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The Philosophical Foundations of Management Thought

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I argue that managers, management academics, and management students benefit from being knowledgeable in Western philosophy. To that effect, a survey of six major themes of Western philosophy is offered: heroism, rationalism, positivism, romanticism, existentialism, and postmodernism. This survey reveals that the dominating themes taught in management schools have recognizable philosophical origins: Power in human relationships is a heroic concept; the case for management education is of rationalist descent; and the conviction that research is to be a value-free, inductive enterprise is a legacy of positivism. Further, the importance of innovation is a romantic theme; accepting one's personal responsibility for one's decisions is a distinctively existentialist demand; and the idea that the world and human existence are without firm foundations is the dominating message of postmodernism. Knowingly or not, in one way or another, all important management authors inscribe themselves in at least one of these traditions. No management education is complete if it is not anchored in their understanding.

The last 15 years have seen the emergence of a small but slowly growing body of literature arguing that management academics, management students, and managers benefit from being knowledgeable in philosophy. Among the precursors, Lynch and Dicker (1998: iii) attempted to show in a series of collected essays that administration thought and philosophy could be united. In a related vein, Laurie and Cherry (2001) encouraged management pundits to explore the tenets of management theory and practice by analyzing managerial ideologies and language through a philosophical lens. The journal they founded the same year to that purpose is now called the *Philosophy of Management Journal*; in 2004, the *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy* was established with comparable intentions. Arguing that no knowledge creation could take place outside of a philosophical framework, Chia (2002) offered a review of the philosophical underpinnings of management research. Managers have been encouraged to engage with philosophy, on the grounds that it develops managerial wisdom, deepens one's understanding of the complexity of management life, and improves creative and critical thinking skills (Chia & Morgan, 1996; Small, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Heeding these recommendations, executives have asked professional philosophers to help them analyze and address sensitive situations (de Borchgrave, 2006: 97–214). Independently of these developments, the long-existing business ethics literature draws abundantly from philosophy and offers countless philosophically inspired advice.

In this essay, I return to Lynch and Dicker's agenda with a view of expanding it to management thought. I contend that concepts that are the bread and butter of management academics have direct, if often unrecognized, philosophical foundations. This contention has two notable consequences. First, management schools should concern themselves with these foundations, for those who have an interest in management thought will only be able to grasp and communicate its full meaning if they appreciate its underlying worldviews and its consequences. Second, if management thought is

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a manifestation of philosophical thought, then controversies that regularly surface in the management literature must be analyzed in the terms of their philosophical origins, because their frustrating irreducibility is a manifestation of the incompatibility of the philosophical assumptions that underpin them.

To the extent that management thought is of Western descent (all major management writers are Westerners), the origins of what is taught in management schools must be sought in Western philosophy. This is not to insinuate that Eastern philosophy is not worthy of interest for whoever studies management. Quite the reverse; the fact remains, however, that with the possible exception of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* (McNeilly, 2011), Eastern thinking has had no demonstrable influence on mainstream management concepts.

The argument I offer here is structured as follows: After some remarks justifying its structure, a simplified historic–thematic overview of major themes of Western philosophy is proposed, in which the philosophical lineages of salient management concepts are highlighted. This overview is not exhaustive but suffices to show that management thought forms a complex jigsaw puzzle, one which cannot be assembled into a neat, meaningful, and reassuring picture but can still be partially ordered along a few important if irreconcilable philosophical themes. A discussion on the consequences of this finding and on the practical value of philosophy to managers, management students, and management academics is offered as a conclusion, which signposts directions for future research.

PHILOSOPHY FOR MANAGERS

In his *magnum opus*, English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1978: 39) commented that European philosophy is best characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato. If this is the case, then a necessarily brief survey of Western thought must focus on those major movements of thought that either predate (so as to provide context), agree, or disagree most directly with Plato's philosophy. Six important philosophical themes have hence been retained: heroism (the dominating worldview before Plato); rationalism (the branch of philosophy that started in earnest with Plato); positivism (a philosophy that dismisses many of rationalism's assumptions); romanticism (a philosophy that rejects both rationalism and positivism); existentialism (an actualized outgrowth of romanticism); and postmodernism (the West's latest output, which also rejects the Platonic tradition). Why other important philosophies have not been reviewed is justified later.

The thematic–historic review of Western philosophy proposed below is summarized in Table 1 along six dimensions: The important themes of the philosophies discussed, what they mean for an individual committed to them (their psychological emphasis), and how these themes and emphases translate in management thought and from a manager's perspective. Representative philosophers of each philosophy are provided, and the corresponding management authors mentioned in the article are also listed. I appreciate that classifying Fichte and Nietzsche as romantic philosophers will be tantamount to heresy for some readers and that reducing three millennia of Western thinking into a six-by-six table will seem laughable to others. If Table 1 aimed at exactitude, both charges would be justified; this is not the case, however, because Table 1 below is only offered as a rough-and-ready roadmap to help navigate what is a very rich body of ideas. A further warning: The length of the section below will presumably test readers' patience, but it is important to provide a reasonable account of each philosophy for the conclusions of the article to be acceptable. Connections between philosophical concepts and well-known management themes are regularly provided throughout the exposition; familiarity with the latter will hopefully facilitate understanding of the former and ease what I recognize is a dense reading.

Heroism

Heroism, the worldview that emerges from Homer's poems, is the mandatory starting point for anyone interested in the historical development of Western thinking. From the text of the *Iliad* (Lattimore, 1961), the story it tells, and the actions of its main protagonists, it is possible to reconstruct in valuable terms how Western man, some 3,000 years ago, conceived of his existence and of the world in which he lived. These conceptions are not limited to Ancient Greece and Western man; they pervaded Bushido Japan, Viking-Age (7th to 11th century) Scandinavia, and 8th century Celtic Ireland, all cultures characterized by an emphasis on nobility, courage, fortitude, warring skill, honor, and commitment to standards (MacIntyre, 2007: 121–130).

To modern eyes, *heroism* is the ability to swim against the tide and to defy expectations to create new ones, with all the risks this entails to personal survival and social stability; *ancient heroism*

TABLE 1
Summary of Major Philosophical Themes and Their Emergence in Management Thought

Philosophy	Representative author(s)	Important themes	Psychological emphasis	Corresponding themes in management thought	Manager's emphasis	Noted management author(s)
Heroism	Homer; Niccolò Machiavelli; Friedrich Nietzsche	Roles; rules; rewards; power; performance.	Perform!	Management by objectives; performance; training; results.	Skills	Peter Drucker
Rationalism	Plato; René Descartes; Karl Popper	Reason; rulership as a body of knowledge; truth; deduction; universals.	I deduct	Managers to be educated; insights; analysis; planning.	Analysis	Michael Porter
Positivism	David Hume; Auguste Comte	Facts; laws; induction; determinism.	I induct	Positivism is the current dominating worldview within management academia.	Evidence	Herbert Simon
Romanticism	Johann Gottlieb Fichte; Friedrich Nietzsche	Will; inspiration; passion; resistance; subjectivity.	I will	Resilience, innovation; creativity; entrepreneurship.	Determination	Tom Peters
Existentialism	Jean-Paul Sartre	'I'; freedom; responsibility.	I am free and responsible	decision making; authority; independence.	Autonomy	Chester Barnard
Postmodernism	Michel Foucault; Paul Feyerabend; Jean Baudrillard	Narratives; knowledge as socially constructed; absence of foundations; interpretation; language games.	I am without certainties	Multiculturalism; managers as leaders; organizational culture; change management; Critical Management Studies.	Story telling	John Kotter

consists in the exact opposite. In (ancient) heroic societies, individuals are defined by their roles, to which are attached expectations of performance, rules of behavior, 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. Heroes are those characters who have excelled in meeting the social expectations placed upon them. In Homer's poems, promotion to rulership is reserved to whomever has triumphed on the battlefield. Warriors are to be brave and resourceful in battle, young men bold and impulsive, old men wise and prudent, women beautiful, chaste, and faithful. These virtues are not something for the *Iliad*'s characters to like or dislike or from which they could distance themselves because 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 at the hands of their friends or enemies. Running in fear before the terrifying Achilles, Hector, Troy's champion, has become "a dog" (Lattimore, 1961: 444); escaping with her lover, Helen, former queen of Sparta, is now, in her own words, a "bitch" (1961: 162). A strong sense of purpose animates the characters of the *Iliad*. For the Achaeans, Troy must fall and Helen be 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 understandable: Without an overall goal, heroic life becomes inexplicable, absurd even, since without it, the entire edifice of roles, rules, and rewards collapses.

