest and did not want to do away with the fundamental institutions of his time. Faithful heir of the Cartesian tradition, he did not seek to abolish the distinction between the religious and the secular. Although he wanted to go beyond the theological and metaphysical stages, he was prepared to pay tribute to their legacies. Besides, Humanity was for Comte the highest being because it transcends the individual that it produces. Accordingly, it should be worshipped. To that purpose, Comte founded the (secular) Religion of Humanity, with himself as the first High Priest. Its motto was 'The principle: Love; The basis: Order; The end: Progress'. Grandiloquence aside, this is the revival of the Enlightenment dream of a just and prosperous society, agreeable to all because arrived at logically and empirically. The continuity and consistency of Comte's thought thus cannot be denied. Positive philosophy of science generally and sociology specifically were for him merely the secular arms of positive religion, means to bring about complete harmony between man's emotional, spiritual and material needs.[16]

Although Comte argued against the *Republic*'s utopian community of property,[17] there are notable parallels between Plato's and Comte's ideal states. Their respective benevolent rulers (philosophers-kings or scientists-priests) know what is best for society. While allowing for freedom of speech, Comte's State, like Plato's, is not open to democratic debate since temporary dictatorship is needed to implement it.[18] When this agenda is combined with Comte's denial of the individual as an independent entity and his dismissal of subjectivity, totalitarianism looms. It cost Comte many of his early

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supporters, including John Stuart Mill, who wondered whether the Religion of Humanity sets society towards positive progress or signals a return to the theological age.

POSITIVISM AFTER COMTE

The Church of Humanity still exists today but it is fair to say that its messianic vision failed to attract many followers. Comte's philosophy of science, however, left a lasting imprint. It can be summarised in four normative principles which have redefined the meaning of such terms as 'knowledge', 'questions' and 'answers'.[19] First, scientists should concern themselves exclusively with facts, conceived as corroborated sense data (rule of phenomenalism). Second, terms that do not point to tangible events or entities should be ignored since they covertly reintroduce abstract or 'hidden' concepts (rule of nominalism). Third, reality must be studied objectively, free of metaphysical or moral prejudices since values cannot be deduced from facts (fact-value distinction). Fourth, all sciences must respect an inductive-deductive method, according to which hypothesised regularities are inferred from facts and confronted by way of experimentation to new facts which are used to arrive at the formulation of universal laws (unity of scientific method).

Comte's conception of science rose to prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although often unacknowledged, its presence is detectable in fields as diverse as zoology, physics, ethics, or political philosophy. In 1859, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* argued that all organic situations, including human existence, can be explained in terms of a single biological principle, that of the 'survival of the fittest'.[20] In a series of books published from 1848 onwards, Karl Marx argued that the history of any society must be understood as a succession of class struggles. In the 1850s, mathematical physicists, Rudolf Clausius, William Thompson (Lord Kelvin) and Ludwig Boltzman, developed a new science, now called thermodynamics. In *Utilitarianism* (1863), John Stuart Mill proposed that what is good is what delivers the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. In other words, ethics (and beyond it, legislation and government) can become as exact as the natural sciences if it counts as valuable whatever can be computed. Although Darwin, the fathers of thermodynamics, Mill and Marx would not have accepted the positivist label, their efforts inscribe themselves in the positivist tradition, insofar as they explicitly attempt a grand unification of their respective domains of enquiry through a causal principle.

Positivism's influence is even more visible in the works of Émile Durkheim which affirm the possibility of identifying the underlying mechanisms, beliefs

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and modes of behaviour through which societies maintain their integrity. In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim proposed an explanation of the various rates of suicide observed in Western countries through differences in religious beliefs, historical conditions, and other social factors. Max Weber did not deviate from this general agenda. In *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905), he argued that Calvinism and other forms of Puritanism, through their ascetic emphasis on rationality, prepared the psychological background for the rise in the West of a special version of capitalism which was supported by an accumulation of a successful body of scientific knowledge. Even if Weber himself lamented the coming age of the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy and rationalisation, his research program would have been wholeheartedly endorsed by Comte. Like Durkheim's, Weber's conclusions are formulated in the terms of a religious ethics (social dynamics) which, combined with social factors (historical situations for Durkheim, the progress of science for Weber), produce a lasting form of social structure.

From 1924 to 1936, a group of philosophers and scientists met weekly under the tutelage of Moritz Schlick, a professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna. Impressed by the works of Albert Einstein in physics, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell in symbolic logic, and Ludwig Wittgenstein on language, these thinkers sought to advance a system of thought that would unify the sciences, clarify the respective domains of science and philosophy and provide a rule for deciding which propositions are meaningful. They held that experience is the only way to know anything about the world and that logic cannot articulate propositions that are relevant to experience since it merely provides a technique of reasoning. There are no propositions that can be both synthetic (empirical) and *a priori* (obtained before experience). Mathematical propositions, when correctly formulated, are tautological and, therefore, true but they do not disclose anything about tangible, everyday reality. As for philosophy, it cannot take the place of science and pretend to propose statements that are relevant to experience. Metaphysical statements (propositions characterising the world as a whole) are nonsensical since they cannot be verified empirically. If it is to exist at all as an independent discipline, philosophy must limit itself to the logical analysis of language, especially the language of science.

From this group of philosophers, known as the Vienna Circle, philosophy emerges as a discipline which defines the meaning of scientific terms and the methods and procedures scientists must follow. In the wake of the disaster of World War I, the members of the Vienna Circle further believed that their ideas would serve an essential social function because they would help people consider their problems rationally and reject ideological fanaticism. This philosophy was a synthesis of central aspects of Comte's thought and of the logicism of Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970).

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It is variously called logical positivism, logical empiricism or neopositivism. It shares with 'classic' (Comte's) positivism a dismissal of metaphysics, a conviction that all sciences must follow a unique method, and a confidence in science as the main contributor to social progress. Although logical positivism no longer constitutes an active area of research, some of its propositions survive in contemporary analytical philosophy, the dominating academic philosophy in English-speaking countries.

Today, Comte's influence is detectable across the scientific spectrum, especially in the natural sciences where his prescribed method obtains. In physics, the hope of unifying all theories within a unique model remains the official agenda. In the social sciences, the demand for value-neutral and fact-based research is expected as a matter of course, even if the origin and justification of this demand are frequently unknown to those who practice it. The expression that appears on Brazil's national flag, *ordem e progresso* (order and progress), is a simplified version of the motto of the Religion of Humanity. The Comtean ideals are represented by those people who profess an unshakable faith in science and technology, supported by the belief that scientific progress leads to social progress. Although Comte's name has all but disappeared, his shadow is ever present. Many managers and most management academics inscribe themselves in its outline.

MANAGING POSITIVELY

Many managers have taken positivism's agenda to heart. They are often, though not exclusively, found in manufacturing, operations, methods or quality control departments, where the culture of result consistency and verifiable evidence is the strongest. There as elsewhere, these managers are easy to recognise, for their language is laden with references to empirical data, such as market research, customer survey results, process measurements, delivery times, defect rates, input and output volumes. Positivist managers live and breathe data, which they interpret to form strategies for future sales, customer preferences, sources of efficiency gains, causes of poor quality, and so on. They proceed to put their strategy to the test by implementing it, which is akin to performing an uncontrolled experiment. As soon as new data are obtained, they are used to assess the validity of the theory. If the facts bear the strategy, it is likely to be implemented on a wider scale; if the strategy is disproved, it is revised to incorporate new facts. Management students and academics are familiar with this general approach since it forms the backbone of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, widely taught in Strategic Management and other general management classes. Just-In-Time inventory management, Total Quality Management, Continuous Improvement, Lean Management or Six-Sigma

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techniques and frameworks proceed in similar fashion. They start from observations, infer sources of waste or poor quality and attempt to rectify them. Such attempts are subsequently revised in the light of new measurements, an approach which is consistent with the positivist perspective.

Positivist-minded managers believe that objective and rigorous standards can be used to measure and control employees' behaviour. They assign goals to their subordinates and strive to measure their realisation accurately. When they select applicants or promote employees, these managers rely on reference checks, intelligence tests or psychological profiling, endeavours that result in quantitative scores. Job candidates are asked to meet with several existing employees to acquire relevant facts about them, with the implicit assumption that these facts are amenable to consistent interpretations. So-called 360-degree evaluation procedures promoted in human resource management manuals follow the same procedure and prescribe peer evaluation of employees, managers and anyone who regularly interacts with them. Their intention is to draw a complete picture of their performance. It hardly needs saying that the image so obtained is almost never a coherent one – for good reasons.

POSITIVISM AND MANAGEMENT ACADEMIA

By the late nineteenth century, the massive economic changes initiated by the Industrial Revolution had become a grim daily reality for millions of people in the West. Low wages, long working hours, appalling or dangerous working conditions and abusive supervisory practices resulted in high employee turnover, violent strikes and latent social unrest. In some industrial areas, the fabric of society was strained. To reconcile labour with capital, to put an end to the industrial relations warfare between managers and workers, Frederick W. Taylor sought to improve efficiency and labour productivity.[21] In true positivist fashion, he thought that scientific organisational improvements would repair the social fabric, namely shorter working hours, simpler tasks and better pay would leave workers and unions with little to complain about. In *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), Taylor argued (and Henry Ford simultaneously demonstrated) that systematic and rigorous analysis of tasks and decomposition of workflow lead to productivity gains that can be redistributed in better economic outcome for workers, managers and shareholders alike: there is 'one best way' to organise work on the shop floor. 'The best management is a true science,' he wrote, 'resting upon clearly defined laws, rules, and principles [. . .]. Whenever these principles are correctly applied, results must follow which are truly astounding.'[22] Beyond the wave of mechanisation and automation it triggered, Taylor's work sparked

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a revolution within management circles, the fallout of which is detectable to this day. Translated in many languages, *The Principles of Scientific Management* remained prescribed reading for generations of managers and management students around the world. The book even started a new industry, management consultancy.

Although Taylorism has been subjected to intense criticism, the idea that there are universal principles that executives must grasp underpins another landmark of management thought, Herbert A. Simon's *Administrative Behavior*. In this book, first published in 1947 and today in its fourth edition, Simon attempted to provide a rigorous theory of administrative decision-making upon which an administrative science can be founded. To uncover the immutable principles of administration and faithful to Comte's demands, Simon held that his first step was to develop a value-free language which describes administrations.[23] Such a research program proved to be enormously influential. It notably spurred the development of the economic movement known as the Carnegie School and gained for its author the 1978 so-called Nobel Prize in Economics. More recent writers do not deviate from Taylor's and Simon's positivist agenda when they argue that management must be evidence-based and managers should rely on the scientific research of management academics.

In a positivist outline, the management of organisations falls within the sphere of sociology, as does management as an academic discipline since the practice of management is an applied science. Although management terms are invented by human beings, they point to phenomena that predate scientists' understanding of them. Like Durkheim, who explained suicide rates in terms of religious differences, and Weber who analysed the successful rise of Western capitalism as the product of the Calvinist ethics, Taylor and Simon formulated laws that rule the evolution of organisations and the behaviour of the people therein. Both authors compared their jobs to those of physicists who observe and codify the behaviour of objects. Their books mark the academic birth of management and administration as positive sciences. As is typical of positivists, however, both authors took the existence of the laws of management and administration for granted. They did not entertain the view that there are no such laws to discover.

The idea of management education rests on the (initially Platonic) assumption that a body of knowledge exists without which the practice of management is defective. The legitimacy and existence of business and management schools are grounded on this conception. This body of management knowledge forms a whole that is not only reasonably stable over time but also amenable to formal codification. If either of these conditions is not verified, no meaningful teaching or learning can take place. Furthermore, once researchers have codified management laws, they are to be turned into tools

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and techniques, in the way that physicists rely on the laws of electromagnetism to design compasses. The job of managers, then, is to apply these tools and techniques and steer their organisations towards greater profits in the way navigators use compasses to steer ships to their destinations.

The idea that management is a positivist science has proved irresistible. So understood, 'management science' secures the position of those who know it, the prototype of which is the freshly minted MBA degree holder. Importantly, it sacralises the authority of those who develop and disseminate it, management researchers and educators. Unsurprisingly, in this outlook, management education has been one of the fastest-growing industries since World War II, with global revenues today in trillions of American dollars. Even in economic downtimes, management schools fare well since unemployed managers turn to them to optimise their prospects in a competitive job market. The success has been such that reputable journals and magazines such as the *Financial Times*, *Business Week* or *The Economist* regularly publish business school rankings and self-help guides for management students.

Its extraordinary success notwithstanding, management academia faces formidable challenges in implementing the positivist agenda. The origins of these difficulties stem from the founding principles of positivism: phenomenalism, nominalism, the fact-value distinction, and the unity of the scientific method. First, would-be management scientists must limit themselves to the study of phenomena, proscribing from their descriptions references to unobservable entities. This is more easily said than done, however, for management research focuses on matters that are intangible by nature. Nobody has seen, nor ever will see, an organisation *qua* organisation. Corporations, partnerships, charities and their volunteers, as well as sports clubs with their fans are all 'organisations'. What one sees is a group of people often (though not necessarily) in the same location, generally (but not always) paid by the same entity, and usually knowingly performing tasks that can be related to an overall purpose which may (or may not) be described formally. Describing unambiguously abstract concepts is always a difficult endeavour and to date no one has come up with a universally accepted definition of organisation, which is a rather embarrassing admission for those who profess to study them.

The rule of nominalism demands that descriptions and interpretations of phenomena must be made in terms which point exclusively to tangible events or entities. Strict nominalist accounts thus exclude unobservable causes, intentions, values, reasons, culture, personalities (or personality traits), ideas, visions, strategies and the like. Instead, they must rely on descriptions of actions like intending, valuing and reasoning. Tangible terms like assets, persons, instructions, results, products, documents, job descriptions and written procedures are preferable. If the rules of phenomenalism and nominalism were applied rigidly (as positivism requires), managers would need

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substantially to change their language and practices since the use of abstractions dominates management, the management literature, and the social sciences generally. Positive management, if it were to exist, would be properly based on objective performance.

In line with positivism's claims to value-free knowledge, Simon insisted that management researchers describe organisational situations in a language that avoids ethical or cultural abstractions. Management schools have followed suit and maintain that they deliver purely cognitive and instrumental education. Indeed, should they forget this requirement, the executives and shareholders who hire graduates would immediately charge management schools with moral arrogance. Reporting organisational phenomena objectively also means abstaining from commentary about the desirability of outcomes, means, processes, and so on. Assessments pertaining to actions or procedures must be made in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness in reaching goals that observers have not set and which they must neither approve nor disapprove. In particular, the obligation to create a profit, which is typical of commercial entities, must be received in such a manner. This is a self-defeating request for management academics since they justify their worth by claiming that the practice of management is somehow deficient without their expertise.

Finally, the positivist agenda requires that researchers respect the inductive-deductive method. To ensure validity and reliability, theorised patterns in the behaviour of organisations must be measured and tested against new observations, ideally through controlled and replicable experiments. A controlled experiment involves an experimental group (which is subject to experimental changes) and a control group (to which nothing is done), to provide reference. A moment of reflection reveals that the nature of organisations creates immense challenges to the conduct of controlled experiments the results of which would be unambiguous. Indeed, no two organisations are the same and this makes the formation of a reliable control group extremely difficult (replicating the experiment is also problematic, for the same reason). Moreover, no organisation can be isolated from its environment to prevent interferences beyond what researchers can control, since organisations only exist through their exchanges and contacts with society.

Techniques exist in social sciences which are intended to compensate for the difficulties associated with being unable to conduct laboratory experiments. These techniques include manipulations such as statistical control and use of proto-control groups such as those used in field or natural experiments. However, as Andreski observed, unambiguous explanations invoking cause-effect relationships are not achievable in domains such as sociology and psychology.[24] Indeed, within the social sciences, conclusions are beset by the possibility of competing explanation that no control group (assuming

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these can be organised) can eliminate. A generic case in point is the changing intentions of individuals whose behaviour is studied. The current 'replication crisis', which torments social sciences, is a direct manifestation of this phenomenon.[25]

Comte himself had high hopes for field observation, comparison and historical analysis,[26] but he did not appreciate the magnitude of the problems which arise from the absence of robust control groups. At any rate, he did not care to show how his law of evolution from the theological to the positive stage of society can be tested empirically. Interactions between communities and the society to which they belong are too complex to guarantee that observed changes result from variations in dependent variables. The results of social or organisational studies can be explained away by changes in variables that researchers ignored, were not aware of, or could not control. The mere fact of observing what people do is sometimes enough to influence substantially their behaviour. This is the so-called 'Hawthorne effect' (also known as 'observer effect') named after the Hawthorne studies.

One conclusion seems incontrovertible: strict positivism is not applicable to the study of organisations or management. Notwithstanding Comte's initial claims, it is doubtful that the social sciences have ever been positivist in their methods. It is understandable that social scientists have sought to distance themselves from positivism and to locate themselves within rival traditions, some of which are reviewed in this volume. Irrespective of their merits, these alternatives have failed to make a deep mark within management academia because many academics, envious of the success of natural science, have attempted to replicate its method. This attitude proved so strong that positivism has become the dominant model for management academics over the last decades.

Among the recent and most vocal advocates of positivism in management are Jeffrey Pfeffer and Lex Donaldson. Michael Porter can also be included since his celebrated model uses the scientific concept of 'force' to analyse the nature and intensity of competition in industries. On Porter's view, organisations in all industries exert actions on one another, the effects of which can be resisted but not escaped. This being the case, their managers have no choice but to execute the decisions the model prescribes. Intentions, alternatives and purposes are terms that are conspicuously absent from Porter's framework, as they are in positivism generally. Industry players behave as described because they must; indeed, they are 'forced'. The appearance of Game Theory, the unstoppable mathematisation of economics and finance and the preponderance of quantitative studies published in management journals are equally vivid illustrations of a positivist approach to social and organisational phenomena, because mathematics and quantification are associated with objectivity. Leading management journals such as *Organization Science*,

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Administrative Science Quarterly, the *Academy of Management Journal*'s suite of publications and the *Strategic Management Journal* (and countless others) insist on value-free empirical research encapsulated in scientific theories. These journals do not refer to positivism in their mission statements but rely instead on such terms as 'facts', 'scientific', 'objective', 'empirical' and 'measurable'. The meaning of these terms, however, cannot be divorced from their positivist definitions. Although it is widely unrecognised and inapplicable in practice, positivism's deep and lasting influence on social research will not be dispelled any time soon.

BEYOND POSITIVISM

The insatiable desire of management researchers to replicate the method and success of natural science has been dubbed 'physics envy'.[27] Although derogatory, the expression is justified. Positivism's rules amount to describing the world in the language of physics, bodies in motion. This is precisely what Comte meant when he coined the expression 'social physics', to name the science of society. Combined with the pressure to publish, this has led to the proliferation of theories about the evolution, structure and behaviour of organisations. To be acceptable for publication and in keeping with the positivist demand, these theories have to pass the test of empirical verification. Given the difficulties faced by management academics in this endeavour, one wonders how such a feat can be achieved.

A glance at the literature answers the question. Management theories are formulated in terms which do not expose their authors to the rebuttal of their peers or to the ire of managers when promised results are not forthcoming. The pervasive employment of expressions (such as the modal 'may'), which render the sentences in which they are found tautological, has no other origin. To take one example at random, a recent study published in the prestigious *Academy of Management Journal* investigated whether and how cultural disharmony influenced creativity in work organisations. It hardly needs saying that neither 'cultural disharmony' nor 'creativity' would have passed Comte's nominalist test, but this comment is left aside. Among his conclusions, the author (a Harvard Business School professor) noted that his research 'lends credence to the hypothesis that beliefs about cultural incompatibility may [or may not] be the mechanism linking ambient cultural disharmony and the ability to connect ideas from different cultures'.[28] Besides, 'a major contribution [of the study] is the demonstration that how culturally different others in one's social environment interact with each other can have unintended negative consequences for individuals' creative thinking'. Such an interaction 'can' indeed have negative consequences, or it cannot. Conclusions

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of this kind do not run the risk of contradiction. The study's appearance of positivist success is intact, but if its conclusions are among the best exemplars of erudite research in management, the field is in dire straits. Management researchers who advance such conclusions have nothing to say, but they say it anyway.

A further problem with applying positivism in management research is positivism's assumption of determinism. Descartes proposed a system of thought in which religion and science could coexist in their respective spheres of authority. Comte placed science generally and sociology specifically above religion and any discipline (such as psychology) that wants to regulate or inquire into man's inner world. The result of this move is the annihilation of the vault in which Descartes safeguarded psychological freedom, 'I'. In a positivist outline, individuals *qua* individuals disappear and are replaced by the sum of their actions. It is a small step, then, to Taylor's principles of 'scientific management' and this proximity explains many of the criticisms that have been levelled against them, including the dehumanisation of workers who are reduced to limbs in motion.

Although they reject Taylorism, social researchers and management academics who inscribe themselves within the positivist tradition, walk in Taylor's footsteps. By imitating the methods of natural science, they reinforce Comte's demotion of 'I' insofar as they must describe what they study in the same terms as those employed by natural scientists. If reality is a stable and predictable whole governed by invariable laws and if only the determined phenomena studied by positivist scientists exist, then humans themselves must be part of this determined whole. Positive human existence is, like the rest of nature, determined by forces. It knows nothing of freedom, choice or responsibility. Ethics and moral values have to be recognised as misguided legacies of the theological era of human development which positive managers must reject.[29] Moreover, if society is the primary reality, then social phenomena and entities, like work organisations and their members, develop and behave according to the laws that positivist social scientists seek to codify. Like that of particles moved by electromagnetic forces, the behaviour of individuals and organisations is controllable through suitable incentives and appropriate structures. This 'push-pull' or 'billiard ball' perspective is at the heart of behaviourism and pervades managerial psychology to this day.

In his last article, Sumantra Ghoshal summarised the foregoing comments poignantly and eloquently.[30] He held that management academics lost their way when they began to see themselves as physical scientists and consistently interpreted phenomena in terms of causes and effects, connected by laws. Positive science, Ghoshal noted, leaves no room for subjectivity, intentionality, choice or resilience, and for aesthetic and moral values. Rather, it demands that, for the sake of calculability, employees are levelled to the status

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of lifeless economic resources. Ghoshal was damning: after a half-century of research on such premises, management academia has only delivered 'the pretence of knowledge'. If management studies were really a sort of physics, all this would be harmless, perhaps even amusing since misconceptions do not change the way nature operates. In social science, Ghoshal warned, the reverse is the case. Owing to the self-fulfilling power of their theories, social scientists carry a 'greater social and moral responsibility than those who work in the physical sciences because, if they hide ideology in the pretence of science, they can cause much more harm'. Ghoshal was himself an extraordinarily successful representative of his profession for three decades. It is difficult not to read in his scathing critique an excruciating exercise in mea culpa. In any case, Ghoshal struck a chord, for his article remained for ten years after its publication the most widely cited of those published by the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*.

Beyond its normative principles, positivism rests on the assumption that the world can be studied profitably through its tangible manifestations and that observations of these manifestations are, or can be made to be, objective. Although attractive, it is unclear if this demand is achievable in practice. There is an element of circularity in scientific observation insofar as the validity of the laws that positive scientists seek to discover are assumed in the working of their instruments. The functioning of thermometers, for instance, assumes that bodies expand in proportion to their heat, yet when physicists want to demonstrate the validity of the law according to which bodies expand uniformly under the action of temperature, they use a thermometer. The simplest measuring device assumes the existence of laws for its functioning. Any reported observation thus cannot be considered as 'raw' since its measurement relies on these laws. In other words, measuring assumes a general theory about what is measured or about what is doing the measuring and this theory must be available before the facts can be measured. To be able to count apples, one must know what an apple is.

What these examples illustrate is that the scientific method does not start exclusively from facts but also from theories.[31] Positivism is vulnerable to this charge because it is unclear whether positivism is itself a conceptual framework arrived at from facts without epistemological or moral prejudices. Positivist scientific truth is reached when predefined verification standards are met; in effect, these standards define what truth is. Even if this circularity was alleviated, the problem of induction would remain untouched. Despite Comte's insistence, successful scientific laws which rest on objective and repeated observations do not encompass the totality of the phenomena they are meant to capture, since they do not (indeed cannot) take account of future observations. Further, Comte's entire philosophy relies upon the existence of pure facts and the possibility of recording them objectively. Without facts so

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defined, his conception of science makes no sense. Even the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle is untenable without them for it, too, hinges on the certainty of immediate experience. That someone sought to develop a philosophy of science which addresses these problems is understandable. It is to this attempt that the discussion now turns.

NOTES

1. Comte, A. 2000 [1853]. *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, Volume I (in three volumes, Martineau, H. trans. and condensed, Harrison, F. intro., Kitchener: Batoche Books), See p. 31. Comte knew of Martineau's condensed translation and recommended it to his French students. Martineau's book, being clearer and more concise than Comte's volumes, was retranslated back into French and published in 1872.
2. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 27–28.
3. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 27ff and 216ff; see also III 10ff.
4. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* II, 74; in the third interlude of Molière's comedy *The Imaginary Invalid*, a doctor explains that opium puts one's to sleep owing to its 'dormitive virtue'.
5. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 28.
6. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 41.
7. A regular theme; cf. for instance Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 150.
8. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 40.
9. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* III, 228.
10. Another regular theme; see for instance Comte, *Positive Philosophy* III, 12ff.
11. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 55.
12. 'The scientific spirit forbids us to regard society as composed of individuals', Comte, *Positive Philosophy* II, 234.
13. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* II, 100–01; see also I 36.
14. Comte, A. 1875. *System of Positive Polity: Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity*, Volume II (Bridges, J. H. trans.). London: Longmans, Green and Co. See p. 189.
15. Comte, *System of Positive Polity* II, 2.
16. Cf. the Preface to Comte, *System of Positive Polity* I.
17. Cf. Comte, *System of Positive Polity* I, 125–26. Comte acknowledged Plato as the first theological philosopher who tried to organise rationally society, but his comments on the author of the *Republic* are almost invariably negative, mostly on account of Plato's reliance on metaphysical (unobservable) concepts.
18. Comte, *System of Positive Polity* I, 160.
19. Kolakowski, L. 1969. *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought* (Guterman, N. trans.). New York, NY: Doubleday Anchor. See pp. 1–10.
20. This expression was not coined by Darwin, but by Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Biology* (1864); Darwin subsequently used it in the 1869 edition of *The Origin of Species*.

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21. Kurana, R. 2007. *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. See pp. 92–95.

22. Taylor, F. W. 1919. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York, NY: Harper Brothers Publishers. See p. 7. 'Best way' is a recurrent expression in Taylor's book; see for instance pp. 106, 122 or 124.

23. Simon, H. A. 1997. *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization*, 4th edition. New York, NY: The Free Press. The fact-value distinction is an important theme in Simon's work and an entire chapter (III) is devoted to exploring the tenets and consequences of that principle. Simon acknowledged the influence of (logical) positivism on his work p. 55.

24. Andreski, S. 1969. *The Uses of Comparative Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. See pp. 47–59.

25. Yong, E. 2016. Psychology's Replication Crisis can't be Wished Away. *The Atlantic*, 4 March. https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/03/psychologysreplication-crisiscant-be-wished-away/472272/. Accessed 5 May 2019.

26. Comte, *Positive Philosophy* II, 202–13.

27. The expression 'physics envy' to refer to organisational research was first proposed in Bygrave, W. 1989. The Entrepreneurship Paradigm (I): A Philosophical Look at its Research Methodologies. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 14(1): 7–26.

28. Chua, R. Y. J. 2013. The Costs of Ambient Cultural Disharmony: Indirect Intercultural Conflicts in Social Environment Undermine Creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(6): 1545–77. See p. 1556.

29. Such are the views for instance of Lex Donaldson; see the conclusion of his *For Positivist Organization Theory* (1996, SAGE), in which he argues that it is a mistake to take into account choice and free will in organisation studies.

30. Ghoshal, S. 2005. Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practices. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(4): 75–91. See pp. 80 and 86.

31. Comte was well aware of this issue ('if it is true that every theory must be based upon observed facts, it is equally true that facts cannot be observed without the guidance of some theory'; Comte, *Positive Philosophy* I, 29) but did not seem to appreciate its consequences.

FURTHER READING

Andreski, S. 1972. *Social Sciences as Sorcery*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. Andreski's book offers a witty yet thorough and devastating demolition of social sciences from a positivist perspective.

Kolakowski, L. 1969. *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought* (Guterman, N. trans.). New York, NY: Doubleday Anchor. This chapter is much indebted to Kolakowski's unrivalled critical study of positivism.

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Chapter 7

Critical Rationalism

Managing by Trial and Error

All swans were white until they turned out also to be black. No matter how many times white swans were observed, these observations did not make the theory according to which they are all white true. If all that is certain comes from experience and only from experience, it is impossible to justify propositions going beyond past or present experience. Despite Comte's claims, positivism does not address the problem of induction that beset thinkers of the metaphysical era, because the universal validity of the regularities inductively inferred from facts cannot be verified. If science is to be rescued from Hume's arguments, it will have to be through alternatives to positivism's starting points and methods, that is, to facts, induction and verification.

Developing a philosophy of science from a non-positivist base is what Karl Popper, regarded by many as the greatest philosopher of science of the twentieth century, set out to do. As can be expected, Popper's visions of science, the universe, society and its members oppose those implied by positivism. If only for this, Popper's work deserves the attention of managers and management researchers concerned with positivism's limitations yet anxious to locate their work under the prestige of science.

THE PROBLEM OF DEMARCATION

Karl Raimund Popper was born in Vienna in 1902 to Jewish parents who converted to Lutheranism before his birth. After working as a trainee cabinet-maker, serving in one of the clinics for children of psychiatrist Alfred Adler, and being for a short time a member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria, he studied at the University of Vienna from 1922 to 1928, graduating with a PhD in cognitive psychology. Teaching mathematics and

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physics in high school from 1929 onwards, Popper published in 1934 *Logik der Forschung* (literally: 'The Logic of Research'), republished in English as *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Fearing the rise of Nazism, Popper secured in 1937 a position of lecturer in philosophy at the University of New Zealand in Christchurch. There, spurred by the annexation of Austria by Germany, he published in 1945 *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, a polemical attack on totalitarianism generally and on Plato, Hegel and Marx specifically. In 1946, Popper became Reader in Logic and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics where he worked with Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend and future billionaire George Soros, who later established the Open Society Institute, a philanthropic think tank named in honour of Popper's book. After Popper's appointment as professor of Logic and Scientific Method at the University of London in 1949, his international reputation as a philosopher of science flourished. Knighted in 1965, Popper retired from academic life in 1969 but remained active as a writer, lecturer and broadcaster. Although widely admired, he died in 1994 in relative isolation, the result of an indefatigable zeal for self-aggrandisement combined with an aggressive hostility to the slightest criticism of his ideas.

According to Popper, the fundamental problem that philosophy of science must address is what he called the 'problem of demarcation', that is, the problem of distinguishing between science proper on the one hand and non- or pseudo-science on the other.[1] Popper dedicated his academic career to the solution of this problem, its tenets and its consequences across the scientific spectrum. In addition to *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959), his noted books on philosophy of science are *Objective Knowledge* (1972) and *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963).[2]

According to Popper, the positivist answer to the demarcation problem, even when refined by the Vienna Circle, is inadequate because it is self-contradictory. Indeed, following Hume, logical positivists divide statements into three categories, namely analytic, synthetic and nonsense. Insofar as the objectives of science are to discover and codify universal laws, its theories, which claim to be descriptions of natural phenomena and reliable bases for predictions, cannot be classified as synthetic since, being generalisations, they go beyond observation. Not being synthetic, they are either analytic, that is, irrelevant to empirical reality (in contradiction with science's stated objectives) or they belong to metaphysics. In other words, on logical positivism's own arguments, positivist science offers either empirically irrelevant or nonsensical propositions.[3]

Popper argued further that, although metaphysics is not science, science must make use of metaphysical concepts if it is to be meaningful. In particular, nominalism, with which Comte and the Vienna Circle wanted to keep metaphysics at bay, is untenable because scientific propositions, such

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as theories, must express or rely on universals if they want to be empirically relevant. A nominalist language made of words that points only to past or present individual events, properties or objects can only express tautologies and cannot be used to describe reality. To illustrate his point, Popper used the following example: if 'white' only acquires its meaning as a property of 'snow' and 'cloud', then not only is the proposition 'snow is white' tautological but also 'white' cannot be used to describe the colour of an object with which it has not been initially associated. In other words, rejecting metaphysical propositions as meaningless amounts to rejecting all statements, including scientific ones, that claim to describe a general feature of reality. Despite its proponents' insistence to the contrary, positivism, even in its Viennese outfit, is itself based on precisely that which it seeks to eliminate, that is, metaphysical assumptions about the make-up of reality. The denial of metaphysics is itself a metaphysical position.[4]

THE GROWTH OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Popper accepted Hume's conclusion that it is impossible to validate scientific theories that are inferred inductively from observations. He argued that the probabilistic approach to this problem is not viable: in an infinite universe, a scientific theory which has been verified many times still has a probability of being true equal to zero, since it is supposed to hold true in an unlimited number of cases.[5] Induction is not logic and cannot be defended inductively, for this would only push the problem back one step without addressing it. Indeed, it is not because induction has been successful in the past that it will be so in the future.[6]

In contrast to many of his predecessors, Popper was uninterested in analysing the process by which scientific theories are born. Against Hume, he rejected the conception that conditioning – the repeated association of ideas – is the source of theories. On his view, no two situations or events are ever the same. At best, they can be said to be similar, but only in respect of a point of view which predates their observation. There is thus no such thing as induction from pure experience. Positivism assumes that there is a neutral position from which the world is observed objectively and from which theories are developed, free of prejudice. Not so for Popper. He held that theories develop from tradition, intuition, reason, imagination, existing theories, new observations or any combination of these, but never from experience alone. What this means is that 'induction, i.e. inference based on many observations, is a myth. It is neither a psychological fact nor a scientific procedure.'[7]

Popper also argued that the combination of the empiricist assumptions of *tabula rasa* (the mind is originally empty of ideas) and of inductive learning

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(by repeated association of ideas) is logically inconsistent. Repetition presupposes similarity and similarity presupposes a judgement of what is or is not similar. In other words, repetition presupposes an expectation, or primitive theory, by which similarity is assessed.[8] As the assumption of *tabula rasa* prohibits innate capacities, including the ability to assess similarity, expectations must be innate otherwise the process of conditioning cannot begin. If expectations are innate, however, then the empiricist assumption of *tabula rasa* must be rejected along with the notion of conditioning. For Popper, expectations are therefore a priori (prior to experience) and knowledge does not develop by the accumulation of sense data but by the modification of these innate expectations. This conclusion drives Popper firmly into the rationalists' camp.

How, then, is one to distinguish science from pseudo-science? Contrary to the positivists, Popper held that verification does not help. On his view, verification rests implicitly on induction (since it assumes that what is verified today will be verified tomorrow) and yields at best possibility but never certainty. Besides, obtaining verification for most theories is always possible, if one looks for verification.[9] If certainty is what one looks for, one should look for error, not for confirmation. Indeed, according to Popper, there are such universal statements as 'all swans are white' and such existential (simple empirical) statements as 'this swan is black'. The negation of a universal statement is always an existential statement and vice versa. For instance, the logical converse of 'all ravens are black' (universal statement) is 'there exists a non-black raven' (existential proposition) and the other way around. This means that it is possible to invalidate a proposed generalisation with a single counterexample, because it is enough to prove a theory false once for it to be conclusively recognised as false. In other words, if certainty is achievable, it is only in the negative. Although there is no criterion of truth, there is at least one for error. No observation is theory-free and therefore experience cannot determine theory. Experience can, however, weed out theory. Since the sighting of black swans, the theory that all swans are white has been falsified. While verification is only temporary, falsification is definitive: while scientific laws are not verifiable, they are falsifiable.[10]

Popper's answer to the problem of demarcation hinges on this logical asymmetry. Although science cannot prove a theory, it can disprove one. When a hypothesised universal statement is disproved by an existential statement, its rejection is a logical and unquestionable outcome. The proper scientific method, therefore, is deductive and rests on falsification. Science, for Popper, starts with problems and grows from scientists' attempts to solve them.[11] That is, science starts from expectations from which predictions are deduced. These predictions are put to the test, but the true test of a theory is a serious attempt at proving it false. Confirmation of a theory counts only if it

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is the result of a bold experiment, bold in the sense that the confirmed result would never have been expected if the theory being tested was not known. In any case, confirmation is not a source of knowledge since it only confirms something that is expected, which is another way of saying that it is already known. Scientific knowledge grows and the scientific adventure continues only when scientific theories are falsified. When this happens, unexpected problems appear. Scientists then propose new solutions and conduct experiments to see whether these can be considered true provisionally. When they are proven false, novel developments emerge. Science, as for human thought generally, proceeds and progresses according to a method based on 'trial and error elimination'.[12]

Consequently, a theory which is not falsifiable in any conceivable way is not scientific: 'Irrefutability is not a virtue of a theory [. . .] but a vice.' Science is based on falsifiability: 'The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability.'[13] The statement 'The Sun is shining or it is not' is perhaps acceptable as poetry, but it does not belong to the language of science because it is necessarily true and requires no empirical verification. Unfalsifiable theories are tautologies. Unrecognised, a tautological theory is attractive because of its apparent explanatory power. However, a theory that cannot be falsified explains everything but predicts nothing. Although such theories can have the appearance and academic reputation that are normally attached to science, they remain propositions best characterised as religious, non- or pseudo-scientific.[14]

Popper believed that his answer to the demarcation problem makes the problem of induction disappear. Indeed, on his view, if it is impossible to establish (inductively or through other means) universal truths based on experience, this impossibility is of no consequence because science does not aim for universally true propositions. Good science eliminates errors by building on previous knowledge. Genuine scientific knowledge is conjectural and provisional because it awaits falsification. For Popper, this is a desirable result since it brings about new problems and triggers innovative theories derived from the inscrutable intuition of scientists. One must have faith in the power of one's reason to generate theories, with the understanding that these must be tested rigorously and remain open to falsification. Science is a critical endeavour before it is an experimental one. This view justifies the name that Popper gave to his philosophy of science: critical rationalism.[15]

If the logic of falsification is simple enough, Popper had to concede to his critics that its practical application is not straightforward.[16] No experiment is ever error-proof and no theory can be falsified by a single observation. Furthermore, no fact is theory-free since it is always possible that an experimental result which contradicts a theory is incorrect because of 'background knowledge' (other assumptions or theories) which is not directly related

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to the theory but has been built into the experiment.[17] Only repeated and consistent tests can bring such mistaken assumptions to light by redirecting scientists' attention towards unexpected problems or by refuting the theory under test. The discovery of Neptune is an example of the former case. When it was established that the revolutions of Uranus are inconsistent with Newton's predictions, the background assumption according to which there are seven planets in the solar system was rejected rather than Newton's laws of motion.

As the example of Neptune's discovery illustrates, a scientific theory leads to positive predictions in that it affirms the occurrence of future events. Popper called this the 'logical content' of the theory. On the negative side, there are events which, if true, are prohibited by the theory (the 'empirical content' of the theory).[18] Popper held that the more a theory prohibits, the more testable and thus the better it is. When deciding between two competing theories, scientists must critically ascertain which one proposes the greater empirical content. Theories must be rigorously evaluated and theories that solve problems, explain hitherto inexplicable phenomena and resist falsification, are preferred.[19] This explains why Newton's theory of celestial motion is superior to Kepler's and why Einstein's physics is preferred to Newton's. Scientific theories must improve on previous ones. Popper's epistemology is evolutionary because there is permanent 'competition between theories – a kind of Darwinian struggle for survival'.[20] Scientists must 'choose the theory which best holds its own in competition with other theories; the one which, by natural selection, proves itself the fittest to survive'.[21]

These propositions amount to a radical modification of positivist philosophy of science. Whereas classical and neopositivists held that scientists seek theories which are verifiable in the pursuit of truth, Popper held that scientists should seek theories which are falsifiable in the pursuit of error. The positivist scientific method is mainly inductive; Popper insisted that it is exclusively deductive. Positivist science holds that its conclusions, once verified, are certain; Popperian science considers that its conclusions are merely conjectures awaiting disproof. Following Bacon's advice, positivist scientists are prudent and advance their ideas cautiously, while for Popper it is scientists' audacity and their willingness to disprove theories that are praiseworthy. The positivists' careful examination of facts is for Popper's a fundamental methodological misconception. If man is born a theorist, then science is essentially informed guesswork.[22] Unsurprisingly, Otto Neurath, a leading figure of the Vienna Circle, dubbed Popper (to the latter's delight) the 'official opposition' to logical positivism. If Popper is right, prominent philosophers of science, including Aristotle, Bacon and Comte, were misguided.

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THE ENDLESS PURSUIT OF TRUTH

An immediate problem with Popper's philosophy is the apparent impossibility of scientific truth. Indeed, if scientific theories must remain open to falsification, they can never be said to be true. 'The empirical basis of objective science has thus nothing "absolute" about it. Science does not rest upon solid bedrock. The bold structure of its theories rises, as it were, above a swamp'.[23] The optimism of Bacon, Descartes and Comte rested on an illusion. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* concludes on a striking note: 'Science never pursues the illusory aim of making its answers final, or even probable. Its advance is, rather, towards an infinite yet attainable aim: that of ever discovering new, deeper, and more general problems'.[24] In this outline and since ultimate scientific truth is unobtainable, the claim that scientific knowledge progresses, is unwarranted, even paradoxical.

While never formally rejecting this dispiriting conclusion, Popper sought to qualify it in later publications. For instance, in *Conjectures and Refutations*, he introduced the concepts of verisimilitude, truth-content and falsity-content which were inspired by Alfred Tarski's work on truth. Although Tarski established the impossibility of a general criterion of truth, Popper sought to provide one. A statement is true, for Popper, if and only if it corresponds to the facts.[25] This being the case, the truth-content of a theory is the class of logically valid and empirically true consequences that derive from it; its falsity-content is the class of its false consequences.[26] The verisimilitude of a theory is obtained by subtracting its falsity-content from its truth-content. Verisimilitude measures, or parallels, corroboration: a better scientific theory has a greater verisimilitude than the theories it displaces because it is closer to the truth. Verisimilitude is not probability since all theories are equally improbable. Rather, it measures proximity to the truth: ultimate truth is perhaps unobtainable, but at least it can be approximated. Or again, truth is the standard of which science falls short.[27] However, that science's successive theories must remain falsifiable is no cause for despair. Theories progress towards the truth when they gain in verisimilitude and their increasing experimental corroboration is an indicator of this progress. Each discovery of a mistake thus represents a genuine advance in scientific knowledge. Although cautious, this is a more optimistic outcome than that initially proposed at the end of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*.

Popper did not claim to displace truth (a concept he found attractive, yet elusive and fraught with problems) with verisimilitude. Rather, he wanted to propose a normative notion which distinguished and ranked competing theories. He held that generally scientists are aware that their theories are approximations to the truth and that the concept of verisimilitude alleviates the concerns such awareness generates. On Popper's view, scientists

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can continue to work with imperfect theories, reassured that they can assess progress in scientific knowledge. When the truth-content of a new theory is the same as the old theory, but its falsity-content is less, its verisimilitude is greater. Although not true, it is a better theory.[28]

Popper relied on his definition of scientific progress to reject scientific determinism (the view that all future events are caused by past events and can be predicted given sufficient knowledge of the past and of the laws that govern natural changes). He held that although scientific theories are deterministic, they are only approximations since their truth cannot be established. That they are deterministic does not mean that the universe is itself determined. In any case, for Popper, the burden of proof rests upon the determinists because determinism goes against common sense. Determinism means that all events happen because they must, including human behaviour. If true, determinism means that it is possible to predict Mozart's musical compositions before he pens them by analysing the physicochemical state of his brain.[29]

The proof of determinism, Popper argued, is unobtainable because it is impossible to gain sufficiently accurate knowledge of the present to be able to predict the behaviour of animals with any degree of precision. Popper also observed that it is impossible to offer predictions about the growth of scientific knowledge, since that would mean in practice advancing this future knowledge to the present, thereby destroying the prediction.[30] Popper encapsulated his views on these matters in a striking contention: 'Determinism is not a necessary pre-requisite of a science which can make predictions'.[31] The world is neither predictable nor logically contained by its present state: all events are unique, undetermined, free. The future is not knowable because the universe is open, emergent and infinite.[32] This conclusion is particularly relevant for Popper's views on social science.

THE CRITIQUE OF HISTORICISM AND THE CASE FOR THE OPEN SOCIETY

Popper's social philosophy is both a consequence of his philosophy of science and a product of his personal history. Forced into exile, it is understandable that Popper opposed all forms of totalitarianism and centralised state control which he saw as attacks on the rationality and dignity of human beings.[33] Popper's arguments on these matters were first exposed in private lectures and seminars delivered in 1935, which were published in 1957 as *The Poverty of Historicism*.[34] Their most sustained development is found in the book Popper looked upon as his 'war effort', *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, written while he was living in New Zealand.[35]

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Popper argued that historicism, the view according to which history unfolds according to law-like patterns, originates in the works of Hesiod and Heraclitus. It was Plato, however, who gave historicism its first unequivocal expression when he argued that society necessarily degenerates. However, it is possible to put an end to this downward trend by implementing *the* perfect society, which Plato described in the *Republic*. Plato was a social scientist and social engineer and the former aspect of his thought fed the latter. He formulated a political vision which addresses the ailments of humankind based on his belief that there are immutable elements in man's *psyche* and in the evolution of society. Plato's vision included minute regulation of everyday life and the merciless suppression of possible sources of dissent. On his view, only Platonic justice produces happiness. Popper noted that utopianism, even if sincere, leads to totalitarianism.[36]

Popper extended his criticism to Hegel's historicism. In his *Philosophy of History* (1824), Hegel wrote that history is the inexorable and rational development of an ideal, the Absolute or World Spirit. This process, which follows an overall dialectical logic (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), culminates in the State which is the ultimate power. The State is infinitely sovereign over its members, which are its instruments. Always seeking to affirm and expand its power, the State seeks to dominate its neighbours. Wars are not only unavoidable, they are justified. Popper found this legitimation of the totalitarian State and its violence abhorrent and when Hegel argued that the State finds its natural embodiment in a supreme monarch, Popper ridiculed him as the obsequious servant of Frederick William's absolute rule to which Hegel owed his academic career. For Popper, Hegelianism led to the rise of German nationalism, racialism and fascism, with the concepts of 'blood', 'soil', 'nation' and 'race' replacing 'Spirit' and 'State'. All in all, concluded Popper, Hegelianism has been a harmful farce that must be stopped.[37]

Popper's indictment of Marx's historicism is more detailed than that of Hegel's. Popper, it must be noted, greatly admired Marx as a sociologist. Contrary to Hegel's, he conceded that Marx's intentions were genuinely humanistic since Marx wanted sincerely to correct the social problems of his lifetime while seeking to limit the power of the State. Popper also credited Marx for the depth and breadth of his historical, social and economic analyses, which changed the face of their respective fields of study. He further observed that genuine Marxism is scientific since it proposes historical predictions that can be tested empirically.[38] Vulgar Marxism, however, is not scientific since it claims that sociological development is the proof of a conspiracy against the labouring classes. Nonetheless, Popper believed that Marxism, like Hegelianism to which it is indebted, rests on a prophetic and sociologically deterministic view of capitalist society which aims to shape its development. All facts, for Hegel, are historical facts; for Marx, they are socio-economic

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facts. Society develops inevitably towards a determined end, the proletarian revolution, with Marx's trade cycle (capital accumulation and the rise of industrialism, inexorable increases in productivity, mass unemployment, unavoidable wars, and class conflicts) playing the role of Hegel's dialectic. In Marx's reading of history, individuals and their free will are dissolved in their social condition which is determined by class interest and the way capital and the means of production are distributed. Marx's objectives may have been noble, but the practical outcome of his work is the same as Plato's and Hegel's: authoritarian rule and denial of the freedom of the individual.[39]

In the end, then, historicism leads irresistibly to totalitarian oppression. The belief in the existence of laws of sociological or historical development opens a perspective which is attractive to those people who want to use such laws to create large-scale, centralised control of society. In keeping with his indeterminism, Popper dismissed these conceptions vigorously. The predictive success of natural science cannot be replicated in social science: eclipses and celestial revolutions can be accurately predicted, but no one will ever be able to predict social revolutions. People are not inanimate entities separated from one another by immense distances of empty space, the interactions of which can be modelled by simple equations. Social organisations are the sums of their members and their historical development results from the largely unpredictable and uncontrollable sum of individuals' actions. Although they do not have all relevant information, people's reasoning ability must be considered in sociological analyses. To understand social action, there is no need to engage in psychology and reconstruct the mental states of individuals. What is required is knowledge of the context in which human action takes place. As people behave in anticipation of and response to situations in which they find themselves, situational logic must guide social scientists. The task of social science is not to propose general laws about the behaviour of wholes (groups, nations, classes, organisations, societies), for there are no such laws. Rather, the task of social science is to analyse situations, including the rationality of the actors, and to explain the unintended consequences of their (intentional) actions. If only because of this, economics is a model for the other social sciences.[40]

For Popper, even if sincere, attempts at social engineering based on alleged sociological laws are not only misguided, but calamitous and self-defeating because the consequences of human actions are not predictable. Over central planning, Popper argued, one is to prefer piecemeal social engineering. Piecemeal social engineers do not try to fix society in its totality but consider its problems separately. They do not aim at utopian perfection but at gradual improvement. Each proposed attempt to address a social injustice is the result of debate and agreement; it represents a reasonable compromise with actual circumstances and between conflicting interests. Mistakes in policy adjustments are always possible, perhaps even unavoidable, for no one can

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predict exactly the outcome of proposed changes. Like the universe to which it belongs, society is an emergent phenomenon beyond anyone's control.[41]

The alternative to the historicist-totalitarian State is what Popper called the open society. The open society is democratic, egalitarian and accessible to foreigners. It values and protects the freedom of its members for individuals strengthen their collective welfare through educated, rational and responsible decisions. The open society is also a society which recognises individual merit as opposed to social origin, which accepts change, public scrutiny and criticism in the affairs of the State as opposed to immobility, secrecy and dogmatism. The open society is not a utopian vision but a desirable objective that can be approximated progressively through piecemeal social engineering.[42]

The foundation for Popper's philosophy of science and his social philosophy is thus falsificationism. The critical rationalist stance must not be limited to scientific inquiry but must be made also to bear on social models and political decisions. It was a lack of critical judgement that made the success of Hegel's and Marx's historicisms possible. Might is not right and no dogma must be allowed to dominate social or political theories: everything must remain open to criticism. All political decisions are tentative because they are based on the provisional acceptance of a social theory which has resisted criticism in better ways than competing ones. Beyond their difference in predictive success, there is no fundamental divergence between social science and natural science. Natural scientists, social scientists and piecemeal social engineers learn by trial-and-error elimination. Sociological theories which have been falsified or the practical outcomes of which have been shown to be undesirable must be rejected, no matter how attractive their ideals.[43]

An absence of absolute theoretical and political foundations is no reason for alarm since it does not signal the inescapable advent of relativism or nihilism. It is not because a consensus on a social ideal has failed to emerge that this ideal does not exist. Although truth in political and sociological matters, as in natural science, is out of reach in practice, it is not an illusion. It can and must be actively sought after. From this strenuous and continuous effort, the open society emerges and consolidates itself. If this is to happen, Popper insisted, historicism must be abandoned.[44]

POPPERIAN SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT ACADEMIA

The consistency of Popper's thought is hard to miss and helps to explain the reverberation of his ideas across a wide intellectual spectrum. Popper's courage in criticising such icons as Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Hegel and Marx must also be acknowledged, for academic careers have been destroyed for much less.

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Rather than damaging Popper's career, his arguments in fact secured it and from 1960 until 2000, he was the philosopher most-often cited in leading sociological journals. Popper's political writings also had a lasting effect on post-war Europe, with such political leaders as Vaclav Havel, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Schmidt citing him among their references. He is one of the very rare philosophers of science whose name is known to the educated public and his ideas have also proven popular in China after Mao Zedong's death.

Anyone alert to the limitations of positivism is bound to find Popper's views worth pursuing. For instance, practising managers should find Popper's views on social science appealing. Indeed, although the debate about the value of decentralisation in organisations continues in academic circles, few will argue that organisational success derives from monolithic central planning and control. Rather, even when piecemeal, decentralised decision-making is regarded as more inclusive, flexible and reactive to environmental changes. While management is not democracy, it is not absolute rule. It is difficult to deny that there is value in internal debate and confrontation of opinions before important decisions are taken. More generally, Popper's insistence on empirical confrontation to establish the worth of a theory fits well with the pragmatic nature of management decisions, which can only 'prove their mettle' in their practical merit.[45]

Management scholars wary of positivism are also likely to greet Popper's philosophy of science as a welcome alternative. Unlike positivist social scientists, Popperian researchers do not aim to discover universal laws ruling the social world since there are no such laws in Popper's vision of social science. Moreover, on Popper's view, managers and employees retain their rationality since their actions cannot be understood outside of an analysis which accounts for their ability to reflect on their personal situations. This perspective, which finds support in common experience, offers a promising framework from which models of organisational behaviour can be developed without the problems of positivism.

Popper's philosophy, then, offers a framework attractive to those who practice or study management and want to locate it in the realm of science. However, management scholars would be mistaken in seeing in Popper an unconditional ally. Considered more closely, his view that science is based on the falsification of theories has striking consequences for current management theory and strategic management theory.

THE LOGIC OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT DISCOVERIES

In the early 1980s, strategic management emerged as an independent field of study in the wake of academics' attempts, triggered by the 1959 Ford and

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Carnegie Foundations reports, to improve their scientific standing. Prior to this, strategic management was merely a sub-field of general management. Although Igor Ansoff is the recognised father of the discipline, strategic management owes its current structure and vitality to Michael Porter. Bringing the rigour of his PhD in economics to business studies, Porter produced early in his career two voluminous books, *Competitive Strategy* (1980) and *Competitive Advantage* (1985), in which he developed most of the ideas for which he is known today.

Despite the impressive size of the books in which they are exposed, Porter's views are easily outlined. In *Competitive Strategy*, Porter identified the 'competitive forces', which structure industries, and the 'generic strategies', which commercial organisations adopt to respond to these forces. In *Competitive Advantage*, Porter corrected these views and became more prescriptive. He argued that there are three generic strategies only (cost leadership, differentiation, and focus) which achieve lasting competitive advantage, a notion transparently modelled on the concept of comparative advantage in classical economics. If they do not want to be 'stuck in the middle' and fail, companies must adopt one of these strategies, irrespective of industry, form, size, business, contingencies or specific situation. Porter also argued that companies should not think of themselves as single units, but as a series of self-contained activities (purchasing, designing, producing, marketing, etc.). These activities form a 'value chain' that must contribute to the value of customers purchases.

As Porter was fleshing out his arguments, Birger Wernerfelt, Jay Barney and others developed a body of research known today as the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. Like Porter's value chain model, but taking into account the specific contingencies of an organisation's situation, RBV theory conceives of firms as collections of internal resources interacting with one another and with the external environment. It posits that competitive success (defined as the ability to obtain above-average financial returns) stems from the existence of one or more valuable tangible or intangible resources or competences that companies exploit. Under some conditions, these valuable resources become competitive advantages. According to Barney, a resource is a sustainable competitive advantage if and only if it is valuable (i.e. at the origin of a value-generating strategy), rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (i.e. for which there is no direct substitute or equivalent). RBV theory challenges aspects of Porter's model since it insists on the existence and importance of firms' specificities. Nonetheless, RBV theory remains compatible with Porter's overall approach to business studies because it builds on the intertwined assumptions, commonly accepted within economics, that in efficient markets prices of goods include all available information and that superior rate of returns can be obtained only on the basis on information (or resource) that is not available publicly.

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Although critics disagree about what constitutes sustainable competitive advantages and at what level (firm, business unit or corporation) they can be obtained, Porter's, Wernerfelt's and Barney's views have met with extraordinary success. The RBV of the firm is now the leading theory of competitive advantage, providing support to a vast amount of empirical research and numerous theoretical developments. Combined with Porter's views, RBV theory forms the substance of Strategic Management courses taught in management schools around the globe. Success has in fact been such that the notion of competitive advantage has achieved cult status. All over the world, management consultants and managers invest considerable time and effort into identifying, creating and leveraging competitive advantages. Today, no self-respecting corporate executive or political adviser delivers a keynote address without the expression 'competitive advantage' or 'competitive strategy'.

According to Porter, then, superior performance arises from following one of three generic strategies, either of which hinges on one or more superior value chain activities or combination thereof. According to the RBV of the firm, superior performance comes from one or more competitive advantages which are broadly defined as inimitable and idiosyncratic resources. Being rooted in economics, these ideas are advanced with the backing and scholarly apparatus of social science. As such, they qualify for a critical scrutiny informed by Popper's work.

For all its academic popularity, it is rather amusing, not to say absurd, to hear teachers claim that superior performance results from inimitable resources. Indeed, if competitive advantages really are inimitable, then even the best-educated and knowledgeable managers cannot reproduce them and create superior performance. More generally, if superior performance comes from the careful development of strategies, resources, skills and systems which are specific to the organisation that is fortunate to have them, then identifying and teaching these strategies, resources, skills and systems is self-contradicting, for by being more common these features lose their interest.[46]

These comments are not as superficial as they appear because they point to difficulties relating to the theoretical foundations of RBV theory and the way these are tested empirically. As Thomas Powell observed, after identifying an organisation which has achieved superior performance, strategy researchers look for competitive advantages, that is, for such specific resources as cultural aspects, processes, skills, technology or any combination of these, which are the source of the superior performance.[47] As per RBV theory, these competitive advantages must exist, for, if not, the observed superior performance cannot be explained. Once suitably analysed, these distinctive resources are used as causal explanations for the superior performance. This way of proceeding illustrates that, owing to the nature of RBV theory, when strategy researchers conduct their fieldwork they can look only for confirmation of their theory.