Homer had no words and hence no concept for "self," "mind," "soul," or "personality"; heroic man is body and behavior, that is, body and body only (Snell,

1982: 8–12). Although the various characters differ from one another and are insistently so described, Homer did not see them as inhabited by a puppet master pulling strings of behavior. No distinction is made in the poem between doer and deed, between action and actor: One is strictly what one does. This lack of psychological substratum is coherent with the observation that Homer's characters do not, indeed cannot, strive for self-affirmation as the modern conception of heroism implies, but only can strive for social recognition. Heroic societies are inherently stable; the price to pay for a culture of excellence according to exacting standards is the unquestioned perpetuation of traditions. To wit, heroism enjoyed an exceptional longevity: It was the dominating worldview from at least the time one of the earliest texts known, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, was written (between 2800 and 2500 BC; Dalley, 1989: 40) until the days of Homer (9th to 7th centuries BC).

Authors who describe management as a task, structured by codified practices and entailing clear responsibilities can thus hardly make a claim to originality. Underpinning Peter Drucker's (1989: 122) "Management by Objectives and Self-Control" (MBO) framework is the conviction that managers are to focus on what the job—as opposed to the boss—requires. For Drucker (1974: 243–244), to ask of managers to probe the personalities of their colleagues is not only morally repugnant and counterproductive, it is also to ask them to lose sight of what really matters: contribution to the overall goal of the organization. For the organization to operate and be more than the collection of its individual employees, a common language is required. This, Drucker held, is possible only through the definition and enforcement of unambiguous objectives supported by workmanship standards. Without objectives, none of management's basic tasks (planning, delegation, performance measurement, decision making, employee development, etc.) is possible, and no leadership can ever take place. Objectives are neither given nor self-evident; setting them is precisely what managing is about. As for seeing them through, Drucker (1989: 145) was straightforward: Poor performance cannot be tolerated and consistently nonperforming employees have to be dismissed. Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers have to perform or be fired.

"Homer's heroes had to perform or be slain; Drucker's managers have to perform or be fired."

Management by objectives inherits heroism's Achilles' heel. Drucker repeatedly emphasized the importance of innovation throughout his books; given the premises of MBO though, one fails to see how it can be possible (Roth, 2009). Innovation means risk taking, and risk taking means the possibility of failure, yet the latter is as intolerable within MBO as it is in the *Iliad*. Similarly, even though Drucker (1974: 45–46) was adamant that managers should strive for effectiveness more than for efficiency, the latter is more likely to be the outcome of MBO; at best, one can expect refinements. Drucker's lifetime passion for Japan and his persistent praise of continuous improvement, Japanese style, illustrate this weakness of his arguments. If many technological improvements as well as efficient management techniques have come from Japan, genuinely innovative products or business practices are not parts of this country's otherwise rich legacy. Little surprise here, in that Japan is still marked by its recent heroic, Bushido style past (Drucker's "heroism" receives a more complete development in Joullié & Spillane, 2015).

Drucker was not the first one to make (implicitly) the case for a return to a heroic worldview. As far as the running of organizations goes, he was preceded by a political theorist with a sulphurous reputation: Niccolò Machiavelli (1995). Revolted by the political decomposition of Renaissance Italy and isolated in his study after having lost his senior position within the Florentine administration, Machiavelli did not hesitate in his arguments, writing advice he thought would be appreciated by statesmen. His objective: unite and restore his country to imperial glory. His models: Rome and Ancient Greece, for him unrivalled examples of human achievement. Just as the foundation of Rome required the murder of Remus, success can demand extreme sacrifice. Men, being "ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers" (Machiavelli, 1995: 52) must be protected from themselves if they want to enjoy peace and prosperity. This is only possible if the State is strong and led by a determined and cunning ruler. To maintain his rule (or hers: Machiavelli praised many female leaders for their fierce determination, see Clarke, 2005, on this point) and preserve the State, a prince "should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary" (Machiavelli, 1995: 56), acting as a lion to frighten off the wolves and as a fox to recognize the traps.

Shocking as he has ever been, Machiavelli was a thinker of his time: Like the Renaissance artists around him, he found inspiration in the pagan,

pre-Christian world. He thought that the price Italy paid for Christian truth had been too high because it brought about the downfall of the Roman Empire. This is because Christianity demoted "worldly honour [and] glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action, [assigning] as man's highest good humility, abnegation, and contempt for mundane things" (Machiavelli, 2003: 277–278). In contrast, Rome's, Athens', and Sparta's religions 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" (2003: 278). God is not going to help: In place of the Christian ethics, the heroic values must be revived, for worldly power is a means as much as it is an end. *Vae victis*.

Even though he was writing for the benefit of heads of state, Machiavelli's lessons have been often transposed onto the management of private or institutional interests (e.g., Galie & Bopst, 2006; Julius, Baldridge, & Pfeffer, 1999). To secure their position and strengthen their organization or department, or so the Machiavellian advice runs, managers must surround themselves with a loyal team, protect the friendship of those who can help, but remove anyone who stands in their way. Executives are to choose their battles carefully but, once committed, must fight to win, no matter the moral costs. True protection of one's employees is not a display of Christian empathy but the rigid demand of organizational performance; a manager who tolerates a poor performer is failing everyone else. If management is "getting things done through people" and if power is the ability to bring events to pass, then management cannot be differentiated from the exercise of power. As Pfeffer (2010: 85) wrote in words Machiavelli would have endorsed, "acquiring real clout—the kind that helps you get stuff done—requires bare-knuckle strategies." The end justifies the means, since the two cannot be dissociated.

In the *Iliad*, Homer's heroes demonstrate courage, resilience, and determination. They hold themselves and their peers to exacting standards. They respect seniority, but excellence remains their ultimate value. When they do not rise to the expectations invested in them, they do not blame anyone but themselves. They do not complain or engage in self-pity but proudly confront their difficulties, for the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory. When they go down, they do so defiantly, standing their ground. They often express intense emotions but strive to dominate them and feel humiliated when they do not; maintaining a noble stance in all circumstances is paramount to them. Friedrich Nietzsche (1998: 153–156) wished he had been able to say the same things of 19th century Western man. He praised Machiavelli's diagnosis of Renaissance Italy but took his arguments further. For Nietzsche, the moral predicament was much more serious than the Florentine had diagnosed. He saw no alternative to Western decadence from within the Christian ethics, which he deemed to be of slavish origins, suitable only for the weak willed. He analyzed Christianity as antinature, because it imposes the same values on everyone, ignoring that there are lambs and that there are eagles. Lambs will never fly, and holding it against eagles who act as birds of prey is absurd; preventing them from soaring above the herd is self-defeating, because it castrates humankind of its most glorious individuals. Nietzsche (1989: 29) thought that the "Greek nobility," the master-type individuals, strong willed and powerful, must be allowed to grow and dominate, for they are the only ones able to take Western culture to new heights. Nietzsche's "heroic individualism" (Thiele, 1990: 9) is extreme; yet it resonates today in contributions that argue that leadership is contingent on innate or acquired personality traits and that the leader is the "great man" able to take his organization to unchartered heights (see Hoffman, Woehr, Maldagen-Youngjohn, & Lyons, 2010; for a review and critique of this perspective; see also Khurana, 2002).

Rationalism

In Ionia (present day coastal Anatolia), by the 6th century BC, men started to inquire into the makeup of the world. Thales' answer (he proposed that the world was really water since almost everything contains or can take a liquid form) no doubt appears naïve to modern eyes, but it signals a momentous shift in thinking, never reneged upon since: There is more to the world that meets the eye. Reason leads to an understanding of what there is, as opposed to what appears to be. Coming after these Ionian pioneers, engaged in disinterested cosmological speculations, the Sophists inquired into more practical and immediate concerns. They notably preoccupied themselves with the art of living, which included the necessity of making money. Management educators before the time of management education, the Sophists instructed the young Greek elite and groomed it for prominent roles. No man in a Greek city-state could hope to attain a position of influence if he

was not capable of speaking in public—speaking well that is—and the Sophists were recognized expert rhetoricians. For a fee, they were ready to help anyone argue his 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 them. An enduring legacy of the Sophists is that they redirected thinkers' attention from inquiries into the ultimate nature of the world to ones that revolve around man and how he should live his life. In this capacity, they set the stage for the entrance of Western philosophy's perhaps most famous figures, Socrates and his devoted disciple, Plato.