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Moreover, the evidence adduced for the existence of one or more competitive advantages is *always* an after-the-fact finding: competitive advantages are exclusively identified within organisations that achieve superior performance. This means that these competitive advantages cannot, in and of themselves, explain superior performance. Put differently, saying that an organisation is successful because it has one or several competitive advantages amounts to the trivial tautology which says that the organisation is successful because it is successful. Well, yes.

When strategy researchers believe they are testing the empirical validity of competitive advantage theory, they are merely validating a proposition (competitive advantages explain superior performance) which is, by its theoretical construction, invulnerable to falsification. This general problem is made obvious when one looks more closely at the definitions of superior performance strategies, competitive advantages and valuable resources outlined earlier. According to RBV theory, (1) organisations must develop superior performance strategies which leverage their competitive advantages, (2) a competitive advantage is a resource valuable to the organisation that exploits it, and (3) a resource is valuable if it is at the origin of a value-creating strategy. In other words, organisations must develop superior performance strategies which result in superior performance. This finding is neither exceptional nor artificial. As Richard Priem and John Butler have shown, when the central terms in the basic statements of RBV theory are replaced with their respective definitions, the result is tautologies.[48]

Although vigorously disputed in the literature, Powell's, Priem's and Butler's arguments have been found to withstand criticism and remain in need of convincing answers. Indeed, they do: to date, no one has observed or looked for companies which have achieved superior performance but do not have competitive advantages. This is not an oversight on the part of strategic management academics, because the very possibility of superior performance in the absence of competitive advantages is explicitly excluded by RBV theory.[49] Resource-based propositions about superior performance are unfalsifiable because they are circular by construction. More damaging still, the very existence of competitive advantages is untenable because it can be argued only through a backward inference from the (observed) superior performance. The basic constructs that lie at the core of strategic management research are unobservable: as opposed to economics' comparative advantages, strategic management's competitive advantages do not exist as tangible entities that can be discovered by strategy researchers in the way buried treasures can. When academics claim they have identified a given organisation's competitive advantages, they do not propose empirical discoveries. In Powell's damning words, their findings have the same import as observations of shapes in cloud formations.

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As one would expect from reputable strategic management academics, Powell, Priem and Butler have tried to salvage their discipline from their own conclusions. Their arguments, however, are as unanswerable as they are devastating. Explanations made in terms of invisible causes are necessarily circular. They are tautological, since the alleged cause cannot be separated conceptually (only definitionally) from its observed effect. The same irretrievable weakness lies behind Porter's competitive forces and generic strategies: they cannot have any causal power since they are inferred backwards from the phenomena they purport to explain. Any explanation made in their terms is bound to be tautological and so unfalsifiable. Further, Porter's prediction that companies that try to compete on both cost and quality will unavoidably fail has been falsified convincingly by Toyota Motor Corporation.

Although they originated in economics, Porter's ideas and the RBV of the firm do not meet Popper's criteria for science. The pillars of Strategic Management are little more than a series of unfalsifiable propositions which appear valuable from afar but collapse under critical scrutiny. In Popper's terms, strategic management forms a textbook example of a pseudo-science which has achieved the prestige and trappings of an academic discipline, but which relies on propositions that escape empirical refutation. If strategic management scholars have benefited from the concept of competitive advantage, practising or aspiring managers will not gain knowledge from it. As Hume and positivists insisted, tautologies are true on their own terms and do not convey information about empirical reality. Should the totem of competitive advantage fall (as it should after the foregoing), there will be little of worth remaining in strategic management, the assumption that identifiable and reproducible management practices have positive effects being core to its current research and education.

The crippling fallacy of unobservable causes is not limited to strategic management. American behaviourist B. F. Skinner indicted scientific psychology decades ago for embracing it. His indictment has been generally ignored by psychologists, especially those in the fields of personality and motivation. For instance, psychologists still assert that extraversion is a personality trait. This assertion ignores the fact that, while extraverted behaviour can be observed, extraversion is an abstraction which itself cannot be observed. In other words, extraversion is a backward inference from observed extraverted behaviour which is given causal powers. How this abstraction acquires or exercises its power is never explained. Nor can it be, since logic requires that all propositions of the form 'x causes y' can be entertained seriously only if x and y are separately identifiable. This can never be the case for such abstractions as extraversion, anxiety, depression, need-achievement, and so on. The

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continued use of these abstractions in psychology is an example of the insensitivity to language and logic which is too often a feature of this discipline.

Furthermore, the idea that people at work are moved into action by mysterious, internal forces has two notable consequences. First, it encourages managers to secure psychological profiles on employees in the hope that, through manipulation of abstractions, they can control them. Second, the idea relieves individuals of their freedom and responsibility since they have few choices in the way they conduct themselves, given that personality and motivational traits 'cause' their behaviour. For reasons just provided, however, explanations derived from personality and motivational abstractions are unfalsifiable and so predictions offered on the same grounds are futile. Most of managerial psychology and all of motivation psychology suffer from this irretrievable conceptual weakness since motives are unobservable private data.

The previous chapter argued that when management research adopts the positivist model of science it lands in insuperable problems, not least stemming from the impossibility, within social science, of respecting the cardinal rules of positivist epistemology. When it turns towards Popper's philosophy of science, however, management research fares hardly better. Indeed, adopting falsifiability as the definition of scientificity leads to dismissing much of current strategic management as useless pseudo-science, or, in less polite terms, academic junk. Some managers and educators will be tempted, therefore, to call for new foundations for management research based on critical rationalism. Unfortunately, this is far too optimistic.

CRITICAL IRRATIONALISM

Popper wanted to do away with induction and verification and replace them with deduction and falsification. He held that theories which turn out to be false confront scientists with new problems to which new solutions are proposed. On his view, this process is the hallmark of scientific progress. However, despite Popper's efforts to depict it as deductive, this process involves induction since it assumes that a theory falsified today will be falsified tomorrow. It is, of course, possible to reply to this criticism with the claim that 'the same test produces the same result'. One of the current authors heard this defence uttered by a disciple of Popper in a seminar devoted to the great man's work. It was immediately followed by a critic who (correctly) pointed out that 'the same test produces the same result' is a tautology. To save Popper's philosophy with a tautology implies that while Popper may (or again may not) have advanced a viable logical theory of scientific discovery, he did not have a theory, which has empirical support, of what scientists do.

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Practising scientists cannot do without induction. Hume's problem of induction is an ever-present challenge.

Contrary to what Popper maintained, scientists typically do not look for falsification. A cursory reading of the scientific literature shows that they seek new empirical evidence to push the explanatory reach of their theories to the limit. When they make observations that contradict a well-accepted theory, scientists do not reject it as a matter of course but seek to explain the discrepancy by revisiting ancillary propositions (what Popper called background knowledge), typically their observations and experimental procedures. In other words, scientific knowledge rarely, if ever, progresses in a burst of creativity which results in the demotion of a given theory. More commonly, there is a gradual and painstaking accumulation of consistent empirical evidence which expands ideas in a new direction and results in the development of a more sophisticated theory. In this respect, Popper confused the logic of science with a distorted and partial reconstruction of its historical development.

Although committed to the correspondence theory of truth, Popper dismissed positivism for its reliance on expectation-free facts, arguing that any observation is necessarily theory-laden. For instance (and on Popper's view), the statement 'this raven is black' assumes that the raven in question continues to exist when unperceived and that there exists something 'out there' to which the proposition refers. An immediate consequence of this comment, one which Popper drew, is that no statement about empirical reality can be received as certain. Indeed, the possibility that an empirical statement is incorrect cannot be ignored, since the theory from which it emerges (and must emerge, according to Popper) must be itself falsifiable, that is, potentially false, if it is to be scientific. In this case, however, the possibility of falsifying scientific theories becomes elusive: if all claims are or emanate from potentially mistaken theories, it is impossible to decide which one is false when two theories contradict each other. Decisive falsification demands verification, in the sense that some claims about empirical reality must be granted unfalsifiable status. Yet this status is precisely what Popper ruled out within the realm of science.

Popper's confusion on these matters is manifest. On the one hand, he recognised that 'no conclusive disproof of a theory can ever be produced'.[50] On the other hand, he insisted that there exist particular propositions about empirical reality like 'there exists a black swan' which can be opposed to universal statements such as 'all swans are white'. Popper's answer to the demarcation problem, and beyond it his entire philosophy of science, hinges on this dichotomy and the asymmetry it generates. It hardly needs saying that these two positions cannot be held simultaneously: either there are purely existential (particular) statements, free of theoretical underpinnings, or there

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are not. Popper, however, alternated between these two incompatible contentions, depending on the point he wanted to argue (making the case for his epistemology or dismissing the positivist one).

As the core of his philosophy of science assumes that scientific truth is unobtainable and consequently scientific theories are at best informed guesses, Popper's arguments demand an extensive rewriting of the history of science. In *Scientific Irrationalism*, David Stove noted that this is precisely what Popper did consistently. Such words as 'knowledge', 'discovery', 'proof' and 'truth' imply progress and certainty: they are success words. For example, 'discover' is a success verb since one cannot discover something that does not exist. 'Invent' is not a success verb since anyone can invent anything (and fail to attract attention). Success words, however, are inconsistent with Popper's thesis. Since it is impossible to write anything about science without employing success words, Popper had to neutralise or replace them with failure words in order to show that science has never achieved any definitive discovery. Under Popper's pen, 'knowledge' becomes 'conjectural knowledge' (an oxymoron, for either one knows or one does not), scientific theories are 'conjectures' or 'guesses' and 'irrefutable', a term which entails the idea of necessary truth, is replaced by 'unfalsifiable' which means 'consistent with every available observation'.

Expressed differently, Popper's philosophy of science annihilates the very idea of scientific knowledge and collapses into sheer irrationalism. In the absence of truth, everything becomes possible. Popper's habit of neutralising success words with quotation marks enabled him to argue that while science cannot yield truths, it has 'progressed'. Furthermore, Stove noted that Popper's ideas were expressed initially in a book, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, the title of which contradicts its contents since Popper concluded that there can be no logic of scientific discovery. Popper's work thus epitomises what Stove called the Jazz Age in the philosophy of science, a movement typical of an era of cultural and intellectual upheaval during which conventions inherited from the Victorian period were either dismissed wholesale or turned on their head. The motto of the day, in 1934 Vienna as in Cole Porter's musical premiered the same year, was *Anything Goes*.

For his defence, Popper wrote in a period coming to terms with the fall of the scientific world view that dominated all others for centuries: Newtonian physics. After Einstein, time and space are no longer absolute; the passage of time, in particular, is relative to the speed of whoever measures it. Planets do not move in orbits around the Sun. Rather, they move in straight lines that close on themselves because mass (like that of the Sun) warps the space-time continuum. If this was not enough, quantum physics' indeterminacy principle has destroyed what was perhaps the firmest bastion of common-sense understanding of the world: ascertaining the speed of a moving object means

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abandoning the possibility of calculating its position precisely and vice versa. Although it makes no sense intuitively, quantum objects are not objects, according to the 'natural' understanding of the term, but are simultaneously particles (i.e. localised 'things') and waves (i.e. 'things' that have no precise localisation and which structure the medium in which they move). The simplest elements of reality are revealed as not having an unambiguous tangible existence. Natural science seems mistaken in its most fundamental assumptions. The positivist emperor has no clothes – or so it seems.

Even in this context, however, Stove's conclusion that Popper was erring into scientific irrationalism is difficult to resist. Indeed, writing as a philosopher and promoter of science, Popper offered the astonishing view that science can never claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it, such as probability. If, as Popper asserted, science is neither a system of well-established statements nor a system which steadily advances towards the truth, one is justified in wondering whether scientific investigation has any point at all. How can scientific tests help scientists in their search for the truth if they admit beforehand the impossibility of ever finding it? Or, in cruder terms, why should scientists even bother to test their theories? Is it not the case that any theory will remain as 'conjectural' after testing as it was before?

Stove argued that Popper and his numerous fans embraced irrationalism about science because of an extreme belief about what is required for one statement to be a reason to believe another. Popper was convinced that absolute certainty is impossible, but he simultaneously assumed that only absolute certainty allows scientists to talk of rational belief. He thus exhibited what Stove called a 'disappointed perfectionism', a standpoint which leads to an irresponsible, frivolous levity and which has fuelled irrationalism, relativism, and a general decline of intellectual standards, especially in the social sciences. In this respect, Popper forgot that if science is an enterprise aiming at providing humans with a picture, even imperfect, of their environment, it has little choice but to start from a humble encounter with what it is meant to describe and advance prudent inductive inferences therefrom. Despite positivism's limitations, science is positivist or it is not science: positivist science's theories are perhaps incapable of demonstration, as Hume wrote of causation, but there are no others available. If it is impossible to demonstrate that flames burn, putting one's hand in the fire is just too painful.

Popper has been called a romantic rationalist because he saw scientists as heroic figures developing audacious, creative theories which are to be thrown into the world and subjected to attack. Throughout Popper's work, there are images of scientists imposing their theories on nature and awaiting nature's response. Popper extolled fierce competition between theories, bold conjectures and imaginative criticism. Popperian scientists pursue an elusive

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journey in which they heroically try to narrow the gap between their finite conjectures and their infinite goals. They need courage and determination to accept the view that they should never rely on any theory because no theory can be shown to be true. Rather than defend their favourite theories by confirming instances, they are invited to see them as bold guesses in the game of science. With Popper, the search for truth has therefore given way to a sort of artistic activity accomplished by strong-willed, creative, individuals, more da Vinci than Newton. If Popper's vision is justified, then, rather than accepting 'the scientist' as their model, managers might do better to accept 'the artist' as their hero. To explore this possibility, managers need to understand the principles of the artistic endeavour. It is to these matters that the next chapters are dedicated.

NOTES

1. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (hereafter LScD). London: Routledge Classics, 2002, Section 4. The expression 'pseudo-science' does not appear in LScD but in the later *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (hereafter CR). London: Routledge, 1996 (see for instance Section 1.I). References are made to section and subsection numbers.
2. The arguments presented in the last versions of LScD and CR are in the main indistinguishable; the language in which they are offered varies slightly and the respective space dedicated to them sometimes differ, however. As far as content goes, the only notable difference between CR and LScD is that the former proposes historical details that help locating Popper's thought in its intellectual background.
3. LScD 10.
4. CR 11.2; LScD 4. These are Popper's arguments. Many have disagreed with them (especially Willard Van Orman Quine) but their rejoinders do not need to be exposed to prosecute the main thesis of this chapter.
5. This point, developed at length in sections 80–83 of LScD, is put succinctly in Appendix *vii of the same work. Quantum physics, a revolution in Popper's early career, proposes a probabilistic view of the world. Popper's meticulous and lengthy development against the probabilistic defence of induction is to be received in this context.
6. LScD 1.
7. CR 1.VIII.
8. CR 1.IV; Appendix *x (1) of LScD is dedicated to this theme.
9. CR 1.I; LScD 79 proposes further developments on this theme.
10. LScD 15; CR Introduction XVI.
11. CR 1.V; see also the 1959 Preface to LScD.
12. CR 15.1.
13. The two quotations are from CR 1.I.
14. CR 1.I.

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15. CR Introduction XV. See also *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962; hereafter OSE), Volume II, Chapter 24 II.

16. LScD 9 is largely dedicated to this theme.

17. CR 3.5. The notion only appears briefly in LScD (in one of the appendices added to the last version, Appendix *ix).

18. These definitions are provided in LScD 31–35.

19. Cf. LScD 79–85.

20. UQ 16.

21. LScD 30; see also CR 15.1: '[the method of trial and error is fundamentally] the method used by living organisms in the process of adaptation'. Early on, Popper compared the growth of scientific knowledge to Darwinian evolution, but later compared natural selection to his explanation for the growth of scientific knowledge. In any case, calling 'Darwinian' the competition between theories implies that scientific knowledge grows from random mutations; while Popper's first books appear to accept this implication, his later ones rather oppose it.

22. 'We must not look upon science as a "body of knowledge," but rather as a system of hypotheses; that is to say, as a system of guesses' (LScD Appendix *i).

23. LScD 30.

24. LScD 85 (the book's last sentences).

25. See OSE II Addendum 1–3.

26. Cf. CR 10.2, especially 10.2.X and XI.

27. OSE II Addendum 5.

28. CR 10.2.XII.

29. These arguments have been extracted from Chapters I and II of Popper, K. R. 1982. *The Open Universe: An Argument for Indeterminism*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield. See also Chapter 6 ('Of Clouds and Clocks') of Popper, K. R. 1979. *Objective Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

30. Popper, *The Open Universe*, 22.

31. OSE II 13; see also OU 15–19.

32. Popper, *The Open Universe*, 31 and 130 (last page of the essay titled 'Indeterminism is not enough' added to the 1982 edition). That the universe is infinite is important to Popper because, if the universe was finite, the problem of induction could be addressed through probabilistic solutions. Popper supported these considerations with a metaphysical theory (the existence of three connected yet separate 'Worlds') that does not need to be discussed here.

33. OSE II Addendum 18.

34. See p. vii ('Historical Note') of *The Poverty of Historicism*, Boston, MA: The Beacon Press, 1957.

35. OSE II Addendum 17.

36. OSE I 3. See the chapter on Plato earlier in the present volume for a discussion on Plato's ideal State.

37. OSE II 12.I–VII. NB: this is *Popper's* account of Hegel's philosophy of history – the question whether is it a fair one is moot in the context of the present discussion.

38. See OSE II 15 for Popper's definition of Vulgar Marxism.

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39. OSE II 13–21. Same caveat as for Popper's presentation of Hegelianism: Popper's reading of Marx (summarised here) is only his.

40. *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston, MA: The Beacon Press, 1957) Sections 29–31; See also CR 14.V–IX and OSE II 14.

41. OSE I 9.

42. OSE I 10.

43. OSE II 21 and Addendum 12ff. See also Popper's essay entitled 'Models, Instruments, and Truth', Chapter 8 of *The Myth of the Social Framework* (London: Routledge, 1993).

44. OSE II 25 and Addendum 4–11.

45. Cf. LScD 82.

46. Donaldson, L. 2002. Damned by Our Own Theories: Contradictions between Theories and Management Education. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(1): 96–106.

47. Powell, T. C. 2001. Competitive Advantage: Logical and Philosophical Considerations. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22(9): 875–88. See notably pp. 882–85.

48. Priem, R. L. & Butler, J. E. 2001. Is the Resource-Based Theory a Useful Perspective for Strategic Management Research? *Academy of Management Review*, 26(1): 22–40 (see p. 27). See also Priem, R. L. & Butler, J. E. 2001. Tautology in the Resource-Based View and Implications of Externally Determined Resource Value: Further Comments. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(1): 57–66.

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50. LScD 2 p. 8.

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Chapter 8

German Romanticism

Managing Artistically

Positivism and its 'official opposition', critical rationalism, do not provide answers to Hume's challenge to empirical science, namely the problem of induction. Inductive inferences, such as scientific theories, are not certain descriptions of empirical reality. Although disturbing, perhaps even frightening, this is not entirely a negative outcome. Indeed, acknowledging that the future is unknowable admits the possibility of changing it. Hume's corrosive conclusions indirectly plead for a revaluation of what science ignores or dismisses, such as aesthetic experience, emotions, intentions, subjectivity and freedom. Such a revaluation was rigorously pursued in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany to the point where it transformed Western thinking and changed the course of European history. If the jury is still unable to decide whether this change has been for the better or the worse, one verdict is indisputable: management students and managers ignore Romanticism, as this movement is called, to their cost.

THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT

By the end of the seventeenth century, the momentum of the scientific revolution which had started in the wake of the Renaissance was showing no sign of abating. In astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, optics and electrostatics, momentous developments multiplied. Crowning the successes of early modern science, Newton accomplished the seemingly impossible by unifying, through a set of elegant formulae, the movements of everyday objects and celestial bodies. As Bacon and Descartes predicted, Western man was on his way to becoming master and possessor of nature. In 1660, under the patronage of Charles II, the first scientific society, the Royal Society of London for

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Improving Natural Knowledge, was established and presided over by Newton from 1703 until his death in 1727. Its French counterpart, the *Académie des Sciences*, was formed in 1666 by Louis XIV. The days of Galileo's trial and house arrest were long gone. The church would not interfere this time.

Although opposed on many subjects, the French and English philosophers and scientists of the eighteenth century shared a few central beliefs, distant legacies of Plato and Aristotle. As exemplified in the Royal Society's motto *nullius in verba* ('on the word of no one'), they agreed that the world is a given and that reason based upon experimentation will eventually lead to a complete understanding of it. Criticising rationalist philosophers like Descartes, who theorised from first principles, they saw in Locke's philosophy the equivalent of Newton's physics. Knowledge comes from the systematic study of what exists, from the light of the one great book of nature to which man belongs. All questions can be answered, because there are methods available by which they can be provided. Moreover, all answers will prove to be compatible with one another, for the world is structured, stable and predictable. Plato's dream was within reach and Western humanity was leaving the darkness of its medieval cave. The Enlightenment had begun.

If the Enlightenment's optimistic program found its most receptive echo in France, where it was promoted in the salons of the aristocratic and wealthy, it was accepted in one form or another by all European political, intellectual, artistic and social elites. In their methodical study of man and his affairs, the French *philosophes* included legal and political systems (Montesquieu), history (Voltaire, Montesquieu), psychology (Voltaire, Vauvenargues), language (Condillac), economic life, agriculture, arts, trade and the crafts. Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert compiled the result of these momentous efforts in their *Encyclopédie*, which they published to popular acclaim between 1751 and 1772. Although committed to the existence of a divine entity, some of the *philosophes* aimed at universality through the uncoupling of morality and theology. The rationalisation and secularisation of the Christian ethics, what Alasdair MacIntyre has called 'the Enlightenment project', was perhaps the most ambitious component of their agenda. On their view, morality promotes respect, equality and dignity, values upon which rest peace and harmony. Universality, objectivity, fidelity, symmetry, standards, discipline and rationality were the main themes of this confident program. Art belonged to this vision if it represented and glorified nature. Once knowledge of men's goals and of their inner workings was established, a just and prosperous society would follow automatically. Agreeable to all men because arrived at through a rational, secularised, science-like approach, this society would promote literature, toleration and freedom of expression. The most tangible manifestations of the Enlightenment project are the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century and their respective political manifestos, which

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survive in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in Paris by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948.

The fight against superstition and the push for secularisation led some to embrace atheism and materialism. Physician Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709–1751) argued that man is a machine, whose behaviour is determined by its nature and directed towards the satisfaction of sensual pleasures. Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), tried to show that one could combine virtue and atheism. He saw the world as a huge automaton the evolution of which is ruled by natural and inexorable laws of cause and effect, in which the behaviour of human beings is determined. Society is like a large clock made of cogs in motion. In this outline, scientific progress, which provides ever deeper insights into the working of the social machine, can be safely equated with social progress.

Extreme views usually call for their opposites and such was the case with those of de la Mettrie and d'Holbach. In his *Julie or the New Heloise* (1761), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) caricatured d'Holbach in the figure of Wolmar, a rich atheist proud to embody the Christian graces. Julie, his young wife, is fatally torn between her love for the young but poor Saint-Preux and her marital commitment. Modern civilisation, then, despite or because of scientific progress, is a corrupting enterprise which alienates man from his natural state of innocence, purity and freedom. Although the novel was an immense literary success, Rousseau's underlying message was not heeded. Rather, most of his contemporaries celebrated science as a liberating and civilising endeavour. In this context, it is little wonder that Hume's scepticism fell on deaf ears. Hume's and Rousseau's views, however, stimulated German philosophers to engage with them, if only to overcome their problems.

THE GERMAN ENLIGHTENMENT

Although sharing the *philosophes*' general program, the German thinkers of the eighteenth century were under the spell of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), mathematician and considerable, if epistolary, philosopher. As can be expected from a mathematician, Leibniz (like Descartes for the same reason) was a rationalist and he held that everything that happens follows a continuous series of causes. While these causes are generally assumed to be material, they are in fact spiritual. This means that for every fact there is a cause as to why it is so and not otherwise and there is no fundamental difference between cause and reason. The universe is, for Leibniz, composed entirely of irreducible force centres, also called souls or monads. These monads are the ultimate substantial form of being and exist in harmony with

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inferior powers called bodies. This pre-established harmony between body and soul addresses the problem of the interaction between the two. Moreover, since God is the reason or cause for everything and since He is good and perfect, then, as Leibniz famously proclaimed in *Theodicy* (1710), this must be the best of all the possible worlds He could create.

Leibniz's influence over the German Enlightenment is particularly visible in the work of Christian Wolff (1679–1754). Wolff, who started his academic career teaching physics and mathematics, quickly emerged as his country's leading philosophical figure during and shortly after his lifetime. He was also the first to provide Germans with a systematic philosophy in their language (Leibniz wrote mostly in Latin and French). In *Rational Ideas of God, the World and the Soul of Man* (1719), Wolff argued that all explanations can be provided in terms of sufficient causes or reasons, as Leibniz taught. Consciousness is itself a simple substance but, since reasons are causes and vice-versa, consciousness can attain certainty in the fields of physics and metaphysics. This means that consciousness possesses active power, since it can represent the world to itself, to penetrate what Wolff called 'the law of nature'. Reason can be reconciled with religion and Wolff spent much of his career attempting to demonstrate this reconciliation. He thought, for instance, that miracles can be explained logically by supposing that when Christ turned water into wine, he was applying superior chemical knowledge that was available to him alone. In any case, reason can apprehend essences which philosophers *qua* philosophers are condemned to study. Their task is to assist students in forming the clear and distinct ideas from which the world can be understood, following the (mathematical) rules of deductive reasoning.

Like Descartes and Leibniz before him, Wolff wanted to submit theology to rational scrutiny. He saw in reason and consciousness higher authorities than faith or revelation. In this, he was a faithful follower of the French *philosophes* even if he did not espouse their materialism and atheism. Less perceptive theologians did not see it that way, however. Despite Wolff's repeated and undoubtedly sincere commitments to God's existence, they accused him of determinism and godlessness. So vehement was the indignation of Wolff's Pietist colleagues that Frederick William I deprived him of his professorship at Halle University in 1723 and ordered him to leave Prussia within two days under the pain of death. After a stint in Marburg, Wolff was recalled to Halle in 1740 by Frederick II (1712–1786). Like his father, Fredrick II was an autocrat, but unlike his father he was receptive to philosophy and wrote several treatises (including one in which he argued against Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a book he read as a preparation for rulership). A very successful military commander, he also proved to be a generous and tolerant patron of the arts, accepting that the personal convictions of a ruler should not bear on those of his people. Seeing in the French thinkers a source of inspiration and a model

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for the German intelligentsia, he corresponded with Voltaire for almost fifty years. The *philosophe*, who was not a democrat, saw in the monarch a model for enlightened despots. Neither of them lived to know that German thinkers would reject their favourite ideas.

THE FIRST ATTACK ON THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Owing to the rationalist influences of Leibniz and Wolff, eighteenth-century German philosophers were less concerned with empirical investigations and more involved with metaphysical speculation than their French counterparts. They were also more receptive to Hume's arguments about the limits of strict empiricism. Notable in this regard are Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803).

Hamann despised the French Enlightenment and those who were under its sway. He translated Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in 1780 and enlisted its author as an ally in his rejection of pure, cold rationality. He agreed with Hume that there can be no such thing as rational belief so that, in all essential matters, reason is subordinate to faith. Contrary to the views of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, Hamann insisted that there are alternatives to science, rational language, cause and effect relationships, materialism and atheism. A man of intense religious convictions, he was convinced that literature and poetry are not rational enterprises. Homer and Shakespeare were men of genius whereas scientists are mere 'reasoners', unreceptive to divine revelation. While he was prepared to acknowledge that human beings use reason, Hamann was not willing to accept that there is a *thing* called 'reason'. Reasoning is only one of many human activities with which men attempt to find their place in the world and it is not necessarily the best. Hamann is hence one of the first philosophers – if such they can be called – who argue that philosophy deals with unreal problems created by the misuse of language.[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein would later make much of this line of argument.

In 1771, the Berlin Academy offered a prize for the best answer to the question of the origin of language. The winner was Johann Herder's essay 'Treatise on the Origin of Language'. Since Plato, the dominating view in Western philosophy has been that the mind is a substance which houses perceptions, feelings and ideas. Herder rejected this notion and argued that the mind is the dialogue within.[2] Against Descartes, he held that self-consciousness is not a personal possession which directs human action. Rather, 'perceiving', 'reasoning', 'feeling' are words which stand for different ways of using language. As language is a public phenomenon, self-consciousness is a form of communication in which humans talk to others and to themselves.

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If this is the case, then people's actions, not their thoughts, express their true nature. A work of science or art is an expression of the character of the individual scientist or artist who created it. Contrary to the view of the *philosophes*, the individual creator of a product, no matter how humble, cannot be ignored. A painting, for example, cannot be judged abstractly against a mythical idea of Beauty: the painting cannot be separated from the painter. Art, as life, is an expression of the artist; it is a statement about the artist's character, not a disinterested and faithful representation of nature.

Herder accepted Hume' argument that causal knowledge cannot be established formally and applied it to the study of history. He concluded that when historians assume the existence of mechanical causes in history, they are engaged, not in historical analysis, but in metaphysical speculation. Opposing the idea that reality is governed by objective laws that can be discovered through rational analysis, he thought that every historical era, nation, group and person is unique and cannot be reduced to a standard model or be described according to universal rules. What is needed is not an attempt to construct a unified science, but the study of differences in history, politics, ethics and aesthetics, all fields in which Herder's ideas were to be influential.

Rather than logic or metaphysics, Herder held that historical, environmental, geographical and psychological factors mould human behaviour. There can be no general or universal standards by which philosophers can judge political, social, historical or aesthetic theories. As these subjects are studied through the medium of language and since there are many different languages by which men attempt to understand the world, there can be no superordinate language with which universal standards can be created and assessed. This is especially true of morality: as creatures of value, human beings cannot be studied according to the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences. It is impossible to develop a universal system of values, since each human group must strive through action and its language to pursue its own ideals. These ideals vary necessarily from group to group and no real understanding can bridge the gap between them. There are French values and there are German values; try as they may, the French cannot understand German values and Germans cannot understand French values. This does not result, for Herder, in value relativism in which all value systems are treated equally. Rather, he acknowledged and promoted value pluralism since authentic human beings maintain that their value system is superior to others.[3]

If human beings cannot be separated from the groups which spawned them and the language which defines them, then the differences between groups and their languages are too great to be surmounted. Voltaire and Hume were wrong in assuming that human beings are the same in all times and places. Peoples from different historical periods vary significantly in their beliefs, values and conduct. Efforts to draw them into a universal 'enlightened'

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civilisation are doomed to failure: the project of the Enlightenment cannot succeed. Worse, it is a dangerous delusion since it isolates people from their roots, supports and purposes. Universalism must give way to particularism and cosmopolitanism to nationalism. The very idea that a progressive and harmonious world based on scientific reason can in principle be created is a secular form of religion, a dangerous utopian ideal which condemns individuals to a new servitude.

European rationalism and the ideals of the *philosophes* never fully recovered from Herder's attacks. His doctrines gave courage and philosophical support to those poets, playwrights and thinkers who wanted to escape from the atmosphere of the Enlightenment, its suffocating cult of reason and its stifling canons which imposed, for instance, that plays have only one plot, take place in one unique location and within the timespan of a single day. German authors were ready to embrace Herder's views, especially his rejection of scientific objectivity and condemnation of universalism. The exaltation of nature, subjectivity, sentimentality and emotional instability had been central themes during the *Storm and Stress* period in German literature and music, which developed between 1760 and 1780. Among the influential figures of this short-lived but extremely popular movement, are Schiller and the young Goethe.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) established his literary reputation as a novelist of sensibility with the publication in 1774 of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Werther is a young man who is in love with a married woman and can see no way out of his terrible suffering. To escape from the appalling tragedy of a life in which love is compromised by convention and feelings by law, he commits a violent act of self-assertion: suicide. Rationality is unable to solve the problems of conflict, tragedy and death. Throughout Germany, young men committed suicide in Werther's name because, like him, they despaired of such an existence. In the classical plays of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), rational solutions to the problem of love are always found. To the poets and playwrights of the *Storm and Stress* movement, these plays are inauthentic because life is a struggle for power and human reason is impotent before it. Echoing Rousseau's idea that humans are born free but everywhere are in chains, these authors emphasised the need for defiance in the face of the tragedy of human existence. This emphasis is obvious in Schiller's play, *The Robbers*.

Johann Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) was a close friend of Goethe. *The Robbers* is a play about resolute defiance and the ambiguous nature of personal liberty. The central character, Karl Moor, is the leader of a robber gang who abandons his sick father, kills his mistress and causes grief to those around him. He is finally caught and executed for his crimes. The play, although wildly successful, was regarded as subversive and a threat

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to public morals, even though Schiller understandably found it difficult to reconcile success with subversion. Moor's actions cannot be condoned and yet audiences saw something admirable in his rejection of the social order. Willingly or not, Schiller had put his finger on what became central themes in nineteenth-century literature, namely the superiority of personal commitment, determination and freedom over intellect in life, the inevitable collision of wills in human affairs and the admiration for individuals of strong will.

Once primacy is granted to the will and secondary status is assigned to the intellect, the power of the will takes over truth and rationality. These conceptions were to become central to the later phases of Romanticism. Ironically, they were to receive seemingly unassailable philosophical support in the works of a thinker who thought of the romantics as intellectually lazy, third-rate poets. This philosopher is Immanuel Kant, for many one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Although treating Kant's work in a few paragraphs cannot do justice to its scope and significance, something must be said about it because he played a crucial role in the evolution of Romantic thought.

IMMANUEL KANT: RELUCTANT ROMANTIC

Born in the Prussian city of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad in Russia) in 1724, Kant spent his life in that city and died there in 1804. He studied a wide variety of subjects, including physics, mathematics and astronomy. After working briefly as a family tutor, he was appointed, in 1770, to a professorship in logic and metaphysics at his city's University (Kant also published in astronomy, a field where he made a notable discovery about the nature of Earth's rotation, namely that it slows down because of the frictional resistance against tidal currents). Raised as a pietist, he lived the life of a conservative bachelor and devoted himself to promoting the ideas of personal freedom, responsibility and duty. Legend has it that he rose at 5.00 in the morning, spent an hour drinking tea and smoking while planning his day's activities, lectured from 7.00 to 9.00 am and wrote until lunch. In the afternoon he would take his famous punctual walk. Fact or fiction, this was a successful routine: by the time he turned fifty, Kant was a respected and accomplished academic, widely admired for his brilliant lectures and moral seriousness.

Kant's name is often cited today for the way he attempted to secularise Christian ethics to make it acceptable for believers and atheists alike – a move typical of the French Enlightenment that Kant admired. He held that to act morally, one needs to act freely for without freedom there can be no responsibility. Any act performed out of desire, feeling, necessity or coercion is not moral, since it is meant to achieve a specific end and therefore does not admit the freedom to do otherwise. According to Kant, to be moral is to

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act with no other reward than the intrinsic satisfaction of obeying one's duty, what Kant called the categorical imperative. In the widely quoted *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, he provided two definitions of this imperative: 'One is to act only on the maxim which one is ready to accept as a universal law' and 'treat people as ends, never as means to ends'. Modern deontology is much indebted to these now consensual formulations.

Although influential, these views do not justify by themselves Kant's place in the firmament of philosophy. If he achieved philosophical fame, it is mainly because Kant has been the first seriously to appreciate the ominous significance of Hume's attack on empirical science. Western philosophy would never be the same once Kant read Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, woke from his dogmatic Newtonian 'slumber' and assigned to himself the task of finding answers to its sceptical conclusions.

Hume had argued that causation, when considered empirically, is a fiction, a product of the association of ideas. Neither reason nor experience can validate the idea of a necessary connection between cause and effect: 'necessity' cannot be experienced through any of the five senses and neither can it be demonstrated logically. Worse, the common-sense belief in a material world which continues to exist even when it is not perceived is neither empirically nor logically valid. In other words, if the empiricist policy of only allowing as legitimate an idea which can be traced back to a sense datum is accepted, there can be no empirical science. Although he accepted Hume's argument that causation cannot be validated by the data of the senses, Kant believed that his conclusions were 'hasty and wrong' and set out to rescue empirical science from Hume's attack.[4]

Kant agreed with Locke and Hume that there cannot be innate ideas in the Cartesian sense of something known prior to sense experience, but he nonetheless refused to accept that all knowledge is originally empirical. That is, while accepting Hume's analytic-synthetic distinction, Kant did not accept that all synthetic propositions are known only through experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), he held that, although knowledge cannot go beyond sense data, it is in part prior to and thus not exclusively inferred inductively from experience. This is so because there exist a priori synthetic propositions: the categories of the understanding.

When one assumes, with Hume, that knowledge must conform to the objects of the world as they are perceived, one ends in solipsistic failure since only that exists which can be experienced. To avoid this outcome, Kant inverted Hume's assumption and argued that objects must conform to men's knowledge of them. If causation is 'incapable of demonstration', it is because it cannot be found in the world of experience. That, however, does not mean it does not exist, because causation is a 'fact' of life (and a crucial concept in Newtonian physics). Rather, it means that causation is

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imposed by human beings on the world they experience. Both Descartes and Hume were mistaken. Humans neither engage the world through their consciousness of it nor respond passively to impressions conveyed by the senses. Rather, they organise the world through their apparatus of sensibility and understanding and raw sense data are ordered into coherent experience through the workings of the mind and its categories. According to Kant, human understanding is structured along twelve categories which he divided into four sets of three: (1) of quantity: unity, plurality totality; (2) of quality: reality; negation, limitation; (3) of relation: substance-and-accident, cause-and-effect, reciprocity; (4) of modality: possibility, existence, necessity. Kant held these categories to be a priori synthetic propositions, that is, true a priori, because inscribed in the minds of people, yet synthetic for being the very means and perspectives through which the world is perceived and understood.

In other words, unlike Plato and Descartes who claimed that humans are born with ideas in the mind, or Locke and Hume who argued that the mind is a blank slate on which experiences etch themselves, Kant argued that the mind is structured like a machine which analyses sense data in terms of immutable rules to produces ideas. That causation is incapable of logical or empirical demonstration is no longer a concern, since, as far as people's understanding and experience of the world is concerned, causation is impressed on and a necessary part of their reality. The human world is the result of categories imposed by the mind and not the other way around. This is Kant's self-proclaimed 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy: humans are again the centre of his universe. At the same time, if the phenomenal world of experience is conditioned by the human categories of understanding, it follows that there must be a world that is unconditioned – the noumenal world, the world as it is in itself – undistorted by the intervention of human beings.

Kant's philosophy strikes many people with the force of revelation. Some of his contemporaries were attracted to his emphasis on human freedom and the power of the mind to structure and give meaning to the phenomenal world. They realised that Kantianism released them from the tyranny of the mechanic materialism of the Enlightenment since it liberated them from the idea that, physically and psychologically, they are puppets pushed and pulled by forces they cannot control. Others, however, were unconvinced by the contrast between the knowable world of experience and the unknowable world and they quickly attempted in their diverse ways to improve Kant's system. First in this queue was Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), an unruly, difficult, energetic and proud critic of Kantianism who nevertheless saw himself as his master's legitimate successor. His ideas were to have a profound influence on German philosophy and dramatic consequences for European politics.

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JOHANN FICHTE: THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE WILL

After an unsatisfactory episode as a private tutor in Warsaw, Fichte decided in 1791 to walk to Königsberg to meet Kant whose works he had been studying. The old man sent him packing but Fichte determined to earn his favours by writing a self-introductory essay. The strategy worked: Kant was so impressed that he arranged for the manuscript to be sold to his publisher and the book appeared in 1792 as an *Essay towards a Critique of All Revelation* without Fichte's name on the front cover. Its readers attributed it to Kant who declined the compliment and praised the young Fichte. Within two years, Goethe recommended Fichte for a professorship in philosophy at Jena where he quickly aroused the ire of his colleagues and students because of his abrasive manners and radical opinions. Never one to compromise, Fichte even incurred the displeasure of Kant who publicly dissociated his philosophy from that of his hot-headed disciple. Fichte left Jena in 1799 under a charge of atheism and repaired to Berlin where he resumed his writing and lecturing. In 1810, the University of Berlin was founded and Fichte was appointed dean of the philosophy department. He died four years later from typhus caught from his wife who had been nursing sick soldiers.

To the moment of his death, Fichte never stopped working on his philosophy, which he called *Wissenshaftlehre* (the science of knowledge) and to which he dedicated most of his books. Fichte's philosophy is a response to Kant's view that there is a phenomenal, causally determined world and a noumenal world of freedom. Fichte could not understand how the two worlds interact and was unimpressed by Kant's assumption that there is a causal relationship between them. If causality is imposed by the mind on the noumenal world to create the world of everyday experience, then it is human and subjective in its origin. The noumenal world – the world as it is in itself – cannot be the cause of anything.

Kant's inability to explain convincingly how his two worlds interact can be remedied by the elimination of one or the other. That is, one can build a philosophy either from the external world to the human experience of it or work from human experience back out to the external world. Causal determinism awaits those who work from outside in; freedom is embraced by those who work from inside out. Whatever the case, there can be only one first principle, not two. Philosophers, Fichte argued, have nothing to work with beyond experience. From experience they can identify separately 'the thing' and 'consciousness of the thing' which are inseparably connected. If philosophers omit the thing, they retain consciousness as a basis for explaining experience; if they omit consciousness, they retain the thing and end up with materialistic determinism. The first procedure Fichte called *idealism*, the second *dogmatism*.

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Fichte recognised that neither position is demonstrable but was in no doubt that philosophers who are worthy of the name will present themselves as free human beings and so commit themselves, by a free choice, to idealism. 'What sort of philosophy one chooses depends [...] on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can reject or accept as we wish; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it. A person indolent by nature or dulled and distorted by mental servitude, learned luxury and vanity will never raise himself to the level of idealism'.[5] Kant had tried to find a middle path between idealism and dogmatism. Fichte was not prepared to allow human freedom to be compromised by such a manoeuvre and made his choice. If dogmatism is to be resisted, philosophers must accept that the world is constituted not of preexisting objects for knowledge but of 'posits' or affirmations of will. Fichte affirmed 'I' and that which is opposed to 'I'. In short, he argued that the so-called external world is nothing but the work of consciousness.

Life, for Fichte as it was for Goethe and Schiller, is action. Consciousness of the world proceeds from the need to act. Life cannot depend on contemplative knowledge for there is no such thing as disinterested observation of nature: 'I do not hunger because food is before me, but a thing becomes food for me because I hunger; so I do not act as I do because a certain end is to be attained, but the end becomes mine because I am bound to act in the particular manner by which it may be attained. [. . .] The end does not determine the commandment; but, on the contrary, the primitive purport of the commandment determines the end'.[6] The source of human action is neither the human body which is conditioned by external forces, nor the passive mind of the empiricists which closes in on itself. The power to act freely is *will* and the primary datum of consciousness is freedom manifested through willing.

Individuals become conscious of willing when they encounter resistance and their ability to overcome resistance is what is meant by 'character'. Individuals of strong character are those who have a personal history of striving against and overcoming resistances. Humans are the sum of their over-comings and they become aware of their existence when their will collides with the inert natural world or with other people's wills. Character is formed from such collisions, because they are the basic data of experience and encourage individuals to asset their will more strongly. By imposing their will upon the world, they structure, give meaning to and master it in the way in which great artists impose their wills on marble, canvas or paper to mould the world in their image. One's world is one's personal creation; life is mastery, power and a titanic struggle for self-assertion. One's existence is the way of one's will.

Descartes and Locke were mistaken: 'I' is neither a given nor a blank, passive receptacle of experience but is the result of man's actions, the product

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of will encountering resistance. Nature, for Fichte, is inert material to be moulded by will. Nature is what individuals create and its truth cannot be assessed by contemplation. There is no truth to be found in nature: truth is imposed on nature. Understanding is smothering, analysis murder. It is preposterous hubris to pretend, like scientists, that life in its chaotic and infinite variety can be adequately encapsulated through mathematical signs. Truth, structure, meaning, rationality, harmony, equilibrium – those beloved goals of Enlightenment thinkers – are creations of strong-willed individuals and groups who impose a rigid discipline on free human beings. Similarly, submission to the causal treadmill of the alleged 'laws of physics' is suicidal stupidity, attractive only to the weak-willed people who are incapable of inventing a life for themselves. The laws that science seeks to discover and codify do not follow from facts since no number of observations can prove them. Rather, events follow from scientific laws if these are true: nature provides the shapeless raw material, men invent rules and objects.

If scientists are right about human nature, human freedom is impossible. Mankind needs to escape from science to freedom. For Fichte, science has failed to deliver since science cannot explain freedom, yet freedom is a given. Since people are more aware of their own freedom than anything outside of them, the scientific world view cannot and must not be applied to human action. The hero is the creator, the artist, not the scientist. Scientists pride themselves on studying what there allegedly is, but that study estranges them from what there is not yet and from what there could be. Individuals are to reaffirm their humanity by inventing and asserting their own ideals by way of resolute action. Fichte realised that dogmatic determinism has great appeal to the majority, but this is because most people do not want to be free and will not choose freedom even when it is offered to them. When they insist that they are the victims of their bodies or environments, they need to be liberated from such tyrannical ideas: to choose the idealistic perspective is to acknowledge oneself as an active moral agent.

What characterises German philosophy, for Fichte, is its emphasis on a freedom that was qualified in Kant's case and unqualified in his. He held that, unlike the 'dead' philosophy of the Enlightenment, the new German philosophy, inspired by his own, was alive, powerful and fertile, for it was not only a philosophy of overcoming but of creating resistances in order to overcome them. Besides, overcoming resistance is not only a measure of individual, but also of collective, character. Groups and nations are to be judged by their power to fight for independence and domination. Whereas 'enlightened' philosophers saw culture as a deterrent to violence, Fichte believed that violence was the price to pay for the existence of cultures. Universal values do not exist. In defence of freedom, Fichte chose chaos and war over peace and harmony based on subjection to an alleged natural order. Consequently,

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his philosophical project developed beyond a psychology of personal power to include communal and national freedom. In his *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808), he exhorted the German people to throw off the yoke of French domination and drive Napoleon out of their country.

When philosophers combined the ideas of Herder and Fichte, they produced an intoxicating brew. Agreeing with Fichte that the 'vocation of man' is to bring to consciousness the idea of a free will, authors transcended individual wills and gave birth to a will which would unite Germans into a mighty *Volk*. To achieve this, a leader of exceptional character would be needed to forge out of the various states a true nation fit for proud Germans. When Leni Riefenstahl was commissioned by Adolf Hitler to direct a propaganda film for the National-Socialist Party based on its 1934 Congress in Nuremberg, attended by more than 700,000 fanatical supporters, she aptly entitled it *Triumph of the Will*. To write that Riefenstahl's title was adequate is not to argue that Nazism is the unavoidable product of Fichte's philosophy or, beyond it, of German Romanticism. However, it cannot be denied that the sources of fascism and Nazism are to be found in the unrestrained German Romantics. Those tempted to dismiss the connection must acknowledge, at minimum, that the human will is not necessarily directed towards amicable ends. The way of the will often turns into the Way of the Cross and if will is permitted to rule unconstrained, anarchy looms. Despite Fichte's enthusiasm, a philosophy of will is not a fail-safe recipe for personal or collective happiness. This line of ideas finds its most explicit formulation in the work of a restrained Romantic, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER: THE DARK SIDE OF THE WILL

After travelling war-torn Europe with his wealthy parents, the young Schopenhauer concluded that the human species is not *homo sapiens* (man the knower) but *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man). From 1809 to 1811, he studied natural science, Plato and Kant at the University of Gottingen, then continued with philosophical studies at the University of Berlin where he attended lectures by Fichte. Schopenhauer was unimpressed: Fichte's idealism was, for him, a kind of insanity and a betrayal of Kant's philosophy. Furthermore, Schopenhauer was unconvinced by Fichte's belligerence. When war threatened and his countrymen prepared to resist Napoleon, Schopenhauer prudently retired to an idyllic village where he composed, without supervision, his doctoral thesis which was later accepted by the University of Jena. From 1814 onwards, he worked on his masterpiece *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), with which he intended to

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prolong and correct Kant's philosophy. Ignored during most of his lifetime, Schopenhauer finally came to philosophical recognition in 1851, following the publication of a collection of essays called *Parerga and Paralipomena* (Greek for 'appendices and omissions'). Misanthropic to the last, he died of heart failure in 1860.

Book I of *The World as Will and Representation* starts from the assumption that the world of everyday experience is a representation (or perception): the world is re-presented in the Kantian sense. As the everyday world is representation or interpretation, there can be no subjects without objects and no objects without subjects. While Schopenhauer accepted that interpretation is conditioned by the mind, he reduced Kant's twelve categories of the understanding to one, causality, complemented by time and space which are two forms of sensibility. The world is not created in Fichte's sense, but is presented to and re-presented by the mind through the lens of space, time and causality. Accepting Kant's dualism of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, Schopenhauer was determined to answer the ultimate philosophical question: what is the world really?

The originality of Schopenhauer's philosophy lies in his answer to this question and that means that he needs to penetrate to the nature of the world as it is in itself. In Book II of his great work, he argued that science cannot provide a complete world-picture. This is the case because, if science wants to escape infinite regress, it must limit itself to the discovery and study of laws of physics and not of the forces that underpin them. Science's account of the world is by construction incomplete: it stands in need of an ultimate force the justification of which cannot come from within science, or from a materialistic world-picture which falls prey to similar rejoinders. If matter means structure, argued Schopenhauer, then whatever is thought to be matter's ultimate component can be broken down further: materialism is bound to account for matter through infinitely smaller entities and is by construction an incomplete scientific position. The only way to avoid this infinite regress, Schopenhauer concluded, is to accept that the ultimate substratum of actuality is not material. The world is a structure-less, immaterial flux or force. Schopenhauer believed this conclusion to be compatible with the Kantian outline exposed in Book I.

Schopenhauer held that science studies the world as a collection of objects that are only known 'from without'. That is, science provides an external, objective picture of actuality, one in which the observing subject cannot be included. If philosophy is to succeed where science fails (that is, if it is to obtain a complete picture of actuality), it must look at the world 'from within': it must propose a subjective world view to complement the objective world view of science. This Schopenhauer proposed to do by considering the phenomenon of human willing. He believed that man has an immediate and

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unmediated knowledge of his own body as will: one does not have to look at one's arm to know 'from within' that it is moving. No causation is involved: one simply wills one's arm to move for it to move. The will is the 'inner' side of one's 'outer' body movements. One's body is one's objectified will: body and will are one and the same thing viewed differently.

Many things happen in the body unconsciously, including willing. Unconscious willing is not amenable to direct knowledge and must be inferred from other sources. As the noumenal world (the world as it is in itself) is likewise not amenable to direct knowledge, Schopenhauer contended that it is of the same nature as unconscious willing. Conscious willing is a phenomenal expression of unconscious willing in the same way that the world of phenomena is an expression of the unknowable noumenal world. As the external world of perception is conditioned three ways (by time, space and causality) and the world of willing is conditioned one way (one knows one's will only in time), Schopenhauer inferred that the world is more like willing than anything science can in principle discover in the apparent world of perception. Schopenhauer's extraordinary and triumphant conclusion is that the real world is Will. Will is the ultimate force that science needs to account for the world: the egg wills its turning into a chick, the will to fly objectifies itself into wings, while the compass wills its orientation towards the pole.

Readers who find these views naïve must pause and consider whether materialism, which reduces the world to matter in motion, can account for such basic yet crucial phenomena as the development of an embryo, the growth of a seed into a shoot, or simply one's commitment, against all odds, to a difficult objective. It does seem that life involves an internal dynamic, an underlying force that positive science is unable to explain, since it focuses only on observable, external phenomena. Schopenhauer, like Fichte before him, calls this internal dynamic Will. Although 'force' or 'energy' would seem more appropriate (in Einstein's physics $E = mc^2$, all is energy), they are scientific words. As such, they point to observable phenomena and not to the 'inside' of reality.

In Schopenhauer's view, the Will is a blind, incessant force and because it is an endless striving it cannot ever find satisfaction. As humans are themselves objectified wills, they are condemned to endless frustration. They seek satisfaction and happiness but can never attain such states, except fleetingly. Rather, they are condemned to lives of pain and unsatisfied desires. Worse still, when people do satisfy their desires, satisfaction quickly turns to boredom. Life, then, is a constant oscillation between frustration and boredom. Happiness as deliverance from pain is only negative and never positive. Whereas Fichte saw will as rational and purposive, Schopenhauer regarded it as irrational and purposeless. One's intellect is a mere tool of the will, which dominates and leads one where it wills, not where one wills. As humans

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are embodied wills striving to overcome other wills, universal suffering is inevitable. With obvious relish, Schopenhauer wrote of the evil, suffering and rank stupidity that characterises human existence. How human beings can profess optimism in the face of a history dominated by suffering, carnage, torture, misery, plagues and mass homicide was beyond his comprehension. Existence is a battleground of tormented beings and history an absurd nightmare. This bleak picture is not a possibility, a nihilistic price to pay for a Fichtean freedom; it is inscribed in the very nature of a world 'red in tooth and claw'. This is the worst of all possible worlds.

German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) argued that such a philosophy, taken seriously, leads to mass suicide. Schopenhauer rejected this conclusion, however. He offered a temporary escape from the treadmill of life's torture, arguing that relief is at hand if desires and interests can be limited or suspended. This is possible if one can obtain, however briefly, a state of disinterested or will-less contemplation of one's existence. If one's intellect can somehow turn against and tame one's will, a form of redemption follows. How this paradoxical state can be achieved is explained in Book III of *The World as Will and Representation*, in which Schopenhauer elaborated what is perhaps the most original theory of aesthetics in the entire Western philosophical canon.

A child of Romanticism, Schopenhauer held art in very high esteem. Art has the power to produce aesthetic, interest-free contemplation. To be in the presence of great art is to be afforded the opportunity to connect with the beauty and sublimity of nature. In those rare moments, the will is tamed as one loses oneself: time, space and causality disappear. One is at peace, as if suspended mid-air amidst a world of turmoil. In this sense, as Stendhal would later write, 'beauty is nothing but a promise of happiness'. The greatness of artists lies in their ability to extract the universal from particulars, in order to draw out the Platonic essence of things. In the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo evoked the eternally feminine; in the *David*, Michelangelo symbolised the eternally masculine; in the Ninth Symphony Beethoven captured the essence of human freedom. Such achievements are the mark of geniuses. Talented individuals hit targets others cannot hit, whereas geniuses hit targets others cannot see.[7] 'Great art' is in fact a pleonasm because if art is not great, if it cannot produce in people a state of disinterested contemplation or freedom from the tyranny of willing, then it is not art. Objects that excite appetites are unsuitable supports for art works. Anything that stimulates in the negative sense is simply disgusting and cannot be turned into art; pornography is not art because it arouses the desire for sexual activity. As for the rest, that which is neither art, disgusting nor pornography, Schopenhauer classified as junk.

It is an understatement to say that Schopenhauer's theory of art is not fashionable today since it condemns most modern and all contemporary art

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to a status below that of junk. His influence on nineteenth-century artists and men and women of letters, however, was considerable. The list of those who found inspiration in his ideas includes Wagner, Mahler, Thomas Mann, Zola, Proust, D. H. Lawrence, Shaw, Hardy, Tolstoy and Conrad. Schopenhauer was in fact so influential that, in the 1890s, he remained the second most famous European philosopher in North America after Kant. After World War I, German philosophies of the will were unpopular and Schopenhauer's name fell into oblivion. In the American Era, as the twentieth century has been called, his pessimism was rejected in favour of a 'can-do attitude', pragmatism and pop psychology based on the 'power of positive thinking'. The disdainful and pessimistic philosopher would have laughed at the futility and naivety of such thinking.

THE ROMANTIC LEGACY

Left undefined, any term ending in 'ism' is very loose, perhaps to the point of insignificance. Romanticism presents this difficulty at a heightened level. As the foregoing shows, it refers to a collection of philosophical, artistic and political ideas whose origins and ramifications are diverse and not easily summarised. There is no neat, universal definition of Romanticism, nor can there be, for Romanticism springs precisely from a rejection of universalism. However, as Isaac Berlin argued (and allowing for the self-referential paradox that such a characterisation entails), the main themes of Romanticism can be summarised in an overall opposition to universalism and a philosophy of will. The world is for Romantics without order, purpose or meaning since these features come from individuals themselves. Neither science nor logic has anything to say about this creative process. Over rationality and objectivity, which they saw as cold, petty and concerned only with calculating human means, the Romantics elevated freedom, passion, imagination and subjectivity, notions which are central to life but remain beyond science's reach. Hume's conclusions as to the limits of empirical science were endorsed: the laws of physics which science seeks to discover and codify do not follow logically from facts since no number of factual observations can prove them. Crucially, however, facts follow – must follow – from laws of physics if these are true: it was this revolutionary insight that Fichte seized upon. How the book of nature can be read as a model for people's lives and society, which obsessed Enlightenment philosophers, were no longer relevant questions. What mattered to the Romantics was not intellect but will. This was an ethical, artistic and existential quest as well as an epistemological one.

If science is shallow insofar as it confuses appearance for reality, if the world has no intrinsic order as the Romantics maintained, the notion of

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'rational happiness' is oxymoronic, pusillanimous and contemptible. There simply are no absolute, unbreakable scientific laws of economics and commerce beyond human control. Concepts of economic law, such as that of supply and demand, or the idea of an invisible yet benevolent hand of the market, are pathetic absurdities. In a Romantic outline, those advocating such concepts are merely seeking to protect their enviable social status, justify poverty and exploitation and transfer the responsibility for their actions upon a sort of divine lawmaker. Economic institutions and regulations, money and trade need to be the servants of human beings. Their function is to promote life, arts and spiritual development, not stifle them. Economics is not a given and it cannot be humankind's ultimate horizon either: it must be moulded to people's ends.

Coming after the birth of ancient philosophy in Athens and the birth of modernity in the wake of the Renaissance, Romanticism represents the third major transformation in the history of Western thinking. It was an attack on the Enlightenment, which promoted concepts now taken to be central to human existence but until then ignored, discounted or suppressed: diversity of cultures and values, personal commitment, sensibility, subjectivity, inspiration and imagination. Romanticism, for better or for worse, dispelled the idea that in ethics, aesthetics and politics truth is achievable, that there are objective criteria according to which one can decide which view is superior. Whereas before Romanticism debates on these matters were about objectively measurable goals, the means to reach them and their consequences, after Romanticism the discussions have emphasised intentions and motives, with the implicit understanding that consensus is impossible. Although there is no great book as the *philosophes* thought, there are countless ones to write: ethical, aesthetic and political knowledge is not to come from the light of nature but springs from the unfathomable human will. Platonic Truth must give way to power because while the former is supernatural, exacting and out of reach, power can be grasped in an embrace that is liberating, exhilarating, intoxicating and dangerous.

It would be easy to point to the tensions between Fichte's and Schopenhauer's philosophies or to argue that Schopenhauer's theory of art, which rests on the existence of sublime Platonic Forms, contradicts his view that actuality is ultimately without structure. Criticisms such as these are valid, but they are not called for. Their emphasis on the irrational means that to submit Romantic authors to logical review is to miss the point altogether. To paraphrase Fichte, Romanticism is to be either embraced or dismissed. To be free of the (possibly evil) will by submitting oneself to logic and science's causal laws are attractive options but they are futile.

What remains certain is that Romantic ideas proved fertile beyond description and that their legacy is incalculable. Even leaving aside the works of

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those artists directly influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy of art, without Romanticism the West would be without Beethoven's piano sonatas as well as his Fifth, Sixth and Ninth symphonies, the études and nocturnes of Frédéric Chopin, the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, the operas of Richard Wagner, the novels and poems of the Brontë sisters, the books of Victor Hugo or the bitter humour of Oscar Wilde. Without Romantic themes, Mary Shelley would have not written *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, Herman Melville *Moby-Dick*, Robert Louis Stevenson the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or Abraham Stoker *Dracula*. Without Romanticism, the West would be a very dull place. This is true also of the world of managers.

MANAGING ROMANTICALLY

The early Romantics, Hamann and Herder, were moderate in their demands and merely sought to reaffirm human freedom and dignity in the face of the determinism of Newtonian physics. They accepted the existence of scientific laws but did not want human beings to become their servant and aspired to preserve a place for freedom and sensibility in an increasingly industrial, urban world. Less retrained authors, such as Fichte, refused to yield to the authority of anything, even of plain facts and were happy to sacrifice peace in the name of idealised personal freedom and power.

Both perspectives have their advocates in the management literature. Belonging to the restrained group are those academics who, while still believing in traditional management scholarship, insist that positivism is not the appropriate model to obtain it; the late Sumantra Ghoshal, whose ideas were outlined briefly in a previous chapter, came to espouse this position. Another well-known representative of this line of thinking is Henry Mintzberg, although he would presumably reject the qualifier 'Romantic'. Canadian management academic of global repute, Mintzberg has long argued that managers are not the cold, rational, scientific decision-makers that management academics depict them to be. After Fredrick Taylor and Henri Fayol, the traditional view of managers is that they plan, organise, coordinate and control; the reality, according to Mintzberg, is quite different for managers have little time to reflect and plan. Although they rarely admit it, managers jump from one problem, one meeting or interview to another and have little time between and during interaction to do anything except play the political game. Reflection and analysis are not altogether ignored, but they give precedence to action and collaboration. Despite the best efforts of management academics to provide them with tools and techniques, managers rely on intuition, judgement and insight in almost everything they do. Little surprise then if business strategies often emerge spontaneously rather than predictably.

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Mintzberg insisted that management is neither a science nor a profession, indeed cannot be one because it rests on procedures that are not amenable to empirical observation or formal codification. Unsurprisingly, these views have proved controversial.[8]

Mintzberg proposed a framework to analyse organisations, classify their internal processes and categorise their strategy development. However, he did not appear to realise the contradiction between accepting that the mechanisms behind managers' behaviour are inscrutable and proposing means through which organisations' structures and processes can be standardised.[9] Logical consistency is not the dominating characteristic of Romantic writers. Mintzberg's name is often cited for his attempts to redesign management education, of which he has lately become critical. If management is not a profession because there is no formal, codified body of management knowledge that can be taught in the classroom, then management schools are deeply mistaken about what they do and teach. Urging these institutions to come to terms with the fact that managers need to be more intuitive and synthetic and less dogmatic and analytic, Mintzberg maintains that if the price to pay for scientific rigour is relevance, then so much the worse for scientific rigour.[10]

Although these views are refreshing coming from quarters (those of management schools and management academics) often defined by their conformity, not to say blandness, they are not revolutionary recommendations. Should Mintzberg's arguments prevail, the curricula of management schools would be only slightly adjusted. Not tied to academia and representative of unrestrained Romanticism is Tom Peters, a Stanford Business School PhD holder, former U.S. Navy Seal, management consultant at McKinsey & Company, who turned management guru of international, if unorthodox, fame.

Since the very successful publication of *In Search of Excellence* (co-authored with Robert Waterman and published in 1982) and in an increasingly volatile prose, Peters has advocated ideas that, despite the generous size of his volumes, are easily summarised. Management excellence is for Peters a crusade, an ideal ever changing, never to be achieved yet to be passionately and relentlessly pursued. Adamant that formulae will not do in a time of perpetual change, Peters enjoins managers to go beyond rational analysis and ignore strategic planning.[11] An obsession with stability, processes and financial returns has led companies to undervalue quality, disregard innovation and see people as costs. Rather than accept such sterile thinking, managers must have a bias for action. Always on the move, they must experiment, try out new ideas, copy successful ones, meet customers, listen to suppliers. Back at work, they are to shout, tell stories, encourage, praise, scold, celebrate, talk the walk and walk the talk, in any case never settle for the unexciting status quo.[12]

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Since people are not rational, Peters fails to see why organisations should be. Employees do not work for money, but for the thrill of winning: creating, experimenting and going beyond what is expected of them. He recommends that job descriptions be burnt outright: managers and their subordinates must disregard boring details and look at the bigger picture.[13] The world has gone mad: to deal with it, only madness will do. No one is better suited for this than 'renegades', 'crazies' who should be employed, who disregard 'fat rule books', irritate many people and break a lot of china, but contribute, evangelise, and help their organisations reinvent themselves every twelve months or so.[14] Peters is unrepentant: managers must live management for it is only in living it that they will understand their organisation and its environment. They must manage 'by walking around'. It is only in acting, even at the price of failing, that companies learn. In fact, firms should actively seek out failures because managers learn from failures. Faithful to Schumpeter's motto of 'creative destruction', Peters reminds his readers: 'get innovative or get dead'. To 'thrive on chaos', organisations must reinvent themselves constantly, eliminate middle-managers, devolve power to the lowest possible level and involve everyone in everything because 'there are no limits to the ability to contribute on the part of the [. . .] committed person'.[15] In Fichtean fashion, Peters holds that 'the asset value of our firms is no longer in smokestacks, but the skills and *will* that reside in the collective heads and hearts of employees'.[16]

Whatever one thinks of his antics, Peters has developed a line that is not easily dismissed, namely that passion and reason are not compatible. Management is not a purely rational or empirical activity. Indeed, it cannot be. Faithful to the positive agenda, scientists pride themselves on studying what there is: they discover, but do not invent. When one studies what there is, however, one is oblivious to what there is not yet, to what there could be. Henry Ford reportedly said that if he had asked people what they wanted they would have said faster horses. Believed to be apocryphal, the anecdote has the merit of highlighting the fact that asking one's customers what they want is rarely the way to come up with a genuinely new idea, for they will answer in familiar terms. There was neither a market nor a business model for internet search engines before Google. Federal Express, the first integrated air-ground parcel service company, was established on the back of an idea which had been rejected by an economics lecturer. In its early days, it was kept afloat only when its founder, Fred Smith, determined to see his venture through against all odds, successfully gambled its last $5,000 on blackjack.[17] It is unsurprising, therefore, to find Peters extolling the power of the uncontrollable individual who, like Steve Jobs at Apple, goes from bursts of creative activity to existential crises to temper tantrums, hiring and firing employees on a whim but moulding the existence of millions through flashes of marketing and technological genius.

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The task of managers, then, cannot be to maximise profits. This misguided idea confuses the means and the ends of business, because profits are required only to cover the risks of economic activity. In this sense, profit is a cost, a responsibility, but not a reward. Similarly, Romantic managers do not pursue pleasure for themselves or their colleagues. Instead, they overcome resistances and mobilise energies above material contingencies to impose a vision on their organisation, employees and customers, like sculptors carve blocks of stone, like maestros lift orchestras above musicians' individual scores to achieve musical ecstasy. In this endeavour, managers-entrepreneurs can find inspiration in Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory. Genuine artistic expression is irresistible because it tames one's desires by taking one closer to the universal, the eternal, the sublime. Perhaps this explains why Peters approves of car dealerships that display magnificent floral arrangements, not automobiles, in the centre of their showrooms.[18]

If the Romantics are right, innovation cannot be decided, let alone taught, for it springs from sources and rests on inner mechanisms that can be neither observed nor controlled. 'Be creative!' or 'innovate!' are self-contradicting instructions, since anyone wanting to respect them will conform and so do the opposite of what is intended. Managers who want to import positivism to the workplace will end up bureaucrats of the worst sort since they smother innovation in the name of efficiency and leave behind them a trail of frustration. If they want to replicate Jobs' legacies, managers cannot satisfy themselves as technicians or scientists, but must in their own ways be creative artists, reaffirming their humanity by inventing and asserting their ideals by way of resolute action. Such managers do not accept the world passively, nor do they defer to 'best practice' which are forged by acts of will. Best practice is indeed one's own practice, not replicated but created. Organisations are not inert objects made of inanimate matter, but receptacles of inexhaustible human energy, often chaotic in their development but always alive. As Machiavelli argued, the way men organise their affairs is not God-given, but is within their control. In this sense, the organisation is a work of art.

What this means is that mainstream management education, with its proud scientific rigour, is good for the scrap heap. The same applies to management consultancies, seminar organisers and management journals insofar as they distil their customers or readers the latest management wisdom as fail-safe, law-like principles or recipes. This comment obviously applies to Peters' own advice and presumably explains why, never shy of a paradox, he is known for ridiculing, sometimes even shouting abuse to those who have paid a small fortune for the privilege of hearing him. In the world of ponderous and oracular management gurus, Peters is no doubt a joker, but at least he seems to be a self-conscious one. If this is the case, then he is what pompous and pretentious managers deserve.

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Even if they do not follow Romantic authors to their extremes, managers agree with them when they insist that what truly matters in life, what makes it worth living, cannot be put in equations and has no dollar value. The smile of a child, the embrace of loved ones, the thrill of sexuality, the mysterious appeal of a poem or the ineffable taste of fresh food are experiences which are central to human existence, yet all go beyond what science, economics or cold rationality can capture. It follows from these trite observations that economic institutions, money and trade are not objectives in themselves but must serve human beings and contribute to their aesthetic development. The Romantics thought that, above all else, aesthetic development is crucial if civilisation is to flourish. However, since their time art, good manners, ethical standards and aesthetic sensibility have deteriorated. The twentieth century may have seen technological progress, but it also saw the decline of art. Primitive art, once despised in Europe, became fashionable after World War I when the Jazz Age conquered the West. When Schopenhauer claimed that art can offer individuals an escape from the tedium of everyday existence, he could not have envisaged that the great art of his day would be replaced with junk for which people are prepared to pay millions. When Manzoni deposited his faeces in cans, art galleries queued for samples and paid tens of thousands of dollars for one. Today, art has truly become shit.

That art and aesthetic values have descended to such a nihilistic state would have horrified Schopenhauer and other Romantics. However, it would not have surprised a late Romantic enfant terrible who predicted the decline of Western civilisation and the rise of European nihilism. Schopenhauer's most famous disciple, Friedrich Nietzsche, stared into the abyss of Western decadence like no one before him. It is to this wildly popular but misunderstood thinker that the discussion now turns.

NOTES

1. Hamann, J. G. 2007. *Writings on Philosophy and Language* (Haynes, K. ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See in particular the essays entitled 'The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-Cross' and 'Metacritique on the Purism of Reason'.
2. Plato (through the mouth of Socrates) had broached this conception in *Theaetetus* (see 190c) but left it undeveloped. Montaigne and Vico expressed similar views.
3. Herder, J. G. 2002. *Philosophical Writings* (Forster, M. N. ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See parts I and II.
4. Kant, I. 1962 [1783]. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present Itself as a Science* (Lucas, P. G. trans.). Manchester: Manchester University Press. See the Introduction.

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5. Fichte, J. 1982. *The Science of Knowledge* (Heath, P. & Lachs, J. trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See p. 16.

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7. Schopenhauer, A. 1966. *The World as Will and Representation* (Payne, E. F. J. trans., in two volumes). New York, NY: Dover Publications. See Volume 2, Supplement to Book III, Chapter 31 (p. 391 offers a direct expression).

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Chapter 9

Heroic Individualism

Managing Aristocratically

In one of the versions of the myth, Prometheus steals fire from Olympus to the benefit of men who struggle to survive in a dangerous world. So armed, men become rivals to gods. As punishment, Zeus condemns Prometheus to be chained forever to a rock. His liver, which regenerates itself every night, is to be eaten daily by an eagle.

Oblivious to Prometheus's curse, the *philosophes* and scientists of Enlightenment were determined to realise Descartes' project of man becoming master and possessor of nature. Despite their achievements, science in their day was more a promise than a lived reality. From the first decades of the nineteenth century, this situation improved. As medicine scored major victories, Western societies went through a succession of deep transformations. Factories mushroomed along riverbanks and railway lines expanded rapidly, setting the stage for the rise of consumerism. Steam-powered machines changed the face of rural life since they improved productivity significantly. The domestication of electricity, effective from the early 1880s, was not far off. These accomplishments were celebrated in recurrent Universal Expositions, the largest ones of which were organised in Paris in 1844 and in London in 1851. The hero of the age was the scientist, the new conquistador who relentlessly extended the frontiers of knowledge. Although few subscribed to all aspects of Comte's grandiose vision, the core of his thought implicitly triumphed, for it provided historical, moral and epistemological legitimacy to the victorious march of the scientific enterprise. Positivism's success was all the more unstoppable that nineteenth-century science delivered in this world what Christianity had long promised in the other: healthier and longer life, material comfort and reduced physical travails.

These transformations had tangible social and moral consequences. Lured by the promise of abundant jobs in ever more numerous factories, people left

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the countryside in increasing numbers. As skilled farming and workmanship were progressively replaced by unskilled factory labour, life on the land was displaced by urban dwelling and the collective contact with nature weakened. With traditional society on its way out, the values that had so far framed it began to lose their appeal and relevance. Further, with the advance of science, the fog of magic with which nature had been endowed since Antiquity and the lingering sense of the supernatural that belittles human existence were slowly dissolved.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant argued that faith starts where reason and knowledge stop. If knowledge continues to grow and reason triumphs, the space for faith and its associated values are bound to contract, perhaps to the point of oblivion. In the celebratory mood of the day, very few people saw the risk of this evolution. Among those who did was Friedrich Nietzsche, who spent the last decade of his productive life trying desperately to alert his contemporaries to future perils. Little known during his lifetime, Nietzsche's fame and influence developed in Europe after 1900 and increased after the 1950s. He has now become 'Nietzsche', *the* icon of the twenty-first-century philosophical landscape, subject of thousands of books and articles. His reputation is a mixed one, however. Before his ideas can be explored, some words of warning are in order.

Chronically and increasingly ill since childhood, Nietzsche wrote in progressively shorter texts dominated by aphorisms. Unlike that of most of his predecessors, his language, especially in his last works, is not composed of patient arguments. Rather, it is assertive and incendiary. Forsaking logic, his books take the form of loosely connected entries forming a rich kaleidoscope of ideas that arouse readers' emotions. To complicate matters further, Nietzsche espoused, then rejected (and vice versa) many views in equally vehement terms. Philosophical sophistication, although not altogether absent, is not the dominating feature of his work. That said, Nietzsche's texts form a hypnotising and addictive maze, an immense jigsaw puzzle waiting to be assembled. To understand him, one is forced to philosophise on one's own feet, with the risk and rewards associated with that effort.

Nietzsche's feisty style explains why his name has been associated with, or highjacked by, diverse philosophical, social and political ideologies. His ideas were appropriated by fascists, Nazis, left-wing ideologues, anarchists, radical feminists, postmodernists and other lost souls who felt themselves empowered by his incendiary language. He has the dubious honour of being Hitler's house philosopher even though he was not an anti-Semite, opposed German nationalism, and would have hated the Third Reich more than he hated the Second Reich. Beyond the hype and the abuse, however, Nietzsche's writings have profound and lasting insights to offer to anyone who wants to understand the fabric and tensions of the West in the twenty-first century.

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THE WANDERER AND HIS SHADOW

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born in 1844 near Leipzig. He lost his father, a Lutheran pastor, when he was five years old and was brought up by his pious mother, sister and aunts. After studying theology for one semester at Bonn, Nietzsche turned to classical philology (the study of Greek and Latin literature and linguistics), which he studied from 1865 under the guidance of Friedrich Ritschl, then a leading figure in the field, at the University of Leipzig. Nietzsche proved to be a gifted philologist and published impressive articles in prestigious journals. Thanks to these and on the recommendation of Ritschl, he was appointed associate professor of philology at Basel in 1869, even though he had neither doctorate nor teaching certificate.

By the time he began teaching at Basel, Nietzsche's interest in philology had started to give way to a growing passion for philosophy. This was a consequence, in large part, of his encounter with Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. The book was for Nietzsche a life-defining event, igniting his passion for philosophy and converting him instantly to German Romanticism (a philosophy he would later dismiss, in terms as pungent as those he used to defend it). His subsequent friendly relationship with Richard Wagner, another admirer of Schopenhauer, inflamed his enthusiasm. Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), is indirectly dedicated to Schopenhauer and Wagner.

In the *Birth*, Nietzsche held that art comes in two major forms, dedicated to Apollo god of the Sun and Dionysus god of fertility. While Apollonian art is concerned with individuation, appearances, restraint and respect of standards, Dionysian art is concerned with unity, content, unrestrained energy and life. The former is the way to the light, the latter to the dark 'innermost heart of things'.[1] The genius of Greek tragedians was, for Nietzsche, their ability to sublimate, through Apollonian means (songs, dance and music) the terrifying Dionysus in a way that was terrible yet pleasant, intoxicating yet controlled. However, the arrival of Socrates and his rationalism signalled the demise of Greek tragedy. After him, Apollo was preferred while Dionysus was disregarded. Truth and reason for their own sake became the order of the day, appearance took over content and empty intellectualism displaced genuine artistic expression. Tragedy was consequently deemed barbaric because it was insufficiently rational. Committed to the view that only art can justify the existence of the world,[2] Nietzsche concluded that only a return to pre-Socratic art, the kind that finds expression in Richard Wagner's musical compositions, can save Western civilisation. Although Nietzsche's general thesis on the birth and decline of Greek tragedy has since gained general acceptance within philological circles, it was, when published, regarded as speculative and controversial. Further, if *The Birth* contains numerous references to Goethe and

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Schopenhauer, it does not offer a single quotation from original Greek texts. The book is not a philosophical treatise but an exploration into the meaning and importance of art. A harsh but predictable critical reception destroyed its author's budding reputation as a philologist.

Nietzsche served as a medical orderly in the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War, during which he contracted diphtheria, dysentery and possibly syphilis. Forced to take increasingly longer sick leaves upon his return from the war and disillusioned by an academic world which had turned its back on him, Nietzsche resigned from his professorship in 1879. Until the end of his productive life, he would survive on a meagre pension from Basel University, travelling alone and residing for short periods in Turin, Genoa, Nice, Venice and Sils Maria, a small village in the Swiss Alps. The first part of *Human, All Too Human* appeared in 1878; a second, then a third part, 'The Wanderer and His Shadow', followed in 1879 and in 1880, respectively. Nietzsche started working on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, his best-known book, from 1883. In 1886, he published on his own account *Beyond Good and Evil*, the first of his works to be noticed within philosophical circles. The now influential *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a collection of three essays exploring the origins and consequences of the Christian ethics, was printed in 1887. In 1888, between renewed bouts of illness, Nietzsche wrote in quick succession two pamphlets against Wagner, *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ* and *Ecce Homo*, a trenchant but deluded philosophical autobiography.

During this productive year, Nietzsche exhausted himself and his condition rapidly deteriorated. On 3 January 1889, he collapsed in a street of Turin, never to regain his intellectual faculties. He spent the last eleven years of his life ever more mentally and physically diminished, looked after by his mother and later his sister, who would also act as his literary executor. Nietzsche died in August 1900, leaving a large amount of unpublished material which remains of interest to scholars at the time of writing. It is possible but unlikely that this exploration will, in the coming years, shed new light on Nietzsche's thought. What remains certain is that the grand work announced at the end of the *Genealogy*, 'The Will to Power', was never completed. The book of that name which is available today is an unreliable compilation of Nietzsche's notes edited and published by his anti-Semitic sister.

Nietzsche is mostly read today for his last works, especially his notebooks, in which he offered an historical analysis of Western philosophy that is as fascinating as it is provocative. In these texts, he also offered predictions about the evolution of Western society that have proved uncannily prescient. Although not beyond criticisms, Nietzsche's general diagnosis of Western thinking has gained so much currency that historians of ideas, knowingly of not, write in Nietzsche's shadow. Offered in the staccato quality of Nietzsche's writing mentioned earlier, that shadow is in fact so complex and

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encompassing that a unified, definitive exposition of all its nuances is not possible. Accordingly, the exposition proposed in this chapter does not pretend to be a complete, accurate or consensual view of Nietzsche's philosophy. More than a century of Nietzsche scholarship has failed to arrive at such a consensus and it is in fact unlikely, for reasons that will be soon apparent, that a decisive interpretation will ever be accepted by scholars. Consequently, the following discussion focuses on the relatively uncontroversial ideas that are applicable to the world of managers.

HISTORY OF EUROPEAN NIHILISM

According to Nietzsche, the West rests on two broad sets of ideas which he called 'the ascetic ideal'. The first is the will to truth inherited from Socrates and Plato; the second is Christian morality. Like Descartes, many scholars believed that the will to truth opposes Christianity and sought to reconcile them. For Nietzsche, this opposition is only superficial. On his view, the two parts of the ascetic ideal prolong and feed one another and so compound each other's value-destroying consequences. The result is an unavoidable and impending catastrophe: nihilistic collapse.

After Socrates, Plato argued that ignorance is vice, knowledge is virtue. The good man is the wise man, the philosopher, the truth-seeker. These convictions shaped Greek philosophy and their revival gave birth to modernity by way of the Renaissance. The same notions structured the agenda of the Enlightenment, resulting in the development of modern science. This much is obvious. Nietzsche, however, argued that the opposition between Plato's essentialism and science's phenomenalism, upon which Aristotle, the Empiricists and the Positivists have been so insistent, is only superficial. Science was for him a Platonic endeavour not so much because it seeks knowledge, but because its truths are supposed to hold everywhere and always. Science's laws, like Plato's Forms, are timeless, perfect universals which structure everyday reality. Insofar as it believes in the existence of unchanging laws of nature, science imposes Being onto a world of Becoming: it freezes nature and transforms it into a lifeless and worthless mummy.[3]

Moreover, despite Plato's conviction that truth is morally neutral and Comte's insistence that science is objective, since it separates facts from values, truth and science are value-laden concepts. Scientific knowledge, just as much as Platonic truth, is a value-objective since it is desirable for its own sake. In this respect, science is a moral enterprise. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche argued that the pre-Socratic Greeks knew that life is absurd, terrible and meaningless but that they were able to sublimate their fears through art forms which granted equal importance to life and truth (broadly understood

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to include rationality, order, symmetry, harmony, etc.). After Socrates and Plato, however, the quest for truth (supernatural, perfect, eternal, adamantine) took over. The result is that life, with all its imperfections, has been devalued, smothered and denied expression. The will to (Platonic, scientific) truth is thus a will to self-destruction, a will to death. Science's will to death is visible in the way it desacralises nature and man himself. What used to be mysterious, worthy of worship and respect is, from the perspective of science, something merely unknowable in principle. Science has demoted the world insidiously to the status of a transformable, usable, disposable, trivial and contemptible item. What is more, insofar as it presents itself as *the* way to timeless truth and since it is itself a moral undertaking, science destroys and denies other moral enterprises the right to exist or to make claim to relevance. All in all, science, the pride of Western modernity, is in fact a value-destroying, nihilistic endeavour.[4]

Nietzsche did not stop his demolition of nineteenth-century Western thinking at these arguments, which have made of him the first moralist of knowledge. His indictment against the Christian ethics, the second pillar of the West, is explored later. Suffice to say that, for Nietzsche, Christianity is 'Platonism for the people', a dumbed-down version of Plato's philosophy.[5] When he considered the 'true' world to be the heavenly one, Christ, like Plato before him, denied value to the world of everyday experience and downgraded it to a 'vale of tears'. Further, the Christian ontology mirrors Plato's since it depicts man as body and soul (*psyche*). In both cases, the depreciation of the body and promotion of the soul are explicit. Finally, just like Plato's, Christ's truth is supernatural because it is of divine origin. These parallels between Platonism and Christianity are not novel to Nietzsche. Church Fathers had drawn them long before him, but while they were for them justifications to elevate Platonism to the status of Christianity's precursor, for Nietzsche these conceptual connections are evidence of Christianity's toxic descent.

The parallels between the scientific outlook and the Christian one run deeper than the above suggests. Christianity, like science, claims to be the unique source of truth. Man's equality before Platonic and scientific truth finds its equivalent in man's equality before God. Accordingly, Christian morality is supposed to hold for everyone and always: all human beings are to behave according to the values of humility, compassion and brotherly love. In other words, truth and reason, for atheists, play the same roles as God and faith for Christians: they are secular substitutes. The wills to Platonic and Christian truths have thus reinforced one another, sharing the same fundamental structure and attributes. Little surprise, Nietzsche concluded, if the church, after some hesitations, finally endorsed the scientific program of the Enlightenment.[6]

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Nietzsche noted that the West has remained profoundly Christian. At first sight, this is obvious. For instance, in Western countries, most Christian holy days are official public holidays. Such trivialities were not Nietzsche's concerns, however. His more fundamental point was that the widespread beliefs in human rights and democracy and the enactment of social welfare policies are in fact secularised manifestations of the Christian ethics, insofar as they hinge on Christianity's messages of compassion and equality before God. Moreover, the various non-religious ethical frameworks proposed since the eighteenth century are all, at core, Christian statements. Kant's ethics (the 'categorical imperative', i.e. the command to treat people as ends, not means) is a case in point. Carefully formulated to be acceptable to believers and non-believers, it is merely a secularised version of Christ's sermons which assumes what it purports to protect, equality between men. The same Christian assumption underpins the different versions of utilitarianism, since they all define 'utility' as something that applies equally to everyone or to which everyone has an equal claim. The secularism of the Enlightenment thinkers is only apparent.[7]

What all this means is that, as far as the West is concerned, there is no alternative to the Christian world view. Western individuals know the Christian morality only and they have built their entire cultural edifice upon it. Worse, at the core of the Western project, fed and cherished during its so-called 'enlightened' age, lies a value-destroying, life-denying enterprise: science. Should its religious foundation falter or merely appear uncertain, Western civilisation would be engulfed in an uncontrollable implosion.

Once he has reached these conclusions, Nietzsche's texts become ever more alarming in content and shrill in tone, a combination that, towards the end of his productive life, makes them regularly verge on incoherence. Nietzsche's growing desperation resulted from his realisation that the undoing of the West was, by his lifetime, in full swing. Seduced by the success of science, nineteenth-century Western individuals were turning away in increasing numbers from Christianity and its morality. When truth has become the new God, when reason is the new faith, Western man, oblivious to their nihilistic nature, invests in truth and reason the devotion that he used to invest in God and faith. When science can explain everything and delivers on Earth the promises of heaven, God is an unnecessary hypothesis. Although this news has not been absorbed fully, 'God is dead!'[8]

The consequences of the death of God were for Nietzsche as incalculable as they are catastrophic, for the event signals the onset of nihilism, the collapse and disappearance of the values that dominated the West for centuries. Without moral foundations, Western folk are deprived of an essential component of their language, since such terms as sin, evil, sacred, saint have lost their meaning. Existence thus becomes meaningless since no behaviour

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can be justified and all is permitted. Faithful to the Enlightenment agenda, the French Revolutionaries believed that moral terms could be divorced from their theological foundations and set out to reorganise French society on secular, rational, scientific principles. Their dream soon produced the Terror, however, a period of frantic and senseless mass executions that did not spare many of the Revolution's fathers. As Nietzsche diagnosed, pseudo-secularism cut loose from its underlying Christian foundations is a recipe for nihilistic disaster. Such events were for Nietzsche a mere foretaste of catastrophes to come: 'I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous – a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up against everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite. […] But my truth is terrible. […] There will be wars the like of which have never yet been seen on Earth'.[9]

The lines quoted above were among the last ones Nietzsche penned in 1888. Twenty-six years later, World War I started, for reasons that are absurdly out of proportion to the events they triggered. In a protracted and pointless confrontation, the scale of which is impossible to comprehend today, the West slaughtered the best people it had to offer: able young men from Australia, Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and Russia, nations that had bequeathed Western civilisation its most magnificent, sophisticated and enduring cultural legacy. By the end of the war, four empires (German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman) had disappeared, sixteen million combatants and civilians had lost their lives, seven million were permanently disabled and fifteen million were injured severely.

Here is not the place to discuss the enduring and multifarious consequences of World War I. It is enough to point out that the conflict is by itself a strong argument for Nietzsche's thesis. The unthinkable casualty rate of the conflict was made possible only by the industrial and technological advancements of the belligerents. These were countries that were allegedly committed to an egalitarian ethic and its respect of human life but were in fact obsessed by a nihilistic will to scientific truth. If the senseless tally of the Great War was not enough, one must add the slaughter of World War II (in the main an aftershock of the first) and its camps of industrialised death. The fascination for science and technology has destroyed the fabric of Western civilisation. In this sense, the West climaxed at Auschwitz and Dachau, as it did at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The nihilistic seeds of one of the two pillars of Western civilisation, the will to Platonic truth, have been fertilised in the name of its other pillar, Christianity. The symbiosis between two faces of the ascetic ideal is a deep and complex one, for the will to (Platonic) scientific truth, after being occulted by Christianity, has re-emerged as a continuation of and a substitute

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for the will to believe in the Christian truth. The West has thus turned against its values in the name of its own values: 'We belong to an age whose culture is in danger of perishing through the means to culture'.[10] When he proposed to make man 'master of possessor of nature' by articulating a framework in which science and Christianity could co-exist, Descartes was too successful: man has become his own new god and has destroyed the old one. Platonism is the cancer of the West.[11] Rationalism, the philosophy that started with Plato has turned into an insatiable snake. Precursor, then advocate of the Christian creed, it has been irresistibly eating itself, finally to arrive at its own head. This theme is revisited later.

THE ANTI-CHRIST

Given these arguments, one would expect Nietzsche to call for a revival of Christian morality. If the West is headed for nihilistic collapse, if Western man has gone mad for lack of moral values, then a readily available remedy seems to be the re-establishment of the moral values that enabled its development. This is not so for Nietzsche who reserved for Christianity his harshest criticisms. Many will reject his arguments as one-sided, simplistic and relying on a distorted understanding of the Christian ethics. Although indeed proposed in general and at times imprecise terms, Nietzsche's analysis of the Christian legacy contains elements that cannot be ignored.

There are many reasons for Nietzsche's hatred of Christianity. For instance, Nietzsche was adamant that there are crucial differences between individuals. Not all men are equal: there are 'higher men' or 'masters' and there is the 'herd' of the 'slaves'. The difference between the two types of individuals is not physiological but moral and psychological. While the herd type is submissive, the master-type dominates and takes pride in his domination. Transparently inspired by Homer's heroes, Nietzsche's higher men accept responsibilities and solitude readily, exhibit the strength of their will, set new standards and affirm life through self-reverence. Above all, they create proudly, convinced of the value of their legacy and unconcerned by popular approval. Nietzsche thought that these master-type individuals must be allowed to grow and dominate the herd, for they take Western culture to new heights. He enlisted Julius Caesar, Goethe, Beethoven and Napoleon Bonaparte in their ranks.[12]

Nietzsche analysed Christianity as a successful slave revolt in morality. The first Christians were the slaves of the Romans, who adhered to heroic values. Oppressed by their masters but incapable of physically toppling them, the slaves took comfort in a moral and psychological revenge: they inverted the heroic values of their oppressors. What was 'good' or 'noble' for

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the masters became 'evil' for their slaves and what was 'ignoble' or 'base' became 'good'. Accordingly, Christian man condemns physical strength, pride and nobility; he sees the body as despicable but the soul as admirable. Weakness has become a synonym for abnegation, while meekness and submission are taken for virtues. Feelings previously considered contemptible, such as guilt, pity and compassion, have taken the high moral ground. While hierarchy was accepted as a fact of life, a consequence of natural differences in ability and a source of self-esteem, it is now considered a major cause of evil and suffering, an offence to the dignity of man which is to be suppressed or denied.[13]

The tragedy, for Nietzsche, is that the Christian herd morality has triumphed and on the back of its egalitarian agenda, its values have left the herd and have been imposed on all humanity, masters and slaves. As superior individuals achieve their status through their actions, they cease to be superior when they stop behaving like superior individuals. One cannot criticise an eagle for behaving like an eagle, yet this is precisely what Christianity does. Indeed, by prescribing the same values to everyone and rejecting the superiority of the higher men, Christianity smothers and nips in the bud the proud, strong, value-creating, culture-enhancing individuals. The devaluation of physical force, the attribution of moral worth to submissiveness, humility and powerlessness and the denial of hierarchy, which Nietzsche analysed as characteristic features of Christianity, have brought about the levelling and degeneration of man. Christian morality is anti-nature because it locates all values in the realm of God at the expense of the world of everyday living and because it denies a fundamental feature of humanity, namely a hierarchy of human beings. In doing so, it castrates humankind and emasculates its future.[14]

Nietzsche saw the triumph of slave values everywhere. Democracy and socialism, according to which power and welfare are to be handed over to the masses of ignorant submissive herd individuals, have become normative social models. Education used to be the means for the higher men to elevate themselves and achieve culture. Under the guidance of herd values, it has been turned into a mass industry. The result has been predictable: enfeebled, dumbed down, education is now incapable of inspiring anybody or anything. To please the barbaric herd and pretend it has been lifted off its swampish base, academic standards have been lowered and expectations reduced to the lowest possible minimum. Teaching was once a vocation, the proud calling of a few but now it has become a job, accessible to millions. Little wonder that students have lost respect for the educational experience since teachers are nowadays barely more knowledgeable than students. All these were repulsive outcomes for Nietzsche. "Today the petty people have become lord and master: they all preach submission and acquiescence and prudence and diligence and considerations and the

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long et cetera of petty virtues. What is womanish, what stems from slavishness and especially from the mob hotchpotch: that now wants to become master of mankind's entire destiny – oh disgust! disgust! disgust!"[15]

As broached earlier, utilitarianism, the moral theory according to which an action is good if it maximises utility for the greatest number, was for Nietzsche a secularised form of Christian thinking. Utilitarianism proceeds from a slavish world view since it values what is 'useful', that is, whatever makes life easier, longer or more comfortable for the herd. On similar grounds and against Darwin's own assessment of his work, Nietzsche analysed Darwinism as a secularised continuation of Christianity, not as its nemesis. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published in 1859, to sensational reception. Building on a Malthusian outlook which accepted a world view in which resources are limited and life is competitive, the book's main thesis is that species arose, evolved and multiplied out of a common primitive ancestor by way of natural selection of successive random incremental variations. According to Darwin, variations which result in superior environmental fitness are retained and passed on to further generations. Superior environmental fitness is defined as the ability to compete, survive and reproduce. The work made a considerable and lasting impression on the Western world view and is today generally accepted outside creationist circles.

If Darwinism is correct, Nietzsche pressed, if evolution really means 'survival of the fittest', that is, 'of the most adapted to the environment', then biological diversity is impossible to explain. Convergence can only obtain if the unique and unescapable criterion of species' survival and reproduction is environmental fitness. Nietzsche also criticised Darwinism for its deterministic, external world view. According to Darwin, species survive, evolve and reproduce because the environment dictates the terms of their survival. This was for Nietzsche an insult to human beings and to life in general. On his view, that species have survived and multiplied can be accounted for only by an internal resistance to the environment helped by an abundance of resources. Moreover, Darwinist evolution makes species extremely fragile, since even a slight change in the environment means non-adaptation, or again, on Darwin's terms, extinction. Nietzsche noted also that Darwinism opens the way to degeneration of the species when weak individuals collaborate to offset their weaknesses, as the Christian slaves did in order to topple their Roman masters. 'The species do not grow in perfection: the weaker dominate the strong again and again – the reason being they are the great majority, and they are also cleverer … Darwin forgot the mind [. . .]: the weak possess more mind'.[16]

Nietzsche concluded that evolution cannot be driven from without, but from within. It is not the most adapted individuals who survive and multiply,

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but the most able to shape the environment to suit their needs. The less adapted species, such as the human one, are the more powerful because they can resist the external pressure of the environment.[17] Utilitarianism and Darwinism were proposed initially by Englishmen who were typical representatives of Christian herd thinking because they promoted passive adaptation, weakness, equality and lesser effort. Nietzsche summarised his contempt for such views in a memorable quip: 'Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that'.[18]

If Nietzsche rejected Darwinism, he accepted the reality of evolution. His overall embrace of evolutionism is, for instance, detectable in the predictions he offered about the future of Western man. In the *Iliad*, Homer's heroes demonstrate courage, resilience and determination. When they go down, they do so defiantly, standing their ground and maintaining a noble stance in all circumstances. The Christian world view, Nietzsche maintained, did away with these values. Happiness is now indolence and paradise eternal bliss. While heroic man sought power and affirmed tragic life, Christian man, this Lamb of God, seeks comfort and absence of effort. When this desire is made possible by the progress of science and technology, Western man becomes lazy, weak, meek, bored and fearful; he soon turns into a coward, complaining constantly of the cruelty of life. In heroic societies victimhood is a source of disgrace; in Christian societies it is an envied status, for the victim has something or someone to blame other than himself for his misery. Modern Western man is a degenerate descendant of the heroes of the *Iliad*. His arrival signals the end of Western humanity, for after him, nothing great can emerge and grow. Modern Western man is the 'last man'.[19]

Hope is not entirely lost, however. Although dominated by the herd type, the human species can overcome its current form, outgrow itself and become *Übermenschen* who are creatures above and beyond Christians. They are a goal, an alternative and remedy to the last men, for they embody the values of psychological strength and independence with which Nietzsche believed the ascetic ideal can be defeated. *Übermenschen* are the anti-Christs, not because they are devils incarnate but because they have gone 'beyond good and evil', because they have overcome the herd ethics of good and evil. Without such an objective, Nietzsche thought that the West could not avert nihilistic suicide: 'If a goal for humanity is still lacking, is there not still lacking – humanity itself?'[20]

WILL TO POWER

In the poems of Homer, power is primarily physical power. In the works of Machiavelli, power is a political concept. To build and maintain his State,

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a prince must do whatever it takes to obtain and retain power, even if this means disregarding Christian virtue. In Nietzsche's thought, power is a psychological and moral concept. This is not to say that a lack of power does not have tangible consequences. These are even more serious than in the *Iliad* or in *The Prince*. As Nietzsche saw it, an absence of power signals not so much defeat in combat or the loss of one's throne, but irresistible civilisational disintegration.

If nihilism is primarily the result of a toxic psychological and moral stance, then remedy must be sought on psychological and moral grounds. Moreover, if the civilisational rot started with Plato's will to truth and deteriorated further under the influence of Christ's teachings, then the answer must be sought in pre-Platonic, heroic terms. Although Nietzsche's concept of will to power is notoriously difficult to interpret (it is rarely mentioned in his books and makes cryptic appearances in his notebooks), it is best received in this context. That is, will to power is (among other things) a psychological and moral notion inspired by the heroic world view. It was the basis upon which Nietzsche wanted to rebuild psychology, revalue all ascetic values and fight nihilism: 'Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism'.[21]

As psychological drive, will to power is a recipe for a heroic form of happiness: 'What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power increases, that a resistance is overcome'.[22] One's will to power is the measure of one's psychological strength, of one's inclination for acting and not merely reacting, for doing, for self-overcoming. The higher men, the heroic masters, exhibit an abundance of will to power, the herd of the slaves a lack of it. While the former embrace life in all its dimensions, celebrate the splendour of the body and elevate strength and nobility as ultimate values, the latter are obsessed with the soul, are afraid of earthly life and crave heaven and its eternal bliss.[23] 'A table of values hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power'.[24]

Nietzsche recognised that the higher and lower psychological stances cohabit within the same individual and within the same group, that even higher men suffer from a will to nothingness and self-destruction. As the fall of Rome proves, the masters, too, can be victims of the herd ethic.[25] In this context, cultivating one's will to power is an aristocratic view of life, the cultivation of a difference with those who are defeated by the travails of existence. Physical effort and pain are not to be feared, Nietzsche held, for they are integral parts of life and are to be welcomed: 'What does not kill me, makes me stronger'.[26] What matters is that one does not surrender, that one outdoes oneself and that one struggles to the best of one's ability, so that one

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becomes what one is.[27] As Seneca put it, 'Fate leads the willing, drags the reluctant'.[28] If this means that others have to be dominated in the process, so be it. For Nietzsche, one of the justifications for the existence of the herd is that its toils and labours are the necessary bases upon which the genius can elevate himself, the meaningless raw material endowed with value by artistic inspiration.[29] Adhering to heroic values and rejecting what the established slavish social order imposes, the higher man retains the ability to invent new moral standards that he is not afraid to impose on the herd.

Will to power is more than a psychological and moral drive, however, for it is also an alternative to rationality and otherworldliness. While the herd is obsessed with truth and perfection to the point that earthly existence is looked upon with contempt, the masters have learnt to take existence on its own terms and to satisfy themselves with whatever nature provides. Like the pre-Socratic Greeks, they know that truth is a woman, that her modesty is not to be forced. Nature's bosom is not to be exposed, because trying to uncover life's secrets amount to belittling and smothering it. Individuals of strong will to power realise that knowledge must not be allowed to dominate life since without life there is no point to knowledge. Although they appear superficial, the masters are in fact more profound. Their 'science' is a gay one; it does not smother or devalue nature but celebrates it. In other words, the higher men know how to balance the Apollonian and the Dionysian. To paraphrase one of Nietzsche's last notebook entries, 'They possess art lest they perish of the truth'.[30] One wishes that management academics and managers shared this insight.

MANAGING ARISTOCRATICALLY

As Nietzsche predicted, the twentieth century has been marked in the West by an increasing devaluation of the religious message, a deepening moral confusion, an accelerating cultural decline and a desperate turning to science as a substitute for morality. Nietzsche saw that Romanticism liberated aesthetic individuals from the suffocating rules and ideas of the Enlightenment. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he feared that if Romanticism jettisoned its lingering classicism, chaos would result. He was right. Shortly after the advent of the twentieth century, classical and romantic music abandoned harmony and melody and embraced atonal noise. Primitive art replaced neoclassical and romantic forms and disciplined writing gave way to flow-of-consciousness trivia. As recounted in a previous chapter, even in science, truth and facts came under attack and were replaced with the idea that 'anything goes'. In architecture, neoclassical design was regarded as criminally excessive and replaced with austere boxes stripped of ornamentation.

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In religion, sects have multiplied. Christianity itself has fragmented into various churches fighting for what is left of the flock. The expression 'in God we trust' does not appear on the porches of churches' or temples, as one would expect, but on those items that symbolise human greed and valuelessness, coinage and banknotes. Losing his moral language, Western man has forgotten how to behave, even in the most elementary aspects of daily life, such as dressing or eating. The environmental damage caused by Western-style economic development is as obvious as it seems irreversible, yet further economic growth is offered as the inescapable horizon, remedy to all current social woes. When moral principles are referred to, it is to undermine what they were meant initially to safeguard. For instance, while the notion of human rights used to protect individuals against the omnipotence of the State, it now leaves them exposed and fragile, insofar as it legitimates the atomisation of society in different communities, proud of their inalienable differences. On this account, pride has given way to shame and confidence to guilt. Whereas, for centuries, the West thought its mission was to conquer and enlighten the world, it now seeks repentance for its colonial past. Westerners can be scarcely called 'individuals' when they obsessively apologise for actions for which they are not responsible, compulsively identify themselves with a paranoid minority (identity politics) which negates what individuality they had retained or submit themselves to a vulgar, cretinised mass and social media. Rather than trying to overcome and push aside whatever hardships have come their way, twenty-first-century Western people display it as a badge of honour, for to be a victim today is to hold a secure claim over society. On radio and televisions, the bleating of feelings, characteristics of the lambs and weak-willed, is interminable; this truly is a 'culture of complaint'.

Beyond its general social disintegration, the cultural decline of the West is patent. The absence of culture is still culture, junk (and human excrement) is now art, noise is music, pop psychology is philosophy. The demise of higher education, compounded by a pervasive commercialisation and an unstoppable massification, is manifest. Functional illiteracy among university students and managers, once inexistent, has become the norm. Simultaneously, technology has triumphed and is everyday more pervasive: Christ is now online and Eucharist can be celebrated over a tablet computer. Twenty years ago, few people had a mobile phone, yet today the realisation that one has left one's phone at home triggers a nervous breakdown. Some queue for days in front of stores to put their hands on the latest technological gizmo, as if their lives had no meaning without it. Friendship that is not online is not real friendship and the number of online 'contacts' is now the measure of one's social and professional status. Unable to stand the heat of summer, Western people demand air-conditioning even when opening the window would allow a breeze to cool the room. Incapable of climbing stairs to the first floor, they

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take lifts. Too feeble to use a broom to sweep dead leaves in the courtyard, they use bark blowers that burns fossil fuel. As for shopping or collecting their children from school, suburbanites cannot survive it without a gas-guzzling four-wheel drive. The last man is a daily encounter; he can be seen every morning in the bathroom mirror.

The irony, of course, is that all these developments cannot be called progressive even by those who promote them since the very notion of progress presupposes certain standards against which it is measured. Since nihilism is characterised by a lack of standards, it is logically impossible to declare that, say, classical art is superior to primitive art. Nihilism and relativism thus fit each other hand to glove and resist all attempts to elevate people or products to superior status. For nihilists, a scribbler is as good as Shakespeare, atonal noise is as good as Wagner. In fact, the notion of good is itself dubious since people and their products can be said to be merely *different*.

The West's moral, cultural, intellectual and psychological disintegration has not spared the workplace. Management students and managers, like everybody else, have lost their moral compass. They now need business ethics courses to remind them that their organisations do not operate in a vacuum and that their decisions have social consequences. The Wall Street bankers who knowingly on-sold dubious home loans as prime quality assets, triggering the Global Financial Crisis of September 2008, apparently had to be reminded of such trivialities. What remains certain is that stringent regulations or powerful enforcement agents are helpless against anyone committed to ignoring them. The only agents who can prevent destructive behaviour from taking place are the concerned individuals themselves. Attributing the crisis to an absence or laxity of regulations rather than to vanishing moral standards is further evidence of the prevalent intellectual confusion.

Increasingly disorientated, rather than turning towards religion to find answers to the questions of existence, workers have tended to look upon their employers as the only formal organisation left which can provide them with a sense of belonging, sometimes even as an extension of their family. When these hopes are frustrated, as they must be, psychological breakdown follows. Rude or inappropriate comments are received as unbearable harassment, aggressive behaviour as persecution, and professional demotion as motive for suicide, even when it would have been enough to quit one's job. As employees, the last men are incapable of facing the difficulties of existence, let alone the realisation that life itself is inherently tragic since it always ends badly. If Nietzsche is right though, affirming one's fate is a psychological stance which is available to anyone who is ready to take existence on its own terms, corporate life for what it is and reject as a matter of principle anything that is meant to make life easier or more comfortable. In this sense, affirmative

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action programs can lead only to mediocrity, discourage self-overcoming and make personal betterment look futile.

Unsurprisingly in such a context, managers have been urged by consultants and academics to become leaders within their organisations and supply what society has been increasingly incapable of providing. Instead of objectives, procedures and performance standards, these corporate leaders are supposed to develop their organisation's mission, define its vision and embody its values. Rather than relating to their peers and subordinates through their roles and status, they are to care for and inspire them to the point of arousing feelings of admiration and devotion. Rather than workmanship skills, they are supposed to develop their charisma. Technical expertise fades into irrelevance, for it smacks of old-fashioned task-focused management concerns: the focus now is on 'soft' or 'people skills'. Hardly anyone seems to have noticed that these terms cannot be defined unambiguously, that notions like 'mission', 'vision', 'values', 'devotion' or 'charisma' (Greek for 'the gift from God') are all heavily laden religious concepts, which can only lose their meaning in a work context. Managers have, therefore, become preachers of a new faith which promotes the prosperity of their organisations and the well-being, even happiness, of their employees. Management, as a technical, goal-directed activity has largely disappeared.

In business magazines and management journals, chief executives have been increasingly portrayed as corporate saviours, men or sometimes women gifted with innate or acquired character traits, able to lead their organisation to unchartered heights. Mythical or real, these knights in shining suits are the corporate counterparts of Nietzsche's higher men, these rescuers of Western civilisation. Whatever the merits of this remedy, those who call for the advent of such superior individuals must remember that master-type corporate leaders, if they are to be faithful to Nietzsche's agenda, will have little consideration for 'utility' if this concept refers to economic benefits meant to advantage the herd. As is true of Homer's Achilles, self-assertion and self-aggrandisement are better qualifiers of higher men's behaviour than dedication to the common cause. Confident in their values, they have little regard for rationality and do not seek approval before committing to action. Further, as Nietzsche's examples of Napoleon or Caesar attest, their legacy will be a questionable one. Max Weber did not argue otherwise when he noted that when leadership is charismatic, it is because it is neither traditional nor rational-legal, ending usually in disaster and with the death of the ruler. Boards of directors beware.

The consequences of Nietzsche's criticisms of Darwinism are less controversial. If Nietzsche's comments are justified, if environmental fitness is synonymous with fragility, then organisations should be wary of being too adapted to the market or industry in which they compete. Fitness, no doubt

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required to meet current customers' expectations, will spell extinction when market conditions change. Rather than aiming for perfect adaptation, firms should value flexibility and seek to remain able to react swiftly to evolving conditions. That is, they should be wary of tight and rigid business practices and rather than efficiency, they should strive for effectiveness. As operations management authors have noted, the most efficient processes, like the moving assembly chain, are the most inflexible and make firms fragile. Success is a trap, easily leading to failure by transforming bold and novel attempts into sacrosanct business habits that destroy adaptability. Long-term survival demands effort, action and creation. Similarly, managers should not hire employees based on the degree to which they 'fit' the organisational culture, for the more they do so, the more difficult it will be for the culture to change. Performance demands contributors, not clones; diversity, even dissent, is a source of contribution.

On the one hand, management requires clear goals, workmanship standards, hierarchy and delineation of responsibility, for without them work is unproductive and organisations disintegrate into anarchy. 'Happiness' and 'job satisfaction' as psychological concepts are too vague to make managers accountable for either of them. However, performance against tangible objectives and professional norms is something that can be defined, enforced and achieved. Peter Drucker made his name hammering this reality. On the other hand, as Tom Peters insisted, too strict a discipline, too rigid an adherence to performance standards or existing market expectations makes an organisation incapable of questioning its practices and reinventing itself. Imagination, creativity and passion cannot be ignored and come from those extraordinary individuals who inspire others. Long-term organisational success requires both discipline and passion, which is not to say they complement each other easily. Between the Apollonian (which insists on formal structure) and the Dionysian (which is about content), the balance is difficult to strike. Nietzsche called higher men those individuals of great will to power who are capable of such feats.

The previous chapters argued that if 'science' is understood in the traditional, positivist sense, then it is inapplicable to management studies and managers because it ignores freedom in the name of rationality and has, therefore, demeaning consequences. A 'gay science', as Nietzsche defined it, is an attractive, if elusive, alternative. That is, if 'science' is understood as a 'profound superficiality', as a celebration of the mystery and tragedy of life guided by the respect for norms and traditions capable of channelling human energy instead of stifling it, then the management of men and women towards the achievement of objectives can be described as a 'science'. Being Apollonian and Dionysian, such a science would not be characterised by a body of formal knowledge but by a body of practices underpinned

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by a psychological stance. Managers capable of such a science would be aristocrats in a world characterised by herd values. It is an understatement to say that mainstream management academia has a long way to go before embracing these arguments.

HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN

Although not without merits, Nietzsche's views on the origin of the Christian ethics and his thesis about the consequences of the death of God are not above criticism. He argued that the slave morality arose as a reaction to the master morality, but this is implausible, because one has first to entertain slavish values to accept life as a slave. It is more probable, as Machiavelli insisted, that there have always been two moralities, one for rulers and one for the ruled. Society being dominated by the masters, the death of the God of the slaves, for all its centrality within the Western ethos, cannot have the sweeping consequences that Nietzsche attributed to it, since the event is, on his own arguments, of no importance to the rulers. This is so unless the slaves' victory over the masters is complete and they have become the new rulers. While this is indeed Nietzsche's argument, it is difficult to reconcile with the existence of such individuals as Caesar or Napoleon, singled out by Nietzsche as examples of higher men. Further, if the herd of the last men has become weaker for lack of moral foundations, then it should be easier for higher men to emerge and dominate it, making the case for a society-wide nihilistic collapse less likely. What this means is that Nietzsche's prophecy of terminal civilisational decline is acceptable only if *both* the masters and the slaves have abandoned their respective values. Although this could well be true, Nietzsche did not provide arguments to that effect.

One can note also that challenges to the Christian ethics did not wait for the 'death of God' and the rise of science to make themselves felt. Greed and the lust for personal power were well developed in Renaissance Europe, as Machiavelli exposed at length. More generally, for all the examples that can be adduced to support it, there is something repetitive and uniform about Nietzsche's diagnostic of Western thinking that detracts from its general validity. If one is to believe Nietzsche, the West's decline started with Socrates, worsened under the influence of Plato, accelerated with Christ, did the same again during the Enlightenment, eventually to culminate in his lifetime in civilisation-wide nihilism. Perhaps, but in this case, how is one to explain post-Enlightenment cultural achievements (Beethoven's or Goethe's) that Nietzsche himself was the first to celebrate? Besides, if the nihilistic consequences of the French Revolution cannot be denied, Europe did not go through events which are similar to those that engulfed eighteenth-century

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France. Nietzsche would have gained in credibility if he had explained these exceptions to his otherwise fascinating thesis.

Nietzsche trained and worked for almost ten years as a classical philologist, a period during which he closely studied the heroic poems. Later, he sacrificed his promising academic career to pursue his growing passion for philosophy generally and for Romanticism especially. As the expression suggests, will to power is a synthesis, if not of both disciplines, at least of aspects of the worldviews they study. That is, will to power is an attempt to merge Romanticism's emphasis on will and heroism's focus on power into a unified conception. At first sight and for reasons exposed above, this is a very appealing project. That Nietzsche thought of making of this notion the centrepiece of his late philosophy is understandable. That he would have succeeded in his attempt is questionable, however.

Heroism, as it emerges from Homer's poems, is characterised by an ethic rooted in an awareness of the tragedy of human existence, in physical power as measured on the battlefield and in stringent role-based compliance. Conversely, Romanticism insists on freedom and power of the will, this conception being in Fichte's and in Schopenhauer's different visions an ideal (non-material) substratum. The only point of contact between heroism and Romanticism is their emphasis on power, tangible in heroism's case but psychological in Romanticism's. Although this discussion is not the place to do justice to such an argument, what has just been said means that Nietzsche's synthesis is an impossible chimera because the philosophies he tried to connect have little in common. Their shared reliance of the term 'power' is merely terminological.[31] Rhetorical appeal aside, the difficulty of defining what exactly constitutes a gay, or joyous, science is an additional illustration of the quandary that Nietzsche faced. If valid, this contention would explain why Nietzsche could not write the great work he envisioned, *The Will to Power*.