Socrates and Plato dismissed heroism's acceptance of established traditions wholesale: Why should one obey the laws? What is justice? Goodness? Beauty? How should an ideal society be organized? In a move that would become rationalism's trademark, Plato (1970: 291ff) considered that only reason, not sense-perception, can lead to knowledge and answers to these questions. The good man is no longer the mighty warrior, but the wise man, he who through dialogue, logic, and argumentation arrives at Truth. Plato believed in the existence of two worlds, the world of everyday experience and another, for him, the real world. He thought that beyond appearances lies essence, that particulars (objects, properties, or moral values) can be recognized for what they are because they are imperfect representations of their respective perfect, unchanging and timeless universals, the "Forms," the understanding of which is accessible by way of the exercise of reason. In Books II to V of *The Republic*, Plato held that the ideal society is one that is ruled by those who care only for the common good, who seek truth, justice, and knowledge of the Forms but not material affluence, because the pursuit of riches is a source of corruption: Rulers must be philosophers and philosophers must be rulers (1970: 252). Detailed legislation about the conduct of society is not required because legislation is ineffective if people are not spontaneously disinclined to engage in wrong behavior. To that effect, basic moral education will be provided to all, but those in charge of the city are to be educated in rhetoric, literature, logic, mathematics, and history. These rulers will be seconded by brave, loyal, if intellectually limited, auxiliaries (Homer's heroes), who will execute their rulers' orders and protect the city from internal or external threats. As for the rest of society, the artisans, farmers, tradespeople, and merchants, they had better remain quiet and busy themselves with their own affairs. 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 expertise, on each and every aspect of their children's and patients' lives.

Plato (1970: 189ff) supported his three-layer model of society by a corresponding theory of man. He believed indeed that there was more to man than his body and held that the difference between a living and a dead man was the psyche, an immortal and immaterial substance trapped in the body. The psyche (or mind), Plato argued, although unitary, is composed of three elements: Reason, Spirit, and Appetite. *Reason* is the rational part, the ability to think logically, to proceed through careful argumentation and calculation toward the truth; *Spirit* is that part of the psyche that enables men to act out of a sense of duty and honor; the *Appetitive* part is where man's instincts are located, that which is directly connected with the body and its desires. The three elements of the psyche are in constant tension with one another, and men fall into three different classes depending on whichever part of their psyche is dominant. The rulers-philosophers are those in whom Reason is the strongest; they seek truth and their main virtue is wisdom. Their auxiliaries seek honor, behave according to their Spirit, and their important virtue is courage. As for the people whose function it is to provide the community with goods and services, they are dominated by their Appetites and seek gain. As long as they remain moderate in their demands, all is good for them. Such a society, Plato held, provides a social position that is consistent with each citizen's psychological abilities; it achieves individual happiness through social harmony and vice-versa.

With these recommendations, Plato is at the inception of a considerable number of ideas that reverberate in management thought. To start with the more mundane, he was the first to suggest that myths, values, and statuses, rather that detailed rules, are effective yet noncoercive ways to regulate behavior. This is tantamount to saying that culture is a controlling mechanism experienced as freedom, an insight that the management literature has not ignored (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Plato invented organization theory by proposing and justifying a multitiered model of society. Moreover, in his view, one's position is not to be attributed on the basis of merit, but on the basis of psychological structuring and dynamics acquired or reinforced during upbringing. In other words, Plato was the

first to argue that selection and promotion should be based upon what is often today called *personality*. Further, those who will make decisions on behalf of the group are to receive a different upbringing from that required for those who will execute their orders. For Plato, education was paramount to rulership; in 387 BC Athens he founded what can be considered the first ever Western management school, The Academy, as a place to lecture and study mathematical, historical, and political questions and where his philosopher-kings would complete their formal schooling. In its broadest outline, The Academy's curriculum has survived to this day, since management schools still propose a combination of quantitative and qualitative subjects. Aristotle, whose works would redirect thinkers' attention from supernatural entities to worldlier matters, studied at The Academy and hoped to take over Plato's chair. In the event, a forgotten rival was preferred. Not that this memorable appointment blunder prevented the institution from enjoying an enviable legacy: Plato's heroes, the academics, have accepted his challenge and made theirs the claim that, if they are not to rule themselves, at least they are to educate those who will (a moved that also ensured the highly politicized nature of education).

"Plato is at the inception of a considerable number of ideas that reverberate in management thought."

In the wake of the political disintegration that followed the fall of the Roman Empire, rationalism took a back seat for centuries. Many great philosophers flourished in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but the conditions that resulted in the civilization-shaping intellectual vitality of 4th century Athens were not reproduced until Florence and the Italian Renaissance. In any case, the exceptional filiation that runs from Socrates to Plato to Aristotle, like an alignment of celestial bodies that happens only once every thousands of years, has not been observed since. By the end of the 16th century, it was up to a French philosopher, René Descartes, to provide the rationalist flame a renewed source of energy.

Descartes (1987) was among the first thinkers to confront the tensions that had by his lifetime developed between religion and the beginnings of science. The study of man's body was progressing fast, and the circulatory and respiratory systems had been discovered. Like that of the planets, the movements of which were progressively chartered with greater accuracy, it seemed that the day would soon come when man's behavior would be explained and predicted by way of causal laws, making freedom an unnecessary concept. Christianity, however, demanded freedom to establish personal responsibility and justify its ethics. Besides, an omnipotent God is not constrained by His own promises, be they implicit; even though He has made the world behave in constant ways so far, He can decide to change them tomorrow. Objects fall when they are released and may have done so from the beginning of time; this cannot be a promise of God that they will do so tomorrow, because God cannot have His powers curtailed even by Himself. If this is the case though, then science, which seeks to discover regularities in the workings of nature, is pointless.

A devout Christian and a considerable mathematician, Descartes took on the task of finding answers to these problems and reconciling his faith with his scientific commitment. Since no man of religion and no man of science could claim to know the truth in their respective fields without being exposed to rebuke, Descartes decided he could not take any of their teachings for certain. He soon realized that he could doubt everything, even that he had a body or that 2 + 3 really made 5, but that he could not doubt that he was doubting. Since doubting is a form of thinking, and since he could not think without being something, Descartes (1987: 78) concluded that thinking is a proof of existence. In the small corner of his self-consciousness, no one, not even God or an evil genius could deceive him in reaching this conclusion. Man is a "thing that thinks": The senses are fallible and often mislead; the mind, however, when it presents to itself clear and distinct ideas cannot be mistaken. It is upon these innate, self-evidently true propositions that human knowledge is to be rebuilt deductively, as per rationalism's foundational credo.

Descartes further held that the "thinking thing," the "I," mind or soul, is free because it is immaterial and unextended, free to think and free to choose; Christianity's ethics are safe. Conversely, the body is material and extended. It is not free; machine-like, it belongs to nature and does not escape its laws. Besides, God has no reason to lead man to believe that the world behaves in this or that way, only to change these ways later on a whim. Doing this would be tantamount to deception, but one engages in deception only when one has interests to protect. God, however, is everything and does not recognize

interests that are not His: He cannot be a deceiver since He has no agenda to further. Science can safely proceed and study nature as God is watching indifferently. Science, however, has nothing to say on the workings of the soul; this is the realm of faith and theology, which in turn must remain silent about the physical domain.

Descartes' *tour de force* is to have proposed a system within which science and religion, causality and freedom, determinism and ethics could be reconciled by being juxtaposed. Although controversial for its implied demotion of God (reduced to the role of a mere spectator) and elevation of man (who is now God's equal in the small corner of his self-consciousness), Cartesianism served as a launch pad for the scientific revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries because it rejected any appeal to authority while delineating neatly the respective domains of scientists and theologians. In this function, it has survived to this day and justifies that Descartes is often called the father of modern philosophy. Not that Cartesianism does not have its flaws; the most obvious one is perhaps that it cannot explain how a concept like the mind or soul, immaterial by definition, can interact with a material one (the body) and vice-versa. This problem (and many that derive from or are related to it) represents a logical impasse that cannot be overcome in the terms in which it has been framed.

Beyond its merits and demerits, Cartesianism has many consequences for managers. Descartes was a persuasive promoter of deductive analysis, which, when combined with synthesis, forms what he called (1987: 41) the "method of rightly conducting reason and seeking the truth." Left to itself, the mind is infallible and almighty as long as it operates according to the method that Descartes outlined and which demands that complex problems and tasks are decomposed into smaller ones until the point where these can be ordered and handled with confidence. Descartes is, therefore, the forefather of those numerous authors who argue that managers must proceed deductively and analyze the problem they must solve, the project they must complete, or the market in which they find themselves before committing to a course of action, itself composed of a succession of elementary tasks. Further, by insisting that the mind can detach itself from all physical sensations and operate independently of information coming from the body, Descartes simplified Plato's model and defined man as an essentially rational being, able to make decisions reaching beyond the requirements of its immediate situation: *Homo economicus* is Descartes' brainchild. Where Descartes' system met less success is in its implication that psychology, if the expression is taken to mean "science of the psyche," is a contradiction in terms. Since the psyche (mind) is an immaterial, ethereal substance and not a material object (it is the subject), it escapes the reach of science. Its assessment is impossible except by God: Only He can read men's souls and decide of their fate in heaven. Anyone who pretends to chart the psyche as Descartes understood it (i.e., as uncaused cause of behavior) commits the sin of vanity of the grandest possible magnitude.

"Homo economicus is Descartes' brainchild."

The role of the mind in Descartes' scheme is not to be discounted though, for at the root of his method is the conviction that elementary ideas, when sufficiently clear and distinct, are necessarily true and must be recognized as such. The prime example of such self-evident truths is of course Descartes' foundational pronouncement that he exists because he thinks. Worthy of note is that the truth of this famous proposition cannot be derived through syllogistic reasoning, because Descartes has not established its implicit major premise, that is, he has not demonstrated that everything that thinks, exists (Descartes could not rely on logic anyway, since he resolved to doubt of everything that was not immediately recognizable as true). In line with its commitment to deductivism, Descartes thus founded his epoch-marking philosophy on an insight taken as axiom. This conviction (itself axiomatic) that deduction from axioms is *the* way to reason runs through all rationalist authors after Descartes. For all his careful dissection of markets and industries, Michael Porter (1998) did not defend the structure of his successful "Five-Forces" model beyond his assertion that competition in markets or industries is so structured and must be so analyzed ("The five competitive forces [...] reflect the fact that competition in an industry goes well beyond the established players" is the closest to an argument I could identify; 1998: 6). That is, Porter's model has been deducted from an intuition taken to be self-evident—not surprisingly for an author trained as an economist, that is, committed from the outset to Descartes' model of man. Porter walked again in Descartes' footsteps when he proposed his "value chain" model, since this equally popular framework requires, in true Cartesian fashion, that one analyses in elementary stages the successions of activities that take place within organizations.

If Descartes is right, though, then managers must ultimately deduct their decisions on insights received as axiomatic truths. Success in management as in life more generally springs from the mysterious inner world of executives. The study of successful practices as enacted by organizations can serve as a useful guide, but only in the same way that artists study the work of other artists. Despite Descartes' insistence to the contrary, the validity of an insight can only be found in its practical application.

For these reasons, social scientists have turned to Karl Popper (1989) to deflate rationalism's claims by subjecting them to empirical critique. If knowledge ultimately comes from inner insights, then these must be amenable, at least in principle, to experimental confrontation, that is, to empirical falsification. In the negative, science will inevitably fall victim to the mystical excesses that are always ready to flow from self-revealed truths: "science must begin with myths, and with the criticism of myths" (Popper, 1989: 50). One learns something new about the world when one's current belief is contradicted by a new observation; if one believes that all swans are white, seeing yet another one does not yield new knowledge. Critical rationalism's (Popper's philosophy of science) most important statement is that scientificity is refutability: Theories that are not in principle refutable, that is, that cannot be put to the test of empirical refutation at least in theory (or so to speak), must be dismissed because they are mere tautologies. Unrecognized, a tautological theory is attractive because of its apparent great explanatory power. Too great a power in fact: A theory that cannot be falsified explains everything but also the opposite; that is, by explaining every possible outcome it predicts none in particular. Such theories can have the language, appearances, and academic reputation normally attached to science, yet they remain propositions best qualified as religious, non- or pseudoscientific (Popper, 1989: 38–39). When they take the form of management theories or business strategies, unfalsifiable propositions are of no use to managers. This is precisely the controversial charge that Powell (2001, 2002, 2003), as well as Priem and Butler (2001a, 2001b), have leveled against competitive advantage theory and the resource-based view of the firm, respectively.

Positivism

Descartes' scheme did not go down uncontested, even by thinkers unconcerned by his treatment of God. On the other side of the Channel, John Locke (1988) pointed out that no idea could be innate, because ideas cannot be contemplated and manipulated by the mind without logical concepts and the means to process them, all of which men do not have until they acquire them. At birth, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate: "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" (Locke, 1988: 121, *emphases in original*). This statement is the birth certificate of modern empiricism. It led philosophers like David Hume (1985) to write about man as a wholly natural being, inscribed in nature and having to make sense of it exclusively through experience. Dismissing the concept of self-evident truths as a noxious illusion, empiricists held that truth cannot be obtained from within, but believed that knowledge is to be read in the great book of nature, from without. Rather than being deductive, philosophy and science must be exercises in empirical fact collection and the proposition of inductive inferences therefrom.

On the face of it, empiricism is science's best ally because it rejects as a matter of principle the position that men can know more about the world than that which can be experienced. Little wonder, then, that in their majority thinkers and scientists of the Enlightenment saw in this philosophy their best weapon against the emprise of religion. It was a vision that would eventually be recognized as too good to be true: As Hume was the first to realize if knowledge is to be arrived at strictly from experience, scientists face immense difficulties. Scientific theories are generalizations, universals inducted from particulars; they project the past into the future and move beyond the facts available. Hume (1985: 189) therefore concluded, "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." Deduction is logical, induction is not deduction, and therefore, induction is not logical: The laws that the Enlightenment's scientists sought to discover and codify cannot be logically proven. Science, insofar as it aims to establish general truths about the world arrived at exclusively from experience, must fail. Scientific statements, especially those involving causal relationships, must be true *a priori* if they are to be formally true. That is, they must be disconnected from experience and be established on reason alone: An empirical science cannot be justified on its own terms, but must be taken on faith.

Descartes could rely on a non-deceiver God to make the world behave tomorrow as it has behaved to date, but this argument is not available to a philosopher committed to accepting only evidence from the senses. The natural science that the Enlightenment's thinkers enthusiastically pursued cannot be differentiated, on Hume's own arguments, from religion, that is, from "sophistry and illusion" (Hume, 1988: 509): Science is another religion the god of which is called causation. Fact-based, "hard-nosed executives" have been urged to care about management theory (Christensen & Raynor, 2003). They would be wise to remember, however, that in a strict empiricist outline no number of academic studies will ever formally prove a theory: All swans were white until one day they turned out to be also black. Similarly, evidence-based management has been offered as remedy to poor management practices and decisions (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006); perhaps, but only as long as one remembers that recommendations that are purely inducted from facts (observations, past sales, and market research) are little more than informed guesses.

"An empirical science cannot be justified on its own terms, but must be taken on faith."

Perhaps this is not such a bad conclusion, after all; Acknowledging that the future is unknowable admits the possibility of changing it. Auguste Comte (2000a, 2000b) wanted to achieve the latter but did not accept the former. To rescue empiricism from its Pyrrhic victory over rationalism, he proposed the expression "positive philosophy," soon shortened to "positivism" under which Comte's philosophy of science is known today. For Comte, science is a sociological phenomenon the evolution of which mirrors that of society. Science and society advance along three stages of evolution: theological (in which all phenomena are explained by calling on supernatural entities such as gods or God); metaphysical (explanations made in terms of natural, if as yet unknown, powers); and last, "positive." In this last era, the "why" questions that tormented the theological and metaphysical thinkers are dismissed and replaced by "how" inquiries. Answers to these must be proposed following four normative principles that clarify what terms such as "knowledge," "science," "questions," and "answers" mean: Phenomenalism (men should only be concerned by what they can observe); nominalism (terms that do not point to tangible concepts must be ignored); respect of the fact–value distinction (reality must be studied free of moral prejudices); and a commitment to an inductive method applicable to all sciences, according to which hypothesized regularities are confronted by way of experimentation of new observations to arrive at the formulation of universal laws. These laws may be approximate, but this is no argument for considering them uncertain: Once they have successfully passed the prediction test, science's laws encompass the totality of what can be known about the phenomena they capture (Kolakowski, 1969: 1–10).