Expressed differently, the expression 'heroic individualism' as qualifier of Nietzsche's philosophy, although justified by his texts, is a contradiction in terms. Heroism denies what individualism celebrates, the existence of individuals *qua* individuals, independently of the social norms that are imposed upon them. One should also remember that Romanticism is, at least in part, a derivative of Kantianism. If, on Nietzsche's own arguments, the Kantian ethics is a secularised version of the Christian herd morality, then it follows that German Romanticism cannot represent a viable substitute to it, because a river cannot turn again its own current.

Machiavelli argued that the rise of the Christian ethics triggered the fall of the Roman Empire and advocated a return to pagan virtues in order to restore Italy to her imperial glory. Nietzsche espoused this thesis but took it further. For him, the moral predicament was much more serious than the Florentine

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diagnosed. In his analysis, there is no alternative to Western decadence and nihilism from within the herd ethics, especially once it has evolved into the ascetic ideal and unleashed the destructive power of science by reaching back to its Platonic roots. In this, Nietzsche's philosophy is a visceral rejection of modernity and of what passes for social and moral progress, namely scientific and technological advances, atheism, secularism, democracy, egalitarianism and human rights. He saw all these conceptions, inherited from the Enlightenment and which culminated in positivism, as having set the West on the path to implosion.

In his *Protagoras*, Plato argued that, to save humankind from the kind of self-destruction that the knowledge of fire brings about, Zeus, after punishing Prometheus, endowed man with such virtues as justice and civic wisdom.[32] Nietzsche, for all his hostility to Plato, would have approved of this remedy. If science is the problem, then morality rather than more science, must be the solution. There are other, perhaps more insidious, manifestations of this conclusion, as the following chapter will show.

NOTES

1. *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 16. Nietzsche's works are available online, often in the widely praised translations of Walter Kaufmann or R. J. Hollingdale used in this chapter.
2. Although proposed in the text as an aside (in section 5), this is the book's defining contention.
3. See the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* (hereafter BGE) and section 1 of the same work; see also *Twilight of the Idols* (hereafter TI) Chapter III 1.
4. These views are offered throughout *The Gay Science* (hereafter GS), especially in the Preface and in Book V (see especially Sections 373ff).
5. BGE Preface.
6. GS 123.
7. This is a very general theme of Nietzsche's last works; see for instance BGE 186 and 191, as well as *The Anti-Christ* (hereafter AC), Sections 11, 43 and 51.
8. GS 125.
9. *Ecce Homo*, 'Why I am a Destiny', Section 1.
10. *Human, All Too Human*, Book I, Section 520.
11. BGE Preface.
12. These ideas recur frequently in Nietzsche's last books; see notably BGE 19, 26, 197, 199, 200, 212 and 287; TI IX, Section 49; GS 55 and 290.
13. These arguments are offered in *On The Genealogy of Morals* (hereafter GM), Essay I, first sections.
14. These claims are made in various forms and with various emphases in Nietzsche's last works. See notably BGE Sections 62, 206 and 228; GM Preface Section 6, Essay II Section 11, Essay III, Sections 3, 13 and 14; AC Sections 43 and 52; TI V 2.

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15. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Book IV, 'Of the Higher Man', Section 3. Nietzsche's views on education were first offered in a series of five lectures given in early 1872, available under the collective title *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. They are summarised, unchanged, in TI VIII.
16. TI IX 14.
17. GM II 12.
18. TI I 12; see also BGE 252 and 253.
19. See the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (hereafter Z), Section 5.
20. Z I 15.
21. GM III 25.
22. AC I 2.
23. Z I 12.
24. Z I 15.
25. See BGE 19 and GM III 28.
26. TI I 8.
27. Cf. the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*.
28. Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius* (letter 107, Section 11).
29. GM II 12; this theme is visible throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*.
30. *The Will to Power*, Section 822.
31. See Joullié, J.-E. 2013. *Will to Power, Nietzsche's Last Idol*. London: Palgrave for a complete development of this argument.
32. See lines 322b–c.

FURTHER READING

The abundant literature on Nietzsche does not shine for its quality. Two works deserve to be mentioned, however, one very complete biography and one insightful study of his thought:

Curtis, C. 2005. *Friedrich Nietzsche*. New York, NY: The Overlock Press.
Heller, E. 1988. *The Importance of Nietzsche: Ten Essays*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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Chapter 10

Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry

Managing Mind

Philosophically, the early years of the nineteenth century were dominated by attempts to reconcile two opposing views of the world, namely deterministic science and personal freedom. The prominent figure in this debate was Kant. Like Descartes before him, Kant was obsessed with the following contradiction: human bodies seem to be controlled by scientific forces, while human actions, controlled by the mind, seem to evade them. Scientific determinism and human freedom were, for Kant, incontestable facts and from this quandary he concluded that the nature of reality is forever beyond the reach of human knowledge.

Schopenhauer, although accepting many of Kant's premises, sought to overcome his conclusion. He argued that fundamental reality is in a sense knowable through the body as will. Unlike Descartes, for whom reflective consciousness is the basis for and proof of human existence, Schopenhauer gave unconscious willing pride of place in his philosophy. The essence of the world is will and human beings are uncontrollable objectified will (to live). The most obvious example of irrepressible willing was, for Schopenhauer, sexual desire since the sexual instinct is the highest affirmation of life and the dominant motive for the human species. Although Schopenhauer's psycho-philosophy is not invulnerable to criticisms (if the will to live explains all behaviour, then it explains no specific one), it was to have momentous consequences.

Schopenhauer's contentions contributed to the development of a new 'depth psychology', one grounded on unconscious, irrational and uncontrollable forces which sabotage human rationality. This evolution came about because philosophers were not alone in their travails. In particular, the seemingly unstoppable success of nineteenth-century science (notably in physics, according to which reality is not ultimately made of matter but of wave-like

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energy), prompted psychologists and psychiatrists to look for positivist foundations for their disciplines. One way this could be achieved was to make the object of their investigation, the psyche, unconscious yet amenable to empirical investigation.

While Comte had no place for self-consciousness, free will and personal responsibility, Schopenhauer emphasised unconscious willing. An imaginative thinker was required to provide a synthesis. He met the challenge by absorbing the free and responsible individual into a mechanistic perspective which bypassed the Kantian dilemma. That man was Sigmund Freud, who was destined to become one of the most influential men of the twentieth century. With the help of Schopenhauer (and Plato's tripartite model of the psyche), Freud forged a theory, a therapy, a language, and a worldwide organisation that exists to this day. Managers cannot afford to ignore Freud's ideas.

PSYCHOANALYSIS'S MAIN PRINCIPLES

Freud was born in Moravia in 1856 and moved with his family to Vienna in 1860.[1] He graduated in medicine from the University of Vienna in 1881 and worked for a few years in the Vienna General Hospital where he conducted research into the clinical uses of cocaine. After accepting a university lectureship in 1885, he travelled to Paris to study hysteria and hypnosis under the supervision of the famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893). Apart from legitimate neurological illnesses, Charcot was interested in people with disorders which had the appearances of such conditions. Rather than considering them as malingerers, Charcot called them hysterics (derived from the Greek for uterus) since he refused to believe that they were consciously simulating illness. That is, while he acknowledged that malingering is a feature of hysteria, he argued that hysterics do not 'know' they are malingering. It must be the case, therefore, that unlike malingerers who consciously imitate illness, hysterics unconsciously imitate illness. Since there are no objective criteria by which to decide whether patients are consciously or unconsciously imitating illness, the easiest solution is to treat both hysterics and malingerers *as if* they are ill.

The ancient Greeks believed that the 'hysterical' behaviour of women is caused by a 'wandering womb', code-name for sexual frustration. Charcot did not agree with such theories, but this did not stop Freud from claiming that he learned from his Parisian fellowship that mental disorders, like hysteria, arose from sexual disturbances. Upon his return to Vienna in 1886, he set up a private practice in 'nervous diseases', using hypnosis to give patients more freedom in expressing their suppressed emotions. Freud soon discarded hypnosis, however, in favour of the 'free association' techniques

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that he learned from his friend and mentor, Dr Josef Breuer, with whom he co-authored *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895.

In the mid-1890s, Freud committed himself to a natural neuropsychology which sought to understand psychopathologies as neuroses, that is, as diseases of the neurones. In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), he consistently tried to describe psychological processes in terms of material states of the brain. He quickly abandoned this fanciful project and claimed instead that he was developing a 'science of mental life', and began to use the terms that were to be associated with his 'psycho-analysis', an expression he coined in 1896. By the turn of the century, his theory of psychosexual development was finalised and in 1900 Freud published his first influential piece, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* followed in 1905. Books kept flowing from his pen throughout World War I and the 1920s. Of special importance is *The Ego and the Id* (1923) which offers Freud's structural theory of the mind with its id, ego and superego entities. The year this book was published was also the year in which the cancer of the oral cavity that was to end his life was diagnosed. In 1933, Freud's books were publicly burned in Germany and he, as a Jew, feared for his future. He sought asylum in London in 1938 and died there the following year, leaving an enormous body of theoretical work and case studies which are still today the subject of active scholarship.

While Freud's is not the only school of psychoanalysis, his remains the first, most developed and most influential. Carl Jung's (1875–1961) version, although significant, never achieved the fame and influence of that of his one-time master. It is impossible to summarise Freud's ideas in a few pages, but it is possible to outline the central aspects of his psychology, particularly those theoretical and therapeutic elements that are relevant to managers and management consultants. In the following and except otherwise stated, 'psychoanalysis' means 'Freudian psychoanalysis'.

According to Freud, the inception of psychoanalytic therapy can be traced to Breuer's treatment of a young woman who has come down in Freudian legend as Anna O.[2] In real life, Bertha Pappenheim (1860–1936), later to become a respected writer, feminist and social worker, was, in 1882, diagnosed by Breuer with hysteria. She suffered from paralysis and loss of sensation on the right side of her body, her eye movements were disturbed and her vision restricted. She coughed incessantly, had an aversion to food and drink, and spoke in unpredictable ways. Anna's relationship with Breuer extended over several years, during which she helped him identify two phenomena which have become classical features of psychoanalysis: catharsis and transference.

Catharsis is the result of Breuer's discovering that when he listened sympathetically to Anna's complaints, her symptoms either moderated or disappeared, especially when she recounted experiences of early life which were

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associated with them. Transference occurred when Anna transferred her loving feelings about her (then ailing) father to the good doctor. When Anna spoke to herself, Breuer repeated her words to encourage her to use them as a prelude to discussion, resulting in Anna producing fantasies which started when she attended her sick father. When she had related several fantasies, she reverted to a relatively normal mental life. Anna christened this treatment 'talking cure' and often referred to it jokingly as 'chimney-sweeping'. Breuer noticed that 'sweeping the mind' could accomplish more than temporary relief of her mental confusion. It was possible to bring about the disappearance of Anna's symptoms if she could remember on what occasion her symptoms had first appeared.[3]

Breuer never abandoned this therapeutic insight and Freud transformed it into a theoretical axiom: all hysterical symptoms are 'residues' of suppressed emotional experiences, or what were later to be called 'psychical traumas'. The specific nature of the symptoms is explained by their relation to the traumatic scenes which are their cause. Breuer's work with Anna convinced Freud that hysterical patients suffer from reminiscences. When the powerful emotions which stem from bad memories are suppressed, the ensuing increase in tension seeks some form of egress. Neurosis occurs when the emotional release is blocked; 'strangulated' emotions are the origin of hysteria.

Freud believed that the suppressed memories of patients are not lost but are ready to emerge in association with what they consciously know. This justified the effectiveness of the free association technique by which patients voice whatever comes to their consciousness under the loose guidance of the therapist. There is, however, some force that prevents suppressed memories from becoming conscious, a resistance on the part of patients which maintains their hysterical condition. Freud determined to confront this resistance and gave the name 'repression' to the process by which it manifests itself. Repression involves the emergence of a wishful impulse incompatible with the patient's ethical and aesthetic standards. At the end of this internal struggle, the idea which appears before consciousness as the vehicle of this irreconcilable wish is pushed out of consciousness with all its associated memories.

Incompatibilities between impulses and ethical standards arise because, for Freud, all desires and fantasies are fundamentally sexual in nature and caused by an unconscious sexual force, which he named 'libido'. The importance and strength of all drives have been shaped by experiences, especially sexual, in infancy and childhood. These experiences explain the general susceptibility to traumas of the adult and it is the task of psychoanalysts to uncover them and make them conscious. The repressed, wishful impulses of childhood alone provide the power for the later neuroses. Without them, the reaction to later traumas would take a normal course. Although Freud's favourite disciples, including Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, would abandon

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him over his obsession with childhood sexuality, Freud never doubted its central importance to psychoanalysis (the theory and its associated therapy) and to adult life generally.[4]

To gain empirical support for his theory, Freud turned to the analysis of dreams, including his own. Clearly, not all dreams are sexual, so Freud asserted that dreams have a second, latent meaning which is not apparent because in dreaming repression operates only partially. The latent meaning of dreams can be understood if their symbolic significance is acknowledged. According to Freud, dreams reveal sexually symbolic themes: elongated objects are penises, houses are human bodies, children are genitals, playing with children is masturbation, and so forth (the same goes with habits: the tendency of females to play with pencils has been interpreted as a manifestation of penis envy[5]). Dreamers are engaged in the activity of wish-fulfilment: they have encountered in their waking hours an obstacle to the achievement of their goal that their unconscious mind tries to solve. By altering the symbols by which wish-fulfilment is expressed, however, the unconscious ensures that the solution is unrecognised by the dreamer.

Psychoanalysis's first and overarching principle is thus *unconscious psychic determinism*: all mental events are caused by unconscious drives, especially the libido. By unconscious, Freud meant any mental event the existence of which must be assumed but of which individuals can have no knowledge; by determinism he meant that, against the idea of free will, every human action and all mental events are 'fully determined'.[6] Consequently, there can be no mental accidents: apparent accidental behaviours, such as slips of the tongue (saying 'fraud' instead of 'Freud), dreams and recurring errors are in fact meaningful and in need of symbolic interpretation. Further, all behaviour is caused by internal mental events which stem from internalisations of conflicts between persons and their environment, past and present. More precisely, these conflicts are between environmental stressors and a reservoir of psychic energy called, in the English psychoanalytic literature, 'id' (in original German *das Es*, 'the it'). Not unlike Schopenhauer's will to live, id is the primitive foundation of all instincts. Its power expresses the purpose of human existence, the satisfaction of innate needs. It is blind, unconscious and operates solely according to the pleasure principle.

The second principle of psychoanalysis is that behaviour is directed towards goals. When individuals fail to achieve prominent goals, the ensuing tension increases psychic energy which seeks release. While the release of tension is pleasurable, social reality often discourages immediate gratification and so there is a conflict between the pleasure drive (id) and the demands of social reality (represented in the mind by an entity Freud called *das Ich*, literally 'the I' but rendered in English as 'ego'). Ego operates according to the reality principle and is, therefore, concerned with the demands of the external

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world. It scans social reality and assesses how id's demands can be accommodated and what consequences follow specific actions. The conscious part of ego is what defines human beings as rational animals; the unconscious part is the storehouse of id's material which has been repressed by ego. A third structure, superego (*das Über-Ich*), develops out of ego and is what is traditionally meant by conscience. It operates according to the morality principle. It oversees the proposals of ego and rejects possibilities that can be expected to lead to moral censure. Interactions between ego and superego can generate anxiety in the face of threats from id.

Freud used the term 'defence' to refer to the process by which individuals unconsciously defend themselves against undesirable thoughts, feelings and impulses by transforming them into desirable ones. Ego reacts to anxiety by defending, primarily by repression of the offending material. Apart from the prominent defence mechanism known as repression, others include the following: reaction formation (opposite impulses adopted); sublimation (dangerous impulses channelled to acceptable behaviour); projection (impulses attributed to others); identification (similar impulses of others adopted); displacement (impulses redirected); denial, rationalisation and regression. Of special interest to psychoanalysts is the defence mechanism known as 'regression' because it is related to the desire to seek the pleasures that were satisfying in childhood. In many cases, when id's instinctual desire is unconsciously recognised as dangerous, individuals behave as if they are pursuing childish pleasures and so unconsciously substitute a simpler and more socially acceptable method of gratification.

The mechanism of regression is closely related to Freud's theory that instinctual drives develop through three childhood stages: oral, anal and genital. The oral stage is a time of life when sexual satisfaction is obtained by sucking at breast, bottle or pacifier. The anal stage offers pleasure through defecating and expelling and the erotic pleasure of retaining faeces. In the third stage, the genitals are the focus of sexual pleasure. These three stages are followed by a period of latency which lasts from about the age of six until puberty reasserts the sexual instinct in full force and redirects itself towards people outside the family. When individuals encounter severe difficulties at one or more psychosexual stages and when expression of their sexual energy is inhibited, they fixate at, or regress to, that earlier stage of development.

The third notable principle of psychoanalysis, then, concerns Freud's insistence that adult behaviour reflects, in modified form, childhood experiences. The first six years of life are crucial in the development of a relatively fixed personality because the child's self-preservative, sexual and aggressive instincts need to be harmonised with each other and with the demands of society. The healthy personality is one that has overcome the traumas of childhood and has harmonised the demands of parents, teachers, siblings and peers

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to achieve a balance between environmental demands, id, ego and superego. The neurotic personality has been unable to resolve childhood conflicts and has difficulties in coping with social demands in later life. Such personalities are fixated at an early level of development and have inadequate psychological resources with which to cope with life's conflicts, including, of course, those arising in the workplace.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AT WORK

Although psychoanalysis is now past its heyday, the everyday use of terms like 'libido' or 'Freudian slip', the widespread belief in the existence of an 'unconscious' acting as reservoir of uncontrollable causal material and the abundant reference to Freudian themes in Hollywood productions attest to its durable imprint on Western culture. Enthusiasm for psychoanalysis has not spared the management and business world. Understandably so, for psychoanalysis makes attractive promises to anyone who professes to study organisations. If the theory is justified, it unlocks the dynamics of employees' and consumers' minds, paving the way to more effective staffing, managing and marketing decisions. Although commentators have traced the formal inception of this line of thinking to the pre–World War II period, it flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, notably owing to the efforts of the members of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the United Kingdom and to Harvard University psychologists Harry Levinson and Abraham Zaleznik in North America.

The output of the Tavistock Institute is exemplified best in the work of organisational psychoanalyst Isabel Menzies Lyth (1917–2008) who argued that unconscious forces shape organisational life.[7] This being the case, consultants must assume that the management issues presented to them for analysis as simple, surface difficulties are really unconscious and complex problems, involving deep-seated, unrecognised emotional conflicts. Organisational behaviour must not be taken at face value but interpreted to uncover its unconscious meaning. As Tavistock social scientist Eric Miller put it, 'Just as the classic psychoanalyst armed with couch, pad and pencil, uses projections into him as primary data on what is going on in a patient in order to help him, so the psychoanalytically-oriented action researcher uses the projections of client system members into him as primary data for the elucidation of what is going on in the organisation'.[8]

The Myers-Brigg Temperament Indicator, a personality test widely used within recruitment and career management circles, allegedly based on Jung's psychoanalytical concepts, is another example of psychoanalysis's inroad to the world of managers. An indirect and apparently misguided one, however,

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for many critics have pointed to the test's aberrant use of Jungian theory and its unreliable practical results.[9] A more direct (and acknowledged) influence of psychoanalytic themes is detectable in transactional analysis's theory of personality. Developed by North American psychiatrist Eric Berne, transactional analysis's three 'ego states' (child, adult, parent) are transparently derived from Freud's mental entities (id, ego and superego respectively). As in classic psychoanalytic therapy, the aim of a transactional analytic intervention is to control the influence of the child in relationships. The use of the model in an organisational context has been recommended by management consultants and career counsellors; anecdotal evidence indicates that it is taught is some management and engineering schools.

In more recent times, psychoanalysis has been used in the field of executive coaching and leadership development programs. INSEAD's Manfred Kets de Vries and European School of Management and Technology's Konstantin Korotov have developed a 'clinical paradigm' based on four premises. The most transparently psychoanalytical of these premises is that the unconscious mind plays a prominent role in determining human actions, thoughts, fantasies, hopes and fears, to the point that it can hold individuals as prisoners of their past.[10] While this view of executives' unconscious robs them of their freedom and responsibility and puts their leadership abilities beyond their control, there is no reason for despair because help is available. Indeed, one of the executive leadership programs designed by these authors includes a visit to a museum dedicated to the life and work of Freud, on the assumption that the example of the great man will increase participants' courage and further their career.

It must come as a surprise to managers to be told that they act from irrational motives, their practical issues are in fact unconsciously motivated psychological problems waiting to be deciphered by psychoanalysts, and their career prospects can be improved by way of an exhibition on Freud. Although no doubt well-intentioned, such approaches sentence managers to the status of naïve spectators of human behaviour (including their own) who need the skills of people who have been psychoanalysed to see through surface performance. There is no evidence to support the view that organisational problems can be solved by such methods. More probable is that organisational difficulties will multiply, for reasons that will now be exposed.

FREUD UNDER ANALYSIS

A striking fact about psychoanalysis is its rapid success, despite or because of its controversial themes.[11] In September 1909, Freud was invited by Clark University to deliver a series of lectures on his theories and his fame grew

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rapidly thereafter. He appears to have foreseen this outcome since, as he was sailing into New York Harbour, he confided to Carl Jung, 'We are bringing them the plague'.[12] This is not to say that Freud's theory has not been resisted. Indeed, it has been subjected to intense critical analysis ever since it was proposed.

One can start by noting that, according to Freud, all behaviour is the expression of one single source of psychic energy, id. However, Freud failed to clarify the process by which psychic energy is converted into physiological energy. Further, Freud's model implies that the resistance exerted by ego to the demands of id must find its source from within id. Basic logic says that this is impossible: no energy can resist itself, for the same reason that a river cannot turn against its own current. If id is ultimately the unique internal source of behaviour, nothing can oppose it. If all behaviour is the product of one instinct or drive (libido), then everything that the person does exemplifies this drive and this means that the said drive cannot explain or predict specific behaviour. The most that can be said is that the person 'behaves'.[13]

On Freud's account, material which has been repressed is antisocial by nature, for otherwise it would not have been repressed by ego in the first place. While the goal of psychoanalytic therapy is the unearthing of this material in order to neutralise it, Freud insisted that individuals are neither free nor responsible for their actions. This is because they are ultimately a system of internal forces and pressures which produce predictable behaviour. An irreconcilable contradiction thus lurks behind the proposed therapeutic process. Either patients are the puppets of their unconscious, which means that whatever therapeutic outcome obtained owes nothing to their (or their psychoanalysts') conscious efforts, or they have control over it and can overcome the tension that had led to initial repression. This second possibility assumes that the Freudian machine contains a free, non-mechanical ego which acts as an 'unconscious judge' (an oxymoron, surely) which 'unconsciously chooses' to repress dangerous material and then decides consciously to allow it into consciousness after suitable chimney sweeping. That is, Freud failed to realise that the therapeutic process he promoted amounts to attributing to human beings far more rationality than he was elsewhere prepared to concede. The possibility of therapeutic intervention and the idea of an 'unconscious judge' destroy the integrity of the Freudian system.

As Freud was adamant that his methods are scientific and his model of the psyche is a naturalistic one, he was convinced that psychoanalysis belongs with reputable academic disciplines, including medicine.[14] The scientific status of psychoanalysis is not widely accepted, however. Indeed, Freud's reliance on unobservable concepts (unconscious, id, ego, superego) and processes (repression, regression and other defence mechanisms) disqualifies his theory from the status of a science. To this comment, many admirers

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of Freud have argued that psychoanalysis is at least amenable to empirical verification in that it can explain observed phenomena. As Karl Popper noted, the explanatory power of psychoanalysis, which has impressed generations of Freud's disciples, is in fact such that it can explain everything in the field of human behaviour.[15] When one of the present authors questioned Freud's theory, a trained psychoanalyst responded that rejecting psychoanalysis is evidence for it, because what is rejected is the theory's reliance on sexual themes, thereby establishing their central importance.

In Popper's sense, psychoanalytic theory is unscientific because unfalsifiable, as are all propositions about the unconscious. Indeed, the use of 'unconscious' as a noun disguises the fact that it is an adjective which refers always to the unconscious mind. Psychoanalysts who claim scientific status for their theory have therefore two problems. First, they need to provide falsifiable propositions about the existence of the mind. Second, they need to do the same for the unconscious mind. Since propositions of the form 'x exists' cannot be falsified (unless x is an oxymoron), the proposition 'the (unconscious) mind exists' cannot be falsified.[16] Furthermore, it is not clear how a 'mind' can be compartmentalised into unconscious, preconscious and conscious levels. It is even less clear how unconscious 'material' moves between these levels, as if the mind were a house with furniture moving from basement to attic. Popper was thus justified in claiming that id, ego and superego have the same scientific status as the gods on Mt. Olympus.

Psychologist Hans Eysenck observed that when a testable Freudian hypothesis is falsified, psychoanalysts typically rework the hypothesis to immunise it from further criticism.[17] Thus, when Freud conceded that his patients' claims that they had been sexually seduced in childhood were false, he substituted the hypothesis that the significance lay in the fact that they *thought* they had been seduced. In this way, a falsifiable (and falsified) statement was immunised against further criticism with an untestable and unfalsifiable hypothesis. An unfalsifiable theory explains every possible outcome but predicts none and so cannot be considered scientific. The conclusion, then, is clear: psychoanalysis fails as positivist or Popperian science. Despite its jargon, prestige and academic status, it is not science. It survives as pseudo-science, a collection of myths and (in view of the fervour of its promoters) a secular religion.

What remains certain is that psychoanalysis stands or falls on the assumption of unconscious motivation. Rather than attribute human behaviour to conscious strategies, choices and purposes, Freud attributed behaviour to unconscious motives and refused to accept free will and personal responsibility. The popularity of psychoanalysis, apart from its emphasis on sex, rests in part on the fact that people act out simple but effective habits, on premises which appear to be unconscious but are merely taken for granted.

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Much is learnt in childhood that remains unquestioned. Freud ascribed abnormal behaviour to unconscious motives rather than to faulty premises. His preconscious defence mechanisms have their analogues in conscious thought process. For instance, Freudian repression is analogous to conscious suppression of unwanted thoughts. The conscious interpretation of denial is 'turning a blind eye', 'ignoring' or 'refusing to admit'; projection becomes telling a malicious lie about another; regression is throwing a temper tantrum; rationalisation occurs when people consciously avoid making public the real reason for their actions but prefer to offer a plausible, false reason which will satisfy enquirers.

Psychoanalytic therapy is a game which begins with analysts' assuming that clients are motivated to perform socially unacceptable but pleasurable acts. However, clients 'unconsciously know' that these acts are dangerous. Analysts observe inconsistencies in clients' actions and assume that they are anxious. Psychoanalysts also assume that clients are not consciously acting in a disreputable manner and encourage them to offer verbal accounts of dream-like material, which is then interpreted as evidence of their undesirable unconscious motives. So, analysis requires that clients who report a problem in living cannot report their disreputable unconscious motives (indeed, if clients report their real motives, these must be conscious and that rules out repression). Analysts are thus trained to read into clients' activities symbolic references to disreputable motives, usually sexual and frequently extravagant. This is a popular game that psychoanalysts play with a vengeance. Reluctant virgins dream of church spires, sexually frustrated men dream of watermelons, and so on. The game is popular because it is exciting to be licensed to express bizarre ideas about sex.

Psychoanalysts are masters of assumption. When clients seem disorganised, they assume anxiety which has somehow 'leaked' from a hidden motive. Accordingly, the anxious behaviour is linked, through a system of forces and hydraulics, to the regulation of the basic appetites. The system of forces and mechanisms in Freudian theory appeals to those who embrace the idea of the person as a biological machine. However, the human machine contains a non-mechanical ego whose activities include knowing, choosing and willing. These activities cannot be fitted into Freud's system of hydraulic forces without destroying the unity of the system. Freud translates such human feelings as rage and lust in such a way that 'repression of our basic nature' becomes a metaphor for social regulation of undesirable behaviour.

Significantly, Freudian theory and the practice of psychoanalysis relieve individuals of responsibilities for their actions. Insofar as acceptance of responsibility makes some people uncomfortable, this relief is welcomed and offers an incentive to believe in Freud's mythology. Many people have reacted well to psychoanalysis, just as many have reacted well to Catholicism.

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Indeed, there are similarities, because the analytic relationship operates on the same principles as the Catholic confessional. A common feature in these institutions is that they remove personal responsibility from people: psychoanalysis by explaining human behaviour mechanically, confession by relying on the priest's licence to forgive.

Despite psychoanalysis's serious logical and epistemological difficulties, many people claim to have derived improved psychological states from its associated therapy. The question of therapeutic value should not be confused with questions about a theory's validity, however. That some people respond well to psychoanalytic therapy does not constitute evidence for the truth of Freudian theory. Psychoanalysis is credible to many people because it acknowledges that individuals have biological impulses which are regulated by society. Freud translated this conflict between 'biology' and 'society' so that (allegedly unhealthy) repression of human's biological nature became code-name for social regulation of unacceptable behaviour. In other words, Freud internalised and treated as pathological what is normally regarded as a relational problem. Now, since they all allegedly operate beneath the level of consciousness, Freudian defence mechanisms relieve individuals of responsibility for their choices. In this way, unexpected and asocial behaviour is reinterpreted as beyond the rational control of individuals.

Beyond its beneficial effects for some, whether psychoanalytic practice should be encouraged or discouraged is a matter worthy of investigation. A notable contributor to this debate from the very beginning was neither a doctor nor a member of the Freudian circle but an Austrian satirist, Karl Kraus (1874–1936). In 1899, Kraus founded a satirical magazine *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*) to which he devoted his life and which made him one of the most widely admired, criticised, and feared men in Vienna and beyond. Kraus accepted the distinction made by the ancient Greeks between noble and base rhetoric. While noble rhetoric provides individuals with self-enhancing versions of themselves, base rhetoric provides them with debased versions of themselves and excuses for misbehaviour. Kraus judged the mass media, politicians, and members of the professions as base rhetoricians and was especially incensed by professional jargon and the tendency, widespread then as now, to apply the dehumanising language of the natural sciences to human behaviour and morality.

Although initially showing interest in the new psychology of Freud, Kraus quickly came to see it as a form of base rhetoric because it tries to persuade people that they are victims of their childhood and unconscious traumatic experiences, thereby providing them with a licence to continue to act strangely. If people accept psychoanalysis as noble rhetoric, he argued, they pay a heavy price: 'Before Freud', he wrote, 'doctors cautioned that the cure may be worse than the disease; now they ought to caution that there is a

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cure which is a disease – namely, psychoanalysis'.[18] The same warning can be uttered about modern psychiatry.

PSYCHIATRY

There are bodily diseases, such as tertiary syphilis, dementia and multiple sclerosis, which are accompanied by bizarre, uncontrollable and even dangerous behaviour. Psychiatrists say that there are also 'mental illnesses' or 'diseases of the mind', although the expression 'mental disorder' is nowadays officially preferred. During the better part of the twentieth century, the influence of psychoanalysis and psychiatry grew together. However, the glory days of psychoanalysis were over by 1970, while the status and power of psychiatry has expanded unabated. The expression 'mental health', of psychiatric origin, is still daily heard on mass and social media. Indeed, it has even entered employment regulations and found its way into work organisations.

In the early years of psychoanalysis, only medical doctors were accepted into the ranks. As psychoanalysis flourished, non-medical therapists were allowed entry and based their practice on conversations with clients rather than medication. Of course, many psychiatrists rejected psychoanalysis in favour of a medical perspective. By the 1980s, while psychiatry was almost exclusively seen as a branch of medicine, it was endowed with powers not devolved to other medical specialties. Indeed, while no treatment can be forced on a patient suffering from a bodily disease, psychiatric intervention can be imposed on people with mental illnesses. This obtains, in part, from the psychiatric belief that since a mental disorder identifies an impairment of the mind, those affected have lost the ability to control themselves and cannot make informed decisions about their welfare. Psychiatry's powers are thus not unlike those attributed to the police and the justice system. If only because of this, psychiatry deserves critical scrutiny.

Bodily diseases are exposed in books of pathology where they are defined in organic terms. Their diagnosis is based on the presence of biological signs without which diagnoses can be only putative. One of the most authoritative books of pathology, *Robbins Basic Pathology*, is clear on this matter: pathology 'is the study of diseases. […] It involves the investigation of the causes of disease and the associated changes at the levels of cells, tissues, and organs which in turn give rise to the presenting signs and symptoms of the patient […]. To render diagnoses and guide therapy in clinical practice, pathologists identify changes in the gross or microscopic appearance *(morphology)* of cells and tissues, and biochemical alterations in bodily fluids (such as blood and urine)'.[19]

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Books of pathology such as the *Robbins* thus enumerate diseases whose existence is established objectively by biological tests. This is not and has never been the case for mental illnesses. Indeed, illnesses identified by biological tests and objective diagnostic signs are, by definition, bodily and not mental. Pathology books do not, therefore, include mental illnesses since they have never been diagnosed by medical signs: such illnesses are diagnosed by symptoms related to (mis)behaviour. That is, mental illnesses are diagnosed by what people do or say. Consequently, mental illnesses are catalogued, not in books of pathology, but in another book, described by critics as one of the great works of fiction of the twentieth century. This is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (which contains few statistics), published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). First published as a slim volume of 130 pages in 1952, the fifth edition of more than 900 pages appeared in 2013. While DSM-I reflected the dominance of the psychoanalytic perspective, DSM-III (published in 1980) marked a determination of the APA to return psychiatry to medicine proper and to make it consistent with the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* published by the World Health Organisation, a move that helped established the DSM's global reach.

If everything that exists can be defined, then doubts must be raised about the existence of something that cannot be defined. On this matter, psychiatrists and psychologists had to wait until DSM-III, which appeared almost 140 years after the founding of the APA, for a formal definition of mental disorders. Prior to DSM-III, any condition treated by psychiatrists was considered a mental disorder. DSM-III defined mental disorders as 'internal dysfunctions' in individuals, causing them harm or distress, thereby making them compatible with the traditional view of illnesses. The term 'dysfunction' was left undefined, however, allowing many disorders to be added to the manual by putting them to a vote of the APA members who sit on the DSM task force. In this way, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder were added to the DSM in 1980 and 1987 respectively, while homosexuality was voted out of the official list of mental disorders in 1974 under the pressure of activists (a new and related condition, 'ego-dystonic homosexuality', persisted until 1986). 'Rapism' was considered and rejected for inclusion in DSM-5 because a feminist lobby thought it would encourage sympathy for men who rape women. It is difficult to image a real illness (dementia, brain tumour or viral infection) being voted into or out of existence by pathologists at a conference.

Definitional problems have haunted the authors of the DSM even since their first attempt at definition. The fourth edition revised (DSM-IV-TR) was published in 2000 and retained the adjective 'mental' in its title, to

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the chagrin of its authors: 'Although this volume is titled *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the term "mental disorder" unfortunately implies a distinction between "mental" and "physical" disorders that is a reductionistic anachronism of mind-body dualism'. Inexplicably after such a caveat, the proposed definition embraced this anachronistic dualism by adding: 'A compelling literature documents that there is much "physical" in "mental" disorders and much "mental" in "physical" disorders. The problem raised by the term "mental" disorders has been much clearer than its solution, and, unfortunately, the term persists in the title of DSM-IV because we have not found an appropriate substitute'.[20] In other words, the authors coped with the categorical dispute by claiming that no condition is solely of the body or mind while, inconsistently, writing a manual that separates disorders of the mind from disorders of the body.

Understandably, the manual's definitional vagueness continued to attract criticism. Although DSM-5 has tried to quell them, its authors have had to admit that no definition can capture all aspects of disorders contained in the manual. The following elements are required for a psychiatric diagnosis, however: 'A mental disorder is a syndrome characterised by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behaviour (e.g., political, religious or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual'.[21] Remembering that mental disorders are regarded by psychiatrists as medical conditions (i.e. illnesses), it is breathtaking to find that included in DSM-5 are: antisocial personality, avoidant personality, binge-eating, caffeine use, child maltreatment and neglect, gambling, hair-pulling, hoarding, illness anxiety, internet gaming, jealousy, learning (academic and mathematics) problems, narcissistic personality, obesity, paedophilia, partner neglect, premature ejaculation, relational problems, rumination.

Most of the mental illnesses in DSM-III and later versions do not present with any objective signs. The small number that do are called (oxymoronically) 'organic mental disorders' because they combine a condition of known biological aetiology with abnormal behaviour. Alzheimer's, a vascular degenerative brain disease, is listed in the DSM because it affects adversely short-term memory, cognitive ability and is associated with changes in mood. Beyond a few similar exceptions though, the DSM is not concerned with bodily diseases. In the absence of signs, psychiatrists must therefore fall back

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to behaviour (including symptoms) to establish their diagnoses. The DSM is thus mainly concerned with (mis)behavioural issues. Logically, the manual should have been called *A Diagnostic Manual of Misbehaviours*. However, this would have raised difficult political questions about how misbehaviours should be treated since psychiatrists rely heavily on medication to 'treat' clients, now redefined as patients. Further, the medical approach to psychiatry has established close relationships with pharmaceutical and medical insurance companies. More than 70 per cent of the DSM-IV-TR task force members had financial relationships with pharmaceutical corporations.[22] Sales of psychiatric medications, which supposedly rebalance brain chemical imbalances and other physicochemical problems (inexplicably implying that the disorders are biological, not mental), reached US$70 billion in 2010 in the United States alone.[23] Although it contains no information on the drugs to be prescribed for the conditions it lists, the DSM is undeniably psychiatry's billing bible.

Ever since the publication of DSM-IV-TR, psychologists have criticised psychiatry's medicalisation of everyday behaviour. The fact is that DSM-5's definition of mental disorder begs more questions than it answers. Applying such words as 'disturbance' and 'dysfunction' to behaviour, in order to classify it as a mental condition, raises normative questions about the criteria that psychiatrists use to determine whether socially deviant behaviour is a rational expression of dissatisfaction with society's values or the result of an illness. How is eccentricity or social protest to be distinguished from mental illness? If 'significant distress' is the main criterion, there is no limit to the number of potential mental illnesses since individuals can be distressed about anything. It is thus unsurprising that gambling or bereavement are now listed in DSM-5, presumably treatable through adequate medication, electroshock, or surgery. At this stage, some serious questions arise.

THE MYTH OF MENTAL ILLNESS

In 1961, American psychiatrist Thomas Szasz (1920–2012) upset his professional colleagues by arguing, in *The Myth of Mental Illness*, that neither schizophrenia nor depression are mental illnesses for the simple reason that there is no such thing as mental illness. As the term 'illness' is defined in terms of those conditions which affect adversely the structural or functional integrity of the human *body*, the term cannot be applied to the 'mind' without self-contradiction.

As Szasz noted in *The Meaning of Mind*, the word 'mind' has had a turbulent history.[24] Today it functions as a verb *and* a noun. Before the sixteenth century, however, people had souls not minds and 'mind' meant

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only minding (as in 'mind the step'). Although people were minded, they had no minds. What this means is that mind (from the Latin *mens* for intention or will) is not a thing but an activity. Further, if mind is not an entity, it cannot be in the brain or in any other part of the body. Religious folk who disagree and claim that that 'mind' is really 'soul' would still have to accept the conclusion that mind is not a bodily organ to be studied by neuroscientists, psychiatrists and cognitive psychologists. Concrete nouns like 'brain' refer to tangible objects; abstract nouns like 'mind' do not and should not be treated as if they do. No human anatomical chart will have a part of the body referred to as 'mind'. As illness affects bodies and the mind is not a bodily organ, the mind cannot be, or become, ill. Mental illness is, therefore, a myth. Traditional psychiatry is a momentous but misguided effort, or, in less polite terms, 'a science of lies'.[25]

As philosophers know, the sting of a syllogistic argument is not in the tail, but in the premise. It is therefore open to anyone to challenge the premise by redefining illness to include any experience which is distressing to people. Such a move medicalises moral problems in living by treating as de facto illnesses conditions which are based on misbehaviours. In this way, Stalin was able to send political enemies to the Gulag because they were suffering from 'soft schizophrenia'. Although animated with different intentions, psychiatrists diagnose difficult or academically under-performing children with ADHD and prescribe Ritalin (the active ingredient of which – methylphenidate – being close enough to cocaine to justify the quip that Ritalin is cocaine with a PG rating). The psychiatric line is that since the behaviour of these children is a source of stress for their teachers and parents, they must be sick. Ignoring the reasons for children acting as they do out of boredom, frustration or fun, psychiatrists medicate them rather than investigate and try to improve the relationships in which they are involved. In this way, quiet children can be obtained at the pharmacy on prescription, not thanks to discipline, love and care.

If something is impossible in logic, it is impossible in every other way – empirically, scientifically, technically. Szasz's critique of mental illness is based on the logical impossibility of combining the words 'illness' and 'mental'. Mental illness is, by definition, a logical impossibility and so it is also a technical, scientific and empirical impossibility. The expressions 'mental illness' and 'mental health' are metaphors, figures of speech not to be taken literally. When one reads the statement 'the economy is sick', one acknowledges the use of metaphor since no one believes that economies contract influenza or need antibiotics. Today the public, encouraged by psychiatrists, regards the mind as the brain or a process of the brain and believes that mental illnesses are brain illnesses. If mental illnesses are really brain illnesses though, they should be called brain illnesses

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and not something else. It is unnecessary and confusing to have two categories (brain illness and mind illness) if one is reducible to the other. Alternatively, if mental illnesses are not brain illnesses, it follows that they cannot be cured by medication.

Although the claim that mental illness is a myth asserts an analytic truth, many people treat it as if it were an empirical truth, subject to falsification by means of observation or experiment. When confronted by Szasz's logical argument, they sometimes counter: 'I know someone who was diagnosed as mentally ill and was later diagnosed with a brain tumour. In the future, psychiatrists will show that all mental illnesses are brain illnesses'. As Szasz noted, however, if people have a disease of the brain or some other organ, then they have a neurological illness or some other disease, not a mental disorder. The proposed rejoinder only makes Szasz's point: the term 'disease' denotes a bodily condition, not a mental one.[26]

As one can imagine, Szasz's views have been subject to intense and loud criticism. No convincing counterargument has been proposed to date, however. His critics seem insensitive to logic or accuse him of ignoring the suffering of those diagnosed with 'mental disorders'. This is not the case since when Szasz asserted that mental illness is a myth, he did not deny the existence of personal unhappiness and socially deviant behaviour. Rather, he argued that they are miscategorised. The expression 'mental illness' is used to render more palatable the bitter fact of moral conflicts in human relations. That is, psychiatric diagnoses are stigmatising labels, phrased to resemble medical diagnoses and applied to individuals whose behaviour upsets or annoys others or themselves. Life is a task which can defeat anyone. 'If there is no mental illness there can be no hospitalization, treatment, or cure for it. Of course, people may change their behavior or personality, with or without psychiatric intervention. Such intervention is nowadays called "treatment", and the change, if it proceeds in a direction approved by society, "recovery" or "cure". [. . .] The introduction of psychiatric considerations into the administration of the criminal law – for example, the insanity plea and verdict, diagnoses of mental incompetence to stand trial, and so forth – corrupt the law and victimize the subject on whose behalf they are ostensibly employed. […] There is no medical, moral, or legal justification for involuntary psychiatric interventions. They are crimes against humanity'.[27]

Psychologist John Read reinforced Szasz's point when he reported studies which show that citizens have preferred to attribute mental illness to practical and moral problems in living rather than to medical conditions. 'Although the public understands that many factors influence who ends up crazy, terrified or miserable, studies consistently find that they place much more emphasis on adverse life events than on chemical imbalances

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or genetics. Biological psychiatry, enthusiastically supported by the pharmaceutical industry, insists on trying to educate the public that they are wrong. This "mental illness is an illness like any other" approach to destigmatisation ignores the large body of research evidence that biogenetic explanations fuel fear and prejudice. If future de-stigmatisation programs are to be evidence-based and therefore effective, they will need to avoid illness-type explanations and labels and focus instead on increasing contact with the people against whom the prejudice is targeted and on highlighting the social causes of their difficulties'.[28]

In the law, one is innocent until proven guilty. Szasz argued that in medicine, one is healthy until medical facts (signs) prove otherwise. His position is thus not to be confused with that of the anti-psychiatry movement created in the 1960s by psychiatrists David Cooper (1931–1986) and Ronald D. Laing (1927–1989), who opposed psychiatry because they saw it as a tool of social control. Szasz criticised them as egregious self-promoters who used their psychiatric authority to coerce their clients. Anti-psychiatry was, for Szasz, a form of psychiatry and he rejected both with equal vigour, calling anti-psychiatry 'quackery squared'.[29]

If one accepts that self-ownership is a basic right and initiating violence is a basic wrong, then it follows that psychiatrists, politicians and government officials violate these beliefs when they assume that self-ownership (epitomised by suicide) is a medical wrong and that initiating violence against individuals called 'mental patients' is a medical right. Indeed, abstaining from these 'interventions' is considered a dereliction of the psychiatrist's professional duty of care. This duty reveals that psychiatrists have been granted the right to coerce individuals on behalf of what Szasz called the 'therapeutic state'.[30] In a theological state, issues of right and wrong dominate people's lives; in a therapeutic state, right and wrong are reinterpreted in terms of health and sickness. That psychiatrists have promoted themselves as agents of the therapeutic state is obvious from the following declaration by George Brock Chisholm, thirteenth Canadian surgeon general, first director general of the World Health Organisation and a psychiatrist himself: 'The reinterpretation and eventual eradication of the concepts of right and wrong [...] are the belated objectives of practically all effective psychotherapy. [...] If the race is to be freed of its crippling burden of good and evil it must be psychiatrists who take the original responsibility. [...] Psychiatry must now decide what is to be the immediate future of the human race. No one else can. And this is the prime responsibility of psychiatry'.[31] 'Pharmageddon' seems an appropriate name for the day such a vision becomes reality. A distant prospect, perhaps; yet every time one sees a copy of the DSM on the shelves of a human resource manager or a chief of staff, one knows it has come imperceptibly closer.

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MANAGING MIND

To complement his main thesis, Szasz contended in *The Myth of Mental Illness* that personal conduct is always rule-following, role-playing, strategic and meaningful. Extending the work of philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) along existentialist lines (see following chapter), Szasz argued for a model of human behaviour in which patterns of interpersonal relations are analysed as if they are games. Szasz did not use the word 'game' in a frivolous sense. He argued that personal conduct is regulated to varying degrees by explicit and implicit rules, as are to be found in such games as tennis, where players can play an implicit game (bad behaviour) within an explicit game (tennis).

A notable characteristic of honest game-playing is the freedom of players to choose appropriate moves, which means that game-playing behaviour is not always easy to predict. Players enter games with the knowledge that they will encounter uncertainties and risks which they must master if they want to succeed. The fewer rules, the more open the range of possible moves and more uncertainty. If they cannot tolerate uncertainty, players will be tempted to act dishonestly to gain some measure of control over other players and some will be tempted to lie and cheat. In the case of honest game-playing, the aim is successful mastery of a task; in playing dishonestly the aim is coercion and manipulation of the other players.

In playing the game of management, honest managers value and thus require knowledge and skills manifested in workmanship and performance; dishonest managers value and will try to manipulate their colleagues. One way they can do so is to seek information about the psychological profile of their colleagues or subtly to encourage inadequate task performance since this puts their colleagues into a position of psychological inferiority calling for 'treatment'. These unscrupulous managers thus replace the task of doing their job competently with the task of doing their job 'compassionately'.[32]

Managers who agree with Szasz's logic thus accept that there is no such thing as mental health and no mind to manage. Rather, they see their task as managing the behaviour which, when judged against work objectives, is called performance. Although not expressed in these terms, Peter Drucker agreed since he insisted that the ultimate test of management is performance, the achievement of actual results. Those who manage by performance aim to produce personal responsibility for work by encouraging their colleagues to develop objectives and standards for themselves. If managers are to maximise their freedom and responsibility at work, they must be able to control their own performance and this requires self-discipline. Managers who concern themselves with their colleagues' psychological or psychiatric profiles sacrifice objective management; they act like psychologists or psychiatrists,

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claiming that they are acting compassionately and unselfishly in the best interests of their colleagues. As Drucker saw, compared with old-style autocratic management, management as psychotherapy is a form of psychological despotism and a gross misuse of psychology.[33]

While effective work relationships are based on mutual respect, psychomanagement sabotages this respect by judging individuals against irrelevant and subjective criteria. In other words, managers who act on the perceived psychological needs of their subordinates, rather than the objective needs of the task, destroy the integrity of the management relationship and undermine their own authority. It is possible that some people at work require psychological advice, but managers do not have the appropriate authority or the mandate to provide it. The relationships psychotherapist-client and manager-subordinate are mutually exclusive and their goals are diametrically opposed. While the integrity of psychotherapists is subordination to the client's welfare, the integrity of managers is subordination to the requirements of the organisational task. Managers who try to play the game of psychotherapy become its first casualty.

In psychotherapy, therapists try to make explicit the implicit game rules by which clients conduct themselves in everyday living. In management, managers try to clarify the explicit rules by which they and their colleagues are expected to conduct themselves at work, the roles they are supposed to embody and the goals they are to meet. Inevitably, managers face behaviour that deviates from the rules and roles of their organisation. That is, they are confronted with colleagues who play games within games. The temptation is strong to turn to psychological testing or therapy in the hope of elucidating the rules these colleagues play and the goals they pursue. It is then a very small step to enter in quasi-therapeutic relationships with such colleagues and judge them as mentally disordered. An army of well-meaning psychologists, psychoanalysts, transactional analysts, psychiatrists and other 'mental health' professionals is only too eager to help.

Managers are increasingly exhorted to manage the 'mental health' of their colleagues. They are encouraged by the psychiatric industry and a powerful media machine, operating with government endorsement and telling them emphatically that 'mental illness is an illness like any other'. Although that proposition is not only false but absurd, it is increasingly accepted in the community. Those who disagree with it are likely to be viewed as uncaring, insensitive, 'mental health illiterates', at worst mentally disordered crying out for treatment. Western society is hereby threatened in its very foundations. The myth of the mind generated the myth of mental illness and although philosophers from Plato to Kant viewed the mind as the source of human freedom and responsibility, mental illness today is the source of unfreedom and non-responsibility. If the related notions of mental illness, unfreedom and

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non-responsibility are rejected, however, the 'mentally ill' can regain their freedom and responsibility, and thus their dignity.

If there is lasting and undeniable evidence for Nietzsche's nihilistic prophecies, it must be the widespread influence of psychoanalysis and the unstoppable rise of psychiatry. By theorising the concept of functional impairments (inabilities of ego to oppose id in socially acceptable ways), Freud reinforced and secularised the ancient idea that there are diseases of the body and diseases of the soul. Psychiatry enthusiastically followed and thus began the progressive medicalisation of everyday behaviour which has dominated psychiatry and Western life ever since. Behaviour that used to be called 'right' is now said to be sign of a 'healthy' mind, while 'wrong' behaviour has become evidence of a 'neurotic' (psychoanalysis) or 'disordered' (psychiatry) mind, waiting to be 'cured' by way of neuroleptics or electroshocks, involuntarily if necessary. Spanking children to enforce moral values is illegal in more and more countries but drugging them in the name of science is not. As Nietzsche saw, scientism has annihilated morality, not to mention common sense. The West has hollowed itself in the name of its own values. A *Brave New World* awaits.

English dramatist, poet and philosopher G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) insisted that no matter how bizarre the behaviour, there is always reason behind it: 'The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason'.[34] Existentialists would have approved, since they have tried to propose a new of way of thinking and living based on responsible freedom, that is, on reason.

NOTES

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3. Freud, S. 1962 [1926]. *Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis* (Strachey, J. ed. and trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin; see pp. 35–36.
4. Freud, *Two Short Accounts*, 71; see also the Fourth Lecture in Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.
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7. See notably Menzies, I. 1960. A Case-Study in the Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety: A Report on a Study of the Nursing Service

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9. Pittenger, D. J. 1993. Measuring the MBTI . . . And Coming Up Short. *Journal of Career Planning & Placement*, 54(1): 48–52. See also Furnham, A. 1992. *Personality at Work: The Role of Individual Differences in the Workplace*. London: Routledge, p. 60.

10. Kets de Vries, M. & Korotov, K. 2007. The Clinical Paradigm: A Primer for Personal Change. In *Coach and Couch: The Psychology of Making Better Leaders* (Kets de Vries, M., Korotov, K. & Florent-Treacy, E. eds.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. See pp. 3–4.

11. This section is indebted to pp. 26–31 of Spillane, R. & Martin, J. 2005. *Personality and Performance: Foundations for Managerial Psychology*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

12. This often-cited anecdote started with Lacan, who reportedly heard it from Jung himself. Cf. Lacan, J. 2006 [1966]. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (Fink, B. trans.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company. See p. 336.

13. Freud was aware of this problem. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he theorised the existence of a 'death drive' that would oppose the sexual instinct of id. Not only does the existence of two simultaneous but opposing drives is impossible to demonstrate (since only one of them is exhibited at any given time), but also and crucially the continued evolution of an anti-life instinct is impossible to conceive at the species level.

14. Freud, S. 2005. *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, A. ed. and Strachey, J. trans.). London: Vintage Books; see pp. 15–17 and 61–69.

15. Popper, K. 1996. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. London: Routledge. See Section 1.

16. The proposition 'x exists' is unfalsifiable because, if x does not exist on Earth, perhaps it does somewhere else in the universe.

17. Eysenck, H. J. 2004 [1985]. *Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

18. Kraus, K. quoted in Szasz, T. 1990. *Anti-Freud: Karl Kraus's Criticism of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. See p. 103.

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26. Szasz, T. 2004. *Szasz Under Fire: The Psychiatric Abolitionist Faces His Critics* (Schaler, J. A. ed.). Chicago, IL: Open Court. See p. 378.

27. Szasz, T. 2010. *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*, Revised edition. New York, NY: Harper Perennial. See pp. 267–68.

28. Read, J. 2007. Why Promoting Biological Ideology Increases Prejudice against People Labelled 'Schizophrenic'. *Australian Psychologist*, 42(2): 118–28.

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31. Chisholm, G. B. 1946. The Reestablishment of Peacetime Society. *Journal of the Biology and the Pathology of Interpersonal Relations*, 9(1): 3–11. See pp. 9–11.

32. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, 225–27.

33. Drucker, P. F. 1974. *Management: Tasks Responsibilities, Practices*. London: Heinemann. See pp. 243–44.

34. Chesterton, G. K. 1909. *Orthodoxy*. London: John Lane. See p. 32.

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Chapter 11

French Existentialism

Managing for Freedom and Responsibility

By the close of the nineteenth century, the death of God and the ensuing moral disintegration of the West were plain to see for those who cared to open their eyes. If the Enlightenment had cast away religious darkness, it had also left Western man alone to find a meaning for his existence. In this quest, rather than rejuvenating their moral foundations, most ignored the Romantics' warnings and intensified the confusion of scientific progress with social progress. Scientism triumphed almost unopposed, as the Eiffel Tower, this obscene monument to mechanics and metallurgy, symbolises.

The cataclysm of World War I showed how hollow this triumph was. As Nietzsche saw, a blind devotion to science precipitates nihilism by promoting a language in which, under the pretext of neutrality, moral expressions are substituted by scientific ones which smuggle in their own assumptions. Nowhere is this shift more visible than in those disciplines that claim to study human behaviour in objective, scientific terms. If one is to believe Freud's psychoanalysis, conduct cannot be said to be right or wrong because it is caused by forces in the unconscious. According to psychiatry, it reflects a healthy or a sick mind. At the extreme end of this scientistic trend, behaviour is reduced to biology in motion and human beings to vehicles of their genes. If one is to believe sociobiologists, even society can be explained in Darwinian terms.

To fight nihilism, Nietzsche called for the rise of heroic 'higher men', individuals who are strong enough psychologically to take life on its own terms. Such individuals view the difficulties of existence as challenges to be overcome by their will to power. Christian herd morality is dismissed defiantly, replaced by heroic values of resilience and nobility. However, as discussed in a previous chapter, if Nietzsche's solution has rhetorical appeal, its content remains elusive. Besides, it easily leads to extolling power for its

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own sake. Little wonder that German and Italian fascists claimed Nietzsche's name. Another solution to nihilism, then, must be sought: one that reaffirms and justifies man's pride in existence and reasserts the meaning of life after the death of God, one which outlines a moral rejuvenation without rejecting reason and the heritage of the Enlightenment altogether. One such solution is existentialism.

Existentialism is a rich if loosely defined philosophical movement which began in the nineteenth century and was at its most popular in Europe during and after World War II. Existential authors (philosophers, theologians, novelists and playwrights) were united in their insistence that human existence is a central problem which Western philosophers have swept under a system of abstract concepts. They maintained that whatever human beings are, they cannot be adequately represented by systematic, deterministic models. They were especially concerned about the difficulty of finding a place for individuals in society and about questions pertaining to the meaning of life in the face of a godless, determined world. Repeatedly, existential writers have emphasised such experiences as faith, empathy, love, aesthetic consciousness, and artistic inspiration. These non-scientific themes have coloured their work with a distinctive hue, theological for some, poetic for others. Another common feature of existentialists is their agreement with Nietzsche that a philosophy is worth nothing unless it can be lived. Consequently, their philosophies are not merely contemplated from an armchair, they are acted upon.

Distant yet unmistakeable roots of existentialism can be identified in Kant's obsession with intellectual freedom and in the Romantics' elevation of personal determination above material contingencies. Nietzsche's praise for moral autonomy and his urge that 'one becomes what one is' have led many commentators to read (part of) him as a proto-existentialist writer. Traditionally, the paternity of existentialism is attributed to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) whose work influenced Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). However, it is in the early works of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Albert Camus (1913–1960) that existentialism found its decisive, clearest and final expression. Other significant existentialist philosophers include José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Nicola Abbagnano (1901–1990) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986).