In other words, for Comte, scientists must not speculate about unobservable powers but must content themselves with codifying the way nature operates. The world is not the visible manifestation of another, deeper, or more authentic substratum: These manifestations are all that there is. It contains no mystery or magic, but only phenomenalistic laws that can be studied. Hume's skeptical arguments can be confidently set aside for belonging to the metaphysical period of evolution which sought to explain events by calling on unobservable (thus nondemonstrable) causes; the advancement of human knowledge leads inevitably to the positive stage in which knowledge is complete and all answers provided. Worthy of note is that positivism is unconceivable without determinism, not because it assumes that there are some hidden causes (it explicitly denies their existence), but because it starts from the view that all phenomena are ruled by universal and invariable natural laws. Positive knowledge is like a Russian doll set, with sciences organized along "the order which of all possible arrangements is the only one that accords with the natural manifestation of all phenomena: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology, social physics" (Comte, 2000a: 55). Comte acknowledged that not all sciences progress at the same rate, though; "social physics," or sociology to reuse the term that he invented, as the most complex, will also be last to reach its positive stage. Nevertheless, since society is the primordial reality and since all sciences are social facts, sociology is the queen of sciences. It alone can and will eventually provide meaning to all other sciences and locate them in the greater epistemological scheme. As for the "I," so important to Descartes, Comte (2000b: 100–101) dismissed it as the secular remnant of the soul, inherited from the theological stage of human knowledge; it could safely be ignored because its existence cannot be established by scientific means.

Beyond its normative principles that result in a particular definition of epistemology, positivism as a whole rests on the belief that the world can (and must) be studied through phenomena and that observations of these phenomena are, or can be made to be, objective (value-free). Put differently, positivism looks at the world as a collection of objects that can be reduced to their external qualities, with the further assumption that these are measurable without any preconception. Now the ability to measure requires a measuring framework: Before being able to count apples, I must know what an apple is. That is, measuring assumes some sort of general theory about what is measured. This theory must be available before the facts can be collected, adding a layer of preconception to what is being observed—an addition that positivism explicitly forbids. Positivism as a whole does not seem to be invulnerable to this charge, because whether positivism is itself a positivist position, or again, whether it is a conceptual framework arrived at from facts without any moral prejudice is debatable. Arguments like these led Popper (1989: 39–41) to reject the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle and develop his own philosophy of science, briefly mentioned above, according to which science must start with theories and not observations (this is not to say that critical rationalism provides science with a fail-safe epistemological basis; see Stove, 1991: 1–26 for criticisms).

Popper's comments would not be formulated before the 1930s, however. In the meantime and although not everyone subscribed to all aspects of Comte's thought or to his grandiose vision, positivism's influence on 19th century thought was profound (if not always acknowledged), because it provided historical, moral, and epistemological legitimacy to the scientific enterprise. Through the victorious march of science it vindicated, positivism promised—and for many seemed to deliver—in this world what Christianity had long promised in the other: healthier and longer life, material comfort, and reduced physical travails. Positivism's authority is still noticeable today across the scientific spectrum, especially in physics where the hope of unifying all theories within a unique model remains the official objective. In management studies, as in the social sciences in general, the demand for value-neutral and fact-based research is taken for granted, even though, for reasons broached above, it is not clear if this demand is itself value-free. When applied to management, positivism's agenda makes attractive promises, implying that management research is an endeavor aimed at discovering "laws of management" according to which organizations operate and thanks to which their behavior can be predicted, enabling profits. Herbert A. Simon (1997/1947: 55) acknowledged positivism's sway on his enormously influential *Administrative Behavior,* in which he attempted to lay the foundations of an administrative science. More recently, following a transparent positivist line, Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) argued that management must be evidence-based, that is, must start from facts, proceed inductively, rely on the successful practices uncovered by management academics, and incorporate the best available scientific findings to date.

Descartes proposed a system of thought in which religion and science could coexist side by side in their respective spheres of authority. Comte placed science in general and sociology in particular above religion and above any sort of discipline (such as psychology) that wants to regulate or inquire into man's inner world. The price to pay for such a move is the annihilation of the vault in which Descartes safeguarded psychological freedom, the "I." If society really is the primary reality that can be known objectively, then social phenomena and entities, such as work organizations, their culture, and their members, develop and behave according to universal and immutable patterns, the laws that positivist social scientists seek to discover and codify but the existence of which they take for granted. In agreement with positivism's underlying determinism and denial of the primacy of the individual, notions like freedom, choice, morality, and responsibility must be recognized as misguided legacies of the theological era of human development that sociologists, managers, and employees must leave behind them. Like that of particles moved by mechanic or electromagnetic forces, the behavior of individuals is controllable through suitable incentives and appropriate structures. This "push-pull" or "billiard ball" perspective pervades human resources management and organizational behavior, notably in a recent textbook which affirms that employees are to be motivated and defines motivation, in transparent positivist language, as "the set of forces that causes people to engage in one behavior rather than some alternative behavior" (Griffin & Moorhead, 2012: 90).

Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation (the hierarchy of needs) must be the psychological theory most widely taught in management schools; it is also a great illustration of the above line of thinking. As per Maslow's theory, when managers are deprived of an office with a view, their self-esteem needs cause them to look for a new one in the same way Newton's law of gravitation makes their mobile phone fall when

it is let go. Similarly, when an executive is offered a promotion, he must accept it owing to his self-actualisation need, the same way sunflowers cannot but turn toward the sun. Now if employees are motivated by their managers, one can legitimately wonder who or what motivated these managers to motivate their subordinates, or, for that matter, what motivated Maslow and the authors of the textbook just quoted to write their works in the first place. God (as first cause) or the pitfall of infinite regress awaits all deterministic psychological models and those who promote them.

In any case, scientific psychology has been faithful to Comte's program because it has hollowed out what it set to understand, the "I," if this entity is understood as the free, uncaused but causal source of behavior. Beyond his little consideration for psychology, Comte would have received psychoanalysis with some degree of sympathy. Freud (2005: 15–17, 61–69) was adamant that his methods were scientific, that his model of the psyche was a naturalistic one, and that psychoanalysis will eventually claim its rightful place along, if not above, medicine and many other disciplines such as sociology, history, philology, and childhood education. Freud's fundamental assumption is that whatever a person does is caused by events taking place in this person's psyche, the tripartite structure (if not the balance) of which is part of the person's immutable human nature. He further believed that early childhood, especially its sexually connoted experiences, molds the internal dynamics of the mind, shapes psychic life, and eventually determines adult behavior. Even though the theory allows that patients, with therapeutic help, can bring up to consciousness material that was previously buried in the depth of their unconscious to recover partial control over their conscious lives, psychoanalysis is a deterministic model of human existence. In typical positivist fashion, it opens very attractive perspectives to marketers, managers, consultants, and those who study organizations. Once they understand the workings of consumers' or employees' psyches through the tools that the theory provides, they can make better informed marketing or staffing decisions or uncover the unconscious processes laying behind the expectations of markets and the problems of organizations (these are rich themes in the management literature; for a review of psychoanalysis' influence on organizational studies, see Arnaud, 2012; for a psychoanalytic study of marketing and advertising practices, see Oswald, 2010).

Romanticism

Oblivious to Hume's devastating conclusions and prefiguring Comte's positive philosophy, the philosophers of the Enlightenment shared a few important but generally unexpressed beliefs, distant legacies of Plato and Aristotle. Although opposed on many subjects, they all agreed in considering that the world is a given and that reason and experience (as opposed to faith) will eventually lead to a complete and coherent understanding of the world. Knowledge comes from the light of nature, and 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, as nature is structured, stable, and predictable. Art is to represent and glorify nature; morality is to promote respect, equality, and dignity, upon which rest peace and harmony. What Newtonian science achieved for the world of objects, philosophy is to replicate for the world of men and their affairs, including ethics and aesthetics. Plato's Truth is within reach; philosophy, helped by science, is about to rule. Enlightened humanity is on the verge of unprecedented social progress: Once a perfect knowledge of men's goals and of their inner workings is established, a just and prosperous society will automatically follow, agreeable to all men since arrived at through a universal, science-like approach. Universality, objectivity, fidelity, symmetry, standards, discipline, and rationality were the main themes of the Enlightenment's confident program (Berlin, 1999: 119–120).

Not everyone subscribed to this optimism, however. The German romantics, as they are called today, saw will, not reason, as determining man's ends. For them, the world is without order, purpose, or meaning: These have to come from man, and logic has nothing to say about this creative process. Over rationality and objectivity, which they saw as cold, petty, and only concerned with calculating man's means, romantic authors elevated freedom, passion, imagination, and subjectivity, all notions which are central to life but remain beyond science's reach. Mankind has to escape from science to freedom: For romantics, science has failed to deliver since science cannot explain freedom yet freedom is a fact. Understanding is smothering, analysis, murder. Nature is inexhaustible; it will not, it cannot, be tamed, let alone coerced and contained in formulae. To think that life, in its chaotic and infinite variety, can be adequately encapsulated through exact mathematical signs is preposterous hubris. Science prides itself on studying what there

allegedly is; what there is, is not only indescribable, but also studying it estranges one from what there is not yet, from what there could be. The laws that science seeks to discover and codify do not follow from facts, because no number of observations can prove them, as Hume taught. Rather, events follow from scientific laws if these are true. What there is to know, what can be known, how the book of nature can be read as a model for man's life and society, the Enlightenment philosophers' obsessions, were no longer the relevant questions. What mattered to the romantics was what man can *will*. This was an ethical, artistic, and existential quest in addition to being an epistemological one.

Pushing this line further, Johann Fichte (1931) held that man's conception of the world had no empirical basis and that this absence of empirical contingency was precisely what freedom means. Descartes and Locke were mistaken: "I" is neither a given nor a blank slate imprinted by experience but is the result of man's actions, the product of will encountering resistance. Rather than trying merely to understand it, nature is to be given meaning and structure. Submission to the causal treadmill of the alleged "laws of physics" is suicidal stupidity, attractive only to the weak-willed incapable of inventing a life for themselves. Nature provides the shapeless raw material; men invent rules and objects. Life cannot depend on contemplative knowledge because there is no such a 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" (Fichte, 1931: 112).

The romantic hero is the creator, the artist, not the scientist. Man is to reaffirm his humanity by inventing and asserting his own ideals by way of resolute action. Since the world has no intrinsic order, the notion of "rational happiness" is oxymoronic, pusillanimous, and contemptible. Whereas "enlightened" philosophers saw culture as a deterrent to violence, for Fichte, violence was the price for the existence of cultures. Universal values do not exist: Between peace and harmony by way of subjection to an alleged natural order and the possibility of chaos and war out of freedom, Fichte resolutely chose the latter. For similar reasons, romantic authors thought that it was a mistake of the first order to believe that there were absolute, unbreakable, and scientific laws of economics and of commerce beyond human control. Concepts of economic law or force, such as that of supply and demand or the idea of an invisible yet benevolent hand of the market, were in their view pathetic absurdities. Those advocating such concepts only seek to protect their enviable social status, justify poverty and exploitation, and transfer the responsibility of their actions upon some sort of divine lawmaker. Economic institutions and regulations, money, and trade have to be the servants of man; they are to promote life, arts, and spiritual development, not stifle them. Economics is not a given, and it cannot be mankind's ultimate horizon either; it must be molded to man's ends (Berlin, 1999: 124–127).

In the management literature, the above ideas find their most visible expression in the works of Tom Peters. In books and articles published in the wake of the successful *In Search of Excellence* (coauthored with Robert Waterman, 1982) and in an increasingly volatile prose, Peters has been advocating a line that, despite the generous size of the volumes in which it is exposed, is easily summarized. For Peters, excellence is 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 (1991: 20–21) enjoins managers to "get beyond rational analysis," break the rules, and ignore strategic planning. Rather than sterile thinking, managers must have "a bias for action" (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 119ff): They must experiment, seek out, and try out new ideas, copy successful ones, observe, meet employees, listen to suppliers and customers, shout, tell stories, encourage, praise, scold, celebrate, talk the walk and walk the talk. Managers must live management because, it is only in living it that they will understand their organization and its environment. They must manage "by walking around" (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 122). Peters is unrepentant: Only in acting, even at the price of failing, that companies learn; in fact, firms should actively seek out failures, for the bigger the failure, the bigger the learning. Faithful to Schumpeter's "creative destruction" motto, Peters (1990, 1991) reminds his readers: "Get innovative or get dead." To "thrive on chaos," organizations 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" (Peters, 1987: 284).

Indeed, in characteristically romantic fashion, Peters (1991: 14, *my emphasis*) 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."

A romantic philosopher of sorts, Nietzsche opposed Darwinism for reasons that have nothing to do with creationism. If Darwin were to be correct, Nietzsche (1968: 47, 364–365, 2003: 86–87) argued, if evolution really meant "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 survival and reproduction is environmental fitness. Nietzsche also held that Darwinist evolutionism pictures species as inexorably forced to perfect states of adaptation. Darwinism is deterministic and externally driven: Species survive, evolve, and reproduce neither randomly nor as they wish, but as they must, that is, as the environment dictates. This principle was for Nietzsche an insult to life and especially to *homo sapiens*. In his view, that species have survived changing conditions and multiplied to the extent that they have can only be accounted for by an internal resistance to the environment helped by an abundance of resources. In a Darwinian outlook, the more adapted, the more fragile to a change in the environment. An evolutionist himself, Nietzsche concluded that evolution cannot be driven from without, but from within; it is not the most adapted that survive and multiply, but the most adaptable. In Nietzsche's terms, the more adaptable species, such as the human one, are those which exhibit stronger will to power.

If Nietzsche is correct on these accounts, then, as Peters insists page after page, organizations should be wary of being too adapted to the market or industry in which they compete (a regular theme of Peters' from his first work onwards; see, i.e., Peters & Waterman, 1982: 106ff, or Peters, 1991: 19). At best, adaptation only buys time; at worst, it spells extinction when market conditions change. Rather than aiming for perfect adaptation, firms should value flexibility, to be able to react to evolving conditions. That is, they should be wary of tight and rigid business processes; rather than efficiency, they should strive for effectiveness. Success leads to failure because it transforms bold and novel attempts into sacrosanct business habits that destroy adaptability (Peters, 1991: 18; see also Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997). The most efficient processes, such as the moving assembly chain, are the most inflexible and make firms fragile (a line that operations management authors have argued for some time; see, i.e., Lee, 2002: 114). Job descriptions are to be burnt outright, for employees must look at the bigger picture and "think in 'wholes'" (Peters, 1990: 25). No one is better suited to do this than "renegades," "crazies" that firms should employ, who disregard "fat rule books," irritate many but contribute and evangelize (Peters & Waterman, 1982: xxiii). Managers must not hire employees based on the degree to which they "fit" the organizational culture, because the more they do so, the more difficult it will be for this culture to change when, not if, it will have to. They would better hire as great a diversity of profiles as is possible; doing this will help their organization resist "groupthink" and will ensure that it values contribution above conformity. Within limits, disagreement is source of contribution (Peters, 1991: 10–11).

For all these reasons, Peters' works, irrespective of what one thinks of them, develop an extended critique of management as an empirical or rational activity and extol the power of the uncontrollable individual. To generate value for customers and shareholders, Peters' managers must in their own ways be artists: They must mobilize energies above contingencies to impose resolutely their vision onto their organization, employees, markets, and so forth, like sculptors carve blocks of marble, like maestros lift orchestras above musicians' individual scores and achieve musical ecstasy. Peters' first book titles and subtitles tell this story better than a long analysis: *A Passion for Excellence* (with Nancy Austin, 1990), *Thriving on Chaos: A Handbook for a Management Revolution* (1987), *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (1992), or again *The Pursuit of WOW!: Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (1994). Knowingly or not, willingly or not, Peters is a romantic management author, in form and content.