Applied to Kierkegaard's philosophy, 'existentialism' is an anachronism since the term only appeared in the early 1940s. Jaspers did not approve of the label for his 'existence philosophy' and Heidegger sought to distance himself from it. The first philosopher to claim the label was Sartre after it was applied to him by Gabriel Marcel. While providing comments on Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger to situate the movement's origins, this

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chapter focuses on the main aspects of its Sartrean development and its rich implications for managers.

THE FATHERS OF EXISTENTIALISM

Søren Kierkegaard was a prolific writer who explored a great variety of philosophical, aesthetic, moral and religious topics. One of the themes which dominates his thought is a visceral rejection of German idealism's culmination in Hegelianism. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was one of several German philosophers who, although struck by the systematic force of Kantianism, rejected the dualism that underpins it. Retaining from Kant the view that all of philosophy can be derived from a small number of principles, Hegel sought to reduce them to one in order to avoid the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. If the subject (that which perceives and knows) creates the object (that which is perceived and known), or if knowing creates being, as Kant can be taken to mean, then the two can be united in a grand, all-encompassing historico-metaphysical system, which Hegel offered in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In Hegel's view, not only are knowledge and existence identical but also 'the real is the rational and the rational is the real'.

Kierkegaard thought Hegel's system, which was held in the highest esteem at the University of Copenhagen when he was a theology student, oppressive. He insisted that if personal existence is equivalent to rational thought, then rationality as a system bears down on individual thinkers and estranges them from their own existence. In Kierkegaard's view, since life is subjective, to think it is to objectify it and to analyse it is to smother it. 'Subjectivity is truth': human existence cannot be reduced to rational thought because thought is an abstraction while existence is real, tangible. This is especially the case with moral values which cannot be justified rationally since they are based on choices to which individuals commit themselves. Individuals makes decisions constantly because they are faced with alternatives, the ultimate one being the decision to continue to live. These choices define the relationship between what one is today and what one can become tomorrow: one can analyse one's life backwards, but one must live it forwards. Human beings are not only contemplative thinking beings, but they are defined by their decisions. One cannot undo one's past, yet one can shape one's future.[1]

Kierkegaard considered the Danish bourgeois society of his day to be indolent and morally bankrupt to the core because it was dominated by publicity and advertising.[2] In *Either/Or* (1843), he outlined an escape from such corrupting influences by highlighting three basic modes of existence. In the aesthetic mode, one lives for oneself, searches for pleasure and bases one's

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moral decisions on sensations and feelings. In the ethical mode, one commits to one's social duties and bases moral decisions on universal principles. In the religious or existential mode, one transcends the two previous modes and acts according to ideals which enable one to overcome the absurdity of existence. Kierkegaard's own ideals were derived from those of Christianity, which was for him less a religious doctrine and more a stance on life, one that he recognised cannot be defended rationally but has to be embraced through a leap of faith.

The refusal to objectify existence is also a central feature of the thought of Karl Jaspers. Trained as a psychiatrist, Jaspers came to realise that his discipline objectifies its patients since it reduces them to the disorders that are the putative causes of their behaviour. He thought that psychiatrists should instead view those they purport to help as human beings, that is, as free moral agents who are in constant, if sometimes peculiar, communication with others and with themselves. He rejected Freudian psychoanalysis for similar reasons, seeing in it a pseudo-scientific theory that degrades man to the sum of his sexual impulses. Instead, he favoured a psychology which tries to understand the meaning of patients' experiences.[3]

From Kierkegaard (and Nietzsche), Jaspers took the view that philosophical thinking needs to be grounded, not in reason alone, but in the fabric of existence. Reason can be no more than a tool for thinking and science is irrelevant to the subject *qua* subject. This is the case because if objective material reality is determined by the laws of physics, subjective lived reality is determined by one's choices, by one's freedom. Existence is therefore continuously in the making, elusive, fleeting, a possibility constantly emerging but which cannot be defined or achieved since it is impossible to go past it. Existence is always possible existence: existence and freedom are thus interchangeable concepts.[4]

Being was for Jaspers the ultimate, non-empirical ground of empirical experience. A philosophy which concerns itself with Being cannot be a systematic body of knowledge, however, since to systematise is to rationalise and objectify. Materialists reduce everything to matter, idealists to mind and positivists to causal laws. None of them has anything to propose to resist a nihilist, faithless world. Being cannot be demonstrated or proved, because to do so would amount to demoting Being to the status of an object of reason: one can only become aware of Being as an act of faith. Rather than a system, Jaspers proposed a philosophical faith flowing from a belief in Being taken to be its own premises. That is, by Being Jaspers, like Kierkegaard before him, meant God.[5]

Martin Heidegger, a one-time friend of Jaspers, also thought the question of Being central to existence. Unlike Jaspers, however, Heidegger's answer is offered as a systematic and secular one. Although widely considered as one

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of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, his personal history, together with the difficulty of his prose (tortured intensity for admirers, pompous charlatanry for critics), especially in his major work, *Being and Time* (1927), ensured that his name is also a divisive one.

Like many of his peers, Heidegger accepted Nietzsche's thesis about the nihilistic decline of the West. In 1933, he successfully manoeuvred to become rector of Freiburg University and shortly after joined the Nazi party. Heidegger's initial dedication to National Socialism was sincere, even enthusiastic. He was convinced that Nazism offered the spiritual and moral renewal the West so desperately required and hoped that his philosophy would be the intellectual backbone of this effort. This illusion did not take long to dissipate and Heidegger resigned from his rectorship a year later. After criticising the Nazi authorities, he was banned from teaching in 1944 but remained a member of the Nazi party until it was dismantled in 1945. Although he was cleared of any serious wrongdoing after the war and allowed to teach again from 1951, Heidegger's reputation never recovered. His steadfast refusal to apologise for his Nazi past did not endear him to philosophical colleagues.

In the opening sections of *Being and Time*, Heidegger noted that Descartes established the existence of his 'I' on pure thought, on his awareness of his self-consciousness which he believed he could sever from his bodily sensations. He consequently defined himself as an 'immaterial thing that thinks' but declared the problem of the exact nature of that 'thing' to be unanswerable on account of its divine origin. This shows that, contrary to his intention to base philosophy on his *cogito*, Descartes resorted to God as an infinite entity to guarantee his own existence. In other words, and despite his claims, Descartes did not break from medieval philosophy and used God as a rhetorical device to avoid the question of the Being of beings. This position, argued Heidegger, has an ancient lineage. It is the logical outcome of a metaphysics that has since Plato dissociated material existence from thinking, seeing the former as base, the latter as the noble justification of human existence. Even Kant, for all his 'critical' efforts, did not deviate from this tradition, since for him Being is the intelligible, but not sensible, noumenon.[6]

Heidegger considered the Cartesian line of thinking to be not only incomplete but deeply misconceived. First, it overlooks entirely the question of temporality, as if human existence is static or beyond time. Second, dissociating thinking from the body makes materiality appear at best a complement, at worst an unnecessary distraction, to existence. The opposite is the case for Heidegger. To exist as a human being is precisely to be able to unite one's past and present with one's future possibilities. Moreover, no one exists alone: being is 'being-in-the-world'. The hyphenation emphasises the fact that human beings cannot be conceived outside the synthetic unity of the relationships that define them. It is impossible to dissociate human

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existence from the web of networked traditions and relationships in which it is necessarily enmeshed. In particular, for a human being, being-in-the-world means being-with-others. This complex human mode of being-in-the-world, Heidegger called 'Dasein' (German for existence, literally 'being-there').[7]

For Heidegger, Dasein is unique: while an object simply is, Dasein exists ('ex-is[ts]') in the sense that it can step outside of itself and question its own Being. Dasein confronts the question of what it wants to be, of the actions it wants to perform and ultimately of the life it wants to lead. Although it is tempting to accept what ordinary people want one to do, to think and thus finally to be, doing so condemns oneself to live an inauthentic life, a life that one watches passing by with a pervasive sense of self-betrayal. Many accept such a life, however, because they are oppressed by their own existence. That is, they agree to be an undifferentiated anyone rather than a unique someone because inauthenticity numbs the fear of death, the ultimate negation of being. The group never dies, only individuals do. By having the same moods, desires and objects as others, by dissolving one's individuality into the group of the average others, one hopes to evade death.[8]

It follows from the above that to live an authentic life, one that mutes the inner sense of self-betrayal that springs from one's inauthenticity, one is to face up to the finitude of one's existence. Dasein, being-there, must also be 'being-towards-death'. One must live as if one was about to die, for the realisation that one's death can happen at any moment makes one realise the importance of one's choice in the here and now. All choices have the same importance. One is to decide one's individuality until the very last second because the last instant has the same importance as one's entire life. One is what one does. To be meaningful and authentic, one's life must amount to a story which is unique to oneself, a totality in which thought and action are equated. The choice, then, is clear: to be oneself or to be lost in the others, that is, to exist or to be nothing.[9]

Heidegger did not allow for any kind of authenticity, however. He argued that the content of an authentic life is to be found in the culture into which one finds oneself. As human existence cannot be thought as a pure 'I' disconnected from material reality, individuality cannot be conceived as disconnected from the traditions it has inherited or from the social roles through which it is evaluated and defined. The choices that one makes must be drawn from the possibilities that one's community offers and it is in the degree to which one exemplifies this heritage that one's authenticity is established. By grounding Dasein in the culture of one's community, by reviving this culture with the urgency of living in the here and now, one can give meaning to one's life and fight nihilism.[10]

There is obviously more to *Being and Time* than the foregoing suggests, but Heidegger's attempted synthesis of the personal and the traditional as a remedy

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for nihilism was enough to make the work attractive to many people. The extent to which it represents an improvement upon Nietzsche's 'heroic individualism', which aimed at the same target, is debatable though. The ambiguity and limitations of Heidegger's anti-nihilism appear when one tries to apply his criterion of authenticity to his own life. This is not an unfair procedure, for central to Heidegger's thought is his insistence that thinking must not be divorced from being, or that the theoretical must not be dissociated from the practical.

On the one hand, Heidegger's initial enthusiasm for the Nazi agenda and his refusal to apologise for it exemplifies the passionate commitment with which one is supposed to live one's life, even against the expectation of the ordinary others. On the other hand, the very reason why Heidegger embraced Nazism was its promise (in his eyes) to rejuvenate a decadent and nihilistic Western culture. Now the root cause of this decadence, according to the introductory sections of *Being and Time*, was Platonic metaphysics, which Heidegger's predecessors, notably Descartes and Kant, cultivated to its extremes. If this is the case, then embodying to perfection one's inherited traditions is not always the best course of action, despite what the same work claims. Besides, the idea that personal authenticity must be carved out from within the limits of one's community is unclear, for one's community is as alienating as the society of which it is a part: the difference between the two is one of size, not of nature.

Heidegger was on firmer grounds when he argued, like Kierkegaard and Jaspers, that there is more to human existence than what science and rationality can offer. As the Romantics saw in their own ways, to believe that there is nothing more to human knowledge than formal logic and sense data is to preclude oneself from what truly matters. What distinguishes human existence from that of a rock is precisely that which escapes logic, sensory observation and language: relationships, love, beauty, sexuality, psychological freedom and self-consciousness. To deny non-empirical experiences epistemological value, as the Vienna Circle did, to forbid philosophy from discussing 'non sense', as Ludwig Wittgenstein demanded of it in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), is to disconnect human beings from their Dasein. In plain English, doing this estranges them from all that makes existence what it is and thus promotes nihilism. Now if self-consciousness is the central element of human existence, then a philosophy that purports to be existential must start with an account of it. This was the conviction of the philosopher who is widely regarded as the 'real' existentialist and its most influential proponent.

CONSCIOUSNESS AS NOTHINGNESS

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris in 1905. He was accepted at the *École Normale Supérieure* (France's most prestigious institution for a career in

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education) in 1924. In 1928, at his second attempt, he obtained his *agrégation* (the teaching degree required to obtain a position in French universities) in philosophy, gaining first rank; the second went to the woman who would become his life-long companion, Simone de Beauvoir. He then taught philosophy in high schools for a few years before going to Germany from 1933 to 1935 on a research scholarship to study the work of Edmund Husserl. Mobilised in the French army in 1939 as a meteorologist, he was made prisoner of war in 1940 but was released nine months later. Upon release, he resumed teaching while co-founding and writing in clandestine journals supporting the Résistance. Literary success soon allowed him to focus full time on writing and in 1943 he published the tome that established him as a major philosopher, *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre's first works had appeared a few years earlier: essays in phenomenological psychology from 1936, philosophical novels (including *Nausea*) and plays, notably *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944).

Sartre drew from his war experiences the conviction that philosophy must be at the service of social action. During the 1950s, while denouncing the abuses of the Soviet regime and their crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, he came to see in Marxism a body of ideas suited to that purpose. By then a well-known public figure, he endorsed the role of a social gadfly, writing political pamphlets, marching to a variety of causes and habitually taking controversial views in political debates. In 1970, when advised to arrest Sartre for fomenting political unrest, President de Gaulle replied: 'One does not jail Voltaire!' Sartre was awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* (French national order of merit) in 1945 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964 but declined them both, not wanting to become an institution of the bourgeoisie, the social class for which his contempt was bottomless. In 1973, in the wake of the May 1968 student protests, he co-founded the left-wing daily *Libération*, which still exists. Sartre's Parisian funeral in April 1980 was the most impressive one since that of Victor Hugo; it was attended by about 50,000 people and was broadcast live on public television.

In a short pre-war essay, Sartre confessed his excitement at the discovery of one of Husserl's central ideas: intentionality.[11] That is, consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, in the sense that it constantly projects itself out of itself. This means, for Sartre, that 'being in the world' is not simply a 'being there in time', as Heidegger had it, but a movement, a surging of consciousness into the world for it to become what it is, a consciousness-in-the-world. Although external to man's consciousness, the world does not exist to man without it: consciousness and the world are inseparable. While they appear simultaneously in a single stroke, they are radically irreducible. For instance, when I look at a tree, I can no more dissolve myself into it than the tree can dissolve itself into my consciousness of it. Moreover, there is

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nothing between my consciousness and the world. Everything that human beings really are, including their consciousness, is to be found outside of themselves.

According to Sartre, when I perceive a chair, three things happen. First, I perceive the chair as an object next to a table. Now I could be wrong about this, since it might be an illusion. Second, I know that it is 'I' who perceives the chair (and not Napoleon) and about this I cannot be wrong. Third, I perceive a distance between me and the chair such that I am not the chair. The same reasoning applies to role-playing. When an actor plays Hamlet, he is aware of the role, he knows that he is not Hamlet and that there is a distance between Hamlet and himself, such that he cannot *be* Hamlet. Consequently, when so-called schizophrenics claim they are Napoleon, they are either using metaphors ('I wish I were like Napoleon') or they are lying. One can never be one's role.

Much of *Being and Nothingness* is dedicated to substantiating and expanding these views into what Sartre called, in the subtitle of the work, a 'phenomenological ontology'. This effort starts by noting that since consciousness is consciousness of something, then all consciousness is latent self-consciousness: at minimum, one is conscious that one is conscious.[12] This self-consciousness is not necessarily explicit or reflexive but can become instantly so at will. Indeed, while I am not constantly aware of what I am doing, I am always able to report upon it when asked. This reflective characteristic of human consciousness shows that Being can be decomposed into being-in-itself and being-for-itself.[13] Being-for-itself is self-conscious being but being-in-itself cannot be conscious of itself or of anything else, because it is non-conscious being. A human being is being-for-itself; everything else (objects and perhaps infants and animals) is being-in-itself.[14]

Sartre insisted that his ontological decomposition (for-itself versus in-itself) is not a metaphysical dualism of the type that has embarrassed Western thinking for centuries.[15] There are not two types of being, one lurking behind the other as in Plato or Kant, but only two *modes* of being. Being is everywhere, but the in-itself simply is, immutable, solid and opaque. As for the for-itself, since it is conscious, it exists only in relation to another being, since there is no consciousness which is not consciousness of something. At the same time, objects which are beings-in-themselves exist through acts of negation on the part of consciousness. A table is what it is and it is not the chair next to it or the window behind it. The chair and the window, although in space, are nihilated to make the table appear for consciousness.[16]

Although it seems that infinite regress lurks behind this scheme (for self-consciousness to exist, there needs to be a self which takes itself as an object, thus requiring a self before the self of self-consciousness and so on), this is not so, because the two modes of being arise simultaneously and remain

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correlative to one another. This correlation also means that Berkeleian idealism or Husserlian phenomenology (according to which everything is a phenomenon of consciousness) and Cartesian ontology (in which the *cogito* exists only by removing itself from everything else and cannot reach out of itself) are mistaken. Hegel's absolute idealism, according to which being and its negation appear in temporal succession before merging into one new being to be opposed by yet another being, is similarly dismissed.[17]

A consequence of these arguments is that there cannot be anything in consciousness, for if there was, then consciousness would be being-in-itself. That is, consciousness would have ceased to be being-for-itself. Consciousness is empty, without content, but this emptiness is a source of great power because it allows consciousness to be directed towards anything. As Husserl showed, intentionality means negativity: an intention is the detachment, the negation of being into something that is not (yet) itself.[18] Expressed differently, while the in-itself simply is what it is, in the sense that it is synthetic and everything to itself, the for-itself is always projecting itself out if itself, into something else. It is not what it was yesterday, not what it is now, yet it is what it is not, what it could be tomorrow.[19] Sartre's central and constant position is that consciousness, or being-for-itself, is a nihilation of being in-itself: perpetually evanescent and emergent, consciousness is ultimately not-being, a no-thing, that is, nothingness. In Sartrean language, 'the being by which nothingness comes to the world must be its own nothingness'.[20]

CONDEMNED TO BE FREE

The merit of Sartre's abstract account is that it provides him with a unique platform from which to investigate themes more traditionally associated with human existence, notably emotions, anxiety, relationships with others, freedom and responsibility in the face of determinism. Indeed, if human consciousness is nothingness, that is, 'if man is the being through whom nothingness comes into the world',[21] then what makes human beings what they are is their inalienable freedom. This is the case because, while being-in-itself has an immutable nature, being-for-itself has no essential nature: it is pure activity, self-determination. What this means is that, even though freedom cannot be said to be the essence of human beings (for if they had one, they would be beings-in-themselves), it is nevertheless the defining characteristic, the primary datum of human existence.[22]

The ontological freedom about which Sartre wrote is, by definition, absolute since there is no such concept as 'half-freedom'. Now Sartre was aware that one's actual freedom is constrained by the situation in which one finds oneself. To be free in Sartre's sense is not to be free *from* constraint, to be at

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liberty to do whatever one wants, but to be free *to* have the power to choose. One always has the power to choose but one does not always have the power to overcome one's lack of liberty. As prisoner, one is not free to escape but one is always free to try. One is never devoid of choice. When one believes that one does not have a choice, Sartre's demand is that one elevates one's level of consciousness to the point where one recognises that this is a delusion, that one does have a choice, even if it entails ending one's life. At minimum, one can choose how to die.[23]

The one choice one does not have, however, is that of choosing: 'to be free is to be condemned to be free'.[24] This is the case because one comes into being first, then must decide who one wants to be. In Sartre's celebrated formula, 'existence precedes essence'.[25] Once cast into the world, one has to face one's nothingness and absolute freedom alone. Being radically free, one must reinvent oneself everyday out of one's nothingness through one's actions. No fact about oneself, be it sex, gender, nationality, body, socio-economic status, education, and past actions (forming what Sartre called one's 'facticity' – the sum of the facts about oneself) can justify one's choices and behaviour. One has no excuses: there cannot be foundations for one's actions, not even foundations for one's values, because this would amount to demoting oneself from for-itself to in-itself.[26] One is not a puppet since there are reasons for one's actions. Motives are not in consciousness and do not compel action, since nothing can be in consciousness. Motives are intentions, negations of the present, projections of consciousness towards something that is not yet.[27]

Coming to terms with one's inalienable freedom is as liberating as it is nauseating, since it leaves one on the edge of existence, facing the void of nothingness. It is also a crushing experience, for if human beings are free, they are responsible for what they do with their freedom. Since consciousness is always self-consciousness, there is no consciousness without responsibility. In Sartrean terms, responsibility is the realisation that one is the author of one's actions and since human beings are condemned to be free, without external supports, responsibility is unavoidable. As such, it is a source of permanent 'anguish', or existential anxiety, pervasive and diffuse because, unlike fear, it is not directed towards a precise object, person or event. To mitigate it, in the words of Erich Fromm, many try to 'escape from freedom'.[28] They deny or seek to minimise their responsibility by conforming to the expectations placed upon them by family, society, religion, fashion, work organisation, and so on. To do this, Sartre held, is to lie to oneself or, in his trademark expression, to be in 'bad faith'.[29]

Bad faith manifests itself in countless ways but ultimately consists in hiding unpleasant truths from oneself (like the fact that one remains responsible for what one does) or in presenting to oneself pleasing ideas as truths. Sartre provided two famous examples of this self-deception no-doubt inspired by

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his own experiences at the left-bank *Café de Flore*. A man takes a woman to a café and pretends to be interested only in her intelligent conversation. She acts as if this is the case, as if she did not know better. In the café, a waiter serves them in ways that appear somewhat forced, as if he were a robot, as if it is crucial that he is a waiter of surgical dexterity. No one, of course, believes any of this for an instant: the waiter knows his job to be of little significance in the same way the woman knows her companion wants to take her to bed as soon as possible. They are all knowingly playing a game and trying to make the most out of it.

Whatever act one exhibits, a seducer or the seduced, a café patron or waiter, one always knows that it is make-believe, that it is one's 'I' that is writing the lines of the part one is acting. No matter how comfortable one's act is, however, one is never one's role; to believe otherwise is to short-change oneself, to accept that one is encapsulated in the world of others. Not that changing one's act is easy, of course, but the crucial point remains that one is always free to act differently from one's past actions and to become what one is not yet.[30]

Unsurprisingly, Sartre rejected psychological determinism, which is the view that one's behaviour is the product of one's facticity. He objected to this view vehemently because he believed it is merely an irrelevant scientific abstraction. Psychological theories, such Freud's, may be well intentioned, but in practice they provide only schemes to maintain one's bad faith or cultivate it in others. While not denying the reality of such psychological phenomena as dreams or phobias, Sartre insisted that they are voluntary modes of consciousness. To analyse them as products of an uncontrollable unconscious entity is merely a sophisticated yet hypocritical attempt to construe a lie without a liar. There cannot be an id, ego and superego in conflict with one another. There cannot even be an unconscious, for consciousness, being nothingness, is entirely transparent to itself. This being the case, to pretend that one's behaviour is caused by psychological forces or chemical imbalances, instincts or personality traits over which one has no control, is to evade one's responsibility by denying one's freedom. When one says, 'I am homosexual' or 'I am shy', one is saying something like 'I am an object', which implies that one cannot help it because this is what one is. In such cases, one has denied personal choice and accepted determinism. One is then ready to be manipulated, a toy in the hands of the others.[31]

Passions and emotions are parts of the arsenal one deploys to that same purpose. Contrary to popular belief and what the etymology of the term 'passion' implies (i.e. that one experiences them passively), Sartre argued that human beings are not the victims of their passions and even less of their emotions. In his analysis, passions and emotions do not 'happen': they are strategies, actions intended to achieve specific goals, one of which is the

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modification of one's freedom and thus ultimately the reduction of one's responsibility. When confronted by a difficult event, one is upset, shocked or depressed. Being conventional and thus expected, these alleged 'reactions' (which are in fact actions) are meant to lift the burden of personal responsibility, emotional screens behind which one tries to hide. Such lame tactics are doomed to failure. One is not in love, sad, jealous or ashamed. Rather, one chooses to act as if one is in love, sad, jealous or ashamed. Emotional behaviour is role-playing that one performs before an audience that is at minimum oneself. To believe otherwise is to renounce one's freedom and ultimately one's existence.[32]

Nevertheless, Sartre recognised that one often appears as an object in the eyes of the others. The gaze and judgements of others form a powerful objectifying cage, one to which one surrenders with varying degrees of bad faith. This process, however, is a necessary condition of existence. Indeed, for the same reason that being-for-itself demands the existence of being-in-itself to exist as its negation, one needs others for one's (self-) consciousness to arise. In the end though, even if animated by the best intentions, human relationships are inescapably conflictual since individuals cannot but objectify each other. Everyone tries to escape objectification while objectifying others; one tries to avoid domination by trying to dominate others.[33] As one of the characters of *No Exit* says in desperation, tortured by the loving and forgiving gaze of his former young wife on whom he cheated repeatedly, 'hell is other people!'

Human freedom is anchored in nothingness and there are no ultimate grounds for choosing one course of action over another: being loved is being devoured. Many people thus wondered how Sartre could call his philosophy existentialist after painting such a desperate picture of human existence. Besides, if everything is possible because of one's absolute freedom, then nothing is forbidden. Rather than proposing a way out of nihilism, Sartrean existentialism seems to embrace or at least compound it. Sartre was acutely aware of these criticisms and took the opportunity of a public lecture in late October 1945, entitled *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, to address them. Published the following year, the eponymous small book, more accessible than the nearly 700 dense pages of *Being and Nothingness*, was a resounding success. It catapulted the label 'existentialism' into everyday language.

Speaking before an eruptive audience, Sartre insisted that, correctly understood, existentialism is not pessimistic but optimistic. Further, existentialism does not condemn man to the solitude of his *cogito* but promotes a renewed and deeper form of solidarity. If there were a god upon whom one could call as a guide, if there were universal values or a stable human nature that could justify the choices one makes, it would only mean that man has no value in and of himself. That there are no such external supports means only that man

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is what he makes of himself. Man is always becoming, a subjective project that is not unlike a work of art but for which he remains wholly responsible. Any other position reduces man to the status of a moss or fungus; deprived of obligation towards himself, his will nipped in the bud, man is then driven to despair.[34]

Sartre argued that misunderstanding of existentialism's message came about because of the two meanings of 'humanism'. The traditional sense considers man to be an end in himself, an abstraction to be worshipped for its own sake. This Kantian humanism will not do because it leads to a secular religion and thus to oppression in the name of ideals. Existentialists promote a different kind of humanism, one which recognises that individuals are not definable ends since they are forever becoming what they will be. Man is constantly outside of himself and his freedom can have no other aim but itself. One must recognise in others the subjectivity that there is in oneself, because this subjectivity is the seed of unlimited accomplishments. One is to treat others as a collective 'I': one's freedom rests on the freedom of others and vice versa.[35]

Existentialist humanism also means that although life has no meaning *a priori*, it is no frivolous matter to create one. One is not justified in doing whatever one chooses, insisted Sartre, because one's freedom and responsibility expand much further than one's own person. What one does exemplifies one's values and sets an example in the eyes of others: 'I am [. . .] responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself, I fashion man'.[36] Every act and every role that one plays is not only personally purposive but has social consequences. It is a commitment, made in one's name as well as in that of humanity. Sartre's existentialism, then, is advanced as a philosophy of social and personal action, tough-minded because it is demanding, but in the last analysis optimistic, even poetic. As Kierkegaard insisted, the past cannot be undone and the present is what it is. The future is, however, what one makes of it.

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY AT WORK

Beyond their differences of emphasis, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre shared a few central concerns, namely the supreme importance of freedom and responsibility without which they believed human existence is nonsensical.[37] Their philosophies reassert the existence of individuals against a social order which, often with their consent, seeks to encapsulate them. To avoid encapsulation, one must seek authenticity which means rejecting external moral codes and all attempts to reduce human beings to their biology,

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feelings or natural instincts. To accept a naturalistic picture of man is, for existentialist philosophers, to fail humanity since it amounts to stripping it of its obligations towards itself. Further, to the extent that personal responsibility is inscribed in the core of the Christian credo and since Christianity is a pillar of the Western ethos, determinism in scientific psychology (of which psychoanalysis is a prime example) is a subtle but potent attack on the foundations of Western civilisation.

Translated in management terms, existentialism's message emphasises the gulf between roles and role-players and between formal descriptions of relationships (such as job descriptions) and the reality of relating. Whereas mainstream management authors aim for a scientific or objective view of people, as human resources for example, existentialists call for an intersubjective understanding of human relationships, one which takes into account autonomy, empathy and subjectivity, without which large structures can become only impersonal bureaucracies.

Existentialist managers understand that they exist first and then choose their behaviour. They also recognise that freedom implies options and responsibility implies obligations. They strive, therefore, to maximise responsible freedom for themselves and for their colleagues. They accept that their subordinates have reasons for behaving as they do and that attempting to discover them is a breach of their privacy. In an existentialist outline, 'motivating' employees, by imposing one's own reasons upon them, is a form of psychological manipulation, as is the demand that they be 'team players'.

As the ultimate test of management is performance, the achievement of actual results, existential managers judge others by their actions and have no time for such unobservable concepts as 'personality', 'potential' or unconscious psychological drives, the reification of which leads to labelling and pigeon-holing. Instead, existential managers use a language of responsible freedom which communicates to others a vote of confidence in their ability to act existentially. Existentialist managers do not try to pull the string of their subordinates' behaviour as puppet masters do but provide them with reasons to contribute freely. Between conformity and contribution, their choice is easily made. They speak in terms of incentives, objectives, rewards and reasons. They maximise the autonomy of employees and encourage them to manage and report on their own performance, believing that accountability must be matched by authority so that individuals have the freedom to perform to the best of their abilities.

In 1943, the same year Sartre published *Being and Nothingness*, Abraham Maslow proposed his well-known hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory hardly needs elaboration since it is familiar to anyone who has attended management seminars. Suffice to say that it depicts human beings as motivated by seven (although only five are taught) levels of needs of decreasing

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urgency but increasing scope. At the basis of the hierarchy are the most basic and specific needs (the 'physiological needs'), atop the most dispensable and general ones (the 'self-actualisation need'), with the 'safety needs', 'love and belonging needs' and 'self-esteem needs' between these two extremes. Crucially, needs must be met before people can proceed to a higher need.

Existentialists are quick to expose the shallowness and absurdity of what is, despite the terminology used for the higher levels needs, a deterministic model. Maslow overlooked the obvious fact that needs do not exist in isolation of the objectives that make them desirable. Human beings have needs only in relation to purposes. For instance, when I say 'I need food', I mean that 'I need food in order to continue to live'. Moreover, Maslow's fixed predominance order means that one is not able to self-actualise oneself at work if tired, a prisoner will not try to escape if hungry, Beethoven could not compose since he had no friends, and van Gogh could not paint since he was poor. Besides, the unconditional nature of the needs endows them with the power of scientific forces. That is, Maslow assumed that when managers are deprived of an office with a view, their self-esteem 'need' causes them to look for a new one in the same way that gravitation makes their mobile phone fall when it is dropped. When an executive is offered a promotion, his self-actualisation need causes him to accept it in the same way in which sunflowers cannot but turn towards the sun. When one remembers that Maslow's is the psychological theory most widely taught in management schools and that, on the back of it, countless organisations arrange 'birthday celebrations' and 'employee of the month awards' to address their employees' love and belonging and self-esteem needs in the hope of boosting morale and productivity, one can but sigh.

Existentialist managers know that the workplace is remote from theories of group dynamics, personality traits and organisational roles. As George Odiorne saw, personal responsibility is irreconcilable with quantitative and behaviourist models of management which, taken as universal principles, either lead to ponderous tautologies or trivialise human behaviour.[38] Situational limits that confront employees include material contingencies, luck, conflict, guilt and inescapable anxiety before death, all of which sabotage the efforts of theorists to frame managerial behaviour within a scientific model. Morally correct decisions cannot be discovered objectively and applied to management work since moral judgements are non-logical acts of choice. On existentialist terms, management decision-making models, insofar as they are used to avoid personal responsibility, are attempts to systematise bad faith. Similar comments can be directed to the idea of 'political science': at best a vacuous oxymoron, at worst an attempt to elevate bad faith to the status of an academic discipline.

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More generally, the quality delivered by an organisation is to a substantial degree in the hands of its operative or front-line employees because there is an ineliminable degree of unpredictability in the situations they face daily. This is particularly the case in services, but even on an assembly line, things do not always happen as expected. What this means is that poor quality arises when employees are not prepared to consider a specific situation on its merits and refuse to act outside the rules. Achieving quality in all circumstances demands that employees are empowered with the ability to make decisions and are not simply considered robots to be made redundant by a future wave of automation. This empowerment must include the authority to override rules when required, but it also assumes that employees understand the limits of this authority. In other words, quality demands responsible freedom. Although expressed in different terms, these arguments have from time to time surfaced in the mainstream management literature.

Existential managers hesitate to give advice to colleagues on moral matters, especially if it removes their burden of choice and responsibility. By refraining from such advice, they convey confidence to their colleagues which reinforces their ability to choose for themselves. When Sartre was confronted by a young man who asked whether he should join the Résistance or stay by his mother, his existential answer was: 'You are free, therefore you must choose by yourself and invent your future'.[39] Any other answer, even if well-intentioned, implies objectification and psychological superiority, both despicable to existentialists. On a similar line, one of the present authors was once presented with a chart plotting the progression of his seniority and salary in his work organisation. Having joined it as a young engineer, his career and retirement age were already carved within the planning tools of the Human Resource Management department. While many people find such a perspective reassuring, existentialists treat it as alienating and despairing. To know one's future, in the corporate world as in life generally, is to demote oneself to the status of an object watching its future passing by. No one holds the pen that is writing the story of one's life but oneself. It is because one's future is not known that it can be changed, if at some personal cost. The salt of one's sweat gives life its taste.

In an existentialist outline, managers' attempts at maximising their freedom while minimising their responsibility are revealed for what they are: childish and self-defeating. As adults, they should welcome the anxiety that inalienable responsible freedom generates as the proving ground of their maturity. This fine line is a difficult one to walk. In the workplace, whoever asserts his inalienable freedom is an obstacle to management and is likely to be treated as such. If employees yield to management, it is usually for pragmatic reasons, because they see their personal interests satisfied by obeying rather than disobeying, because the tangible cost that would follow from

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dissent is perceived as exceeding the moral price attached to submission. If this is the case, then the authority granted to managers is no more than a fiction, a confidence trick with which employees fight their existential anxiety and which cannot be justified beyond the fact that, without it, managers and employees would not be able to act at all.

Chester Barnard made similar points when he developed his theory of authority in his landmark book, *The Functions of the Executive*, published in 1938. Barnard observed that employees assent to managerial authority only within what he called their 'zone of indifference': they accept orders when these refer to the tasks they have implicitly accepted when they became employees.[40] In Barnard's view, the range of this zone of indifference is arbitrary since it depends 'upon the degree to which the inducements exceed the burdens and sacrifices which determine the individual's adhesion to the organization'.[41] Authority, then, comes from below: it rests with those to whom it applies. It is a subjective notion that is dissolved by dissent. In words that could have been Sartre's, Barnard thus called the belief that authority comes from above 'the fiction of superior authority'.[42] Little surprise, then, that he closed his study on an existentialist-sounding 'declaration of faith' in which he asserted his belief 'in the cooperation of men of free will' accepting 'their responsibility for choice'.[43]

Although Barnard did not claim the label existentialist, other authors have not been so shy. In 1960, John Rice thought it necessary to rely on explicitly existentialist arguments to explain to managers that they cannot shift the blame for their actions onto the shoulders of those above them in the organisational hierarchy.[44] Personal responsibility, explained Rice, is not dissolved in slavish role-playing. If they believe that what they are doing is wrong, managers must not seek excuses beyond themselves. As active contributors to the situation in which they find themselves, they bear responsibility for it. Existential meditations are not procrastination, though. Coming to terms with the ineluctability of their 'non-being' and committed to giving meaning to their lives, existentialist managers jettison the façade of conformism from management behaviour and reject such time-wasting rituals as committees and other pointless meetings.

Using more direct terms, Andrew Richter also relied on existentialist language to urge executives to engage in soul-searching and to encourage what he called 'a revolution from the top'. 'The management term for choice', he insisted, 'is decision-making'.[45] Public administrators must stop hiding behind established systems and procedures, shed their bureaucratic indifference, and accept the responsibilities of their decisions. Richter was unforgiving: anyone pretending to follow blindly orders from above or to be but his role in the bureaucracy is re-enacting the Nuremberg defence. That such refreshing warnings are rare in the management literature is a good indication

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that management authors have lessons to learn from existentialism. This is not true of management's most famous author and consultant.

THE EXISTENTIALISM OF PETER DRUCKER

In 1928, aged only nineteen and employed as an accounting clerk, Peter Drucker accidentally came across Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843).[46] The work made an indelible impression on Drucker's life and work. Beyond impregnating his latent Christian faith, it ignited his obsession with questions pertaining to the authority, responsibility and legitimacy of managers. However, apart from one article in an obscure journal, Drucker did not write about his engagement with existentialism in his management books.

In this one article, Drucker hailed Kierkegaard as a prophet for insisting, before anyone else, that the question 'how is human life possible?' must come before the question 'how is society possible?'[47] To ask these questions in the reverse order (as economists do) is implicitly to accept determinism, since it amounts to believing that individual existence depends on society. Agreeing with Kierkegaard, Drucker argued that one exists at two levels, spiritual and social, but that the spiritual level must come first because social values are corrupt and deceptive: 'Society is not enough – not even for society'.[48] The first task one faces is thus to decide who one is.

Drucker's thesis on the origins of German and Russian totalitarianism, expounded in *The End of Economic Man* (1939), derives from this central existentialist conviction. Management's overarching responsibility, Drucker argued, is to integrate meaningfully the individual with the economic and the personal with the social, by reconciling the interests of employees with those of their employer. Economics cannot be the last frontier: the profit motive of commercial organisations must not be allowed to dominate if society is to remain harmonious, stable and peaceful. There is not, nor can there be, business ethics because there is only personal ethics.[49] Business ethicists who reject this view must remain ready to face the charge of promoting determinism and thus nihilism.

The opening chapter of this book argued that Drucker's work is marked by a pervasive heroic dimension, one according to which managers must be evaluated for what they do against workmanship standards. This position is compatible with existentialism's central view that one is what one does, insofar as one's actions are commitments one makes before one's community (humanity for Sartre). Received in this light, Drucker's work can be read as pursuing the 'heroic individualist' tradition inaugurated by Nietzsche and continued confusedly by Heidegger. This tradition combines solidarity with freedom, society with individuals or, in philosophical terms, the heroic with

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the existential. These considerations confirm that the management literature has produced so far only one thinker of indisputable intellectual stature: Peter Drucker, a Christian existentialist who has strong affinities with the atheistic existentialism of Sartre.

NO EXIT

Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre wrote in the shadow of the First World War. While Germany was slowly emerging from the economic deprivations of war and the Versailles treaty, French employees were enjoying their first paid annual leave. Contrary to many of their contemporaries, the existentialists were not of celebratory mood. They knew that nihilism had not been defeated. They could see its spectre still hovering over the West and were convinced that providing a protection against it was as urgent as ever. The Spanish Civil War, the death camps, the threat of mutual nuclear apocalypse, and the abuses of Soviet communism soon proved their prescience beyond reasonable doubt. Received in this context, the post-war fascination with existentialism on both sides of the Atlantic is understandable.

Insightfulness and topicality are no substitute for coherence, however. As can be expected of a book of about seven hundred rich pages, *Being and Nothingness* is not without inconsistencies or imprecisions. Sartre was not the best editor of his work and his fondness for hyphenated expressions, inherited from Heidegger, is not beyond reproach. All the same: as Hazel Barnes (Sartre's translator) noted in her introduction, these weaknesses neither invalidate Sartre's overall argument nor diminish his impressive literary skills and philosophical sophistication. His ability to apply philosophical and psychological concepts to daily situations is impressive and widely acknowledged.

One of Sartre's indisputable merits is his rupture with the untenable Cartesian view of man as mind and body. In Sartre's view, human beings are not a combination of two substances, one immaterial and the other material. Rather, a human being is a consciousness surging in a world of objects and separated from it by nothingness. There is no internal, subjective world of mental perception duplicating the external, objective world of experience. Such dualistic constructions lead inevitably to an 'inner man' doing the internal perceiving and guiding behaviour as well as to infinite regress, since the 'inner man' presumably also requires an internal entity responsible for his own perception and behaviour, who in turn, and so forth.

Rather, with Sartre (as with Heidegger), the 'inner' world is indistinguishable from the 'outer' world because action is perception (and vice versa). Man is in a world which is lived and experienced. Not only is action enacted intention, but it is also embodied knowledge, for only by acting in the world

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does one come to know oneself and the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), a classmate of Sartre's at the *École Normale Supérieure* who shared with him a critical admiration for Husserl and Heidegger, sought to develop an alternative to traditional psychology along these phenomenological and existential lines. As a psychology of the body in action, it was intended to be at the opposite theoretical ends of Freud's psychoanalysis and Watson's behaviourism.

If nothingness separates subjects from objects, however, then it follows that the two are ultimately indistinguishable. Although this is consistent with Sartre's claim that conscious subjects and non-conscious objects are two correlated modes of being, it is not compatible with his repeated assertion that the two beings are at ontological extremes, since the latter is and the former is not. Besides, if consciousness comes into being by nihilating being-in-itself, that is, by producing a not-being as Sartre maintained, consciousness does not produce anything at all. If this is the case, consciousness cannot be said to exist in the sense that Sartre intended, since the production of the kind of being that is called nothingness is precisely what, according to him, characterises nothingness.

Many other similar logical difficulties can be produced from Sartre's starting points. They mainly arose from Sartre's unfortunate terminology and especially his decision to use 'nothingness' to mean 'consciousness' as 'not-being' (as the title of his main work implies) and to refer to what separates being-for-itself from being-in-itself. Sartre tried to have it both ways: reifying nothingness into the sort of being called consciousness yet treating it as non-being to avoid Cartesian dualism. The result, as one can expect, is unconvincing: using the same term to refer to something and its opposite is bound to lead to inextricable contradictions. As for the claim that, for man, 'existence precedes essence', one cannot fail to note that it is self-contradictory. Indeed, if true, it would characterise human existence and be de facto an expression of a universal human nature. This would mean that, for man, essence comes before existence. The celebrated existentialist axiom rests on a sophism.

To these comments, Sartre would presumably retort that he was doing phenomenology, not metaphysics. That is, he was developing a theory of human existence as it appears to consciousness, not proposing a model of how things really are. One of Sartre's convictions, however, is that dualisms of the Platonic or Kantian type have led Western thinking astray. In his view (which was also Nietzsche's), speaking of 'how things really are' is sterile and futile; the world with which philosophy concerns itself is that in which human beings live. If this is the case, then there is no difference between ontology and metaphysics. While this explains why the penultimate chapter of *Being and Nothingness* is dedicated to metaphysical implications, it also means that the defence broached above (should Sartre have used it) is inadequate.

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This conclusion does not mean that nothing can be said for existentialism's metaphysics. Empiricists like Hume argue that human beings are conditioned to believing in determinism. Logical positivists recognize that no proof of determinism is available but argue that men should act as if determinism is true, for if not the scientific world view they promote makes no sense. Existentialists argue that men are (and must believe that they are) free. Neither empirical evidence nor logical necessity can justify these positions, however, on pain of circular reasoning. The only available criterion to decide between the three perspectives seems to be intuitive insight and unless one is ready to concede defeat to determinism from the outset, one must acknowledge that only existentialism survives as an acceptable philosophy. Whether this argument overcomes the charge of circularity is unclear, though, since psychological freedom is among existentialism's prominent axioms.

Being and Nothingness concludes with a section exploring ethical consequences and its last paragraph promises a future ethical theory. Sartre offered a brief outline of an existentialist ethical theory in *Existentialism is a Humanism* and in the first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), in which he tried to combine his existentialism with Marxism. It must be noted, however, that a complete Sartrean theory of ethics never materialised even though Sartre compiled six hundred pages of notes, published posthumously as *Notebook for an Ethics*.

It is not difficult to see why Sartre failed in this endeavour (and recognised his failure since he did not publish his notes) by contrasting *Being and Nothingness* with *Existentialism and Humanism*. In the latter, Sartre insisted that one recognises in others the freedom that one ultimately is and accepts that one's actions are commitments made in the name of humanity. Not only is this prescription at odds with the allegedly inescapably conflictual nature of human relationships, but also it can make sense only if there is such a thing as humanity, that is, if there is a defining quality or feature that is shared by all human beings. Now this view directly contradicts one of the central contentions of *Being and Nothingness*, the dismissal of the very concept of human nature, which demotes man to the status of a being-in-itself. The ethics which emerges from the public lecture is, therefore, a Kantian one which transforms ontological freedom into an ideal to be protected. Although Sartre also insisted on moral autonomy in terms that Nietzsche would have endorsed, his claim that one's freedom rests on that of others amounts precisely to the model of humanism that he repudiated later in the same address.

Such difficulties mean that, despite all his talk of nothingness and radical freedom, when pressed, Sartre could not help lapsing into Kantianism, that is, into a herd morality that seeks guidance and reassurance in numbers. As in Heidegger, the personal had to give way to the social in the name of peace and harmony. Sartre's attraction for Marxism can be analysed in

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similar terms, insofar as Marxism holds that individuals are trapped in economic conditions which frame their existence and from which they cannot escape.

FURTHER CRITICISMS

Albert Camus was an early critic of existentialism, in which there is a certain irony since he was (and remains) identified with the movement. Although an existential writer, he chose existence over existentialism. For Camus the world is not rational and attempts to find a justification for it are pointless. There is no correspondence between the human need of unity and the contingent chaos of the world. The experience of the absurd arises from a confrontation between an appeal to rational solutions to human problems and the irrational silence of the world as exemplified in nature's indifference to human beings and the inevitability of death. Many individuals confront this absurdity by contemplating or committing physical or philosophical suicide.

Camus' criticism of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre is that they try to escape from absurdity through philosophical systems which are in fact quasi-religious. Confronted with the anxiety of their encounter with nothingness, existentialists 'leap into faith' and thus commit philosophical suicide. Their tool is negation which they use to humble human reason. This negation, however, is self-destructive because it destroys *all* philosophies. Faith, then, is returned to centre stage and it calls forth a supra-rational leap. As their philosophy demands a movement from the anxiety of the nothingness of freedom to a will to freedom, existentialists leap out of their own philosophy. Camus noted, however, that while most existentialists leapt into religion, Sartre leapt into a secular religion called Marxism. In any case, existentialists suffer from what they diagnose in others: bad faith.

Although he denied that he was either a philosopher or an existentialist, Camus pursued an existential project within a pagan perspective which refused to separate individuals from nature. Pagans say yes to all that is natural. To paraphrase Nietzsche, they are innocent in being natural and thus achieve a certain dignity in their naturalness. Obsessed with the infinite, religionists and existentialists alike have refused Nietzsche's exhortation to love the earth. A philosophy of anxiety in the face of being is not for Camus, however. His naturalistic defiance of the fates presents individuals with a choice between nihilism which is the belief that life is meaningless, and rebellion which is the belief that though life is ultimately meaningless, one should act as though it were not. Camus chose the path of heroic defiance while rejecting heroism and all absolutes, including Sartre's absolute freedom, because it gives to powerful people the right to dominate others.

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Camus' 1951 book, *The Rebel*, criticises the existentialist obsession with absurdity because it can be used to justify any action. Camus rejected revolution in favour of rebellion because revolutionaries fail to transcend nihilism. Indeed, they pursue power under the guise of freedom. That is, by grasping the freedom to force others to be free, revolutionaries sacrifice individuals to abstractions. They replace the love of humanity with the delusion of power and dream of an abstract world in which they are free and other people are not. Like many religionists, revolutionaries devalue the present, finite world of nature and laud a future infinite world created by their own arrogance. Despair of life has driven men to inhuman excesses. For Camus, the first principle is to learn to live. To do this, to be a human being, one has first to refuse to be a god.

Metaphysically, rebellion enabled Camus to overcome the solipsism of Descartes' self-enclosed subject by replacing it with 'we'. After they experience the absurd, individuals separate themselves from people. Rebels, however, overcome their personal feelings of the absurd when they realise that the absurd is a collective experience: all human beings suffer from the division between themselves and the rest of the world. Individual absurdity thus becomes collective absurdity, which is a challenge to be met practically and philosophically. Camus argued that in daily life rebellion plays the same role as the *cogito* does in the category of thought. Rebellion is the common ground on which individuals base their values. 'I rebel, therefore we exist'.

Camus' alternative to the absolute affirmation of revolution is a morality of moderation drawn from Mediterranean sources, ancient and modern. Combining the wisdom of Aristotle's golden mean with Goethe's view that existence divided by human reason leaves a remainder, Camus argued that the irrational remainder imposes limits on the rational world which moderates it. His existential, or libertarian, project is thus clear. The aim of life can be only to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in all human beings. It cannot be to reduce or suppress that freedom, even temporarily.

Unsurprisingly given their wariness of abstract language, logical positivists have no patience with existential philosophies. British philosopher A. J. Ayer, for example, criticised Heidegger for the error of taking nothing to be the name of something. In *Metaphysics and Common Sense* (1969), Ayer acknowledged Heidegger's admission that, logically, assertions about 'the nothing' make no sense. However, Heidegger also claimed that he had a right to dispense with conventional logic because he was not interested in knowledge but in a more basic understanding. Ayer then (rightly) pointed out that Heidegger nowhere explained how understanding can dispense with the rules of logic. This being the case, Heidegger's admission that his statements are nonsense means that he had no claim to be taken seriously.

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Ayer accused Sartre and Camus of dramatising necessary truths and turning them into negative moods. They thought that life is meaningless because statements of fact are not necessary but contingent. However, as Ayer stressed, that empirical statements are contingent is itself a necessary fact. That facts are contingent is therefore no tragedy, unless one allows one's moods to replace valid philosophical analysis. In other words, Sartre and Camus violated the distinction between necessary and contingent statements by treating contingent propositions as though they are necessary. Further, existentialists made a grievance of the fact that because God is dead there are no absolute values and hence heroic choices need to be made. However, if it is true that there are no absolute values, it is necessarily true and thus there is no need to pretend that individuals need to assume a heroic stance in the face of necessary truth. Ayer concluded that existentialists have a special philosophical technique. They take a genuine problem, like the problem of freedom, make a few dramatic points about the lack thereof, forsake analysis for a description of an abnormal psychological condition, generalise this psychological condition, transfer the generalisation to a metaphysical plane, finally to treat the metaphysics as the basis for a literary conclusion about the tragedy of human existence.

The foregoing comments reveal that if existentialism is a philosophy that is intoxicating because of its thesis of absolute freedom, it is also a deeply flawed one. As was the case with Nietzsche's, existentialists' remedy for Western nihilism fails to convince. Replacing power with freedom is attractive (because seemingly more palatable) for some people, but the result is hardly better. In fact, it could well be worse, as the ideas of Johann Kaspar Schmidt (1806–1856), also known as Max Stirner, illustrate.

Stirner is remembered for one extraordinary and provocative work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1844), literally 'The Unique One and His Property' but inexplicably translated into English as *The Ego and His Own*. In this book, Stirner argued that since neither existence nor non-existence can be thought, the only way to overcome the problem of non-existence (which is for him *the* problem of human existence) is to take a stance above reason and logic. Stirner was a radical nominalist and an inflexible individualist. He lived according to a philosophy of personal power, describing himself as a creative nothing. For Stirner, freedom means to choose to reject as binding everything outside oneself, conventional laws and moralities included. Stirner claimed that he did not experience anxiety and was not concerned with the notion of responsibility as accountability to others. He did not aspire to community, but to one-sidedness. He (or his Unique One) wanted neither slavery nor liberty for others; what others made of their lives was up to them and he could not care less. The Unique One does not serve society, humanity, God, or liberty: these are irrelevant 'spooks'. Stirner served only himself.

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Stirner's book, consistent and uncompromising to the last page, made such a destructive impression on contemporary German philosophy that Marx and Engels thought it necessary to dedicate nearly four hundred pages of what is known today as *The German Ideology* (written in 1846 but not published until 1932) to repudiate its arguments. Stirner died of an infected insect bite, alone and in poverty, having spent the inheritance of his second wife who had subsequently left him. If existentialism means coming to terms with absolute personal freedom, however, he must be remembered as the first and last true existentialist, one who would have found his alleged successors' efforts, with their quasi-Christian emphasis on personal responsibility, pathetic, hypocritical and spineless. As for Stirner's assessment of what came after existentialism, one would not have dared to ask.

NOTES

1. See notably Section Two (entitled 'The subjective problem, or how subjectivity must be for the problem to appear to it') of Kierkegaard, S. 2009 [1846]. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Hannay, A. ed. and trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Kierkegaard, S. 1940 [1846]. *The Present Age* (Dru, A. trans.). New York, NY: Harper Perennial. See p. 35.
3. Jaspers, K. 1952. *Reason and Anti-Reason in Our Time* (Goodman, S. trans.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; see pp. 22ff. See also Jaspers, K. 1957. Reply to My Critics. In *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (Schilpp, P. A. ed.). New York, NY: Tudor Publishing Company, pp. 817ff.
4. Hoffman, K. 1957. Basic Concepts of Jaspers' Philosophy. In *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (Schilpp, P. A. ed.). New York, NY: Tudor Publishing Company. See pp. 100ff.
5. Jaspers, K. 1950. *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy* (Manheim, R. trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
6. Heidegger, M. 2001 [1927]. *Being and Time* (Macquarrie, J. & Robinson, T. trans.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (hereafter BT). See Section 6.
7. BT 13 and 24 notably.
8. BT 26, 27 and 51.
9. BT 45, 52, 53 and 73; the expression 'what is what one does' is found in BT 47.
10. BT 74 and 75.
11. Sartre, J.-P. 1970 [1939]. Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology (Fell, J. P. trans.). *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1(2): 4–5.
12. Sartre, J.-P. 1956. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (Barnes, H. E. trans.). New York, NY: Philosophical Library, hereafter BN; see pp. l–lvi.

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13. BN lxii–lxvii.

14. A passing question (BN 224) seems to indicate that Sartre viewed animals as Descartes did, that is, as 'machines'. Now since animals know where their food is, it seems to follow that they are at least non-reflectively conscious, setting them apart from inanimate objects; nowhere Sartre discussed this difference.

15. BN xlv; positivism is not discussed as such in BN, but in view of Sartre's dismissal of phenomenal monism and determinism, it follows safely that he did not consider positivism as a viable position.

16. BN 21.

17. BN l–lii.

18. BN 25.

19. BN 100.

20. BN 23, emphases in original.

21. BN 24.

22. BN 25.

23. BN 405–06 and 483–84.

24. BN 129.

25. The expression is only alluded in BN (see p. 25 and pp. 438–39) but only appears as such in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (hereafter EH); see p. 29 of Sartre, J.-P. 2001. *Basic Writings* (Priest, S. ed.). London: Routledge.

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27. BN 433–36.

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33. The theme of conflict, mentioned throughout the work, receives extensive treatment in Part III of BN. See for instance pp. 364ff.

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Chapter 12

American Pragmatism

Making Management Work

'American pragmatism' is something of a tautology. Indeed, in its early or 'classical' version, pragmatism is an almost exclusively North American philosophical movement and in fact *the* original contribution to Western philosophy of the United States. It emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century, met with considerable success in the first decades of the twentieth century, declined almost to extinction from about 1950 onwards, before enjoying a multifaceted and sustained revival since the mid-1970s as neo-pragmatism. Since the late 1990s, academic journals, some of them run from European institutions, have been established to support the development of (neo)pragmatic and pragmatic-leaning philosophies.

Irrespective of classical pragmatism's philosophical descendance, its relationship with the American continent will endure because pragmatism is a North American philosophy and the United States is a pragmatic country. The reasons for this association are multiple. The American founders did not share European thinkers' trust in pure, incorruptible reason to lead mankind. That is, the federalists turned away from Plato, Descartes and Kant towards Locke and Hume to provide them with a philosophical compass. In particular, the American constitutionalists believed that the value of a law, principle or right, be it 'universal' or 'natural', can be appreciated only in view of its ability to curtail the unavoidable corrupting influence of political power. Against a backdrop of pioneering, violence and general disinterest in 'high culture', such mistrust of abstract ideas suited well the newcomers, impatient as they were to make a life for themselves. For most of them, success can be reduced to effectiveness in action. This mindset has survived today in those who seek to live the American dream. In North America, expediency is not merely an acceptable substitute for style, intention or principle. Rather, expediency *is* principle if it delivers the goods. In many respects, pragmatism embraces,

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indeed systematises, such a conflation, conceiving knowing as indissociable from acting (the term 'pragmatism' comes from the Greek *pragma*, meaning 'action').

Before its decline, classical pragmatism exerted considerable influence over American intellectual life, including politics, education, and what came to be known as social psychology. This influence continues to this day, even if unrecognised. Such an enduring relevance justifies that management scholars, students and practitioners pay attention to pragmatism. However, the main rationale for including a chapter on pragmatism in the current volume is more intuitive: management is fundamentally a pragmatic activity since managers are paid (or at least should be) to achieve actual results for their stakeholders. A philosophy which considers action as its alpha and omega is surely one that managers and those who study them would be keen to know and espouse. Or so one might think.

This chapter explores the works of the major figures of early pragmatism, namely Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead. One book, let alone one single chapter, cannot do justice to these authors' work and even less to the multifarious developments to which they led. Of (pragmatic) necessity, the following pages focus on these authors' salient ideas and their main implications for management scholarship and practice.

CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE'S PRAGMATIC MAXIM

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) was a true polymath: besides philosophy, he wrote abundantly and brilliantly on logic, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, geodesy, metrology, anthropology, psychology, semiotics, history of science, economics, rhetoric, and more. As historian of ideas and Peirce scholar Max Fisch put it, 'Who is the most original and the most versatile intellect that the Americas have so far produced? The answer "Charles S. Peirce" is uncontested, because any second would be so far behind as not to be worth nominating'.[1] As often happens with deeply original thinkers, inventors and artists, Peirce achieved little recognition during his lifetime and spent the last part of his life in penury. He has had his revenge since, for if his work remained mostly unpublished until the mid-1950s, it is today the object of active scholarship.

For many, pragmatism is principally a theory of truth. Yet, as the title of Peirce's well-known 1878 essay implies ('How to Make our Ideas Clear'), the first self-proclaimed pragmatist was not primarily interested in truth, but in meaning, that is, in defining the conditions an idea must meet to be meaningful.[2] In this essay, Peirce took aim at Descartes (and to a lesser degree at Leibniz) and argued that his predecessor's methodological doubt, even when

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associated with his criteria of 'clearness' and 'distinctiveness' of ideas, does not achieve what it is famed to achieve. Specifically, it delivers neither truth nor meaning.

Starting with Cartesian doubt, Peirce held that it was more pretence than a genuine philosophical or scientific method. For Peirce, one does not doubt without having reasons for doing so. That is, to doubt a belief or idea, one must suspect that this belief or idea is mistaken because it conflicts with another belief or idea or with an aspect of one's experience. In other words, in doubting the former, the latter is given a higher epistemic priority and is not doubted, at least provisionally. It is thus impossible to doubt everything at the same time, contrary to what Descartes maintained. Doubt is not a method of but a motive for inquiry.

Peirce was similarly unconvinced by the value of clarity and distinctness as criteria for truth. On his view, it is possible that an idea appears clear because, although mistaken, it is familiar to whomever is contemplating it. Further, if distinctness is understood as the quality of being apprehensible by way of definitions, distinctness achieves nothing in addition to what these definitions achieve. If they are mistaken, the so-called distinct idea is also mistaken.[3]

Peirce held that truth is not something that one person achieves alone, either by experiment or by contemplation. 'The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all [scientists] who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real'.[4] That is, truth is the end result of the process of scientific inquiry, if that inquiry continued indefinitely: 'Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief.' Truth is therefore a quest, to be ever pursued if possibly never secured. As Peirce explained, 'When we speak of truth and falsity, we refer to the possibility of the proposition being refuted.'[5] Such a view of truth does not imply that objective truth does not exist or that its nature makes it unobtainable. Quite the reverse. Peirce was a realist in the sense that he believed in the objective existence of a stable and independent reality. On his view, what scientists investigate exists independently of and is unaffected by whatever opinion they have of it.[6]

If truth is, for Peirce, the ideal, abstract goal of scientific investigation, meaning is something tangible and immediate. Meaning cannot be dissociated from action, because thinking itself can be justified only if it supports acting. To know what an idea, concept or belief means, 'we have, therefore, simply to determine what habits it produces. [. . .] there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice'. That is, if there is no difference between the consequences of actions justified by two seemingly different ideas, then there is only one idea, not two. Ideas, concepts and beliefs are exclusively and entirely defined by their

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tangible consequences. As Peirce put it, 'Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object'.[7] This formulation is known as the 'pragmatic maxim' (in his early writings, Peirce called it a principle).

Peirce illustrated his principle through an analysis of the concept of 'hard'. A substance is 'hard', he noted, when it is not scratched by many other substances. This quality of hard substances is all that is meant by 'hard'. At any rate, it is the only difference hard objects have with soft ones, unless one is ready to believe that some soft objects (those which are called hard) become suddenly hard when they are touched. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, it is purely theoretical and would reflect only the way about which hard objects are spoken. The practical, tangible consequences of the idea of hardness would remain unchanged. As Peirce insisted, 'Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects'.[8]

If the meaning of an idea is the sum of its practical consequences, it follows that mathematical expressions are meaningless. Indeed, since mathematical symbols have no tangible referent, propositions made of them cannot have a correspondence to everyday reality. Those mathematical statements which have been logically demonstrated are formally true, but they have no meaning because they have no practical consequences.[9] It is here apparent that if Peirce's theory of truth can be said to prefigure that of Popper (since for both thinkers what is true is what is not yet falsified), his pragmatic maxim prefigures the position that the members of the Vienna Circle would later espouse with regard to metaphysics. Indeed, if statements which cannot be translated in practical terms are devoid of meaning,[10] then all metaphysical language can be dismissed as 'absurd', 'senseless jargon' or 'meaningless gibberish'.[11]

Peirce applied to ethics his distinction between truth as abstract goal of inquiry and meaning as the sum of practical consequences. He conceived of ethics in two branches: pure ethics and practical ethics. Pure ethics is concerned with the absolute goal of human behaviour, or good in an ideal sense. Practical ethics, unsurprisingly, is concerned with the conformity of deliberate behaviour (action) with that ideal. It is noteworthy that pure and practical ethics cannot be conceived independently. This is the case because, on Peirce's view, every action is, by definition, purposive since it is conducted for the sake of an end. For an action to be considered ethical, its end must therefore be compatible with the absolute good as defined by pure ethics. At the same time, the meaning of the ideal good of pure ethics can be grasped only in view of its practical consequences.

In his early years, Peirce had little consideration for ethics, calling it 'dubious' and 'useless' knowledge. For reasons that are still debated, he later viewed ethics as a science and the pursuit of ethical knowledge as an

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enterprise not unlike scientific inquiry. Indeed, if a conduct guided by the ideal end of pure ethics is deemed to lead to unacceptable results before it is enacted, then the ethical theory should be revisited. Conversely, if the consequences of actual conduct are not compatible with the ultimate good defined by pure ethics, then that conduct must be corrected when a similar situation arises. The community of moral agents thus behaves like the community of scientists who test their theories through experiments and revisit the former or the latter depending on the results they obtain. Peirce hoped that universal ethical agreement would one day be reached because he conceived of the ideal ethical good as having a real (i.e. man-independent and objective) existence. It is a small step from this contention to the view that moral values have the same epistemic status as empirical facts, or that the fact-value distinction is unwarranted. Although Peirce did not take this step explicitly, some of his successors were more adventurous.

A few pages cannot do justice to the writings of one of North America's most prolific thinkers. Nonetheless, this brief outline allows for critical comments about a philosophy that, although original, is not without contradictions. The most evident of these is that embedded in Peirce's conception of a man-independent and objective 'reality'. The problem, which is a variation of the empiricists' dilemma about the continuous existence of unperceived objects, is that if the meaning of an idea is the sum of its sensible effects, then this meaning is contingent on these effects being experienced (sensed). This contingency implies that the meaning of that to which the idea refers cannot be established independently of human experience. It follows that anything thought to exist beyond experience has no meaning since it cannot be experienced. In other words, if reality exists independent of human experience, it is meaningless, according to Peirce's own maxim.

Similar doubt obtains about the meaning of truth as an ideal, stable and independent notion. Indeed, two conflicting conclusions follow from Peirce's account. First, if truth is what the community of scientists pursues endlessly, then it is impossible to say that truth exists or when it will be reached. The only certainty is that truth is pursued. Second and paradoxically, truth can be produced at will and at any time, for it will be whatever truth-seekers finally agree is truth. This contradiction highlights the circularity that lies at the heart of Peirce's theory of truth (truth-seekers pursue what truth-seekers pursue), from which no definitive meaning can be extracted.

Despite these problems, Peirce's insistence that the meaning of an idea derives from its practical consequences is not to be entirely dismissed. It is a welcome reminder that abstract words are linguistic shortcuts which acquire their signification only insofar as they have an empirical referent. For instance, one fails to see what the idea 'whiteness' could mean if it did not refer to white objects. Yet Peirce seemed to have been unaware that his

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nominalism has notable consequences for the rest of his philosophy. Indeed, a strict application of his pragmatic maxim should have led Peirce to dismiss metaphysics since metaphysical propositions refer, by definition, to matters that escape the realm of sensible experience. However, this is not the conclusion Peirce drew. In some pages he called metaphysical knowledge 'scrofulous' yet considered it in some others as 'rest[ing] on observations' from which it is possible to extract 'a precious essence'.[12] Independent reality and absolute goodness are presumably part of it.

Peirce's ambivalent assessment of metaphysical statements is unsurprising since it derives from his attempted solution to the limitations of rationalism and empiricism by way of a fusion of the two doctrines. On the one hand, Peirce was a rationalist, because he believed in the existence of *a priori* notions, such as truth, goodness and objective reality. The pragmatic maxim is another example of an idea (in this case a principle) accepted as self-evidently true, in typical Cartesian, rationalist fashion. On the other hand, Peirce was an empiricist because he insisted that the meaning of these constructs can be known only through their practical consequences, that is, through experience.

Insuperable contradictions follow from a dual commitment to rationalism and empiricism because pure ideas inevitably contradict experience. For instance, if the principle of pure ethics states that human life must be preserved in all circumstances, then it is impossible to decide what to do in the case of a pregnancy where either the mother or the baby can be saved (and both die if nothing is done). One cannot be a deontologist and a consequentialist at the same time. One way out of such quagmires is to abandon the view that meaning and truth have distinct origins (reason for truth, experience for meaning) and to hold that both derive from the same source, that is, to commit exclusively to one version or another of rationalism or empiricism. Alternatively, Peirce could have considered truth and meaning as obtaining from a third but identical source, yet to be identified. To Peirce's disapproval, a good friend of his took up the challenge.

WILLIAMS JAMES'S CONVENIENT PRAGMATISM

Like Peirce, William James (1842–1910) was frustrated by contemporary philosophy and its interminable disputes. Prominent among these, James explained in the public lectures that would form one of his most successful books, is what he called the 'dilemma in philosophy'.[13] While rationalists and empiricists make valid points, the worldviews they respectively espouse are not adequate in and of themselves. Rationalists rightly advocate the notion of principles, believe in free will and are generally religious and optimistic

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people. Yet their idealism tends to make them dogmatic and ignorant of scientific advances. As for empiricists, if they have the merit of going by the facts, they are generally irreligious and pessimistic people who deny free will and reject the role of ideals in human existence.

Peirce's pragmatism, James held, offers a solution to the current philosophical stalemates. It is an 'anti-intellectualist [philosophy that] has no dogma, and no doctrines save its method'.[14] According to James, pragmatism's method is this: if the practical effects of two theories or viewpoints do not differ, then there are not really two theories or viewpoints, but only one. A debate about them is thus pointless. For instance, the dispute between free will and determinism disappears when the practical consequences of committing to either view are examined. Indeed, free-willists and determinists, despite their philosophical differences, behave in similar ways, in the sense that they all strive to make a good life for themselves. On their daily endeavours, the view that they advance (and the one they disparage) has no practical bearing.[15]

James, like Peirce, held that what really matters about an idea, belief or hypothesis is the actual behaviour this idea, belief or hypothesis justifies. Unlike Peirce, however, James advanced pragmatism (or 'radical empiricism' as he sometimes called it) as a theory of truth and not of meaning. He defined 'pragmatism [as an] account of the relation called "truth" which may obtain between an idea (opinion, belief, statement) and its object'.[16] James's was thus an instrumental view of truth: to evaluate the truth of beliefs and ideas, their 'cash-value' must be considered, because true beliefs and ideas are useful in ways that false ones are not. He went so far as holding that the phrases 'it is useful because it is true' and 'it is true because it is useful [. . .] mean exactly the same thing'.[17] If James's books and addresses contributed to making Peirce's name known within philosophical circles and beyond, Peirce himself did not endorse all the views that James promoted. In particular, the latter's theory of truth was heresy to Peirce and prompted him to rename his own philosophy 'pragmaticism' to mark the difference with that of James's.[18]

According to James, the pragmatic theory of truth is an improvement over the traditional correspondence view of truth. Empiricists, James pressed, do not clarify what they mean by correspondence or agreement with experience. At any rate, truth as correspondence with facts is inapplicable to statements about such moral notions as justice which cannot be said to have empirical reality with which they could correspond. Pragmatism addresses these issues, James explained, because, in the pragmatic outline, 'The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process, the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its *validation*. [. . .] Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or

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intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that does not entangle our progress, [that] adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. [. . .] The true, to put it very briefly, *is only the expedient in the way of our thinking*'.[19]

Against his critics, James insisted that his definition of truth does not make it possible to call true any statement or belief that 'works' or because it is merely convenient or opportune for those who utter or harbour it. He thought he had provided truth's instrumentality with an objective empirical grounding. For instance, he held that 'true is the name for whatever idea starts the verification process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience'.[20] Further, James explained that a statement about a new experience must reconcile with all other experiences if it is to be recognised as true.[21] Be that as it may, the conclusion that 'truth is what works for me' is difficult to reject from his account. Indeed, James also wrote that 'When the pragmatists speak of truth, they mean exclusively something about the ideas, namely their workableness.'[22] Elsewhere, he contended that, in looking for theories, 'we must find [those] that will work. [. . .] Truth in science is what gives us the maximum possible sum of satisfactions'.[23] Among those satisfactions to be tallied are the pleasures deriving from (say) finding a theory elegant and capable of advancing one's reputation. James insisted that a new experience must reconcile with previous ones if it is to be established as true, but this does not rule out personal advantages.

For rationalists such as Descartes, truth obtains *a priori*; for empiricists, truth obtains a posteriori. In both cases, truth stems from a source (reason or experience) that is held to be authoritative and objective. This view implies (as in Peirce's account) that truth and meaning must be distinguished since the latter contains a layer of subjectivity. This distinction is lost in James's application to truth of Peirce's theory of meaning, which, taken to its logical conclusion relegates truth to mere personal convenience. If truth is workableness, every statement, belief or idea becomes true for those who hold it, provided it affords some advantage or convenience. In this way, religious creeds are 'true' since they presumably 'work' for those who believe them.

Peirce's pragmatism contains insuperable contradictions and its practical value is therefore uncertain. The reverse is true of James's pragmatism, for it leads to the convenient view that truth is 'what works'. Such a conclusion is practical because it has universal application. For instance, it applies to James's philosophy, for doubtlessly James found his work satisfactory in one sense or another. In that respect, if Peirce's pragmatism is not pragmatic on its own terms, James's is. This is not saying much, however, for in this case practicality has been purchased with self-indulgence.

His theory of truth aside, James's proposed dissolution of long-standing philosophical debate, such as the freedom versus determinism dispute, is not

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without merit. Yet if James's had been the last word on pragmatism, the success of the philosophical movement would have been short-lived. For pragmatism to prosper, its flame had to be stoked by a more ambitious thinker. One possibility to contain pragmatism's self-indulgence is to provide it with a less subjective grounding; instead of mere satisfaction, one can look for human development as the basis for truth and meaning.

JOHN DEWEY'S NATURALISTIC PRAGMATISM

John Dewey (1859–1952) was a prominent academic, public speaker, political and social activist. Writing on philosophy, psychology, ethics, religion, aesthetics, epistemology, education and democracy, he produced no less than forty books and about seven hundred articles in over one hundred and forty journals. Active until the end of his long life, Dewey was among the most prominent American intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century. His reputation was such that Canadian historian Hilda Neatby, one of his most resolute critics on educational policy, had to concede shortly after his death that 'Dewey has been to our age what Aristotle was to the later Middle Ages: not a philosopher, but *the* philosopher'.[24]

In 1909, fifty years after the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Dewey wrote an essay in which he discussed the consequences of Darwinism for philosophy.[25] Before Darwin, Dewey noted, biologists saw species as fixed and final, perfect and eternal. In like manner, most philosophers after Plato have embraced the view that knowledge is about certainty and identified wisdom with the understanding of unchanging principles. However, as Darwin's achievement illustrates, knowledge does not originate from the contemplation of an idealised, fixed and perfect realm. Rather, it emanates from the observation of the evolution of nature. Philosophy must be reconstructed along similar lines, so that rather than pursue ideal principles or theories, philosophers start from a practical understanding of nature. Francis Bacon exemplified the right spirit: the objective of philosophy is to guide the production of knowledge that increases man's control over his environment and supports human growth.[26]

Reconstructing philosophy on Baconian lines requires, for Dewey, abandoning the traditional 'spectator' theories of knowledge. Depending on which version one considers, these theories ascribe 'the ultimate test of knowledge to impressions passively received, [or] to synthetic activity of the intellect. Idealistic theories hold that mind and the object known are ultimately one; realistic doctrines reduce knowledge to awareness of what exists independently, and so on. But they all make one common assumption. They all hold that the operation of inquiry excludes any element of practical activity

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that enters into the construction of the object known'.[27] As was the case for Peirce, for Dewey knowing cannot be dissociated from, let alone be opposed to, acting. Knowing, just like thinking, is an activity undertaken by highly developed and interdependent organisms to cope with problems arising in an evolving environment. Thinking and knowing are always and of necessity practical. They are about action, evolution and adaptation of the knowing organism itself and of its physical or cultural environment by way of experimentation and innovation. Ideas and theories are not meant to elevate human beings above nature, but to support growth. Growth, for Dewey, is the constant reorganisation of human experience, the solution of practical problems and the resolution of conflicts. Growth is the goal of evolution and thus an imperative of existence.

If nature constantly evolves, if knowledge is not about universal and unchanging principles, it follows that there are no *a priori*, absolute truths. Rather than 'truth' and 'knowledge', terms which he saw as fraught and burdening traditional philosophy with intractable problems, Dewey preferred to speak of 'warranted assertability'. With this expression, Dewey wanted to capture the goal of scientific inquiry, which he saw as an ongoing, dynamic and self-correcting process, far remote from the traditional static assignment of truth to propositions depending on how they correspond to experience.[28] However, this endorsement of Peirce's conceptualisation did not prevent him from proposing an instrumental theory of truth not unlike that of James's. While he argued that only 'judgements', not 'propositions', can be properly qualified as true,[29] Dewey also held that, between two ideas, the one 'that works is the *true* one; [. . .] *truth* is an abstract noun applied to the collection of cases, actual, foreseen and desired, that receive confirmation in their works and consequences'.[30] Unlike James, however, Dewey emphatically ruled out mere satisfaction as criterion for truth, for such a basis for evaluation would open the door to whim or personal idiosyncrasy. For Dewey, truth as utility is functional and corresponds to a solution of an actual problem, leading to a reorganisation of human experience as a whole and the collective growth that this reorganisation affords.

In Dewey's naturalistic outline, the vexing opposition between body and mind is revealed as misguided. Mind is not a substance or a blank slate, passive recipient of experience. Rather, mind is an activity, a process of interaction between an organism and its environment that goes through communication. Mind is a system of meaning embodied in organic life, a constant flow of messages.[31] Dewey is worth quoting here: 'Mind is primarily a verb. It denotes all the ways in which we deal consciously and expressly with the situations in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately, an influential manner of thinking has changed modes of action into an underlying substance that performs the activities in question'.[32] That is, language enables the conscious

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manipulation of pains, pleasures, odours, colours, and other feelings by assigning them mental symbols, but in so doing it 'objectifies' them, giving the impression that feelings, thoughts, mental events and eventually mind itself are tangible things. In any case, science has shown that life, in all its forms, is a continuous biological process; there is no activity, mental or otherwise, that cannot be traced back to some sort of organic behaviour or event.[33]

For Dewey, the traditional dichotomies, such as those between subject and object, nature and culture, self and society, essence and existence, cause and effect, are as misguided as that between mind and body. In nature there are no such divides and it is only language, infected with overtones of metaphysical dualisms inherited from Platonism, that conveys and sustains belief in their existence. The opposition between facts and values is a case in point. Unlike Peirce, Dewey did not conceive of ethics as the quest for a supreme and fixed ethical principle. Rather, as philosophy is an enterprise dedicated to the formulation of practical methods, ethics is concerned with the development of methods to improve individual and collective habits. That is, Dewey saw ethical inquiry as the systematic evaluation and revision of moral judgements evaluated against their actual consequences. Value judgements are thus not unlike social institutions. They are tools which are assessable and adjustable in light of their results by testing their ability satisfactorily to address practical problems and support human growth.[34] The worth of value judgements is objectively measurable because it is grounded on actual, lived human conduct, not *a priori* principles or divine command. Moral progress is achieved when better (i.e. leading to superior growth) patterns of behaviour follow from revised value judgements. Dewey's ethical philosophy is thus a naturalized meta-ethic aimed at collective development.[35]

Dewey's repudiation of permanent truths, his insistence on the practicality of knowing, and his contention that institutions and principles, including moral ones, be subjected to constant revision in view of their practical consequences, come together in his educational philosophy. Education, for Dewey, is the central concern of philosophy; indeed, if 'education [is] the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, [then] philosophy [is] the general theory of education'.[36] To his credit, Dewey's life exemplified such pronouncements. In addition to writing abundantly on education, he taught in high schools and colleges, devised curricula, founded departments of education and schools (notably the University of Chicago's Laboratory Schools, still in existence) and lectured and consulted internationally on educational policy.

For Plato, education was acquisition of knowledge of the Forms; for Dewey, 'education is the process of living and is not meant to be the preparation of future living'.[37] That is, in keeping with his ethics, education, like any other social institution or practice, must support human growth. It is a process

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that does not stop at school or university but continues during the entire life of the individual. Rather than teaching their students (inexistent) fixed and dubious principles or ancient wisdom, educators should encourage children's natural curiosity, imagination and willingness to experiment, which form the cradle of the scientific mindset.[38] Learning is to be experiential and problem based. Children should not be spoon fed ready-made formulae to learn by rote and apply mindlessly, but should learn to develop solutions. Doing this equips them with the skills required to address the problems they will face as adult citizens. Further, Dewey believed that the group pre-exists and gives rise to the individual. Schools thus play a critical role in socialising children and should teach them democracy, which means not only civic and economic conduct but also compassion, creativity, and self-governance. To achieve these outcomes, schools should be run as small communities and require the active participation of their students.

Although Dewey's fame quickly declined after his death in 1953, his arguments consolidated the victory of progressive over traditional education. The current popularity of student-centred teaching approaches, the importance granted to socialisation while at school, and the rise of problem-based learning in school and university courses attest to the enduring success of Dewey's ideas in North America and beyond. In Western schools and colleges, rote learning is typically discouraged, discipline and standards are seen as hindering creativity, students (renamed 'learners') receive cognitive authority equivalent to that of their teachers, and participation in extra-curricular activities is granted equal, if not greater, attention than academic achievement. As for the study of Latin and ancient Greek in high schools, it has long become an amusing oddity.

Largely taken for granted today, Dewey's educational principles met with spirited, if eventually futile, resistance. For instance, Hilda Neatby (1904–1975) and later Allan Bloom (1930–1992) argued that ignoring the difficult questions that preoccupied ancient authors in favour of more practical, fleeting concerns amounts to abandoning the past.[39] Without knowledge of the past, though, present living is meaningless and 'growth' is impossible to define. Even social scientists need to know the past in order to offer meaningful statements about the present. More generally, educating children without confronting them with the great works of the Western canon turns them into cultural orphans, bereft of the intellectual references required to engage in critical thinking. However, when confronted with these arguments and other shortcomings of progressive education, its promoters typically respond by shifting the blame to cultural determinism, the enduring legacy of traditional educational models or on inadequate application of progressive principles. Rather than being questioned, these principles are thus implemented with renewed determination.

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A general inability of Dewey's disciples critically to examine their principles and methods in view of their consequences should not come as a surprise. Dewey defined critical thinking, which he also called 'reflective thought', as the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends'.[40] Assuming that it is arrived at following the principles of logic, the outcome of such an analysis is either an endorsement (possibly qualified or provisional) of the proposed belief or a rebuttal of the grounds that allegedly support it. However, if there is no essential difference between empirical facts and moral values, the evidence advanced to counter the proposed belief can be ignored for being subjective, politically motivated or somehow biased. Indeed, this is typically the line of defence used by progressive educators when facing criticisms. In other words, blurring the fact-value distinction, as Dewey did, makes critical thinking, according to Dewey's own definition, impossible.

Against Dewey, Neatby also pressed that morality cannot be reduced to learned socialisation, for it is not the case that all behaviour is acceptable. Dewey himself recognised this, since he based his meta-ethics on the promotion of human growth. Yet he also claimed that fixed ethical principles are inexistent and their study toxic to human flourishing. Not only is the promotion of human growth a permanent principle of sort, but Dewey did not elaborate the direction that such a growth should take, except that it should support democracy (in which case 'democracy' becomes the overall guiding ethical principle). Such a first-level inconsistency in Dewey's work is not exceptional. Besides the contradiction about critical thinking, noted earlier, another and perhaps obvious one is exemplified in Dewey's dismissal of general principles and theories while expounding a book-long *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

Dewey's theory of truth, although offered as an operationalised version of the correspondence theory and an improvement on James's theory, suffers from weaknesses inherited from James in a more severe form. Namely, if a true judgement is one that is useful because it reorganises human experience satisfactorily (i.e. addresses a problem), then, as Bertrand Russell noted, even simple problems like 'did you have coffee with your breakfast this morning?' receive different yet equally true solutions depending on how that problem is to be addressed.[41] That, for Dewey, problems are collectively defined and their solutions meant to reorganise collective human experience, does not make his criterion for deciding that truth has been obtained more objective than in James's account.

Further, Dewey did not specify when exactly one is to decide that a solution addresses a problem satisfactorily. One can understand why he did not. Indeed, according to Dewey's own method, this question does not admit a

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definitive answer, since the truth of the statement reporting that a given problem has been satisfactorily addressed must be evaluated also by considering whether it addresses another problem. The evaluation of that second statement rests in turn on the solution to yet another problem. This infinite regress shows that Dewey's philosophy destroys not only the notion of truth but also that of empirical facts, since without means to decide whether statements are true, even simple statements about the existence of facts are impossible to evaluate. Russell noted that even if these difficulties are addressed, there are statements that are false but still useful and others that are true but useless. Despite James's and Dewey's views, the true is not the useful and vice versa.

The most attractive component of Dewey's work is undoubtedly his characterisation of mind not as an entity but as an activity mediated by language. While this view seems difficult to reconcile with the determinism implied by Dewey's equation of mental processes with biological events, it points to novel conceptions of such constructs as 'I', 'Me', 'self' and their relationships with society. The philosopher and social psychologist who further explored these possibilities was one of Dewey's closest friends and an academic colleague at the universities of Michigan and Chicago.

GEORGE HERBERT MEAD'S PRAGMATIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is remembered today for his theory of action, self-consciousness and intersubjectivity which informed the school of symbolic interactionism in social psychology. A gifted speaker who lectured without notes, Mead published many articles but died without completing a book. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, appeared in 1934. The title is not Mead's and the book is an incomplete draft based on student notes and unpublished manuscripts. Nevertheless, this chapter would be incomplete without a brief outline of the ideas of this exceptional thinker.[42]

Like Peirce, James and Dewey, Mead was frustrated by the intractable and sterile dichotomies that plagued philosophy and wanted to ground his work in the results and methods of contemporary science. Like Dewey, he thought that dualisms like body and mind, individual and society, nature and culture had to be revised in the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution.[43] Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, Darwinism appeared to provide the study of human existence with the one overarching structural constancy that it had lacked. If the human species is the result of a natural process, then this unifying process must also be relevant to the psychological and social aspects of human existence. Taking the view, like Dewey, that the group came first,

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Mead saw mind not as an entity or substance in the individual but as a process which arises within a pre-existing social environment.[44] That is, Mead thought that the biological organism becomes a minded individual within and through social experiences and activities. First among these is the acquisition and use of language, which for Mead is the vehicle for the emergence of self-consciousness.

Studying in Berlin from 1888 to 1891, Mead discovered the research of the father of experimental psychology, Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920). Wundt believed that animal gestures are best analysed in terms of the behavioural responses they trigger in other animals. For instance, a dog takes the bone of another; the second dog then attacks, submits or flees. In all cases, one animal's move is a response to what the other does. The meaning of each animal's gesture is essentially the response of the other to that gesture and so on: what was a meaning becomes a stimulus to a further gesture.[45] However, unlike Wundt, Mead did not think that animals understand the meaning of their gestures, seeing them as instinctively responding to one another, like fencers during a bout. That is, Mead believed that the kind of interaction exhibited by animals does not require *self*-consciousness. If this sort of interaction provides a basic framework for analysing human social interactions, it manifests a crucial difference.

A committed pragmatist, Mead considered the act (or action) as the primary entity and the source of meaning. He conceived an act as an uninterrupted event consisting of stimulation, response and the results of that response. The isolation of the act, its separate existence as a sequence of behaviours with a given result, is achieved by focusing attention on a series of stimuli, a series of responses and their outcomes. Further, a human act is described in symbolic terms, through words and language, such as 'taking notes' or 'reading a book', which set it apart from other acts and confirm its cognitive existence and unity. Acts, Mead argued, determine the relationship between individuals and their environment. Indeed, it is noteworthy that descriptions of acts like 'taking notes' or 'reading a book' are descriptions of people in relationships with something external to themselves. They are neither descriptions of people as separate entities, nor only of something external to people. A first consequence of this analysis is that acts, their meaning and the symbols (language) used to capture them mentally form a coherent whole. For Mead, 'significant' is what is identified as a stimulus-response couple taken as an independent cognitive unit.

When a person gestures in the form of an instruction or command to another, the former is aware of the significance of his gesture insofar as it implicitly considers the explicit response of the latter. For instance, if a police officer raises his hand to indicate that traffic must stop, this gesture has meaning because the police officer and the motorists share the idea that

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the response is to stop. This shared understanding of the relationship between the symbol and the object or act that this symbol signifies is the necessary condition for the existence of consciousness. In fact, the realm of conscious phenomena is precisely that of shared understandings of relationships between symbols and acts. Further, the significant units (the acts) are attached to verbal symbols (spoken words), which evoke in the consciousness of those who utter them their expected response. Thus, the word 'stop' evokes in the person who pronounces it the same expected response as raising his hand evokes for the police officer: the expected response is that the person to which the symbol is directed stops. When this happens, evidence for shared meaning is established. Mead called such gestural conversations 'taking the attitude of others'.[46]

Human beings have the additional capacity to represent symbols to themselves rather than saying them out loud, allowing them to call the expected response of an act only in thought. Thus, they can maintain a conversation with themselves in which they explore the possible consequences of their actions. For Mead, this ability is what is called 'self-consciousness'.[47] Mead was adamant that the crucial difference between the behaviour of conditioned laboratory rats and the human thought process through symbols is that symbols, instead of being simple instincts or learned reflexes, are the means of selecting stimuli, so that a variety of responses can be organised into one form of action.

Having learned to control their behaviour so that they can call, or at least make possible, certain responses on the part of others, individuals must still choose which response is to be promoted. Indeed, social activity is not just a series of exchanges in which individuals trigger responses from those around them as they please. Rather, social activity is organised. Mead compared social activity to a game. Indeed, in a game, participants understand the general framework, which includes the objective of the game, the rules, the relationships between players and so on. Mead merged all this into a unique concept, 'the attitude of the generalised other'. Leaving aside whether everyday social life can be compared to a game, taking the attitude of the generalised other can be understood as referring to a universalisation of the process of role-taking, or a general sensitivity to cultural norms. During the internal conversation individuals have with themselves in exploring the possible lines of action, the generalised other calls forth cultural or conventional responses to self-consciousness. It does not provide the expected response of a single person, but the manner with which a proposed action affects social organisation. The generalised other is simultaneously arbitrator and critic, except that there is no referee, just playmates symbolised in a kind of group consciousness.

The individual is more than a group consciousness, however. Still missing in Mead's account is the entity that issues the proposals for action which

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are judged according to their expected effects. Mead's answer is that self-consciousness has two phases: a social consciousness, the 'Me', which is the anchor for the relationships between individuals and their environment, and a private consciousness, 'I', which is the source of proposals for actions. If the proposed action is carried out, 'I' instantly becomes 'Me' because the realisation of an action is a relationship with the others. 'I' is never socialised because it is not an object; it is unpredictable because it is the very principle of unpredictability.

Mead's ideas set him apart in the social sciences. Allowing that person and society emerge as products of the relationship between them introduces aspects not found in most models of scientific psychology and certainly not in behaviourist models. In fact, Mead's social psychology contains elements that make it a cousin not far removed from existentialism. Specifically, three points of convergence between the views of Mead and existentialists are noteworthy. First, both posit the existence of self-consciousness mediated through language, a feature which distinguishes humans from other animals. Second, Mead and existentialists advance a dual perspective of the person as subject and object. Third, they locate social rules and conventions in the 'Me', an internal structure comparable to Freud's superego, or what is called conscience in ordinary language.

By introducing 'I', Mead emphasised the implications of self-awareness: creativity and novelty. 'I' is of course totally mysterious: it is spontaneous but seeks to express itself. At the same time, 'I' evaluates its own proposals, which implies a sensitivity to morality and a rationality the origin of which Mead did not elucidate. Further, Mead believed that the dialogue 'I – Me' comes into play only when the person deliberates over and chooses an action but did not specify when exactly this deliberation and choice take place and when they do not. Besides, Mead consolidated society at large into the 'generalised other', a repository of the rules against which behaviour is judged, presumably on moral and efficiency grounds. This implies that the relationship between individual and society is essentially a relationship of authority (in the sense of authorisation to action) and that society has a monopoly on judgement. Mead's society is therefore conflict-free, stable and ruled on consensual authority, but not power. This is hardly a realistic model of human interaction.

Other aspects of Mead's work deserve criticism. For instance, Mead tends to reify 'I' (through use of the definite article for instance, omitted in the summary proposed in the foregoing) while ascribing to it qualities, such as the possibility to generate freely proposals and to choose between them, which can be ascribed only to immaterial entities. This reification (and the determinism it implies) is further conveyed in Mead's conceptualisation of 'Me' as a product of (caused by) social interactions. Moreover, in Mead's account, the

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mental ability to detach symbols from their referent is crucial since it separates humans from other animals. Yet Mead did not explain how or when this ability arises during the development of the socialised individual.

Mead's model is not without weaknesses. Its lasting merit, however, is to acknowledge the person as engaged in meaningful, autonomous action and not in caused behaviour as assumed by theories of scientific psychology. This conviction allowed him to seek self-consciousness where it is, in social interaction, while eschewing models of the individual and society as self-contained entities. While Mead's work does not provide definitive answers to the mystery of human existence generally and self-consciousness specifically, it indicates where these problems lie.

MANAGEMENT: PRACTICE, THEORY, IDEOLOGY

Management has been defined in diverse ways. For Henry Fayol, to manage is 'to forecast and to plan, to organise, to command, to co-ordinate and to control'; for Mary Parker Follet, management is 'the art of getting things done through people'; for Peter Drucker, to manage a business is to 'create a customer'. Beyond their different emphases, these definitions imply that management is a pragmatic activity. Indeed, this statement is a tautology: when not referring to those in charge of an organisation (the managers) or the academic discipline, 'management', that is, what managers do, can be only a practice.

If management is a practice by nature if not by definition, one would expect the authors discussed in this chapter to figure as prominent (if not mandatory) references and philosophical background to scholarly and practitioner-orientated management literature. Surprisingly, this is not the case. A survey of the literature reveals that only a handful of studies and a couple of monographs seek to anchor business ethics on the moral philosophies of Peirce and Dewey. Whether such studies are faithful to these authors' ideas and whether these ideas are applicable despite the inconsistencies flagged earlier are debatable matters. Similarly, there are very few management articles on the work of the early pragmatists. Even if neopragmatism has enjoyed a degree of popularity within organisation and business ethics studies since the mid-2000s, classical pragmatism as a research framework is yet to make significant inroads to management studies. As for reviews of management research frameworks, they either do not mention pragmatism or acknowledge it only in passing. The most notable example of this neglect is perhaps Burrell's and Morgan's *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, published in 1979. In this extremely influential book (over 16,200 citations at the time of writing), the word 'pragmatism' appears only once, in a footnote.

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Management scholars' disregard of pragmatism did not go entirely unnoticed. In an essay published in 2008, Jeffrey Pfeffer noted that pragmatism has had a small and diminishing influence on management thought, research and education since the reforms of the late 1950s which sought to consolidate the status of management as an academic discipline.[48] In other words, since management researchers and educators have tried to model their work and methods on those of natural scientists, they have focused on scientific theory at the expense of practice. In this context, management researchers' neglect of pragmatism is no accident. Although taking place as part of a broader history (the birth and evolution of management schools) that is explored further in a later chapter of the present volume, the way this neglect came about is worth telling.

Management academia generally and management education specifically hinge on the assumption that there exists a codified, teachable body of knowledge without which the practice of management is defective. Since Taylor's (1919) *Principles of Scientific Management*, the building block of this corpus has been management theory. Indeed, in providing a rationale that there is 'one best way' to perform production-related tasks, Taylor was de facto advancing a theory of management, in this case a theory of job design. After Taylor, the scientific, theoretical focus of management research was explicit in Herbert Simon's work at the Graduate School of Industrial Administration, the successive waves of behavioural sciences, and the Ford Foundation 1959 report that triggered the institutional reforms of the following decades. Peter Drucker's warning that there was no such a thing as a management theory fell on deaf ears.[49]

The overall concern for management theory has had two main justifications. First, theory professionalises researchers through a common embrace of the scientific framework and a commitment to disseminating findings using a shared language. Producing theory (and publishing it in scientific journals), even for its own sake, boosts researchers' professional status and their institutions' rankings, ensuring their accreditation by the same token. Second, theoretical knowledge acquired at university is meant to offset the inexperience of novice managers and improves the practice of more seasoned ones. Evidence-based management scholars are notable advocates of this latter thesis. They insist that managers operate like the best medical doctors and engineers: not according to ideology, preconception or intuition, but according to the best scientific theories. In summary, the quest for theory legitimises both management and management research as professional fields.

Whether the legitimation efforts of management researchers have been successful is debatable, however. In 1989, John Van Maanen lamented the lack of progress of management research, its lack of practical relevance and the evanescent nature of the theories it produces.[50] It is unclear if much

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progress has been accomplished since. The decried 'jungle' of management theories of the 1960s and 1970s has thickened and expanded beyond description and it would take a brave scholar today to survey all the theories that have been proposed. Not that such endeavour would be useful. As *Academy of Management Journal* editor George observed, the more management studies multiply, the more they resemble 'black cats in coal cellars'.[51]

What remains certain is that, to date and despite the best efforts of thousands of researchers, no management theory has been identified that can be implemented within work organisations with the same reliability as theories about the world of physical objects. This absence of demonstrable results threatens the existence of management, the academic discipline as it exists today, of management schools as places of learning and of management as a profession. Although the lack of relevance of management research has been a regular theme for commentators for the last decades, those primarily concerned have barely noticed. If management researchers have done anything to address their existential doubts, it is to pursue with renewed vigour their quest for theory. For some of them at least, helping managers in their practice has always been an illusory concern because they believe that the language of management research is not reconcilable with that of managing.[52] As for the academy's flag-carrying journals, they still require, unperturbed, new or expanded theoretical contributions as a main publication criterion. Like their progressive counterparts in educational sciences, management researchers are therefore no longer the disinterested scientists they claim to be. Absence of results is the rationale to stay the course, rather than to change it. In other words, those who should be instinctively pragmatic, owing to the nature of what they study, are in fact self-serving ideologues.

MAKING MANAGEMENT WORK

To alleviate the situation described in the foregoing, editors of scholarly management journals now typically request of researchers that they articulate the practical aspects of their research. These normally appear in short 'implications for practice' sections written to the attention of managers and management consultants. Despite their title, these sections exemplify the issues just discussed, notably the lack of practical relevance of management research. These sections are also a good place to start if one wants to correct the current situation on pragmatic lines.[53]

The liberal use in management literature of auxiliary verbs such as 'may' or 'might' was noted in the chapter on British Empiricism. These modal verbs, which imply that the opposite of what is proposed is also possible, render sentences that contain them tautological and devoid of practical import.

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Two other linguistic practices pervasive in the 'implications for practice' sections of management articles are worth mentioning: use of the verb 'to suggest' and reifications.

In management articles, the verb 'to suggest' (or other verbs of comparable meaning and their derivatives) appears frequently in sentences such as 'the results suggest that . . .' or similar wording. Dictionary definitions explain that to 'suggest' is equivalent to 'evoke', to 'give the impression' or to 'imply a possibility or hypothesis'. To write that a piece of research 'suggests' a practical implication is thus to insinuate that a subjective process has been at play in the collection, reading, description or interpretation of the data collected during the study. Not only does this amount to distancing oneself from one's conclusion (and pre-emptively exonerates advice-givers from a future accusation that they gave the wrong counsel), but it is also incompatible with the imperative that results derived from empirical research are, at least in principle, replicable by anyone. Indeed, while there are strict rules associated with moving from conclusions about samples to ones about populations, there are no principles that apply to suggestions: anything can be said to suggest anything else. As per Peirce's maxim, the meaning of a suggestion is unclear because it does not have unambiguous practical relevance.

Management authors love reifications. In their 'implications for practice' sections, they write of abstractions such as 'personality', 'motivation', 'company', 'organisation', 'firm', 'strategy' or 'culture' as if these were tangible entities with independent agency, as if these notions had an independent concrete existence distinct from that of the human beings who comprise and create them. This is not the case: what does exist is people working with each other and delivering outputs consistent (or not) with their stated goals. Statements such as 'personalities make teams cohere', 'companies produce more creative innovations if their leaders have professional experiences abroad' and 'firms adjusting their social engagements in accordance with their product scopes have better financial performance' are not descriptions of observable phenomena, let alone of implementable practices.

Reifications (and the attribution of physical attributes or independent powers to them) are so pervasive in organisational scholarship that ignoring propositions that rely on them can lead only to a near complete dismissal of the management literature. Readers resisting this conclusion will no doubt object that terms like 'personality', 'organisation', 'culture' or 'strategy' are shorthand for patterns of individual and collective behaviour that management authors use because they are convenient. Such a line of defence is acceptable as long as the statements that incorporate these terms are explicitly accompanied by reminders that a personality does not do anything, firms do not invest, organisations do not produce anything, cultures do not reward and strategies do not improve performance, because these concepts do not exist

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in a sense in which they have physical attributes or powers. Without such clarifications, the so-called practical implications of management research are rendered trivial and impossible to enact. For example, when management authors write, ‘organisation’ to mean ‘group of people’ without specifying precisely who these people are and ascribe independent faculties or powers to that group, they reify an abstraction and propose a statement denuded of practical consequences. A manager waiting for his organisation (as distinct from its members) to do something will not know what to observe.

Lest readers think the above is anecdotal or rests on a partial or biased reading of management articles, the following study is enlightening. In 2010, Jean Bartunek and Sara Rynes surveyed the content of the ‘implication for practice’ sections of 1,738 articles published in five leading management and management-related journals in 1992–1993 and 2003–2007.[54] They found that, overall, 74 per cent (up to 89 per cent for some journals) of ‘implications for practice’ sections used tentative language (built upon ‘may’, ‘speculate’, ‘potentially’, etc.). Such language, analysed with Hume’s Fork, classifies as analytic (‘relations of ideas’) or nonsense (‘sophistry and illusion’). Either way, it is denuded of practical meaning. Thus, when Bartunek and Rynes concluded that the content of ‘implications for practice’ sections ‘probably discourages practitioners from imagining ways in which academic findings might be applied’, they offered an understatement. Closer to the truth is to say that, contrary to what their heading claims, ‘implications for practice’ sections of leading management journal articles propose little that has practical relevance, or ‘clarity’ as Peirce would have said.

The debate about the value of scholarly studies to managers has at times been framed as a battle between relevance and rigour, as if a trade-off existed. In the same editorial in which he lamented the pointless multiplication of management theories, *Academy of Management Journal* editor George took an opposing view and argued that there are conditions under which relevance and rigour come together. Pragmatists would agree and insist that when researchers (or anyone else for that matter) believe that their work has practical implications, they formulate them in ways that make these implications apparent and unambiguous. The following recommendations, which follow from the preceding comments, are offered to help them meet this objective. They are consistent with pragmatism’s central message, which is that, to be meaningful, propositions must have unequivocal practical consequences.

First, if practical relevance is their objective, management authors must refrain from using the modals ‘may’ and ‘might’ when formulating practical implications. Anything ‘may’ cause, influence, improve, anything else. Researchers are understandably prudent when advancing their conclusions. However, if a research project is to lead to action, professional prudence cannot take precedence over practical relevance. Although results based on

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statistical inferences are uncertain, it is possible to quantify this uncertainty by way of confidence intervals or significance levels associated with hypothesis-testing protocols. Similarly, sentences relying on the modals 'can' or 'could' must similarly be avoided in formulating practical research conclusions. Unless probabilities are specified, that something 'can' lead to something else is of little interest. However, knowing that something will do so under precise conditions or in a specified percentage of cases has practical utility.

Second, if practical relevance is one of their objectives, authors must use reifications sparingly and always in tandem with specification of that to which they refer. While stylistic concision is desirable and conceptualisation is the precursor to generalisation, neither must come in the way of precision. Ambiguity obtains if abstractions are employed without clear definitions of what they are meant to represent. The more often reifications are used in a text, the greater the risk that reality is not faithfully portrayed. Here as elsewhere, Ockham's razor (the parsimony principle) is sound advice. That is, if Ockham's uncompromising nominalism is too high a bar to clear for management studies, a dose of Peirce's version of that philosophy will strengthen the discipline, not weaken it.[55]

Third, it is not enough to suggest research conclusions. Results must be affirmed and precisely delimited by way of empirical results, standard form arguments that are free of logical fallacies and statistical inferences when required. Logic, informed by fact-based evidence, does not suggest anything, but supports or does not support hypotheses and recommendations. While suggestions *may* stir the interest or imagination of readers and trigger further investigations, they are not, in and of themselves, relevant to practitioners. Managers anxious to ground their practice on scientific findings will not benefit from suspicions, suggestions, speculations or hints, even if they come from learned and well-intentioned scholars.

NEOPRAGMATISM

If North America's intellectual and historical context provided pragmatism with a favourable cradle, American thinkers faced the same broad challenges that their European counterparts did. In Europe, the Enlightenment project that culminated in positivism led to scientism, hollowed out (secularised) Christian ethics and the death of God. In America, the conquest of the Western frontier and its intoxicating promise of unlimited opportunity proved too strong a solvent for the demands of New England Puritanism. All the same, by the close of the nineteenth century, in American as in Europe, traditional moral, aesthetic and cultural norms were collapsing. As Nietzsche predicted and as World War I confirmed, modernity was imploding. Today,

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behind the thin veneer of religiosity that distinguishes North American from European societies lies the same nihilist void.

As antidotes to science's paralysing determinism and scientism's nihilistic freefall, existentialists took their cue from Nietzsche and reaffirmed human freedom. In America, Peirce's disciples sought to redefine scientific truth in ways that would make room for reflective action. They held that general metaphysical speculations are sterile because knowing comes from acting. Under Dewey's pen, pragmatic truth is a measure of the success with which individuals cope with their environment through their actions. Paradoxically, a focus on actions makes empirical reality fade into irrelevance. This is so because, in the pragmatic outline, the existence of a stable and independent reality is uncertain, or at least secondary; whatever reality is, it disappears behind its transformation and interpretation through action. This interpretation is either personal (in James's account) or collective (in Dewey's and Mead's versions). In either case, facts no longer really matter, for there is no limit to how they can be interpreted. In this sense, if James' pragmatism is a philosophy of self-indulgence (truth is what works for me), Dewey's is a philosophy of social power and collective indulgence. If truth is what works, pragmatists have a licence to rewrite history according to what works for them. Truth as correspondence with the facts is rejected in favour of a new kind of truth, namely pragmatic truth.

Further, when truth is defined as 'what works', the way is open to a rampant relativism in which 'works' is deemed to be relative to whomever judges it. When 'works' is trivially reduced to an individual's feelings, it can be treated at best as a subjective truth which cannot be generalised beyond that individual. When 'works' is defined in terms of the judgement of a group or nation, it is a political concept and leads to the view that there is, for example, American truth, European truth, Australian truth, and so on. The notion of truth becomes thus so elastic as to be meaningless. As human beings differ in their judgements, and as human relationships are inevitably power relationships, the judgements of those in strong positions of power will ultimately decide what it is that 'works'. At this point, neopragmatism has joined postmodernism's fray.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Sebeok, T. A. 1981. *The Play of Musement*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
2. Peirce, C. S. 1878. How to Make Our Ideas Clear. *Popular Science Monthly*, 12 (January): 286–302.
3. Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'. See also Peirce's 1877 essay 'The fixation of belief'.

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4. Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'. 'Fate', as Peirce was quick to add in a footnote, is not to be understood here in a religious or superstitious sense but as conveying the notion of inevitability.

5. The two statements are found in Peirce, C. S. 1901. Truth and Falsity and Error. In *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Volumes V and VI (Hartshorne, C. & Weiss, P. eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935, pp. 394–98.

6. A regular theme; see for instance Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'.

7. Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'.

8. Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' (emphasis in original).

9. Peirce, 'Truth and Falsity and Error'.

10. 'I only desire to point out how impossible it is that we should have an idea in our minds which relates to anything but conceived sensible effects of things' (Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear').

11. Expressions found in Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' and *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Volume 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 282 [5.432 as per the referencing system of Peirce scholars], respectively.

12. See *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Volumes V and VI (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press, 1960), pp. 6, 2 and 282, respectively.

13. James, W. 1922. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Co. See Lecture I.

14. James, *Pragmatism*, 54.

15. James, *Pragmatism*, 115–23.

16. James, W. 1911. *The Meaning of Truth*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Co. See p. ix (opening sentence of the Preface).

17. James, *Pragmatism*, 204; the expression 'cash-value' appears p. 200.

18. Peirce, C. S. 1905. What Pragmatism Is. *The Monist*, 15(2): 161–81.

19. James, *The Meaning of Truth*, x–xi; emphases in original.

20. James, *Pragmatism*, 204.

21. James, *Pragmatism*, 216.

22. James, *The Meaning of Truth*, xv.

23. James, *Pragmatism*, 216–17.

24. Neatby, M. H. 1953. *So Little for the Mind: An Indictment of Canadian Education*. Toronto: Clarke Irwin & Co. Ltd. See pp. 22–23 (emphasis in original).

25. Dewey, J. 1909. Darwin's Influence upon Philosophy. *Popular Science Monthly*, 75(1): 90–98.

26. Dewey, J. 1920. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. See Chapter II.

27. Dewey, J. 1929. *The Quest for Certainty*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. See p. 25.

28. Dewey, J. 1938. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. Peirce's theory of truth is explicitly endorsed in note 6 p. 345.

29. Dewey, J. 1941. Propositions, Warranted Assertability, and Truth. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 38(7): 169–86.

30. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 156–57 (emphases in original).

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31. Dewey, J. 1929. *Experience and Nature*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. See pp. 258–59.

32. Dewey, J. 1980 [1934]. *Art as Experience*. New York, NY: Perigee Books; see p. 263.

33. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Chapters I and VI.

34. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 177.

35. Dewey, J. 1930. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. New York, NY: The Modern Library.

36. Dewey, J. 1930. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company. See p. 383.

37. Dewey, J. 1897. My Pedagogic Creed. *School Journal*, 54(3): 77–80.

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39. Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*. Bloom, A. 1987. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York, NY: Simon & Chester.

40. Dewey, *How We Think*, 6.

41. Russell, B. 1972 [1945]. *The History of Western Philosophy*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster. See p. 825.

42. The following exposition of Mead's ideas is indebted to pp. 163–70 of Spillane, R. & Martin, J. 2018. *What Went Wrong with Psychology? Myths, Metaphors and Madness*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

43. Mead, G. H. 1972. *Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Morris, C. W. ed. and intro.). Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press. See pp. 15–17.

44. As Mead realised, the view that the group predates the individual is a requirement of Darwinism applied to social psychology. Indeed, Darwinian evolution requires an environment (in this case society) to which the individual must adapt. See Mead, *Mind Self and Society*, 24–25.

45. Mead, *Mind Self and Society*, 42ff.

46. Mead, *Mind Self and Society*, 186ff.

47. 'Consciousness, as frequently used, simply has reference to the field of experience, but self-consciousness refers to the ability to call out in ourselves a set of definite responses which belong to the others of the group.' Mead, *Mind Self and Society*, 163.

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relevance in management research', unpublished at the time of writing (but not for lack of trying).

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Chapter 13

Postmodernism

Managing without Foundations

In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell argued that American pragmatism is a philosophy of power, though not like Nietzsche's philosophy of personal power. Rather, in the hands of Dewey especially, pragmatism is a philosophy of social power. It is attractive to those who are more impressed by human control over natural resources than by the limitations to which that control is subject. While this is not in itself an objection to pragmatism, it introduces the danger of what Russell called 'cosmic impiety'.

Cosmic impiety obtains from pragmatism because its definition of truth as 'what works' lifts the restraint that a confrontation with the environment henceforth ensured. Indeed, when 'what works' is defined in scientific terms, it refers to the power of scientists to act on the course of natural events, but for whom the notion of 'truth' remains ultimately dependent on a reality largely outside of their control. However, when pragmatists redefined truth as 'what works for us', they replaced humility in the face of nature with an exaggerated confidence in the ability of human beings to redefine it on their terms. It was Russell's conviction that when this check upon pride is removed, a further step is taken on the road towards a certain kind of madness – the intoxication of power which invaded philosophy with the German Romantics and to which modern folk, including philosophers, are prone. Russell concluded that this intoxication represents the gravest danger to Western society and that any philosophy which, however unintentionally, contributes to it increases the risk of social disaster.

Although penned during World War II, Russell's comments on pragmatism have not lost their relevance. They apply with an uncanny prescience to philosophical developments that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic since the conflict. Indeed, independently of Ayer's and Camus's criticisms of existentialism that were outlined earlier, many post-war European thinkers

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found Sartre's arguments impossibly demanding. On the one hand, material contingencies cannot be ignored and as anyone who has had to endure severe pain will attest, for self-consciousness to speak freely, the organs must remain silent. On the other hand, Sartre's inability to propose ethical propositions consistent with his ontology curtails existentialism's reach. Society is not, nor cannot be, a collection of Stirnerian individuals. Another solution to nihilism must therefore be sought after, one that averts the dangers of scientific determinism highlighted by existentialists, yet able to propose a viable stance on daily life. Many have received postmodernism as this alternative because postmodernism rejects science while promising to liberate the individual from society's corrupting influence. In management, postmodernism has contributed to the emergence of an active body of scholarship, the 'critical management studies'.

It is commonplace to say that there is no commonly agreed definition of postmodernism. Indeed, there cannot be a neat, encompassing definition of the movement if its advocates are justified in their views, since one of their central claims is precisely that definitive descriptions do not exist. This difficulty means that offering a critical exposition of postmodernism entails exposing oneself to the strawman rejoinder, that is, to the charge that one proposes a picture of postmodernism that suits one's thesis. That this criticism can be returned to postmodernists' treatment of modernity does not make it less justified in principle. To mitigate it and at the risk of a lengthy exposition, this chapter proposes a general overview of the postwar philosophical scene, from its main premises to its dominant thematic developments.

THE END OF MODERNITY

Plato held that beyond the changing material world of Becoming lies the stable and real world of Being. Although Being cannot be experienced, Becoming can be understood and characterised through appeals to Being. Until the eighteenth century, these conceptions framed the Western philosophical agenda. Beyond their many differences, religious and atheistic thinkers alike considered truth to be a unique, extra-human, immutable, neutral and ultimate concept, accessible to all through logic and the study of nature or scripture. The revival of these conceptions after their medieval decline ushered in the Renaissance and opened the gates to modernity. Consummate moderns, the philosophers of the Enlightenment pushed Plato's vision to its logical conclusions. They thought that the world, including society, forms a great book ruled by stable laws, the knowledge of which brings forth peace, justice and prosperity.

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Kant reaffirmed the project of the Enlightenment after Hume's attack by proposing the existence of two worlds, one stable but unknowable (the noumenal world), the other knowable (the phenomenal world). The phenomenal world is ruled by mind-imposed causal laws which represents a transformation of the noumenal world by the human mind and sensory apparatus. Knowledge thus does not conform to the world. Rather, the world conforms to man's knowledge of it.

Although Nietzsche had no time for world dualisms of the Platonic or Kantian type, his views can be read as a reaction to Kant's. Inveighing that the only world of interest is that of everyday experience, Nietzsche insisted that merely speaking of a realm as 'knowable', 'phenomenal' or as 'revealed by the senses' implies that the world in which humans live is not the 'real' one. Rather than advancing such follies, Nietzsche continued, one had better recognise that, owing to their biological make-up, human beings have only limited access to actuality. The world is in a flux, in constant transformation; it knows neither of clouds nor of mountains as stable entities. These concepts exist only in man's understanding of and in addition to whatever there is, but which has no name without him. Knowing is nothing but an immense exercise in anthropomorphism.

Nietzsche's dissolution of Kantian dualism has far-reaching consequences. In particular, it implies that knowledge is never innocent, neutral or fact-based, as Plato and his successors taught, but always serves a purpose, especially survival. Knowledge is, therefore, vested with interests and is always a matter of perspective. The intellect, then, is merely a tool used in the service of power. Furthermore, for Nietzsche, there are no facts, only interpretations. Consequently, there is no truth either. 'What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms [. . .. . .]: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are'.[1] God is dead, certainties are illusory, everything is a matter of interpretation and 'convictions are prisons'.[2] Western thinking since Plato has been a monumental exercise in self-deception. Positivism, the culmination of modernity, was in fact its swansong. The ground has shifted underneath modern man's feet.