Existentialism

Despite the romantics' warnings, positivism triumphed by the late 19th century. Its inherent determinism as exemplified in psychoanalysis led thinkers to look for alternatives, however. One of these is existentialism, a rich if loosely defined philosophy, the distinctive ascientific and almost poetic flame of which has burnt in the works of writers united in their opposition to systematic models of man and society. Each in their own ways and sometimes in opposition to one another, existentialists wrote to remind their readers of the

supreme importance of choice, responsibility, freedom, and authenticity without which they believed man's life is nonsensical. Over and again, they point to experiences such as faith, empathy, love, aesthetic consciousness, or artistic inspiration to insist that, whatever man is, he cannot be adequately represented by a mechanical model, no matter how sophisticated. For these thinkers, if existence really is determined, then human beings have been in catastrophic error about themselves for millennia. Concepts like intentions, efforts, morality, or justice have to be discarded. Purposive behavior is merely instinct; action must be reinterpreted as reaction; rationality must be reanalyzed as irrationality, and responsibility is in fact irresponsibility. In a determinist outlook, man is a string puppet, a nonperson, in the sense that he is no longer the embodiment of a self-determined "I" but merely the focal point of internal and external, past and present forces, which result, with the help of uncontrollable biological processes, in the movements of the limbs. For existentialists, accepting this picture of man is failing humanity; they see determinism as a degrading position that strips mankind of its obligations toward itself. Perhaps more important, 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 is a subtle attack on Western civilization's foundations.

Among these authors, Sartre (1966, 2007) held that freedom is the primary datum of human existence. The essence of man, his consciousness, is nothingness, for if it was a thing (an object) it could be acted upon and would not be free. Yet free it is because it must be: Without freedom there is no choice, no action, and no intention, all notions without which life cannot even be conceived. Man behaves not because he is caused to react, but because he has reasons to act (Sartre, 1966: 530–533). Man is never devoid of choice: At every moment, he makes decisions, the ultimate one being to continue with living. When one believes that one does not have a choice, Sartre's demand is that one elevates one's level of consciousness until the point where one recognizes that this is an illusion, that one does have a choice, even if it entails ending one's life; at minimum one can choose how to die. The one choice man does not have is that of choosing: "[M]an is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 2007: 29). To believe that one's choices are constrained or that one's responsibility is limited was for Sartre a self-inflicted debilitating enterprise stemming from a cowardly wish to be socially sanctioned and encapsulated in the desires of others. Man has to face his nothingness and his absolute freedom alone; he must reinvent himself everyday through his actions. External supports and agencies are illusory and demeaning, because they imply that man finds value in something else than himself.

Not that one should feel free to do whatever one chooses: Sartre (1966: 273ff) insisted that one recognize in others the essence, that is, the nothingness, that there is in oneself. One is to treat the other not as an object but as an "I," for one's freedom rests on the freedom of the others. Not only must I resist objectification in the gaze of the others, but also, for the others, my own gaze must not be an objectifying cage. At the same time though, my freedom and responsibility expand much further than my person, for what I do exemplifies my values and sets an example in the eyes of the others: "I am […] responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man" (Sartre, 2007: 24–25). Every action, then, is a commitment, in one's name as well as in that of mankind. This responsible freedom is demanding and source of anguish, but it is also liberating, because it opens unlimited horizons. Existentialism is tough minded but optimistic: The past cannot be undone and the present is what it is—the future, however, is what man makes of it.

This very fertile line of ideas could be expanded much further (as well as criticized), but not here. For its central emphasis on commitment and responsibility (terms that were virtually nonexistent in the philosophical glossary until then), existentialism was bound to stir the interest of management writers. Attempts to bring existentialism to bear on management thought date back at least to 1960 (Rice, 1960; Odiorne, 1966), and some have gone as far as crediting existentialism for having a deep influence on public administration research and practices (Waugh, 1998). For others, organizational theory has still to absorb and make sense of existentialism's lessons (Macmillan & Mills, 2002). In any case, existentialism led management writers to engage in and promote soul searching. Calling for a "revolution from the top," Richter (1970: 415) reminded executives of public administrations of their freedom to choose. "The management term for choice," wrote Richter (1970: 417), "is decision-making." Administrators must stop hiding behind

established systems and procedures, shed their bureaucratic indifference, and accept the responsibilities of their decisions.

Spillane and Martin (2005: 93) agree, applauding existentialists for reemphasizing, in their own ways, the gulf between formal descriptions of relationships (such as job descriptions) and the reality of relating. Whereas traditional management literature favors scientific, objective views of people (as human resources), an existentialistic one stresses the importance of autonomy, empathy, and subjectivity in human relationships without which large structures can only become impersonal bureaucracies. In their view, employees always retain a degree of self-control and have to accept the responsibility of their actions, insofar as they could predict their consequences. Managers' attempts at maximizing their freedom while minimizing their responsibility are childish and self-defeating. As adults, they should welcome the anxiety that inalienable responsible freedom generates as the proving ground of their maturity. Spillane and Martin (2005: 19) note, however, that employees who express their autonomy in the workplace will not be accepted by those who want to control them. In an organization, whoever asserts his inalienable freedom is an obstacle to management and is likely to be treated as such. If employees yield to management, it can only be for pragmatic reasons, because they see their personal interests in obeying rather than in disobeying, in other words, because the tangible cost that would follow from dissent is perceived as exceeding the moral price attached to submission. In this outline, authority granted to management is revealed as an idiosyncratic illusion, "a confidence trick" with which employees fight the anguish stemming from their responsible freedom (Spillane & Martin, 2005: 94). This authority cannot be justified beyond the fact that, without it, managers and employees would not be able to act at all.

Spillane and Martin (2005: 87–89) further observe that Chester Barnard made very similar points when he developed his theory of authority in his landmark and still influential *The Functions of the Executive*, first published in 1938. Barnard (1968: 168–169) indeed observed that employees assent to management authority only within their "zone of indifference," that is, that one accepts orders when these refer to the tasks one implicitly accepted when one became an employee. In his view, the range of this zone of indifference depends "upon the degree to which the inducements exceed the burdens and sacrifices which determine the individual's adhesion to the organization" (1968: 169). 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 (1968: 170) called the belief that authority comes from above "the fiction of superior authority." Little surprise then if 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 [...] accept[ing] their responsibility for choice" (1968: 296). It is very reasonable to infer that Barnard had been exposed to some form of existentialist thinking when he prepared the lectures that would become his famous book. If this is the case, existentialism's influence on the canons of management thought deserves to be explored further.

Postmodernism

The first romantics were moderate in their demands and merely sought to reaffirm human freedom and dignity in the face of the determinism implied by Newtonian physics. They accepted the existence of scientific laws but did not want man to become their servant and aspired to preserve a place for myths and magic in an increasingly industrial and urban world. Less retrained authors, such as Fichte, refused to yield to the authority of anything, even of plain facts; they were happy to sacrifice peace in the name of idealized personal freedom and power. In the event, romanticism did not survive the 19th century for long; after the destructions of World War I, the ideals of the former and the exaltation of the latter made way for more tangible and immediate concerns. For all that, romanticism, for better or worse, definitively 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 were about goals, the means to reach them and their consequences, all of which were deemed to be objectively measurable, since romanticism the discussions have been limited to motives, with the implicit understanding that consensus will be impossible. In other words, the Enlightenment project as it (perhaps naively) culminated in positivism had already been dealt a fatal blow in the hands of the romantics before being slaughtered in the trenches of North-Eastern France. It was to be supplanted by modernism, itself soon superseded by postmodernism.

After Plato, religious and atheist philosophers alike accepted that knowledge was virtue. For these thinkers and regardless of their great and many

differences, Truth was the unique, ahistorical, extra-human, immutable, and ultimate, that is, God-like, value-objective in the pursuit of which men should and could come together. If the romantics are right though, if absolute truth is no longer achievable, or if it is not unique, then Western thinking has been a misguided effort from its Platonic start. In the postromantic world, as Nietzsche saw, truth and its loyal servant, reason, are demoted to the status of tools among others. The price to pay for this demotion is no less than apocalyptic, for if reason is not an infallible guide, then approaching ethics, aesthetics, and politics rationally has been a laughable enterprise, doomed from the outset (on this general theme as well as Nietzsche's diagnostic, see MacIntyre, 2007: 51–61, 109–120). In the wake of the death of the Absolute (God for Christians, Truth for atheists), certainties of all kinds are revealed as illusory, arrogant, and oppressive. Uncertainty rules, sects multiply: A moral crisis of epic proportion looms. It was then only a matter of time that, after ethics, aesthetics, and politics, next in line to fall was epistemology.