In his notebooks, Nietzsche captured what soon became the dominating mood of the early twentieth century. This period, known as *modernism*, is notable for its rapid and large-scale sociological changes, particularly industrialisation and urbanisation. In addition to analysing such changes, modernist thinkers had the difficult task of having to come to terms with the realisation that the light at the end of Plato's cave had led to the mass homicide of World War I. Modernity had been nurturing a snake in its bosom. The confidence and certitudes of the Enlightenment had been deceptive daydreams. Everything had to be thought anew. In this effort, modernists gave rise to an era that was fascinated with the so-called unconscious aspects

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of human existence. This is obvious in the case of such modernists as Freud and Jung, but it is also visible in the work of those disciples of Nietzsche who took seriously his views about the mythology that is contained within language.

Modernism was a revolt against modernity. While the ornamentation of classical architecture was considered oppressive, melody and harmony disappeared from orchestral music, and primitive paintings were thought as important as Renaissance art. Anarchy was extolled; structure and form indicted. Rather than stability, in Franz Kafka's novels these central features of modernity metamorphosed into a nightmare of alienation, brutality and labyrinthine bureaucratisation. Painters offered portraits of people screaming inaudible pain, human images as if seen through shattered glass or chaotic visions of a mechanised life. Blank canvasses, invisible 'works' and silent 'music' were soon to follow, symbolising Western humanity's desire to de-realise itself, revealing a nihilistic desire to end the farce of human existence.

In the early 1930s, a group of sociologists and philosophers, led by Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), developed a modernist critique of Western society and social science. They argued that the Enlightenment, the revolt of reason against religion, myth and superstition, had been so successful and self-justifying that it became an all-encompassing myth itself which oppressed those it intended to liberate. Further, Horkheimer and Adorno held that individual rights are no longer served by scientific and technological developments, because the economic-political elite have turned them into instruments of economic domination.[3]

While recognising the merit and successes of positivist natural science, Horkheimer argued that its underlying conception of theory (what Horkheimer called 'traditional') is inadequate in social science because its theorists study reality only as it is given in experience, in isolation from social and historical considerations. Further, traditional theorists, faithful to the positivist agenda, claim that they ignore the moral dimension of their research. Consequently, traditional theorists do not appreciate that their work is morally, socially and historically situated. Their objectivity is therefore an illusion and the knowledge they produce is superficial.[4]

Ignoring their work's social, historical and moral underpinnings, positivist social scientists are ignorant of its social consequences. Further, they do not recognise that they work only insofar as society affords it (i.e. authorises, legitimates and rewards what they do). It follows that research conducted according to traditional theory, despite claims of neutrality and objectivity, supports rather that challenges the established social order. This social order, for Horkheimer, is quintessentially bourgeois. It oppresses the labouring masses to the benefit of a capitalist elite and its servants. To this latter category belong, knowingly or not, traditional natural and social scientists.

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Espousing Marx's thesis that the point of philosophy is not merely to understand the world but to change it, Horkheimer insisted that the purpose of social science is to make society more humane. To achieve that objective, that is, to liberate the masses from bourgeois oppression and capitalist exploitation, a new type of theory is required in social science: critical theory. Critical social theorists do not try to explain society in terms of fixed laws and impersonal structures, because they believe that social reality is not a given but the product of human activity. Rather, they study interpersonal relationships and their underlying motives, with particular attention to the subordination of traditional science to bourgeois society. Furthermore, unlike traditional theorists, critical theorists do not pretend to be neutral or objective. They are aware of their partiality. Indeed, they claim it because the transformation of capitalism into 'real democracy' requires that human subjectivity be granted priority over the alleged objectivity of scientific laws. All in all, Horkheimer and his disciples of the Frankfurt School maintained that critical theory reconciles subject with object and man with society to produce humane knowledge.

FRENCH THEORY

Borrowing from Nietzsche's 'genealogical' method of inquiry into the origin of the Christian ethics and from Marx's reading of history as class struggle, Michel Foucault (1926–1984) continued along the lines of the Frankfurt School. He studied the formative moments of Western modernity as a physician studies diseases by analysing institutions inherited from the eighteenth century (parliaments, schools, universities, hospitals, courts, etc.) as elements of a conspiracy to control the masses and turn them into docile bodies at the service of capitalist society.[5] Taking his cue from Horkheimer, Foucault analysed the Enlightenment as an elaborate enterprise in deception that, under the cover of universalism, relied on the rhetoric of science and philosophy to promote its proponents' supremacy over those it intended officially to emancipate. What is called socialisation is in fact oppression. For instance, the norms that guide social practices have for overarching goals the inclusion of those who comply, the exclusion of those who do not, and the control of public speech. The law even shapes individuals' impulses and sexual desires since it decides which can be expressed. Another example is the guillotine, invented and promoted in the name of humanist ethics. The existence of this contraption shows that alleged humanism is in fact coercive de-humanisation. To be a member of modern society is thus to be an artificial creature, a product of the discourse of the juridico-techno-sphere.[6]

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Behind their official emancipatory agenda, Foucault continued, universal human rights are nothing but a sophisticated control device. They do not protect communities and minorities. Rather, they define and objectify them. Criminals, drug users, infirms, old people, young ones, women, the working class, the unemployed, those considered insane or simply deviant, are sanctified and silenced, discriminated against, removed from political and social life and even from conversations. Everyone is under permanent surveillance: workers, students, academics, politicians, royalty, celebrities, and so on. The society bequeathed by the Enlightenment is an immense panopticon, the model prison imagined by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century in which inmates are watched without their knowledge. Everyone is a security guard; everyone is a prisoner. The system sustains itself through constant and pervasive self-deception.

Foucault insisted that power is everywhere. What is presented as knowledge or as scientific progress is nothing but the manifestation of and disguise for a will to dominate, with no other justification than the interest of whoever propounds it. Not only is knowledge (the expression of a will to) power, but power itself is knowledge because institutions produce only the sort of knowledge that affirms them. This is a perpetuating, self-justifying phenomenon: power/knowledge must justify itself if it is to endure. The first step towards liberation from these oppressive forces is to identify the coercive discourses lurking behind allegedly neutral pronouncements, to reject the seemingly given, to take everything as a metaphor to be deciphered, a mask to be upturned and a plot to be exposed. The concept of ‘author’ is for instance a legal-ideological device invented by modernity whose function is to include certain ideas under a given discursive sphere at the exclusion of others.[7]

The general suspicion of modernity, exemplified in Foucault’s work, does not limit itself to moral notions and social institutions. As Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) noted, concepts have no equivalent in experience: no object is ever completely or exactly red, round, sweet, and so on.[8] Language is a simplification, a screen between the world and whoever experiences it. Language mediates all that is possible to know. There is no (self-) understanding that is not mediated by signs and symbols. Even Descartes was mistaken. Between his ‘I’ and his experience of it, there were no bodily sensations, but there were words and grammar, whose meaning and structure he did not control. The problem is thus more severe than Kant or Nietzsche articulated. Individuals have no access to the world, not even to perceptions of the world as interpreted by the mind, only to descriptions of perceptions of the world. The world as it is perceived and reported is not a given. Rather, it is a system of socially constructed signs and possibly a gigantic lie. Interpretation means suspicion.

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If descriptions are all that there is, there is no essential difference between describing reality and describing a system of interrelated signs. Heidegger argued along similar lines when he held that 'language is the house of Being', that man does not speak language, but speaks out of it. Language speaks, man listens. The world itself is text. In the words of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), 'there is no outside-text'.[9] All the dualisms the West took for granted since the days of Plato and upon which Western philosophy is erected are mere linguistic artifices, only pointing superficially to antinomies. Such coupled concepts as nature-culture, truth-falsehood, being-becoming, quantity-quality, intelligible-sensible, mind-matter, pose as fake syntheses, smokescreens hiding inconsistencies, complexity and ultimately genuine experience.[10] Words find their meaning only in relation to and as erasure of other words. There is no neat, reassuring closure of knowledge; every fragment is a palimpsest, a bottomless abyss of embedded symbols that is to be 'deconstructed'. To deconstruct a text is to go beyond the words, to uncover the contradictions it hides, to reach for the unconscious structure of the writing beyond and despite the author's intentions. Deconstruction is anti-dialectic since it takes apart the illusion of synthesis. No final meaning is possible because behind each uncovered layer there is yet another.

In Derrida's outline, the antagonism between subject and object is revealed as another unwarranted construction. Derrida walked here in the footsteps of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), according to whom the subject is nothing but an unresolved tension, a text continuously read and written. The unconscious itself is discourse. Everything is simultaneously sane and insane, normal and abnormal, conscious and unconscious, signifier and signified, written and writer. If one is to believe Roland Barthes (1915–1980), there is no author, only a 'scriptor' which produces (and is produced by) the text out of cultural and historical forces but does not author it.[11] The existential self, tough-mindedly reinventing itself everyday out of nothingness, is an illusion. What there is instead is a script playing itself out uncontrollably, be that of a white male, black woman, migrant worker, or abandoned third-world child.

In an age of mass production, symbolisation has colonised every aspect of human existence. Books, newspapers, photographs, paintings, drawings, speech, music, myths, the Bible, are all signs, narrative and stories with no other objective than cross- and self-reference.[12] Industrial goods are not materially contingent but owe their existence to the symbols that are invested in them. A refrigerator is not an object but a machine; as soon as it no longer performs as it is meant to, it becomes useless clutter, nothing.[13] What passes for an object is thus merely a reified nexus of symbols which refers to nothing beside itself and other symbols. Despite what was claimed by its promoters, the miniskirt had nothing to do with sexualisation or attractiveness, but

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everything with fashion and symbols. It finds its meaning only in opposition to the long skirt. The journey back to the long skirt, when it happens, will be celebrated in the name of 'beauty', just as much as the mini version was. Reality exists only as a mirror, simulation and endless replication of itself, that is, as 'hyperreality'. In the oft-quoted words of Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), 'The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*. [. . .] the real is not only what can be reproduced, but *that which is always already reproduced*'.[14]

Short of material justification, symbolic exchange is its own legitimation and since hyperreal existence is contingent on symbolic value, one ceases to exist when one stops exchanging and consuming symbols. Individuals are so absorbed in hyperreality that they cannot be distinguished from it. As Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) noted before Baudrillard, when individuals value themselves by and seek social validation for their choice of automobiles, home appliances, accessories and garments, when they find their identity in commodities, they are alienated to the final degree for they have become these commodities. Encapsulated in what they consume, they are the ones being reproduced endlessly. Anyone appropriating the same symbols would live in the same environment and would share the same existence. Indistinguishable from one another, moulded by industrial capitalism and its consumerism, these individuals no longer consider an alternative to it: they have become 'one-dimensional'.[15] Whereas Marx saw workers alienated at work, Marcuse and Baudrillard diagnosed them as alienated at home, in their daily lives and as consumers. From assembly line to assembly life in the 'little boxes' of Malvina Reynolds' song.

Baudrillard described industrial, consumerist man as never being his own, deprived of primary instincts. Consumerist man's innermost desires and freedom are 'de-sublimated', in that they are determined by what he acquires fleetingly and must continue to acquire. Individuals believe they choose, but their choices are defined by what is given to them to desire, over which they have no control. They are held captive, glued to their television screens whose content they swallow passively and indiscriminately. Advanced technological society does not liberate. Rather, it seduces, subjugates, enslaves and dissolves the subject into non-existence.[16] Consumerism and technological rationality are political projects because they have resulted in a subtle but totalitarian regime in which everyone is willingly maintained in a state of permanent control.

In hyperreality, everything is representation, make-believe, appearances, or, as Guy Debord (1931–1994) put it: spectacle.[17] Everything that was once lived is now represented. Not to be represented is not to exist, which means that Being has been degraded to being represented. Continuous and

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kaleidoscopic, the spectacle is its own justification. Indeed, what is represented is good and what is good is represented. The means of the spectacle are also its goals because representation is itself represented in the act of representing, with the mass media informing the public about the role of the mass media informing the public. What this means is that the media are no longer mediating reality. Rather, the media are the reality. That which passes for news is simply the product of news organisations having to legitimate themselves independently of what has 'really' occurred: truth has become a privileged moment of falsehood. For instance, the First Gulf War did not really happen. What happened was an hysterical military-technological extravaganza, which, even though it made no Western victims, was proclaimed as war and conveyed as such by television networks controlling the public by way of collective stupefaction.[18] Everyone knows this, yet no one wants to acknowledge it, because the appearance of the real, of materiality and of success must be preserved at all costs. Society is an immense masquerade of willing dupes in which participants are wearing masks to hide the fact that they are wearing masks.

The French authors reviewed in the foregoing came to intellectual life during a period dominated by structuralism as bequeathed by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Structuralism is a world view incorporating elements of Marxism and psychoanalysis which hinges on the conviction that social, cultural and linguistic structures determine the individual. Although accepting this general outlook, Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard and others sought to go beyond structuralism. This they did by applying structuralism unto itself to reveal that, as a discipline and methodology, structuralism is itself a social structure. Along lines opened by Nietzsche's perspectivism, this approach led them to abandon the idea of an ultimate foundation of human existence.

Poststructuralism, as Foucault's, Derrida's and Baudrillard's research program is generally called, was greeted with unexpected enthusiasm in North America (where it is also called 'French theory'), because it resonated with intellectual developments which had taken place there since the middle of the twentieth century. A brief exposition of these ideas is thus in order.

THE LINGUISTIC TURN

In a much-quoted article published in 1951, American philosopher Willard van Orman Quine (1908–2000) dismissed the analytic-synthetic distinction. Noting that the statement 'all bachelors are unmarried' is analytic only within an artificial language in which a semantic rule stipulates that 'bachelor'

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necessarily means 'unmarried man' (and not a university degree), Quine argued that no adequate definition of 'analytic' can be provided which is not itself a tautology. This is so because, for 'analytic' to mean 'necessarily true', there must be semantic rules which specify that the two expressions are strictly equivalent. Now if 'analytic' is itself analytic, then it is inapplicable to statements found in experience, that is, those formulated in natural language. Quine concluded that there are only synthetic statements.[19]

Rejecting the analytic-synthetic distinction has striking consequences. Indeed, if Quine's arguments are correct, the concept of *a priori* knowledge is meaningless. Further, as Quine noted, his conclusions rule out the possibility of a single, isolated empirical statement. This is the case because scientists never consider a given result alone, but always a set of results, some of which serve no other purpose than to test the validity of the experimental instruments. In other words, scientific results are never tested in isolation of others; their status is evaluated in view of all the results available to date. Quine thus held that empirical statements form a 'corporate body', whose validity is indistinguishable from that of the whole of science. Statements stem collectively, not individually, from experience. They either stand as a coherent whole, or they fall together.

If Quine's conclusions are valid, the possibility of assessing the truth of an empirical proposition disappears. Meaning is divorced from experience because language has lost its connection with the real, whatever it is. As Nietzsche pressed against Kantian epistemology, human knowledge pulls itself up by the hair above 'a swamp of nothingness', *à la* Munchhausen.[20] Wittgenstein repudiated much of his early philosophy (exposed in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) when he came to accept similar arguments. Propositions, even seemingly empirical ones, can be true only within a given semantical frame of reference, which defines what Wittgenstein called a 'language game'. Although different language games can have a 'family resemblance' when they share some agreed conventions or rules, no frame of reference is shared by all games.[21] In other words, no statement is true absolutely, but is relative to an arbitrary covenant.

If absolute truth is impossible to secure, argued Richard Rorty (1931–2007), then knowledge cannot be the goal of inquiry. Instead, knowledge and truth should be recognised as mere words which express endorsement of statements with provisional standards of acceptance. Philosophy as an attempt to provide neutral and secure foundations of knowledge, an attempt which started with Descartes, continued with Locke and culminated in Kantianism, has been a misguided endeavour. The mind is not, indeed cannot be, the faithful 'mirror of nature' philosophers have claimed it to be.[22] This being the case, philosophers should cease metaphysical speculation. Instead, they should follow pragmatists and content themselves with the way objects,

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actions and propositions are revealed through their practical consequences. That is, they should take objects and actions to be the sum of their effects and the meaning of a proposition to consist in its practical consequences, without worrying about their metaphysical status.[23]

In Rorty's (neo)pragmatic outline, the meaning of an idea, its practical consequences, depends to a large degree on how people talk about it. Accordingly, *the* central task of philosophy is the clarification and elucidation of language. However, Rorty insisted, language is not a tool that one can abandon. Although language can be evaluated critically, it is the vehicle by which existence is thought, ideas entertained, and intentions elaborated. Further, language is a form of action since speaking is one of the things people do to control their environment. It is thus impossible to 'step out' of language. Such considerations had led Peirce to conclude, in words Heidegger would have endorsed, that 'My language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought'.[24] Although not confined to neopragmatism, this change of philosophical thrust is often referred to as the 'linguistic turn' of North American philosophy, an expression popularised after Rorty's eponymous anthology that appeared in 1967.

Once the linguistic turn had taken hold, the authority of science was scrutinised and challenged. There as elsewhere, truth has been accused of verifying itself, that is, to be that of which truth is an understanding. In what is the most successful book of philosophy of science of the second half of the twentieth century, Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) argued that scientific progress is neither the accumulation of predictive truths (as positivists maintain), nor the progressive elimination of erroneous theories (as Popper believed). Rather, science progresses by way of revolutions, with new paradigms replacing old ones, as happened when Newton's physics followed Aristotle's world view, and Einstein's relativity theory improved upon Newtonian mechanics.[25] In the periods during which a given paradigm dominates (periods that Kuhn called 'normal science'), empirical anomalies and theoretical problems slowly accumulate and challenge the prevailing world view, eventually to lead to a crisis and a new paradigm. The success of a new paradigm is not a measure of scientific progress, however, because phenomena that were explained within the previous paradigm (typically by way of theorised but undiscovered entities) are no longer accounted for in the new one when the existence of the same entities is ruled out. The idea 'that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth' needs to be abandoned.

Kuhn's scientific paradigms are like Quine's 'corporate bodies' of knowledge since they stand or fall as one piece. When the dominant paradigm is found to be untenable, it is abandoned entirely in favour of another. Like Wittgenstein's language games, Kuhn's scientific paradigms

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are incommensurable, because they are ways of interpreting phenomena and of practicing science that are incompatible. That is, scientific paradigms are accepted on their own terms and are characterised by specific basic assumptions about the world and particular set of standards, methods, instruments and techniques. In the last analysis, scientific paradigms do not represent empirical reality but are concerned with consensus and the conventions of scientists who work within them. In other words, if one is to believe Kuhn, scientific propositions are those sanctioned according to academic fashion.

The incommensurability of scientific theories is also at the heart of Paul Feyerabend's (1924–1994) philosophy of science. Rejecting the differences between discovery and justification, or again between observation and theory, Feyerabend saw science as a fragmented enterprise without a common underlying method or mode of explanation.[26] On his view, there is no difference between science and non-science because what passes as science is a disjoint assortment of models, classifications and concepts that have been invented for particular purposes or to advance a specific cause. There is no system, structure or principle which are applicable to all sciences, except one: *anything goes*. All bodies of expertise are of equal merit and the Church was rational and justified in its treatment of Galileo.

Since one man's reason is another man's insanity, Feyerabend continued, it follows that, in a democracy, 'reason' has as much right to be heard and expressed as 'unreason' and scientific theories must be allowed to proliferate if science is not to become a tyranny. That is, scientific standards must not be imposed on innocent folk. They must be discussed and evaluated on their benefits and citizens must be educated to that purpose. If science must be safeguarded from ideology, 'societies, especially democratic societies, must be protected from science. [. . .] In a democracy scientific institutions, research programs, and suggestions must therefore be subjected to public control, there must be a separation of state and science just as there is a separation between state and religious institutions, and science should be taught as one view among many and not as the one and only road to truth and reality'.[27] Dogmatic science is an obstacle to humanity's road to full development.

If Kuhn's and Feyerabend's arguments are correct, science is a language game like any other. It is a language game that tries to legitimise itself by way of appeals to the superiority of reason over feelings or faith. Such appeals are jejune, however, because, according to Wittgenstein, language games are incommensurable and thus equally valid. More generally, standards of validity do not apply to games because they should be judged only according to how people feel about them, or how useful they are to specific groups. The proximity with Rorty's neopragmatism is here again patent.

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THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

Kuhn's and Feyerabend's books can be read as a defence of, if not a call for, relativism. Relativism is a position as ancient as philosophy. Its first expression is the Sophist Protagoras' pronouncement that 'man is the measure of all things', by which he meant that there is no criterion of knowledge that is not of human and subjective origin. Owing to Plato's vigorous rebuttal, however, relativism had failed to attract substantial philosophical attention until Nietzsche revived it as perspectivism. After Nietzsche's revival, relativism remained dormant until poststructuralism, neopragmatism, and the linguistic turn gave it a vigorous new lease on life. Indeed, if there is no absolute truth, if all perception is theory-laden, if (scientific) worldviews are incommensurable, if there is no standard by which one can decide that one world view is superior to another, if everything is at bottom a language game, then no beliefs, however irrational, can be excluded. Notions of rationality and validity no longer apply. As Bertrand Russell noted, if there are no rational beliefs the lunatic who claims that he is a poached egg is to be condemned (if at all) solely on the grounds that the majority (or the government) does not agree with him.

Further, if all knowledge is the expression of power, any reaction except that of tolerance to opinions, be they irrational in the extreme, spells oppression. When this line of thinking becomes mainstream, then, as Feyerabend insisted, anything goes and must be allowed to go. While beliefs are expedient for those who promote them, they are acceptable. In the absence of truth, logical argumentation is no longer an enterprise which releases people from oppression and depression. Rather, logical argumentation is viewed as oppressive, ill-mannered and aggressive behaviour. If readers think this an exaggeration, they should read American philosopher Robert Nozick, who asserted (rather than argued) that argumentative philosophy inherited from Socrates is a coercive activity and must be rejected.[28]

Replacing argumentation with the expression of feelings, many late twentieth-century philosophers promoted diverse and often contradictory causes. Identity politics replaced the universalism of the Enlightenment and minority groups found themselves defended by philosophers who rejected truth in favour of power politics. According to these authors, all perspectives, be they scientific, moral, political or aesthetic, are expressions of self-justified and thus unjustifiable ideologies. Those who promote them are arrogant and authoritarian. In this sense, many feminists, cognitive and moral relativists, as well as teachers and students of cultural, literary and gender studies have embraced, in one form or another, the ideas reviewed in the foregoing, notably the view that philosophy, if it to continue to exist, must turn its attention from truth to power.

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The switch from truth to power as focus of philosophical analysis is particularly noticeable in a short book that propelled the term 'postmodern' into the philosophical vocabulary. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) argued that, in a computer age that has seen the multiplication of fragments of knowledge, the central problem is that of legitimation, for to legitimate knowledge is to control and dominate. Following Wittgenstein, Lyotard analysed knowledge in terms of language games or discourses. In his view, each language game rests on a specific set of rules and standards, which excludes all others. In particular, the language game of science does not recognise any language that is not its own. For instance, scientists refuse to consider morality as a matter of enquiry and dismiss myths and legends, which Lyotard called narrative knowledge. While philosophy provided an overall justification for other forms of knowledge, including science, this corrosive effect of science on other language games remained without consequences. Since Plato, what is true has been legitimised in the name of social and political justice and this interlinkage of science, ethics and politics (i.e. of scientific and narrative knowledge) is precisely what has defined Western civilisation.[29]

According to Lyotard, the rapid scientific developments of the second half of the twentieth century have fatally undermined the credibility of non-scientific language games and especially those of the narrative kind. Now, since philosophical knowledge is itself narrative knowledge (because speculative), the result has been widespread delegitimisation of knowledge, including scientific knowledge. As Nietzsche predicted, when the truth demand of science turns against itself by questioning its own foundations, the outcome is engulfing nihilism. Today, bereft of an underlying legitimating metanarrative, epistemic coherence has disintegrated into a myriad of independent and competitive language games. Heterogeneous linguistic clouds collide and leave individuals fragmented, adrift of fixed referent, values, and personal identity. Everyone is now a 'post through which various kinds of messages pass' none of which is granted superior epistemic value. This overall, widespread 'incredulity towards metanarratives' is what defines postmodernity.

The advent of postmodernity is not to be lamented altogether, Lyotard held, because quests for and impositions of unifying metanarratives resulted in the large-scale disasters that have marked the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Short of an underlying metanarrative, postmodernity has made room for performativity as a criterion of justification. As the neopragmatists argued, valuable means useful, especially the production of wealth and new knowledge. Other kinds of language are eliminated, especially those which are speculative. Although this is a self-defeating outcome, since there cannot be new knowledge without a degree of speculation, hope can be afforded. Philosophers will remedy the situation not by restoring a totalising unity,

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since doing that would repeat the mistakes of the past, but by fostering as many different language games as possible if they are to be worthy of their name.

Rorty did not deviate substantially from Lyotard's vision when he rejected metaphysics and replaced knowledge with hope. Renouncing references to universal rights, natural justice and humanism, Rorty argued that cruelty, pain and humiliation are negative motivations which establish social solidarities. These are to be formed, in Heideggerian fashion, by like-minded individuals who replace such toxic questions as 'Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?' with 'Are you suffering?' Furthermore, such individuals will substitute philosophical debates about ultimate foundations for tolerant, open-minded conversations.[30] Rorty's optimistic vision of a society peaceful because without truth is a thoroughly postmodern one. It confirms the unexpected but robust wedding of French poststructuralism (the influence of which was fading in France when it started to grow in North America) with neopragmatism, united in their rejection of ontological, moral and epistemological absolutes.

MANAGING WITHOUT CERTAINTIES

In North America, as in France, the 1960s and 1970s were decades marked by significant social and political change. Such rapid evolution included decolonisation and its wars, the advent of television as a mass medium, the rise of consumerism, the acceleration of globalisation and international marketing, and the shrinking of the globe that followed the arrival of the jet aircraft. At the same time, the general failure of Soviet communism became evident to those who had seen in Marxism a substitute for capitalism and its excesses, leaving them despondent and bereft of an alternative. Contesting the authority of their parents and university teachers, students rejected military conscription, embraced recreational drugs, and jettisoned sexual inhibitions made obsolete by the contraceptive pill. Postmodernism's dismissal of fixed references resonated with the rebellious but uncertain mood of the times.

Today, the death of grand narratives is difficult to deny. Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and short of an alternative economic and political model, Western governments have alternated between moderate liberalism and welfare socialism, basing their policies not on enduring guiding principles but on what they believe their constituents expect. At the same time, Christianity has lost its grip on society. Religious celebrations, once opportunities for family gatherings, prayer and meditation, have turned into commercial debauchery, with sprawling shopping centres acting as new cathedrals. With the fabric of Western societies slowly disintegrating under the pressure of cultural and

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moral relativism, national flags have lost their appeal in the face of commercial logos. Dinner table sermons concede defeat to marketing discourses and the authority once derived from the Ten Commandments now flows from ubiquitous global brands. Whereas corporations used to serve populations whose aspirations they sought to understand, they now target individuals whose desires they attempt to shape and whose sense of agency they reduce to a shopping crave. Modern man believed that his thinking was proof of his existence and sought to elevate himself above bodily contingencies; postmodern man revels in them and seeks existential reassurance through instant gratification and compulsive consumption.

Postmodernism's dissolution of absolutes accords well with a multicultural world, the dematerialisation of the economy, and the advent of the information age. Citizens as flesh and bone individuals have all but disappeared, replaced by an endless but fragmented list of data and symbols. Without one's passwords, biometric passport, social security number, mobile phone number, email address, blood and urine samples, superannuation membership, credit rating and bank account coordinates, one does not really exist. Privacy and individuality have all but disappeared as phone calls and electronic messages are spied upon by government agencies, individuals' whereabouts are monitored by video surveillance and web browsing is extrapolated to a psychological profile. As postmodernists insist, human existence is now text to be interpreted, symbols to be deciphered, and data to be mined. Panoptical devices have left Bentham's ideal prison and now observe the remotest corners of daily life. George Orwell's dystopia is not far off. Indeed, in many respects, it is already here since, owing to constant reinterpretation, the past has disappeared and does not need to be rewritten.

Similarly, daily reality has vanished under its representation. While birth certificates have become digital records, hospitals are now little more than bed ratios and restaurants bacteria counts. If something has not been seen on television and has no internet presence, it does not exist. Commercial organisations now compete through elaborate online campaigns because, for many, virtual reality is more real than daily reality. To the delight of marketers, words are malleable and their significance can be stretched to extraordinary lengths. For instance, advertisements seriously pretend that brands have a personality, machines are sexy, and scented aerosols make families happy. Even war, the ultimate experience of material brutality, has become a video game, with drone pilots firing on targets located thousands of kilometres away from their console and joystick. Before the proposal was cancelled, the most effective of these pilots were to receive military medals of a higher standing than those awarded for ground action.

Whereas modernity substituted farm labour for factory labour, postmodernism has substituted the factory for a virtual office where symbols (words,

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numbers, images, computer icons) are endlessly manipulated. Drucker's 'knowledge workers' of the 1950s and 1960s have become interchangeable communication churners, names on email distribution lists. As Lyotard predicted, these workers are now little more than impersonal network communication nodes, sending and receiving hundreds of messages a day. Little surprise if office walls have been destroyed to make room for rows of identical cubicles and 'hot desks'.

In the open postmodern workspace, centralisation of information has been replaced by decentralised communication and Weberian bureaucracies have become flexible adhocracies. In 'virtual' or 'boundaryless' organisations, all work is self-managed teamwork. Even in academia, no position is secure and temporary employees now form the bulk of the workforce. The proud, scientific, confident, loyal if robotic corporate citizen portrayed by William Whyte is a distant memory.[31] Twenty-first-century employees have been commodified in human resources, increasingly anxious because ever more quickly obsolescent, disposable and replaceable. Traditional identities and equilibria have been shattered. If women have found at work professional opportunities and financial independence, these have come at a heavy price. Not looking after home and children is for many mothers a source of pervasive guilt, leaving both parents searching for an elusive work-life balance. Work-life integration is in fact a better expression to denote the conundrum, since with mobile phones and videoconferencing, the borders between work and home have become notional. In postmodern organisations, described by human resources managers as happy families, one is constantly at work.

Managers have not been spared the professional uncertainty that has afflicted front line employees. They are expected nowadays to be simultaneously leaders, managers and entrepreneurs. As leaders, they are supposed to embody their employees' hope of control over an uncertain future; as entrepreneurs, they are meant to create alternative futures; as managers, they are supposed to introduce predictability in a chaotic environment.[32] What these three incompatible figures have in common is the symbolic stability they are meant to provide to the workplace. A similar nostalgia for fixed references, belongingness and permanence is also noticeable in recurring talks of organisational 'values', 'mission' and 'vision' and in the elevation of organisational ways, even if transient, to 'culture' status. The devaluation of these notions that obtains from such manoeuvres, which only disorientates employees further, is transparent enough.

In the absence of fixed foundations or guiding principles, perpetual organisational instability has become the norm. According to Harvard Business School professor John Kotter, however, organisational change is not to be feared but welcomed.[33] In his popular book, Kotter argued that executives can obtain the organisational transformation they desire provided they become

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'change leaders'. To do this, they must follow an eight-step process, which will see them creating a sense of urgency by insisting on the dangers of inaction, sharing the correcting vision with concerned employees, publicising short-term wins to encourage the change effort, and telling everyone about the success of the new corporate behaviours.

For all its popularity, Kotter's 'change leadership' model amounts to little more than careful storytelling. His change leaders are communications experts for whom empirical validity is second to rhetorical force. They pretend to be quasi-messianic figures who can provide reassuring references and stability in times of change, yet they maintain uncertainty as a control mechanism. Presenting as organisational development the mass retrenchment of employees – elsewhere introduced as organisations' 'greatest assets' – reveals the base rhetoric which has gained widespread acceptance in management circles.

Similar comments can be directed to Spencer Johnson's bestseller *Who Moved My Cheese?*. Written in very simple language and printed in large characters, the slim book proposes a management parable in which four characters (two mice, two men) look for cheese in a maze (transparent metaphors for professional success and corporate life) and react differently to its disappearance. The lesson of the book is easily discerned: happiness awaits those who prepare for change, do not whinge when it comes about, and work hard in all circumstances. Anyone reacting differently is condemned to misery, if not starvation. The book's implicit message is a patronising one: change is constant and resisting it is futile. Employees have reasons to be concerned but management is there to help them, provided they are obedient and forever loyal to their employer. The book is known for being mass distributed within organisations that undergo mergers, downsizing or restructuring. That it is discourteous to the intelligence of its readers hardly needs saying (in the book, the two mice are described as cleverer than their human counterparts).

CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

The foregoing considerations have offered fertile research grounds for a branch of scholarship latent since the 1970s but granted formal recognition in 1992 with the publication of Mats Alvesson's and Hugh Willmott's edited collection, *Critical Management Studies*. Supported by dedicated journals, critical management is now an active body of scholarship, although its influence is yet to be noticed in mainstream management curricula.

As its name suggests, critical management research is the continuation in management studies of the agenda of the Frankfurt School. Unlike mainstream management academics and following Horkheimer, critical management

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scholars dismiss positivist management research as a mirage, insisting that (social) experience is constructed and never passively recorded. With various emphases, they typically argue that individuals and employees are prevented from attaining their full potential by social and bureaucratic structures. Such limiting elements are notably found in government agencies, hospitals, prisons, universities, and corporations. These institutions are vehicles of mass oppression under the guise of welfare provision, health preservation, crime prevention, higher education and economic development. Business schools are notoriously at the receiving end of this indictment because they represent corporate interests and extol managerialist and neoliberal ideologies under the guise of common economic sense and good managerial practice.

Furthermore, critical management authors deny texts a stable meaning, seeing in them circular processes of words used to silence other words. Management case studies in which protagonists bear masculine names and seek to maximise returns on investments are challenged for their anti-feminist, risk-taking and capitalistic bias, while human resource management practices are criticised for transforming organisations into psychic prisons practising soft enslavement. Following Foucault, these scholars believe that power is knowledge since it supports the production of knowledge that consolidates social control in general and managerial control in particular. In typical postmodernist fashion, critical management authors thus consider logic, rationality and the scientific enterprise with suspicion, holding that oppression hides beneath those conclusions that are allegedly universal, ahistorical and unquestionable. Accordingly, the research conclusions of traditional management scholars are better thought of as ideologically driven distortions of reality which serve institutional interests. There is no shortage of research topics along those lines, to which Foucault, Kuhn, Derrida, Baudrillard and their disciples in gender and cultural studies have provided theoretical support.

As with postmodernist authors, however, it is easier to understand what critical management scholars are against (positivism, domination, rationality, argumentation) than what they propose, if anything. This lack of practical relevance has two broad sources. First, critical management authors, despite their wariness of positivist science, still embrace its central objective, that is, the production of management theory. As Alvesson and Willmott wrote in a review of the body of scholarship they initiated, while mainstream management research promotes the view that 'knowledge of management [is] knowledge for management, [. . .] critical perspectives on management share the aim of developing a less managerially partisan position. Insights drawn from traditions of critical social science are applied to rethink and develop the theory and practice of management'.[34] That is, even though their intentions are at odds with those of the positivist researchers they criticise, critical

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management authors still seek professional legitimation through improved managerial practice by way of theory. Understandably so, since adopting a purely critical, non-performative stance would ultimately condemn critical management authors to solipsism and irrelevance. As commentators have noted, in critical management studies, 'critique has always been in tension with a desire for influence'.[35] This tension, which was first highlighted by Jürgen Habermas about critical theory in general, has recently intensified.[36] Whatever the case, insofar as they embrace theory, critical management authors do not propose a counter-perspective to mainstream management studies.

Second, critical management studies cannot deliver definitive outcomes even in the form of critical theory. Indeed, if social structures are by nature alienating, as the critical management community assumes, then so are critical management studies since this body of scholarship, with its journals, conferences and research grants, is itself a social structure. Besides, if rationality is misleading as critical management authors assert, then rational arguments (including defence of the proposition that rationality is misleading) are rendered impotent. On these matters at least, critical management advocates lack the reflexivity they claim as one of the central features of their approach.

In summary, in the absence of knowledge of ultimate truth or ways to obtain it, definitive theoretical conclusions or practical courses of action cannot be proposed. Critical management inquiry will reveal that underneath every alienating institution or managerial layer lies another which is equally alienating. Theoretical abyss and practical paralysis, not emancipation, characterise critical management scholarship. Critical management authors play the role of their academic orthodoxy's good conscience. They speak from self-claimed higher moral and epistemological grounds, but their epistemology prevents them from influencing academic and managerial practice.

Critical management authors will not allow logic or argument to get in their way, however. For instance, some have ventured to write management books. Thus, in the introduction to *Strategy without Design: The Silent Efficacy of Indirect Action*, authors Chia and Holt advise managers to be wary of conscious decision-making, instrumental rationality, and goal-directed behaviour. Instead, they encourage managers to let things happen by themselves.[37] That is, Chi and Holt write a book (presumably a deliberate and goal-directed behaviour) to argue that managers should not argue or act deliberately. Other critical management authors have recognised that embracing an anti-positivist posture amounts to pulling the epistemological carpet from beneath their feet. They have tried to retain their balance through irony, auto-criticism, self-effacement and (as last resort) by writing perplexing textbooks as kaleidoscopes, without beginning or end, presumably hoping readers will

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tumble with them.[38] These observations point to wider and deeper issues at the core of postmodern thought.

THE POSTMODERN DISORDER

Lyotard's characterisation of postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives was insightful and assured its author's philosophical fame. Lyotard's account was also relatively clear by postmodernism's standards. Wary of reason and logic, it was perhaps unavoidable that postmodernists regularly verged on (and sometimes landed squarely in) the incomprehensible, the vague and the opaque. The tendency of poststructuralist authors to pepper their writings with scientific jargon (paradoxical in view of their attacks on science) makes their readers suspect dubious motives.[39] What is beyond doubt is that postmodern writings are often resistant to definitive analysis and this is to put the point mildly. Suffice to say that when reading their oracular pronouncements, one is reminded of Nietzsche's pointed aphorism: 'Those who know that they are profound strive for clarity; those who would like to seem profound to the crowd strive for obscurity. For the crowd believes that if it cannot see the bottom of something it must be profound'.[40] If one is to judge by postmodernism's popularity in philosophy departments, one must concede that the technique has been successful.

Lyotard's lucid synthesis should not hide the many disagreements between postmodernism's advocates, however. These disagreements, which in some cases have degenerated into exchange of invectives (a game at which Feyerabend was particularly adept), explain why some prominent authors have tried to distance themselves from the postmodernist label. For instance, whereas Foucault analysed society as an oppressive panopticon, Debord saw it as an uncontrollable and unceasing spectacle, which served only its own agenda. Derrida and Baudrillard proposed yet another interpretation of social interactions, since their society is an amorphous kaleidoscope of words and symbols of constantly evolving meaning. Even the existence of postmodernism as an era is under debate. While Lyotard saw postmodernism as modernity in a constant 'nascent state', as modernity trying to reinvent and rejuvenate itself, most postmodern authors have insisted that the period upon which they were commenting is a sequel (with varying degrees of continuity) to modernity by way of modernism.

Nevertheless, as Lyotard saw, some common threads run through postmodern works, which derive from or are connected to the collapse of God, Being or Truth. These are anti-foundationalism, incommensurability, the disappearance of the subject, and the all-encompassing role of language. Under the pens of postmodernists, explanation gives way to interpretation and objectivity to

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perspectivism, rational analysis is replaced by deconstruction and metaphysics by metanarrative. The centred, individual self crumbles into fragmented selves; there remain collective and individual discourses that are to be interpreted endlessly and reinterpreted, since no interpretation is final. Definitive meaning disappears, buried under layers of interpretation. Science, norms and standards fade into irrelevance and liberation from them is sought through anti-dialectics and self-oblivion. These themes are frequently seasoned with remnants of Marxism and psychoanalysis, Freudo-Marxism having acquired a life of its own. A lingering flavour of anarchism, openly endorsed by Feyerabend, is another common characteristic of postmodern authors.

One of the reasons why postmodern authors have resisted the postmodernist label is that, as Jürgen Habermas and many others have pointed out, postmodernism is self-contradictory. The very fact of proposing a grand discourse about the current era goes against arguing that grand discourses are extinct. Or again, if postmodernism is 'incredulity towards metanarratives', one should harbor a degree of incredulity towards Lyotard's own narrative. If such is the case, however, nothing remains of Lyotard's account, for such statements as 'this proposition is not to be believed' are meaningless. If no interpretation is final as Derrida asserts, one fails to see the point of proposing yet another. If words are constantly under erasure and their meaning impossible to grasp, writing books can belong only to the sphere of pathetic self-delusion. That Baudrillard was aware of this problem, since he protested that he did not have a theory to profess, does not make it less acute.

At this point, some fundamental questions obtrude themselves. Is it true that there is no such thing as truth? Is it a fact that there are no facts? Is it relative that everything is relative? Is it a political view that everything is political? Is it possible to argue that one should not argue? If there is no truth, how can a discourse be said to be a lie? To these questions, poststructuralists typically retort 'which truth?', 'whose facts?' or again 'who is asking?' and they insist that life is not logical. These are rhetorical deflections, however, not philosophical answers. Even a more qualified statement, one proposing truth as an incomplete, historically dependent, perspective-specific and socially sanctioned concept will not do, because the application of this statement to itself invalidates its meaning. These rejoinders are less academic than they seem, for the same poststructuralists who dismiss positivist science are not the last ones to check in at the local hospital (an institution where positivist sciences – chemistry, radiology, physiology, etc. – are practised every day) when they need medical assistance.

Contrary to Rorty, neopragmatism cannot correct such poststructuralist inconsistencies. As argued earlier, if 'truth is what works', philosophy collapses into collective and self-indulgence. That there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was false according to the correspondence theory of truth

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(in which truth is correspondence with the facts). However, it was pragmatically true since it 'worked' for America and its allies. What this means is that, taken to its logical conclusion, neopragmatism, like poststructuralism, leads to epistemological nihilism.

As for Quine's demolition of the analytic-synthetic distinction and his subsequent rejection of *a priori* knowledge, one is compelled to remark that they rely on precisely what they seek to disprove. It is self-contradictory to argue that there are no analytic statements because definitions of 'analytic' are themselves analytic propositions. As for Quine's denial of *a priori* knowledge, it has been (allegedly) arrived at logically. Now if one accepts the view that the ability to learn a language is innate and that logic rests on the rules of language, it follows that the sense of logic is itself ultimately innate because it is not of sensuous origin. In this sense, Quine's conclusion rests on an *a priori* conception and is therefore inconsistent.

Expressed differently, there are definitions and there are empirical facts. Setting aside the question whether this sentence is itself a definition or an empirical fact, it is surprising to say the least that a philosopher thought it necessary to assert that all definitions need empirical verification, or that the statement 'all tall men are tall' requires validation by observation or experiment. No philosopher thought to question this distinction since Kant formulated it, until Quine cast aspersions on it. Happily, Quine's arguments are so weak that few rationalist or empiricist philosophers have taken them seriously. Sadly, the same cannot be said for social scientists who routinely quote Quine's assertions (for he advanced few arguments) as evidence of the collapse and death of positivism in their disciplines. Related comments can be directed to the later Wittgenstein. Indeed, the very fact that he was able to propose observations relevant to all language games establishes that they have something in common, for instance basic grammar and the rules of implication. Languages not respecting these conventions would share nothing with ordinary languages, but in that case, they would not be languages at all.

Postmodernists reject absolutism yet are absolutists themselves. While they hold that any culture, morality or epistemological position is acceptable because merely an arbitrary language game, they reject those games which dismiss relativism. Anything goes and must be allowed to go, except rejecting the assertion that anything goes. Expressed differently, if all texts silence or suppress conflicting voices, then this is true of postmodern texts and there is no reason to prefer them to other texts. The promise of postmodern authors to enable the expression of oppressed minorities is contradicted by their refusal to grant statements definitive truth status or empirical validity. The overarching point here is not that postmodernism is incapable of accounting for itself or that its claims challenge common sense, for empiricism and rationalism suffer from the same weaknesses. The more pressing issue is

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that postmodernists provide arguments to reject from the outset what they propose.

Postmodernists are on firmer grounds when they insist that social reality is constructed, but closer examination reveals that it is not a particularly enlightening position. Granted, twenty-first-century developed economies are exploitative of people and natural resources and make little room for those who refuse to bow to the prevailing techno-capitalist dogma. That postmodern man has abandoned aspects of his existence to marketing discourses and seeks comfort in frantic consumerism is equally difficult to ignore. Postmodernist authors are justified in exploring these phenomena and the thesis that they are the products of a modernity that has run its course uncontrollably is not without merit. Kierkegaard had said as much of the Danish society of the 1840s, which in his eyes had become 'the public', a 'phantom' controlled by the media (the press in his days).[41] Holding that objects possess their owners, languages speak their speakers and texts write their authors is something else altogether, for in this case the questions of who manufactured the first object, invented the first language, or wrote the first book impose themselves and are left unanswered.

Similarly, holding that 'everything is text' waiting to be interpreted is appealing at first sight given the overwhelming importance of signs and symbols in developed economies, but the extremes to which postmodernists have pushed this view makes it incomprehensible. Taken seriously, it entails that empirical reality is a social construct since all is at bottom a language game. If this is the case, the venom of a deadly snake or the crushing impact of a falling rock can be explained away through more attuned exegesis or different grammatical conventions. That such observations are trivial does not make them less relevant.

Postmodernism's denial of the subject equally undermines its message. Central to Western thinking since its existence was theorised by Plato, the self (psyche, ego, 'I', etc.) is a philosophically elusive notion, about which many conflicting accounts have been offered. Many philosophers, including Hume and Nietzsche, dismissed it. However, contrary to Lacan, Derrida, Baudrillard and others, Hume and Nietzsche never denied the centrality and individuality of human existence but ascribed it to experience and to will to power, respectively. Even Sartre, for all his talk of 'nothingness', proposed a model which acknowledges individual emotions. As for Freud, his deterministic model of existence leaves room for an internal source of energy to which individuality can be ascribed. Not so with the postmodernists, for whom the difficulty in identifying the locus and dynamics of self-identity becomes a pretext for throwing away the baby of humanity with the philosophical bathwater. In a rather cavalier fashion, they dissolve human existence in symbolic and unauthored external structures. Contrary to what postmodernists maintain, one's

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liberation from coercive discourses will not be achieved by weakening one's selfhood, but by affirming it.

When Foucault argued that all social institutions discharge a controlling purpose and that power enters all social relationships, he was stating the obvious. Control, after all, is precisely why social institutions are formed in the first place. Although no doubt perfectible, schools control primary education so that all children receive crucial basic skills, universities control higher education so that alchemy and astrology are recognised for what they are, and prisons control criminals to protect citizens. Max Weber, an author with whom Foucault was (surprisingly) unfamiliar, had long explored these themes in *Economy and Society* (1925). The concern is not that social structures are endowed with power, but that this power is not exerted for the good of the community, or is left unchecked. On these real and pressing issues, postmodern authors have remained silent, preferring to repudiate stable meaning to terms like 'good' or 'community' or deconstruct them as vehicles of dark agendas.

Foucault's indictment of universalism as a philosophical cover for the intellectual and cultural take-over that accompanied Western colonisation was more insightful. However, what neither Foucault nor his disciples in cultural studies acknowledged is that the Graeco-Roman heritage, of which Foucault was otherwise proud, is itself the product of wars and cultural fights for supremacy. Moreover, for all its alleged hegemony, the 'victims' of moral universalism have been quick to use it against the West as a powerful ideological weapon in their struggle for political independence. Minorities' rights to cultural identity within Western societies have been equally justified on similar grounds. In this respect, universalism is only a prelude to moral relativism. What this means is that, contrary to Foucault, universalism does not act as a mould to format the individual but as a communal solvent whose corrosive effects postmodernists have been only too willing to activate.

When reading Foucault, Baudrillard and their followers, one is left with the impression that society is a victim of an immense conspiracy, whose execution is supported by the media, universities, hospitals and other institutions. While such a thesis has some validity for a handful of countries, a cursory engagement with the political scene of Western democracies reveals a different picture. There, many issues stem from an absence of central power and the fragmentation of social influence in the hands of countless uncoordinated channels, actors, structures and administrative layers (some of them finding their legitimacy in popular vote), whose existence impedes the implementation of reforms that seem otherwise required. Besides, the very idea that social change can be controlled and directed to precise aims, an idea that is implicit in many postmodernist contributions, is debatable. Indeed, history provides ample evidence that it cannot.

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In the same vein, postmodernists' indictments of the corrupting influence of the media and corporate marketing are not without justification but should not be blown out of proportion. One will not deny the dumbing down effect of television programs, but these cannot, in and of themselves, cause decerebration. One can regret the appeal of infantile theme parks and the crass vulgarity of 'reality TV' shows, but no one will believe that those who visit *Disney World* or watch *Big Brother* are unable to tell the difference between these offerings and daily reality. Their commercial success is the result of a decline in cultural and aesthetic standards rather than coercive enforcement of such references. In any case, liberation from such intellectual degeneracy is only a switch away. Unlike in *A Clockwork Orange*, no one is forced to watch television.

Paranoia is a problem for psychology, not philosophy, even if postmodern philosophers seem to be among its first victims. That academic philosophy falls victim to fads is patent and that some philosophers (Hegel for instance) yielded to political agendas is equally clear. If one is to believe postmodernists, however, Western philosophy generally is a dubious ideology. Rather than an expression of a disinterested, if imperfect, quest for truth and wisdom, it is merely 'old dead white men's philosophy'.[42] One will not court controversy by asking whether Foucault and Derrida (white, dead, males) were part of it.

Kuhn's reading of the history of science as a linguistic phenomenon with little empirical foundation has attracted considerable interest from social scientists. This success is understandable since Kuhn's thesis gives pride of place to sociological analyses. Natural scientists, however, have remained unimpressed. Again, understandably so. No one will object to Kuhn's claim that scientific theories displace one another or that scientific results are interpreted through the lens of the dominating theory of the day. This, however, is an observation that pertains to the history of science, not to its logic or method. Kuhn (like Quine and Popper) confused the former for the latter. When he maintained that successive paradigms are incommensurable and rest on arbitrary conventions and linguistic fashions, he de facto argued that scientists have no way of deciding rationally between competing worldviews. They would be left with theories that they cannot test, since the measurements they obtain are framed by these theories and cannot contradict them. In other words, if theories were true only according to arbitrary paradigms as Kuhn had it, then these paradigms would never be abandoned, which is contrary to what he maintained elsewhere.

Although Feyerabend's charge against scientific methods and indictment of scientists for surrendering to politics cannot be dismissed, they cannot be given undue importance. As the existence of various philosophies of science shows, defining precisely what science is and how it should proceed are

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difficult endeavours. These difficulties do not imply that science is a myth, though, for it is not the case that lead can be changed into gold or that cancer can be cured with a sleight of hand and appropriate unintelligible pronouncements. In other words, if Feyerabend was justified in insisting that legends and magic have their place in human culture, they are not science.

It is also true that scientists, like anyone else, keep an eye on their careers and must secure funding for their projects. Between compromise and compromission, there is sometimes a fine line to walk – this point of Feyerabend's is well taken. However, to erase the distinction between discovery and justification, as Feyerabend did, is to blur the distinction between empirical science and politics. If this were the case, objects would be attracted to one another in proportion to their mass only because Newton found it convenient that they did so. Anyone ready to defend this thesis has long departed the shores of rational thought. Combined with his self-declared scientific anarchism and provocative rhetoric, it justifies that Feyerabend was called in *Nature* 'the Salvador Dali of academic philosophy and [. . .] the worst enemy of science'.[43]

Postmodern irrationalism is not a purely academic phenomenon confined to Berkeley University's philosophy department which employed Kuhn and Feyerabend. It has spread to the workplace. Until the 1970s, the ultimate test of management was performance. Peter Drucker's Management by Objective and Self-Control would never have achieved global fame if this had not been the case. In a postmodern organisation, however, performance will not do since it requires the existence of facts (achievements) and standards against which these facts are evaluated. In the absence of facts, employees' feelings are granted the status of indisputable inputs. Postmodern managers thus have little choice but to fall back on elusive and subjective notions like personality, potential and attitude. Expertise must give way to friendliness, competence to empathy, contribution to conformity, cognitive intelligence to (oxymoronic) 'emotional intelligence', results to needs, analysis to interpretation, and so on. These substitutions, although justified on the grounds that they are 'soft skills' which should be aligned with or set against 'hard skills', jeopardise performance, undermine competence, foster uncertainty, and open the door to manipulation by unscrupulous executives and consultants. Indeed, when roles are replaced by relationships, expertise with empathy, rationality with emotionality, analysis with intuition, objectivity with subjectivity, and performance with personality, the achievement of actual results is sacrificed to pseudo-psychological concerns about human interaction. This sacrifice opens the door to what Drucker called 'psychological tyranny' since judgements by managers about employees' performance are 'soft' and court no appeal.

A comparable undermining of organisational performance is visible in the rejection of authoritative management. Authoritative managers deliver

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unambiguous instructions and set objectives derived from experience and expertise. Authoritative managers thus reassure employees and provide organisational stability. This is not how authoritative management is analysed, however. In a context marked by an aversion to definitive meaning, facts and argument, the postmodern management literature has equated authoritative with authoritarian management. The same authors who reasonably lament the covert, manipulative nature of certain management processes denigrate a clear, confident management style as inherently toxic. Managers who practice it are variously vilified as masculine, unempathic, uninspiring, exploitative, argumentative, coercive and a threat to group stability. Instead of authority, managers are encouraged to develop 'people' skills and adopt 'positive' management styles, described as feminine, participative, consultative, laissez-faire and democratic, all allegedly strengthening organisational cohesion but in fact undermining it.

The current obsession with 'soft skills' is one of the clearest indications that postmodernism has infected management. Another is the constant emphasis on political correctness. Political correctness is usually associated with a compulsion to apologise for actions for which one is not responsible. Customers apologise for seeking assistance from shop attendants, children are asked to apologise for winning on the pitch, teachers apologise for failing their students' papers, and managers apologise to their subordinates when counselling them. For all its popularity, however, 'political correctness' is an oxymoron in a democracy since opposition parties are required to disagree and argue with government parties. To suggest that it is politically incorrect to argue with a governing body is therefore tantamount to endorsing authoritarianism, or even totalitarianism. In this sense, the most infamous exemplars of politically correct regimes in the twentieth century are those of Hitler, Stalin and Mao.

Ignorant of or insensitive to such arguments, postmodern managers have long stopped disagreeing, let alone arguing, with each other, since these behaviours are deemed to be offensive and thus politically incorrect. Rather, they spend their days stupefied in meetings during which they look at the projector as at a magic lantern, out of which comes little else but dumbed down PowerPoint slides and vacuous bullet points. While listening, managers and their subordinates express their feelings and try to become friends. Seminars, conferences and team-building retreats, during which managers abseil, trek or play football, have no other purpose.

In the postmodern workplace, it takes a brave manager to state that the language of management is not compatible with that of friendship and psychotherapy, since one does not rate one's friends or one's patients. This is a point which Wittgenstein emphasised and postmodernists should otherwise accept, but do not. In any case, to be a team member in the game of postmodern

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management is to play knowing that the rule of the game is that there is no rule. Protesting that this is an incoherent position is a pointless exercise when insensitivity to logic has become a badge of honour.

Nietzsche called Kant a 'fatal spider' for his covert Christian ethics which severed Western morality from its religious cradle. Despite Nietzsche's aversion to Kantianism, his perspectivist 'arguments' (unconnected jottings in posthumous fragments) completed Kant's unintended demolition of the link between truth and the possibility of securing it. The qualifier Nietzsche directed at Kant can thus be returned to its sender. To his credit, Nietzsche's nihilistic prophecy has become a postmodern reality. Endorsed by badge-carrying philosophers, postmodernism's demeaning of the Western intellectual enterprise and genius is a monstrous libel. One will not waste one's time putting this point to neopragmatists and poststructuralists, however. As Thomas Paine wrote in *The American Crisis* (1778), 'to argue with a man who has renounced the use and authority of reason [. . .] is like administering medicine to the dead'.

Of all the philosophies reviewed in this book, postmodernism is the most jejune and self-indulgent. It is a fin de siècle philosophy, a philosophy fit for a society which does not know where it is going. Although postmodernists have proposed insightful analyses of the West's nihilistic ailments, they are unable or unwilling to propose a remedy. Indeed, despite postmodernist rhetoric, perspectivism is not liberating but paralysing. The absence of standards promotes apathy, not creativity, because it makes excellence impossible to assess. People who claim that, say, Pavarotti had a better singing voice than Bob Dylan (who has no voice) or that (to reuse Alain Finkielkraut's apt phrase) 'a pair of boots is as good as Shakespeare' are intellectual fascists who impose their elitist view while claiming that nothing can be subjected to judgement. These pseudo-thinkers forget that norms are not politically incorrect or coercive by nature. Rather, norms are the indispensable supports of action. If inadequate, they must be improved, not removed. Without terms of reference, one is left without recourse, vulnerable to arbitrariness and oppression, precisely what postmodernists allegedly oppose. Or again, without truth, however defined or measured, nothing is possible. Postmodernism is therefore not an antidote to Western nihilism, but one of its manifestations. It does not belong to the solution, but to the problem. It is not a viable position for managers or for anyone else.

POST-POSTMODERNISM

In some respect, postmodernism no longer matters to anyone except university undergraduates since the collapse of the World Trade Centre. Postmodernism

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diagnosed societies dominated by television screens, mass media, and the advent of global marketing. It seems, however, unable to propose a meaningful analysis of a Western world spinning everyday more out of control, or to read the irresistible rise of the internet, blogs, wikis, chatrooms, instant texting, and so-called social networks. Today, teenagers upload videos from their bedrooms, viewers eliminate contestants from reality TV shows, friends 'like' each other on Facebook, and personal diaries take the form of online photographic diarrhoea. Everyone is an author, if only of despairingly vacuous 'tweets' and other 'short messages' mixing emoticons and words made of letters, digits and punctuation marks, respecting no grammatical rule except number of characters allowed. i m on the bus oredy :) c u tom lol

Alan Kirby has argued that these phenomena signal a new age, that of pseudo- or digimodernism.[44] Digimodernism is a period in which people communicate with the other side of the world while walking the dog, but need to be reminded to eat vegetables or told how to clean their house. The same people who use an automobile for an errand less than a kilometre from their home wake at 5.00 a.m. to burn calories on a treadmill. Advanced yet childish, technologically everyday more powerful but utterly uncultured and functionally illiterate, digimodern man harbours no incredulity towards metanarratives for he is not aware of any. Postmodern man had given up on truth, yet, like Nietzsche, stared at the abyss that took its place indignant and fearful. His digimodern successor walk upon it like Jesus on water, unconcerned and indifferent because absorbed in his smartphone (yet another oxymoron). His only concern is instant gratification and self-oblivion, obtained in consumerist frenzy, mental illnesses, plastic surgery, and video games. To qualify the current era, moronity seems a better label than digimodernity.

It is of course too early to know if digimodernism is an era that will see Western thinking fall deeper into its postmodernist coma, or if it is the name of a short period of transition during which everything is up for grabs, as modernism was. In the absence of definitive philosophical analyses, one must make do with cultural and sociological descriptions. These are not reassuring. If thinking is talking to oneself and if talking is 'tweeting' or going through a succession of 'bullet points', then the end of the line for the West is nigh. The impression that an economic, social and environmental discontinuity is on the horizon is indeed difficult to dispel. At the time of writing, Western countries are in a state of stupefaction verging on medieval collective hysteria triggered by a new viral infection from China while Asian economies seem to weather the same storm calmly. What remains certain is that epic poems do not fit on mobile phones screens or on PowerPoint slides. Heroic man no longer lies on its postmodern deathbed but has finally expired, his name and deeds forgotten. One wishes one could close this chapter on a more optimistic note.

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NOTES

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23. See the Introduction of Rorty, R. 1982. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

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Epilogue

Philosophy as Remedy

> *Real educators can be nothing more than liberators; that is the secret of all education.*
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche

After his return from exile in June 1944, Charles de Gaulle, then head of the provisional government of the French Republic, refused for months to meet with executives of large companies and representatives of the national council of French employers. Their requests were dismissed with a final 'I did not see any of you in London!' In de Gaulle's eyes, not joining the forces of the Résistance amounted to tacit support for the occupying forces. That support was sometimes active. For instance, Photomaton, a manufacturer of instant photo booths, proposed to help the Nazi occupants take pictures of French Jews.[1] The individuals behind the Enron, Tyco and WorldCom scandals hardly deserve a better response than de Gaulle's rebuke. Many scholars and laypeople have understandably concluded that management has become a self-interested, unethical, bloated profession, confirming Bernard Shaw's view that professions are conspiracies against the public. In the eyes of many, managers are barely above used car salesmen and politicians in the status game. Although it is not clear how history will judge those who educated them, early signs are not positive. While management academics cannot be held responsible for the activities of corporate gangsters, they cannot avoid responsibility for the underlying ethical perspectives they have promoted. Why and how such an indictment came to be levelled at management schools is a story worth telling.

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PROMISING BEGINNINGS

The first modern management school, the *École Spéciale de Commerce et d'Industrie*, opened in Paris on December 1, 1819. Intended to support France's development by educating its business elite and modelled on the engineering schools created at the end of the eighteenth century, the *École Spéciale* owed its creation to the patronage of a group of economists and businessmen. This was not a consensual initiative: the idea had been advanced in 1803 but was rejected by the business community, which opposed teaching commerce as a matter of principle. However, in a period that witnessed the rise of large commercial organisations and the progressive divorce of ownership and management, the demand for salaried managers kept increasing and the idea prevailed. Not that it was plain sailing. Internal tensions and an absence of State funding resulted in the school going bankrupt in 1869. By that time, however, the concept had sufficiently matured and governmental endorsement, as well as institutionalised support, became available. The *École Spéciale* was then resurrected under the name of *École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris*, a name it kept until 2009 (the institution is known today as ESCP Business School).[2]

Among the economists who spearheaded the creation of the *École Spéciale*'s was Jean-Baptiste Say, a prominent if critical advocate of economic liberalism. In Adam Smith's view, free trade is the way to economic prosperity because it generates a powerful 'invisible hand' that guides society towards peace and wealth. Private vice makes public virtue: by pursuing one's own interests, everyone contributes to the greater good. While promoting free trade, Say sought to correct Smith's position. He believed that the profit motive must not be allowed to reign supreme because it does not ensure social stability. 'Love for work must not always be excited by the desire for profit', he wrote, adding that 'happiness and the future of society demand that people in each nation cultivate the sciences, arts and the letters'.[3] Furthermore, Say held that the economy is not merely an impersonal, objective force to which one had no choice but to adapt passively. Businessmen, although subject to the rule of the invisible hand, have the power to shape the environment in which they operate. Noting that English theorists like Smith did not have a word to capture this concept, Say proposed a coinage of his own: entrepreneur.[4]

The businessmen supporting the *École Spéciale* included Vital Roux, a successful trader turned central banker who had played an instrumental role in the writing of France's first modern business laws. Before establishing the *École Spéciale*, Roux had argued that, in a regulated and stable economy, 'business will be a science that one will have to know and fortune, for too long the outcome of intrigue, will become the reward of work. It will be

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seen then that one must be educated and how reduced is the number of good businessmen; the institutions that can educate them will become more necessary'.[5] The school's first curriculum, mainly conceived by Roux, included training in languages (French, English, German and Spanish), courses in geography as well as subjects dedicated to the study of economy, accounting, commercial law and mathematics as it applies to trade and industry. Roux also ensured that students, after basic theoretical training, went through simulated exercises of increasing complexity which were meant to develop their practical retail and trading skills in national and international contexts.

The first American business school, the Wharton School of Finance and Economy at the University of Pennsylvania, opened in 1881 sponsored by the founder and executive chairman of Bethlehem Steel Corporation, Joseph Wharton. A devout Quaker, Wharton was animated by a strong sense of social responsibility. He believed that too many young men see their talent wasted, their fortune put to unproductive use or their ambition muted for lack of fundamental knowledge that would enable them to improve their condition and that of society. To remedy this situation, the Wharton School would provide credentials to anyone who wished to join the ranks of what was emerging as a promising new occupation: management. Ad-hoc, on-the-job management training would be replaced by formal, university-sanctioned education of a status comparable to that required of doctors or lawyers. Furthermore, the development of a codified body of knowledge, grounded in the liberal arts and social sciences, would enhance the authority, self-awareness and legitimacy of managers. Accordingly, the first students of the Wharton School spent the first two years of their curriculum studying such disciplines as history, political economy and foreign languages, before dedicating themselves to such business subjects as accounting and business law in their final two years of study.[6]

It was at the Wharton School, in May 1886, that Henry Towne, co-founder of the Yale Lock Manufacturing Company, delivered an address to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, which had been founded a few years earlier. Towne noted that, although there were good engineers and good businessmen, they rarely combined in the one and same person. He thought such a combination essential to the successful management of industrial works: 'The matter of shop management', he argued, 'is of equal importance with that of engineering'. The problem, he noted, was that 'the one [engineering] is a well-defined science, with a distinct literature, […] the other is unorganized, almost without literature'.[7] Towne hoped that mechanical engineers would remedy this deficiency because he conceived of workshop management as a set of practices that could be studied and improved. In a later address, he insisted that this effort would be rooted in economics, since it was meant to decrease costs and increase profitability.[8]

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The automation of the factory at the beginning of the twentieth century offered a testing ground for Towne's arguments. In Book I of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith had contended that output increased greatly when labour was divided, because workers' dexterity improved when it was directed to a few tasks only while their idle time decreased. This insight was not lost on Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford. Shortly after Towne's address, they showed that vast productivity improvements could be obtained in industrial settings by way of process simplification and standardisation. 'Scientific management', as Taylor called his methods, led to shorter working hours and better pay; it also accelerated, as Smith feared, the mechanisation of production means and the deskilling of jobs. Workers and factory foremen, now interchangeable and almost incidental to the production process, lost much of their social status to the benefit of the production engineers. On the shopfloor, the contest for authority was decisively won by the latter. A new status was born, that of the educated manager. With it, a new industry was dawning.

Once the case for Towne's arguments had been made in such a spectacular fashion by Taylor and Ford, the idea that management can be systematised, that there are value-free methods and recipes available to managers through which they can make their organisation more successful, became irresistible. On the back of this conviction, management education established itself as one of the most successful academic domains of the twentieth century. The first graduate school of business, the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, was established in 1900. Harvard Business School was founded in 1908, offering the world's first Master of Business Administration, a degree which was to become one of the most recognised postgraduate qualifications. The American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, now Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business to reflect its international reach) was formed in 1916 to accredit business schools worthy of the name. In the United States, in 2016, about 20 per cent of all undergraduate students were business majors, making business the most popular field of study (social sciences and history, with approximately 10 per cent each, are distant second). Worldwide, business and management schools graduate hundreds of thousands of students each year and provide jobs to thousands of academics.

UNRESOLVED TENSIONS

What the extraordinary success of management education does not reveal, however, is the extent and intensity of the debates and controversies that have accompanied its rise. Two agendas presided over the creation of the *École Spéciale*. While men like Say insisted on man's role at the centre of economic

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life and wanted his creative powers acknowledged and developed, others like Roux conceived of management as a science, a stable body of universal knowledge that one must possess to succeed in business. The former promoted a humanistic picture, one in which man shapes the economy to serve his ideals. The latter promoted a world view inspired by Smith's in which economics rules human existence. It was this tension between businessmen-entrepreneurs and engineers that Towne lamented and wanted to resolve to the benefit of the latter. The conflict between Say's humanist and Roux's scientific visions would disappear when the latter absorbed the former. Educated managers operate like engineers, that is to say safely, reliably and sanctioned by university credentials. Taylorism gave flesh to Smith's and Towne's views and signalled the victory of Roux over Say. This victory would shape management academia to this day.

Abraham Flexner, an educator who had played a central role in the reformation of U.S. medical education, was not so easily convinced. 'In so far as business [. . .] is concerned', he wrote in 1930 in a review of American universities, 'Columbia [University] can do nothing for undergraduates that is worth their time and money. Both are worse than wasted. [It delivers] a bachelor's degree that represents neither a substantial secondary education nor a substantial vocational training'.[9] Flexner was not opposed to the existence of university business degrees per se. In a previous work, he had recognised that preparation for a career in business fell within the scope of higher education.[10] His point, however, was that universities are supposed to deliver higher education, not vocational training. 'Let the economists study banking, trade cycles, and transportation', he insisted, 'let the chemists study textiles and foods; and let the psychologists study advertising. [. . .] Technical accomplishments such as salesmanship, etc. belong to technological schools or must be left to apprenticeship'.[11] There is more to management education than the rote learning of techniques and formulae.

World War II muted Flexner's criticisms. To support the war effort, British and American army engineers developed quantitative methods, soon called 'management science', which enabled the efficient control of large-scale resources and processes. After the conflict, these tools and concepts found their way outside of the military. They were notably employed in the automotive industry and are credited with turning around the then uncertain fortunes of the Ford Motor Company. They catapulted one of their most ardent advocates, Robert McNamara (a Harvard Business School MBA graduate), from an obscure position in the U.S. Air Force to the first president of Ford who was not a member of the Ford family. McNamara later became U.S. Secretary of Defence under John F. Kennedy. Even if McNamara's tenure in this latter post turned out to be a controversial one, management education could hardly dream of a better endorsement.

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Apparent in the first curriculum designed by Roux and in Wharton's instructions is an intention to impart practical and useful knowledge which serves the interests of business, industry and their students. This utilitarian orientation resulted in the faculty of early business schools being dominated by active or retired consultants, managers and businesspeople with little formal education but who were willing to share their experiences with their students. Although American business schools were housed on the campuses of long-established universities, these educators had little time for academic standards and even less for scientific research. Students were not screened for academic aptitude before enrolment since a general interest in business studies was deemed an appropriate credential. These issues were compounded after World War II, when the rapid growth of management programs saw business schools scurrying for faculty.

The situation continued until 1959 and the publication of two book-long independent reports, one from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the other from the Ford Foundation of New York. Both reports were based on extensive surveys of current U.S. business curricula. Recognising the popularity and the social role of business schools, the two reports delivered a searing indictment of management education. Reiterating many of Flexner's criticisms, they highlighted the weak content of business programs (which for some included such two-semester courses as 'Principles of Baking: Bread and Rolls'), the mediocre calibre of students and the low academic qualifications of educators. Both reports acknowledged the existence of a 'management science', but, faithful to Wharton's agenda (which was in part that of Say), they insisted that business students should study liberal arts subjects to enhance their 'clear analysis, imaginative reasoning and balanced judgement'.[12]

Management academia responded to the charge of academic laxity with a vengeance. With the faith and energy of the recently converted, business school deans fell over themselves to improve the respectability of their programs and looked upon science departments as *the* model to imitate. The AACSB, which despite its official mission had been more concerned with representing the interests of its members than with enforcing academic standards, followed suit. Inspired notably by the Ford Foundation report, it now demanded that management students demonstrate minimum academic abilities and their educators engage in the sort of scientific research that advances theory. Within a few years, all leading business schools complied, later copied by countless others in America and elsewhere. Ten years after their publications, the Carnegie and Ford reports had profoundly transformed management education. Despite Flexner's criticisms, Roux's and Towne's visions triumphed. Business schools have since the 1960s promoted academic rigour in the form of quantitative exactitude and scientific research.

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Not everyone saw the benefits of the 1960s' reforms, however. Sterling Livingston walked in Flexner's wake in 1971 when he argued that the concept of the educated manager is a 'myth'. Academic achievement, as business schools define it, does not measure what matters to managerial success, such as the abilities to identify and exploit opportunities, discover, formulate and solve problems. The very existence of management education conveys the idea that there is one best way to manage, but this is not so because situations must be assessed on their own merits. A capacity for empathy and a will to lead and work with people are characteristics managers need. Further, they must develop their own natural management style. Much evidence, Livingston added, suggests that those who believe otherwise see their management careers suffer.[13]

In diverse forms and with various emphases, Livingston's charge was to reverberate within the management literature in the following decades. In 2002, an article in the inaugural issue of the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* supported Lexington's conclusions with evidence showing that management education, its flagship MBA degree included, has no demonstrable effect upon career success or organisational performance.[14] In the same issue, another contribution argued that the actual content of management education is in fact incompatible with the very idea of management education. This is the case notably because many management theories assume that organisational success comes from the application of unique management practices, yet the task of management academics is precisely to spread knowledge of these practices.[15] Damaging as it seems to be, this criticism assumes, however, that management academics have something to teach. A later article in the same journal argued that management scholars, working on incorrect assumptions and methods, have imparted nothing only the 'pretence of knowledge'. Managers so 'educated' do more damage than good work.[16]

The original conflict between Say's and Roux's agendas remains unresolved and manifests itself in countless ways in the management literature. For instance, in the world view which underpins classical economics, there is room only for the rational and egoist pursuit of self-interest. If they are to achieve their organisation's objectives, managers must therefore resort to bribery, menace, coercion or manipulation to prevent employees from doing what economics says their nature makes them do, which is to use the organisation to their own advantage. One can thus understand why those who teach economics are generally hostile to business ethics. Indeed, the fundamental assumption of economics is not compatible with the widely held definition of organisations as social entities which are coordinated towards the achievement of common goals. The incompatibility arises because such a definition implies that there is a general agreement shared by the members of the

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organisation, in the name of which they are ready to abandon self-interest. Furthermore, it is difficult to conceive of consumers behaving rationally, as economics assumes, while at the same time being driven by an overall pleasure principle, as alleged by marketing and psychological theories. A pleasure principle doubtlessly knows little of demand versus supply equilibria.

The list of unsettled contradictions plaguing management thought is a long one. Most management scholars plead for the priority of planning over doing and promote rational analysis of facts before decision-making. A minority, however, insist that organisations never really plan anything but learn by trial-and-error elimination. They see organisational order not as self-standing and rarely, if ever, emerging from rational projects, but from inextricable contextual, political, symbolic and material contingencies. Among this group of scholars, a few like Peters are adamant that greatness comes from a relentless, passionate and irrational pursuit of excellence. While authors hold that only employee contribution matters and employing psychology in the workplace is repugnant, industrial psychologists insist that managers must understand the psychological needs and profiles of their subordinates. Most scholars insist on the role of empathy and compassion in the workplace, although there are rare advocates of the unscrupulous use of power in management. Furthermore, critics have argued about the serious ambiguities of key management concepts. For instance, the notions of competitive advantage and valuable resources have been criticised as tautological and devoid of theoretical interest. Should these totems fall, the idea of management as a distinct body of knowledge, which is teachable in the classroom, would be dealt a serious blow.

The changes implemented in the wake of the 1959 Ford and Carnegie reports have resulted in management programs which develop in their students and educators the analytical skills that quantitative, scientific work requires. Admission to management schools is decided largely on such skills. Once enrolled, students wade through an endless list of cases and problems which they analyse through the systematic application of concepts, theories and formulae. Business schools have long prided themselves on the learning outcomes of this pedagogy, portraying the successful manager as a detached, rational decision-maker who makes the best trade-off, even in the face of incomplete or conflicting information.

As astute commentators have noted, though, there is a lot more to managerial life than economic decision-making. Managers are not chess players absorbed in solitary calculations. They sit in meetings, observe, listen, explain and persuade. Sensitivity to office politics is as much, if not more, instrumental to managerial success than cold analysis. Real-life situations cannot be neatly summarised in a ten-page case study completed with a handful of financial reports and charts. Graduates who are convinced

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otherwise are likely to manage without leaving their office, relying on files and spreadsheets rather than first-hand observations. Behaviour of this kind, according to Henry Mintzberg, is another name for incompetence mixed with arrogance.[17]

If management education nurtures ivory-tower managers, it is likely to produce disengaged citizens. In the United States, a study found that the more business courses students complete, the less they engage in citizenship activities, such as participation in democratic duties, attention to public affairs, involvement in debates on political matters, voluntarism and community service.[18] Controlling for all other variables, the college curricula that correlate most positively with civic engagement are, unsurprisingly since society is their field of study, social sciences. By contrast, natural sciences and engineering studies, together with business programs, are those with the greatest negative relationships. The same study also found that, irrespective of the curriculum followed, verbal aptitude, as measured through scores on university entrance tests, has a strong positive relationship with civic engagement, while quantitative aptitude, obsessively cultivated in management programs, has a small but significant negative relationship with civic engagement.

Business schools have been accused of encouraging short-term and 'winner-takes-all' values above more humanistic ones. Coming after the scandal of the 'tobacco papers' and the corporate disasters of the early 2000s, in which many MBA degree holders were involved, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 has lent support to this view. Joel Podolny, former dean of Yale Management School, held business schools responsible for the subprime debacle.[19] In Podolny's view, such institutions have irretrievably corrupted the moral sense of their students, especially those who became Wall Street executives. For Mintzberg and other noted commentators, management programs, if unchanged, will destroy organisations, communities and society. The most strident critics have called for all management schools to be shut down. Of course, management schools have their defenders, but even deans of renowned institutions have had to concede that the academy suffers from 'a bad case of existential angst'.[20]

If all this was not enough, even a careless reader cannot fail to notice a shift in the language of management. Until the 1970s, terms like 'expertise', 'tasks', 'analytical intelligence', 'discipline', 'standards', 'responsibility' and 'results' dominated. Evidence of postmodernism's pervasiveness, the same terms today occupy a conspicuous secondary role, replaced by such concepts as 'relationships', 'consensus', 'subjectivity', 'emotional intelligence', 'empathy', 'feelings' and 'needs'. As for 'management', it has all but disappeared, replaced by the more fashionable 'leadership', with many business schools claiming to produce inspiring and world-changing leaders, rather than effective managers. In some respect at least, their graduates agree, since

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in increasing numbers they neglect careers in management in favour of more lucrative jobs in consulting and investment banking.

Business schools have remained undaunted. The recommendations of the 1959 Carnegie and Ford reports to include liberal arts courses within management programs were initially misunderstood or ignored: they are now long forgotten. Quantitative disciplines (like economics, finance or operations management), which lend themselves to mathematical exactitude, continue to attract perks and research grants. Others like marketing, consumer behaviour and strategic management, which are (at least at first sight) about values, choices and objectives, have had to acquire scientific status and now make extensive use of quantitative techniques. A research-based doctoral degree, rather than successful management experience, is a requirement for a full-time faculty member in a management school. As junior faculty, the continuation of one's career hinges on the ability to publish in peer-reviewed journals which expect theoretical contribution supported by quantitative analysis. A few years later, supervision of PhD students will take precedence over undergraduate teaching, because it normally results in publications.

To the extent that business schools have engaged in soul-searching, the exercise has resulted in the inclusion of courses in business ethics and social responsibility in their curricula, completed by renewed claims to practical relevance. These efforts, although well-intentioned, are bound to remain ineffective. As Nietzsche pointed out, utilitarianism and deontology, the moral frameworks that receive most attention in business ethics and social responsibility courses, are secularised versions of Christian morality. Further, they turn a blind eye to the pagan ethics favoured by Machiavelli. In any case, academics who teach ethics to managers place themselves on the higher moral ground, which is a very questionable claim for them to make.[21] As for practical learning, some business schools have sought to deliver it through mandatory industry internships, a clear if indirect recognition that their academic content, for all its scientific rigour, does not deliver it.

The domination of Roux's agenda over Say's, propelled by Taylorism's successes and doubled down after the 1959 Ford and Carnegie reports, has been a Pyrrhic victory. If management academia has achieved scientific rigour, it has come at the expense of practical relevance, internal coherence and civic sense. Business schools' students are meant to extract the knowledge and skills they need to become good managers from their curricula while ignoring their contradictions. At the same time, the same students are expected to become responsible citizens despite the morally dubious implications of the theories they learn. To entertain doubts about students' ability to achieve this feat is not to underestimate them. As for those who profess to teach management, they must be at times wondering what it is exactly they are doing and why they are doing it.

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Harvard Business School professor Rakesh Khurana concluded his historical analysis of management education by noting that it is in a perilous state.[22] What remains certain is that the preparation of management students for citizenship is too serious a matter to be ignored. Shifting this responsibility to the legislator, by way of ever more stringent regulations and powerful enforcement agents, is not the answer. Indeed, tackling the problem from this end is bound to perpetuate and aggravate it, since it amounts to considering management graduates as irretrievably immature individuals. There cannot be a police officer behind every manager. If someone is going to stop managers from engaging in socially destructive behaviour, it will be the managers themselves. However, acting as one's own guardian demands an appreciation of one's place in society, one's rights and responsibilities, not merely job descriptions and corporate status. Despite the grandiose rhetoric of educating managers for leadership, the development of students' command of language, civic sense, cultural references and general intellectual maturity is not the concern of today's business schools. Management schools cannot survive in their current format if the relevance and civic consequences of their teaching can be seriously questioned by way of empirical studies backed up by conceptual arguments and anecdotal evidence in the form of recurring corporate scandals.

THE WAY FORWARD

The 2011 instalment of the Carnegie Foundation repeated the recommendations of its 1959 predecessor to include liberal arts in management programs.[23] It is unlikely that this advice will be heeded, because business schools failed to revise the content of their curricula in the wake of a previous and much-discussed Carnegie report published in 1990. In it, Ernest Boyer, then the Carnegie Foundation president, argued that educators of any discipline can deliver academic rigour by way of four distinct areas of scholarship: research, cross-discipline synthesis, engagement with peers and teaching.[24] Irrespective of the merits of Boyer's arguments, they should have reminded deans of management schools that rigorous scholarship does not equate with scientific research and that academics can be true to their roles through means other than quantitative exactitude.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) long argued that if natural science research produces and codifies predictive knowledge about the world in the form of theory, social science research tries to understand experiences, intentions and meaning.[25] The social sciences are interested not in facts for their own sake but in the *meaning* of facts for those who experience them. No quantification or predictions are required, only after-the-fact

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reconstructions of values, motives and context, since these are the reasons why people behave in the way that they do. Although this way of conceiving research should be attractive to management scholars, interested as they are in studying why managers do what they do, it has made little headway in business schools and management research. If this book can show that endeavours so conceived can be enlightening, it will not be a wasted effort.

So long as business schools allow Roux's vision to dominate over Say's, that is, until they revisit their reading of the 1959 Ford and Carnegie reports, little change in their curricula will occur. Thirty years ago, commentators believed business schools were so deeply entrenched in their ways as to be congenitally immune to reform.[26] Although facts have supported this view, mounting internal criticisms lead one to believe that business schools are ripe for change. Wharton's vision can be revived by balancing Roux's scientific, vocational agenda with Say's humanistic, liberal one. This re-balancing is achievable through adjustments to current curricula that are not revolutionary. At minimum, one feels compelled to try because management education today concerns the lives of too many individuals to allow it to remain in its current uncertain shape.

Such attempts will start by noting that, since the days of the *École Spéciale*, the conviction that management education discharges a pivotal social function has been embraced by all parties. Business schools are supposed to legitimate managers because managers are expected to contribute to the welfare of their community. Lawyers serve justice, educators disseminate knowledge and managers improve economic prosperity and secure jobs. As Drucker maintained, management is a civic duty that expands well beyond the interests of private employers because it integrates the public with the private, the collective with the individual. A tall order no doubt, but there seems to be no alternative if managers want to reclaim some respectability and legitimate their role in society.

To contribute to social cohesion, however, managers need to know and understand the strengths, weaknesses and contradictions of political and social agendas. The world today offers a long list of issues that call for critical appraisal. Globalisation of trade, environmental degradation, South-North migration, and growing economic inequality are examples of challenges to social cohesion with which managers would do well to engage. Indeed, these problems represent opportunities for managers to demonstrate their contribution to civic life. In other words, to be true to Drucker's brief, managers cannot accept their status as hired guns in the service of shareholders. Nor are they cogs in organisational machines, happy to transmit orders from above uncritically. Rather, they are players who have personal stakes in the social fabric they weave.

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Moreover, managers cannot satisfy themselves with technical expertise if they want to be successful entrepreneurs. In professions that require technical expertise, the point is to deliver a given outcome within a set time-frame, usually at the least expense. Surprises in the form of unspecified results are not desirable. Rather, everything is done to minimise the likelihood that such events materialise. Entrepreneurs follow a different agenda, however. If they want to innovate, they must go beyond transforming existing tools and concepts. They are not so much interested in what there is, but what there could be.

The difficulty entrepreneurial managers face in their endeavours can be reformulated like this. Marketers who ask customers what they want are bound to obtain sterile answers, because expressed in the terms of what these customers know already. For instance, no one could appreciate how useful an internet search engine would be before the first one was produced. The opportunity to develop a new product or service is thus unlikely to be identified through rigorous market research. What this means is that entrepreneurs complement their marketing skills with intuitions about what customers are ready to accept but do not know. As Wharton noted and the Carnegie and Ford reports repeated, while expert knowledge is necessary, it does not exhaust management education.

Managers, then, are supposed to contribute to society's cohesion by engaging critically with the social agenda and by integrating its cultural, moral, aesthetic and technological dimensions in acceptable ways. It is the overall contention of this book that, if business schools want to produce graduates who rise to this challenge while eliminating the coarsest inconsistencies in their teaching, they should ask their faculty and graduates to study Western philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY AS PROPHYLAXIS

When management academics argue, with Drucker, that the ultimate test of management is the achievement of actual results, they follow a tradition that found its first expression in the epic poetry of Homer. When they hold that organisational effectiveness hinges on the perspective of the CEO and that success comes at a moral cost, they endorse the authority of Machiavelli. When they believe that the fate of an organisation rests on the shoulders of exceptional employees, they promote a Nietzschean ideal. What these authors have in common is a commitment to the heroic conception that (personal) might is right: management is effectiveness in action. In this outline, the one moral principle that managers must follow is that the group is worth more than its members, for these do not exist outside of it. Success is all that matters and it requires personal sacrifices.

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People who believe that rulership rests on a body of universal concepts that can be taught are indebted to Plato. Rulership is not a physical activity requiring skills, but an intellectual exercise demanding knowledge. Managers must be educated because might is not right. Rather, reason is right, because it is *the* way to truth. Management schools would not exist without such intertwined anti-heroic and rationalist preconceptions. Economics has understandably found a home in their curricula, for the discipline relies on a picture of human existence, articulated by Descartes, in which individuals are rational, that is, able to elevate themselves above bodily instincts to the point where these can be ignored. Managers who believe that they are to deduce their actions from insights taken to be self-evident do not deviate from the Cartesian tradition. Those who hold that project management is essentially an exercise in task decomposition and subsequent synthesis do not do otherwise, since they follow the Cartesian method and confirm its universal validity.

Conversely, when management educators maintain that experience is the first datum of human existence, they walk in the footsteps of Locke and Hume. On the empiricist account, human beings are inscribed in nature. There is small step from these premises to the view that the world is one of cause and effect and that it behaves according to laws and structures that are immutable and universal. Science follows an inductive-deductive method which codifies the phenomenalistic laws that rule the world. A question that cannot be formulated in scientific terms is not a true question; an answer that is not obtained through the methods of science is not a true answer. Organisations operate according to fixed causal patterns which management researchers are to discover, educators to teach and managers to apply. Indeed, as Bacon taught, to know the cause is to be able to produce the effect. That management academia has wedded itself to such a world view is anything but surprising.

Freud accepted scientific premises upon which he built a biological model of the mind. In the psychoanalytical picture, the psyche is a natural entity made of forces which interact with one another and over which the individual has no control. Past and present experiences, especially those of a sexual nature, determine behaviour. Knowledge of these situations and their consequences is attractive to managers and occupational psychologists because it raises the possibility of external control of employees. Psychoanalysis's assumptions find their counterparts in psychiatry, insofar as psychiatrists are committed to the view that mental disorders make individuals behave against their desires. Psychiatrists also hold that these mental (i.e. non-physical) disorders can be treated by physical means (medication or surgery), elementary logic be damned.

Some academics and managers who reject the scientific outlook believe that the test of management is innovation. In their view, innovation demands

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passion and the will to shape one's environment, rather than subjection to an allegedly immutable pre-existing order. Nature is not a great book to be read but, as the German Romantics insisted, a book to be written and the pen is moved by personal will. Enterprising managers create their markets, just as much as they make themselves. *Wer will, der kann.*

These same academics and managers believe, against psychoanalysts and psychiatrists but with existentialists, that individuals are free and responsible for their actions, insofar as they can foresee their consequences. Such people believe that decision-making models, when used by managers to avoid personal responsibility, are little else than attempts to systematise what Sartre called 'bad faith'. Human existence is not reducible to biology, even less to the human genome. Rather than attempting to direct organisations and control their subordinates by way of scientific models, existential managers speak to them in terms of objectives, choices, freedom and responsibility. Employees are not puppets, or victims of internal and external forces: they have reasons for what they do. As Barnard saw, when these reasons disappear, when the moral cost of compliance exceeds its benefits, one ceases to be an employee.

Finally, when management scholars believe that education is not emancipation for the greatest number, but a sophisticated form of social control by which elites maintain themselves and perpetuate oppression of the masses, they demonstrate postmodernism's pervasive influence. In the postmodernist outline, there is no such a thing as truth or if there is, it is unobtainable. All is narrative, power games, evidence of sinister conspiracies. Nothing is certain, not even plain facts, for everything shifts endlessly. These quicksands open avenues to managers and marketing experts. Change is to be made perpetual because employees and consumers in search of references can be controlled by well-crafted storytelling, symbols and other pseudo-cultural artefacts. Management becomes manipulative surveillance and marketing is brainwashing. Anything goes because there is always someone who is convinced to believe it.

In summary, management scholars, including those who are unconcerned by business ethics, have long based their views on mainstream philosophical traditions. Management concepts and research methods are distant, indeed at times distorted and hardly recognisable, descendants of philosophical arguments. Genuine innovation in management literature is extremely rare, just as it has been in Western thought. Like their philosophical precursors, management authors isolate one thread and present it as the dominating pattern of the entire fabric. Like those of a tapestry though, intellectual threads are not meaningful by themselves, but acquire their significance when seen in the context of the overall drapery.

Exposing the philosophical foundations of management thought reveals the vulnerability of its core concepts. Philosophy is critical thinking: the

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more philosophy one learns, the more one becomes familiar with well-rehearsed arguments and counterarguments. In this sense, analysing management thought through the lens of philosophy emerges as a sobering enterprise. In Ghoshal's language, such endeavour pokes holes in the 'pretence of knowledge' of management academics and deflates the arrogance of their students.

A philosophical analysis of the curricula of management schools is unforgiving. Indeed, one cannot view employees consistently as sources of new, unpredictable ideas and human resources whose behaviour is predicted by deterministic psychological or psychiatric models. One cannot hold that employees are controlled by external or internal forces or disorders yet treat them as morally responsible beings. One cannot, in the same breath, teach that employees are free individuals and that management is a science because organisations behave according to law-like patterns. These positions are incompatible because one cannot simultaneously advocate freedom and determinism, at least not without considerable philosophical sophistication that the management literature does not come close to offering.

Similarly, one cannot advocate the rigorous study of organisations and their environments as the source of strategic vision and simultaneously hope that such endeavours will produce competitive advantages in the form of innovation. One cannot be an empiricist and a rationalist at the same time: either ideas come from without, or from within. One learns from experience, or by the progressive modification of innate ideas. One proceeds either inductively from particulars or deductively from universals. The debate about the relevance of management research (which pretends to universality) to managers is another aspect of these alternatives. If one believes, however, that to be innovative managers should ignore traditions, material contingencies or logical difficulties, then one will believe that the above oppositions are misguided. Passion has no time for rationality and discounts experience. Many entrepreneurs have learnt this lesson to their cost.

Fichte insisted that whichever philosophy one adopts is one's responsibility. He also believed that one's preference betrays what kind of person one is. What matters is that one makes an enlightened choice, taking account of what it assumes about human existence, what it explains and what it makes possible. Once the choice is made and its consequences known, the contradictions listed above disappear. One accepts those management concepts which are compatible with one's preferred philosophy and rejects the others as misguided. Although offering no direction of its own, philosophy is a potent prophylactic which clears the confused jungle of management thought.

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PHILOSOPHY AS CITIZENSHIP

In antiquity, disciplines which were essential for free men to master, in order to take an active role in civic life, were collectively called the 'liberal arts'. Initially taught by the Sophists, they revolved around grammar, logic and rhetoric, which were deemed necessary to participate in public debate, defend oneself in court and sit on juries. The Renaissance, the matrix from which modernity developed, revived this educational approach after its medieval decline. One of its central premises, embraced by the Moderns, is that the social order is not God-given but man-made, as the pre-Socratic Greeks taught. One cannot be a (wo)man of the world if one does not know the classics.

Although the 'liberal arts' now include history, literature, languages, philosophy and psychology, the Moderns' educational principle is still pertinent. Despite postmodernists' insistence that State-sanctioned education is an instrument of social control, formal education remains the most effective means through which one acquires the knowledge and skills that are required to defend one's place in society. Scores of empirical studies have shown that educational accomplishment correlates with knowledge of political principles, actors and institutions and with a critical engagement in public affairs.[27] Further, an education that develops the ability and courage to engage in critical thinking preserves the essential legacy of the Enlightenment, namely democratic ideals, freedom of thought, and separation of Church and State. In a democracy, everyone rules indirectly and can pretend to rule directly. President of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins argued that everyone should be educated as rulers should be. If education cultivates the habits, references and skills upon which the democratic ideal rests, notably a general engagement in public affairs, a working knowledge of political and legal principles and the critical thinking skills that intellectual freedom requires, there is no danger in over-educating.

Management education has been criticised for producing graduates with a diminished sense of citizenship. This finding is not altogether surprising. Citizenship is a matter of understanding the broad social framework, one's place within it and the duties that flow therefrom. Citizenship rests also on the ability to reflect critically on the relative importance of the issues that confront society and the possible means to address them. All in all, citizenship is about meaning, words and the ability to relate them to social affairs. This ability is obtained through the study of history, the arts, literature, laws, policies and forms of government. Keeping in mind that business schools have, since their reaction to the 1959 Carnegie and Ford reports, increasingly placed the emphasis on quantitative disciplines but neglected the liberal arts, it stands to reason that their contribution to the civic spirit of their students is not a positive one.

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Social order can be achieved in two ways: self-control on the part of society's members, or force by the agencies of the State. The extent to which the former is an alternative to the latter is a measure of the degree of maturity of society. Anyone committed to the view that organisations must be studied scientifically because they operate according to immutable laws is ultimately committed to a world view in which human beings do not have control over themselves. If organisations behave according to immutable laws, then so must those who compose them. Accordingly, social order is the State's, not the citizens', responsibility. Knowingly or not, willingly or not, management schools, because of their scientific bias, promote this conclusion.

Ideally, management schools should overhaul their curricula and propose only a handful of business subjects (law, economics, accounting and finance) as complements to a liberal arts education. Doing so would bring management programs in line with the spirit of the recommendations of the 1959 Carnegie and Ford reports, repeated in the 2011 Carnegie Foundation report. Such curricula would also make business schools faithful to Wharton's vision of a fundamental body of knowledge for managers grounded on liberal arts and social sciences. Although programs based on these principles exist (in the form of business majors in arts degrees), their generalisation is unlikely to be embraced by faculties of business schools. One is yet to see a revolution welcomed by those it relegates to the periphery. Moreover, consulting companies and investment banks, which have gained access to the advisory boards of many business schools, are likely to resist the transformation. Quantitative skills, cultivated ad nauseam in today's curricula, are the main reason for which these consultancies and corporations hire management graduates.

The inclusion in business school curricula of courses in philosophy modelled on the present book is a realistic alternative to the ideal model broached above. As the preceding chapters show, such courses provide students with overviews of the main movements of thought that have structured Western thinking and illustrate their manifestation in mainstream management disciplines. Matters as diverse as ethics, psychology, political science, literature, aesthetics – that is, the liberal arts – are analysed historically and brought together through a common language. Fichte's assertion that (his) philosophy is the science of all knowledge, the queen of all disciplines, can be received in this light. Even at an introductory level, philosophy underpins all other subjects by connecting the problems they address in their own ways.

For a time, psychology was favoured as the subject through which the tensions between management disciplines would be resolved. After all, what other discipline than psychology, with its insights into human behaviour, could unite the conflicting agendas of employees and their employer, of

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executives and engineers, of humanists and scientists? The influence of Elton Mayo in the 1930s and Abraham Maslow in the 1950s was based, in part, on this conviction. The widespread use of intelligence and personality tests reflects psychology's enduring imprint on management practice.

The scales have fallen from the eyes of those who had been seduced by psychology's delusion. Psychology is unable to address the contradictions between management disciplines because psychologists have long made known, in deeds if not in words, whose side they favour. Having promised to explain (ultimately to predict) behaviour, mainstream psychology had little choice but to fall within the sphere of science. That is, it had to treat human beings as entities subject to internal or external forces – hence the popularity in management circles of the concept of motivation as a cause of behaviour. However, a scientific approach to man's inner world, exemplified by psychoanalysis and psychiatry, reduces man to a string puppet. That the exact nature of the strings has proved elusive has not deterred aspiring puppet masters. Besides, industrial psychology sided with employers since the day it promised productivity improvements based on a judicious selection of applicants, unconscious control of employees, or pacified relationships with unions by way of the psychological well-being of the workforce. Industrial psychologists thus became and largely remain, in Loren Baritz's cruel but apt expression, 'servants of power'.

Philosophy, however, has not sold out. Apart from the unfortunate cases of Plato placing himself alongside the tyrant of Syracuse and Hegel placating the German State, philosophers generally have followed Kant's advice. Even when they provided advice, like Machiavelli, philosophers have shown little sympathy for rulers. Philosophy is concerned with critical reflection, not political engagement. When one crosses the line, one must do so as an individual, not as a philosopher. Those tempted to do otherwise should meditate on Martin Heidegger's example. This is not to say that philosophy is beyond reproach, but to emphasise that it serves no agenda beyond its own. Even those philosophers, like Fichte or Marx, whose ideas have contributed to questionable outcomes, were sincere in their efforts. They wanted to help individuals face their existence by prompting the difficult questions.

One possible objection to this line of argument is that philosophy does not offer a unified account of human existence and is unable to provide students with a trustworthy compass to navigate civic life. That it is indeed impossible to reconcile the main movements of ideas that criss-cross Western thinking does not mean that they are all unfounded or useless. Rather, it means that they offer diverging explorations into the main problems of human existence. Once these investigations have been surveyed and their meaning absorbed, one can retrace one's steps and decide to look no further in their direction. The critical evaluation of assumptions enables awareness

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of alternatives: intellectual freedom has no other possible foundation. In this reading of Western philosophy, philosophers are not individually mistaken and collectively inconsistent, but merely guilty of mistaking the entire horizon for a cardinal point towards which they have directed their readers. All the same, the philosophers examined in this book are giants on whose shoulders one can look deeper within. Philosophy, like citizenship, is concerned with meaning generally and the meaning of human existence specifically. Short of a full-blown liberal arts education, philosophy is the best preparation for responsible civic life. Socrates did not mean otherwise when he enjoined his disciples 'know thyself'. As the intellectual foundation of the liberal arts, philosophy concentrates its teachings and helps one find one's place in society. It is also one of the best preparations for the practice of management.

PHILOSOPHY AS MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

To train is to instruct through drills and rehearsals designed to inculcate procedures, routines and standards that deliver predefined outcomes. Training is not self-legitimating, however. Plato demanded that rulers be philosophers because he saw that even if philosophy teaches conceptual understanding at the expense of practical knowledge, the latter has no value without the former. Practical knowledge without understanding is a means without an end, a solution without a problem. When management schools take pride in delivering purely instrumental, value-free education, they forget that this education does not exist outside of the philosophical and moral frameworks that justify and articulate it. Teaching technical expertise without its conceptual underpinnings runs the risk of producing robotic executants who are unable to understand what they do and why they do it.

The concept of management education is predicated on the assumption that there is a body of knowledge without which the practice of management is impaired. Since technical knowledge does not age well and is industry-specific, this corpus must endure through time and be generic enough that managers require it generally. Now if management is 'getting things done through people', then managers do not do anything by themselves since they have others do it for them. They do, however, need to communicate through language. Management is, therefore, first and foremost a linguistic practice. Accordingly, rhetoric is the prime managerial skill.

Now if one accepts that thinking is talking to oneself (as Socrates explains to the young Theaetetus in Plato's eponymous dialogue), then reasoning is invalid if one's internal dialogue is muddled by terminological confusions. One cannot make meaningful decisions, study organisations insightfully,

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analyse industries or ponder human existence, if one does not understand the consequences of the words used to frame recalcitrant problems. To communicate effectively with their colleagues, students, or subordinates, or talk to themselves when engaging in decision-making and reflective practice, managers need to be sensitive to language. Philosophy is the discipline of choice to develop this skill, because paying attention to the assumptions and consequences of the words one uses is the first demand and thus the first learning outcome of philosophy.

If one believes that, although management concepts are themselves man-made, they point to phenomena which predate their human understanding, then one is bound to believe that there are methods available to managers through which they can predictably improve their practice. Science as positivists define it is understandably the first candidate in the quest for a model through which these management phenomena can be discovered, codified into theories, taught and eventually implemented. As has been noted regularly in this book, this perspective, nascent within management academia at its inception, has achieved today an almost undisputed dominance over its agenda. Roux, Towne, Taylor and those who read the 1959 Ford and Carnegie reports as recommending that management education become scientific certainly thought along those lines.

Ultimately, though, why and how science gained its current dominance in management academia is a secondary point. Of more significance is the recognition of the consequences of this domination. In particular, as Ghoshal and other commentators have noted, modelling management studies on natural science has meant that, in the name of calculability, intentionality, freedom and responsibility were removed from the equations, theories or law-like generalisations taught to management students. For the same reasons, employees and consumers have had to be levelled down to the status of agency-less economic resources.

As argued in this book, if science is the process through which consensual, predictive knowledge about the world is generated and accumulated, there is no alternative to positivism: science is positivist, or it is not science. This conclusion does not mean that there is nothing more to human existence than what positivist science offers, for positivism cannot shake off its Humean legacy and its denial of the subject. What it does mean, however, is that the study and practice of management cannot be reconciled with science as positivism defines it. No matter how legitimating this vision is to management researchers, educators and practitioners, it must be abandoned, for pursuing it cannot come at the price of reducing employees to the status of objects bereft of the ability to reason and choose. This abandonment will not be at management studies' cost: if science is unable to account for basic aspects of management practice, then so much the worse for science.

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Those who resist such a conclusion must concede that positivism is itself a philosophical tradition, built on philosophical arguments and proposed as an attempt to overcome philosophical problems. In other words, even if one believes that management is or should be a science because organisations are governed by invariable laws, one must still accept the claim made above, albeit at a degree once removed: management concepts do not exist outside of the philosophical foundations that made their formulation possible. Above all, what remains certain is that the study and practice of management are impossible in the absence of philosophical references, in the darkness of an imprecise language, or in the senseless profile of a world without intellectual perspective. Learning management concepts without insights into the worldviews upon which they rest can result only in superficial, short-lived learning. Indeed, to know a concept is to understand what it assumes, that is, to be able argue for or against it. There is no competence without wisdom.

Further, if science's knife is too blunt to dissect management, philosophy's is not. This conclusion rests on this book's central thesis: what is taught in management schools finds its roots in long-standing philosophical arguments. Understanding management concepts means reaching back to the intellectual substrata that nourished them. Only the most direct of this lineage was discussed in the preceding chapters. Going further and deeper into the identification of the philosophical foundations of management thought represents an exciting research program for philosophers and management academics alike. The former can seize this research program as an opportunity to exhibit the tangible manifestation of a discipline often derided for its practical irrelevance; the latter can extract from it the insights with which to repair their confused discipline. If these arguments are heeded, if philosophy becomes the foundation upon which management research and curricula are rebuilt, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which the management school becomes the place where applied philosophy thrives. An unlikely outcome no doubt, but one in the pursuit of which this book has been written. One aims for the stars to have a chance not to end in the mud.

Without the insights of philosophy, students, academics and managers alike will remain the slaves of unrecognised blind spots, biases and contradictions. Yet, when confronted by philosophical perspectives, some managers complain of their inability to decide which of the Western world-views is superior. This is not, however, a paralysing dilemma. As the existentialists emphasised, if one exists one acts and if one acts one chooses. To paraphrase Kurt Lewin's celebrated saying, 'There is nothing as practical as good philosophy'. Management, then, is philosophy in action.

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NOTES

1. Other corporate heads preferred to sabotage their machinery rather than seeing it falling in Nazi hands. These matters are explored in de Rochebrune, R. & Hazera, J.-C. 2013. *Les Patrons Sous l'Occupation*. Paris: Odile Jacob (see p. 316 for the Photomaton anecdote). Although the authenticity of de Gaulle's quote is disputed, that it reflected his opinion on French bosses is not.

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5. Roux, V. 1800. *De l'Influence du Gouvernement sur la Prospérité du Commerce*. Paris: Fayolle, pp. 310–11.

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16. Ghoshal, S. 2005. Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practices. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4: 75–91; see p. 77.

17. Mintzberg, H. 2004. *Managers Not MBAs*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler.

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20. Thomas, H., Lorange, P. & Sheth, J. 2013. *The Business School in the Twenty-first Century: Emergent Challenges and New Business Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (the quotation is from p. viii).

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24. Boyer, E. L. 1990. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

25. Dilthey, W. 1989. *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Volume 1 (Selected Works). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Dilthey's arguments have had a rich legacy, since they influenced Max Weber, Ernst Gellner, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Peter Winch, among many.

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27. See Nie, N. H., Junn, J. & Stehlik-Barry, K. 1996. *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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Name Index

Abelard, P., 69
Achilles, 7–8, 10–13, 15, 23–24, 28, 199
Adler, A., 133, 208
Adorno, T. W., 288
Agamemnon, 11–13, 24, 25n6
Alembert, J. le R. d', 158
Alexander the Great, 1, 44, 47
Alvesson, M., 302–3, 317n36
Andreski, S., 4, 125
Aquinas, T., 50, 69–70, 80, 89n35
Aristotle, 1, 4, 30, 39, 44, 47, 49–51, 55, 61, 69, 72, 78, 79, 91, 138, 143, 158, 187, 252, 265, 295
Ayer, A., 252–53, 285

Bacon, F., 91–92, 103, 113, 138–39, 143, 157, 265, 332
Baritz, L., 337
Barnard, C. I., 246, 333
Barthes, R., 291
Baudrillard, J., 292–93, 303, 305–6, 308–9
Beauvoir, S. de, 230, 236
Beethoven, L. van, 173, 176, 191, 244
Bentham, J., 290, 300
Berkeley, G., 93–95, 103, 238
Berne, E., 212
Borgia, C., 52, 56
Boyer, E. L., 329
Breuer, J., 207–8
Brontë sisters, 176

Caesar, J., 61, 191, 199, 201
Camus, A., 230, 251–53, 285
Carnegie Foundation, 145, 324, 326, 328–31, 335–36, 339
Carnegie School, 123
Charcot, J.-M., 206
Chesterton, G. K., 226
Chisholm, G. B., 223
Chopin, F., 176
Cicero., 48, 51, 55–56
Comte, A., 114–21, 123, 126–29, 130nn1, 17, 131n31, 133, 134, 138–39, 183, 187, 206
Copernicus, N., 72, 166

Darwin, C., 119, 130n20, 138, 154n21, 193–94, 199, 229, 265, 270, 281n25, 282n44
Debord, G., 292, 305
Derrida, J., 291, 293, 303, 305–6, 308, 310, 316n24
Descartes, R., 74–87, 88nn3, 5, 88n20, 89n35, 91, 93–94, 96–97, 99, 102, 115, 117–18, 128, 139, 157–61, 165–66, 168, 183, 187, 191, 205,

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233, 235, 238, 248–49, 252, 255n14, 257–59, 262, 264, 290, 294, 332
Dewey, J., 258, 265–70, 274, 280, 285
Diderot, D., 158
Dilthey, W., 329
Drucker, P. F., 3, 16–25, 108, 200, 224–25, 247–48, 274–75, 301, 311, 330–31
Durkheim, E., 119–20, 123

Euripides, 29–30, 65n1
Eysenck, H. J., 214

Fayol, H., 176, 274
Feyerabend, P., 134, 296–97, 305–6, 311, 316n27
Fichte, J. G., 1, 166–70, 172, 174–76, 334, 337
Finkielkraut, A., 313
Flexner, A., 323
Ford (Foundation), 144, 275, 324, 326, 328, 330–31, 335–36, 339
Ford, H., 122, 178, 322–23
Foucault, M., 42, 289–90, 293, 303, 305, 309–10
Frankfurt School, 289, 292, 302
Freud, S., 1–2, 206–16, 226, 227n13, 229, 232, 240, 249, 273, 288, 306, 308, 332
Friedrich, C. J., 176

Gadamer, H.-G., 342n25
Galileo, 72–73, 75, 81, 296
Gaulle, C. de, 236, 319, 341n1
Gellner, E., 342n25
Ghoshal, S., 128–29, 176, 339
Goethe, J. W., 163, 167–68, 185, 191

Habermas, J., 304, 306
Hawthorne studies, 126
Hegel, G. W. F., 134, 141–43, 154n37, 231, 238, 310, 337
Heidegger, M., 2, 230, 232–36, 242, 247–52, 291, 295
Heraclitus, 28, 32, 65n1, 141
Herder, J. G., 161–62, 170, 176
Hesiod, 51, 141
Hitler, A., 170, 312
Holbach, P. H. T. d', 159
Homer, 2–3, 7–8, 10–15, 19, 22–25, 27–30, 32, 38, 43, 51, 161, 194–95, 331
Horkheimer, M., 288–89, 302
Hume, D., 1, 94–106, 109, 113, 117, 134–35, 148, 152, 161–62, 165–66, 250, 257, 308, 332, 339
Husserl, E., 236, 238, 249

James, W., 3, 258, 262–66, 269–70, 280
Jaspers, K., 230, 232, 235, 242, 248, 251
Jobs, S., 63, 178–79
Jung, C., 208, 213, 227n12, 288

Kant, I., 3–4, 42, 164–71, 174, 184, 189, 202, 205–6, 225, 230–31, 233, 235, 237, 242, 249–50, 257, 287, 290, 294, 307, 313, 337
Kepler, J., 72, 138
Khurana, R., 329
Kierkegaard, S., 3, 230–32, 235, 242, 247, 251, 308
Kotter, J. P., 301
Kraus, K., 216
Kuhn, T., 295–96, 303, 310–11

Lacan, J., 227n12, 291, 308
Lakatos. I., 134
Leibniz, G. W., 159–61, 258
Lévi-Strauss, C., 293
Livingston, S. J., 325
Locke, J., 1, 92–95, 97, 103, 158, 165–66, 168, 257, 294, 332
Lyotard, J.-F., 298, 301, 305

Machiavelli, N., 1, 3, 47, 52–65, 66nn3, 24, 67n42, 160, 179, 194, 201–2, 328, 331, 337
MacIntyre, A., 158
Mao, Z., 144, 312

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Marcuse, H., 292
Marx, K., 1, 4, 14–16, 21, 114, 119, 134, 141–43, 155n39, 236, 250–51, 254, 289, 292–93, 299, 306, 337
Maslow, A., 243, 244, 337
Mayo, E., 337
Mead, G. H., 224, 258, 270–74, 280, 282n44
Melville, H., 176
Merleau-Ponty, M., 249
Michelangelo, 51, 173
Mintzberg, H., 176–77, 327
Montaigne, M. de, 51, 180n2
Montesquieu, C. L. de, 158

Napoleon I, 1, 170, 191, 199, 201, 237
Newton, I., 74, 95, 113–15, 138, 151, 153, 157–58, 165, 176, 295, 311
Nietzsche, F., 1–3, 83, 89n46, 180, 184–204, 226, 229–30, 232–33, 235, 247, 249–51, 253, 279–80, 285, 287–90, 293–94, 297–98, 305, 308, 313–14, 319, 328, 331
Nozick, R., 297

Ockham, W., 70–72, 76, 79, 81, 87, 98, 279
Odiorne, G. S., 244
Odysseus, 11–13, 24
Orwell, G., 42, 108, 300

Patton, G. S., 3, 15, 24
Peirce, C. S., 258–64, 266–67, 270, 274, 277–80, 295
Peters, T. J., 177–79, 200, 326
Petrarch, F., 51
Plato, 1–3, 27, 30, 32–44, 45n15, 46nn26, 27, 47–51, 55, 59, 70, 75–76, 79–81, 83–84, 91, 94, 109, 118, 123, 130n17, 134, 141–43, 154n36, 158, 161, 166, 170, 173, 175, 180n2, 187–88, 190–91, 195, 201, 203, 206, 225, 233, 235, 237, 249, 257, 265, 267, 286–87, 291, 297–98, 308, 332, 337–38
Popper, K. R., 46, 133–44, 146, 148–53, 154nn21, 32, 37, 155n39, 214, 260, 295, 310
Porter, M. E., 86–87, 126, 145–46, 148
Prometheus, 183, 203
Protagoras, 39, 297

Quine W. V. O., 153n4, 293–95, 307, 310

Reid, T., 103
Ricœur, P., 290
Rome (Roman), 47–49, 51–54, 56, 58, 61–62, 67n42, 191, 193, 195, 202, 309
Rorty, R., 294–96, 299, 306
Rousseau, J.-J., 1, 159
Roux, V., 320–21, 323–25, 328, 330, 339
Russell, B., 120, 269–70, 285, 297

Saint-Simon, H. de, 114
Sartre, J.-P., 2, 230–31, 235–43, 245–51, 253, 255n14, 286, 308, 333
Sass, S., 341n6
Saussure, F. de, 293
Say, J.-B., 320, 322–25, 328, 330
Schiller, F., 163–64, 168
Schopenhauer, A., 2, 170–74, 180, 185–86, 205–6
Seneca, 48, 55, 196
Shakespeare, W., 59, 161, 198, 313
Shelley, M., 176
Simon, H. A., 123, 125, 131n23
Smith, A., 320, 322–23
Socrates, 27, 30–35, 37, 39, 42, 44, 45n5, 46nn27, 30, 49–50, 91, 109, 180n2, 185, 187–88, 196, 201, 297, 335, 338
Stalin, J., 60, 221, 312
Stendhal, 173
Stevenson, R. L., 176
Stirner, M. (Schmidt, J. K.), 253–54, 286

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Stoker, A., 176
Stove, D., 104, 151–52
Szasz, T., 220–24

Taylor, F. W., 24, 85–86, 122–23, 128, 176, 275, 322–23, 328, 339

Vauvenargues, L. de, 158
Vico, G., 180n2
Vienna Circle, 120, 130, 134, 138, 235, 260
Voltaire, 1, 158, 161–62, 236

Wagner, R., 174, 176, 185–86, 198
Weber, M., 120, 123, 199, 301, 309, 342n25
Welch, J., 19, 25, 63
Wharton, J., 321, 324, 330–31, 336
Whitehead, A. N., 3
Whyte, W., 301
Wilde, O., 176
Winch, P., 342n25
Wittgenstein, L., 83, 120, 161, 235, 294–96, 298, 307, 312
Wolff, C., 160–61

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