From about 1970 onwards, authors argued indeed that the notion of a natural and absolute empirical bedrock foundation, taken for granted by the Enlightenment thinkers and their positivist successors, was an illusion; the most one can do is upturn masks and decipher metaphors, knowing that behind each one there would be yet another. The Enlightenment's project is itself uncovered as an elaborate enterprise in deception which, under the cover of universalism, relied on science and philosophy's rhetoric to secure the elites' power over those it was meant to emancipate. Not only is knowledge power, but also, as Michel Foucault (1972) insisted, power itself is knowledge, because it produces only the knowledge that affirms it and decides who can produce knowledge. Is true whatever achieves power. Man has become an artificial creature, a product of the technosphere's discourse, itself a servant of the controlling classes' desire for perpetuation. Explanation must give way to interpretation and objectivity to perspectivism; analysis is replaced by deconstruction and metaphysics by metanarrative. Western philosophy, rather than being the expression of an encompassing and disinterested quest, is in fact "old dead white men's philosophy" (Inglis & Steinfeld, 2000). The individual itself evaporates; there remain collective and individual narratives playing out uncontrollably and that are to be endlessly genealogically interpreted and reinterpreted, since no interpretation is final. Definitive meaning disappears, buried under layers of interpretation; rationality fades into irrelevant discourse. Science is only a narrative among many, "conspicuous, noisy and impudent" (Feyerabend, 1976: 295). Language is a game whose words lose and acquire signification depending on context, itself nothing else than text and interpretation of text. This series of substitutions and abandonments is postmodernism's antifoundational foundational diagnosis, prescription, and research agenda (see Shalin, 1993, for a critical review). Over these ruins, it is not surprizing if moral relativism has prevailed, traditional values collapsed, and nihilism settled, as Nietzsche (1968: 7ff) predicted it would. The absence of culture is still culture; junk is now art and noise, music. "Hyperreality" (Jean Baudrillard's (1994) coinage for the representation of reality in the mediasphere) and its simulacra have taken over. The disappearance of meaning compounds the overall moral and intellectual confusion; Western thinking lies on its deathbed (Sloterdijk, 1987: xxvi). In any case, pride has given way to shame; whereas, for centuries, the West thought its mission was to conquer and enlighten the world, now it seeks repentance for its colonial past. The empire truly has collapsed.

Postmodernism's dissolution of absolutes accords well with business in a multicultural world, the dematerialization of the economy, the virtualization of the office, perpetual change, and the advent of the Information Age. As societies fragment under the pressure of cultural relativism, mass production of goods is supplemented by customization of services. Corporations used to serve populations whose aspirations they sought to understand; they now target individuals whose desires they make concerted efforts to shape and whose sense of agency they try to reduce to a shopping craving. Consumerism triumphs: While Cartesian man considered thinking as proof of his existence, postmodern man cannot conceive of himself outside of compulsive consumption and instant gratification. National flags lose their force in the face of commercial logos, dinner table sermons concede defeat to marketing discourses, and the authority once deriving from the Ten Commandments now flows from ubiquitous global brands. In the hyperspace, firms compete through elaborate narratives because for many, virtual reality is more real than reality. To the delight of marketers, words are malleable and their significance can be stretched to extraordinary lengths: Advertising campaigns seriously pretend that brands have a personality, machines are sexy, and scented aerosols make families happy.

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Modernity substituted farm labor for factory labor; postmodernism has substituted the factory for the "office where symbols (words, numbers, computer icons) are analyzed and manipulated" (Fox & Miller, 1998: 432). In the postmodern workplace, unity of command and centralization of information have been replaced by decentralization and networked communications, while Weberian hierarchies have become fluid adhocracies. In the absence of fixed foundations, perpetual organizational change is the norm. Organizations are the new families of their disoriented employees; organizational ways, even if ever so transient, are elevated to culture status. Management is now leadership; indeed, constant change is not so much to be managed than it is to be led through an 8-step process (Kotter, 1995) that amounts to little else but careful story telling. Privacy has become notional as communications are spied upon by corporations and government agencies, individuals' whereabouts are monitored by video surveillance, and shopping or Internet browsing habits are extrapolated into psychological profiles. For critical management scholars (many of them inspired by postmodernism's themes), the objectivity demanded by positivist research is a mirage, for reality (especially social reality) is always constructed, never passively recorded. So-called organizational science is thus for them synonymous for managerialization (for overviews of postmodernism's multifarious influences on critical management studies, see Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007 or Fournier & Grey, 2000). In this context, George Orwell's dystopia does not seem so far off. The moral crisis has translated itself into a financial, social, cultural, political, and environmental one. For the West, the end of the line does seem to be in sight; at any rate, as postmodernists insist, human existence is now text to be interpreted, symbols to be deciphered, and data to be mined.

Other Philosophies

There would be considerably more to say, especially with regard to epistemology. Important themes like idealism, empiricism (beyond the few comments offered on Locke and Hume), dialectical materialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and poststructuralism have been omitted. Rich and fascinating as they are and although debated for some in the management literature, these philosophies do not propose major additions, in the context of a discussion that seeks to identify the major philosophical roots of dominant management concepts, to those reviewed. Idealism is intimately connected with rationalism and so is empiricism with positivism; united as they are in their common dismissal of timeless absolutes, hermeneutics and poststructuralism, despite their many divergences, can be subsumed, with caveats that cannot be offered here, under the postmodernist movement (Shalin, 1993). Similarly, phenomenology does not need to be differentiated from existentialism for its focus on intentionality (Sartre was a phenomenologist before developing his existentialism) and from empiricism, owing to its insistence on unmediated first-person experience, on the other. As for dialectical materialism (Marxism), allowance made for its historical and social importance, its marginal influence on what is taught in management schools today does not warrant its inclusion in this argument. The same goes for neo-Marxism, the presence of which is undetectable beyond the borders of critical management studies. These observations do not hold for the works of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and George Edward Moore. These philosophies, the ethical dimensions of which are routinely taught in business ethics classes, have already received considerable attention in the management literature; including them here is of little interest. For similar reasons, the discussion offered stayed clear of the moral implications of the themes selected.

Management being a pragmatic activity that cannot be detached from the necessity of achieving tangible results, one may be surprised not to find above a section dedicated to pragmatism. Pragmatism is an almost exclusively North American philosophical movement that started in the late 19th century, met with considerable success in the first half of the 20th century, declined almost to extinction from about 1950 onward before enjoying a multifaceted if indirect revival since the mid-1970s. In the words of one of its founders, pragmatism was a "new name for some old ways of thinking" (subtitle of James, 1975/1907), namely empiricism, of which it was said to be a radical form; James' goal was indeed to arrive at unassailable knowledge by grounding it upon its practical consequences at the expense of any other conception. This led James to reject foundationalism, that is, to dismiss any

attempt to establish truth on a priori postulates. Pragmatism connects here with postmodernism: As mentioned, postmodern philosophers, beyond their many disagreements, are united in their disdain for timeless principles. If, as they argue, knowledge is not an unchangeable given but is constructed on the objective of legitimizing power and social domination, then the truth of a proposition is not to be found in a man-independent substratum but, as James taught, in its practical outcomes. This perhaps unexpected congruence between early and late 20th-century thinking explains pragmatism's return in philosophical grace (Kloppenberg, 1996). For these reasons and again in the context of the present discussion, pragmatism's classic formulation does not need be differentiated from the few comments on empiricism offered earlier; as for pragmatism's revival, it can be seen as belonging to the broader postmodernist movement.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

The far-reaching implications of the foregoing cannot be exhausted here, but some first comments can be offered. Superficial as it had to be, the account offered above is enough to show that management academics, even those who do not teach business ethics, have long based their arguments on mainstream philosophical traditions. The idea that different kinds of people require different kinds of education is of Platonic origin, and so is the assumption that management is a body of universal concepts that can be taught. When one advocates a framework inspired by Drucker's management by objectives, when one is adamant that managers are paid to achieve results, when one believes that the future of an organization rests on the shoulders of its CEO, or that effectiveness in action is all that really matters, one promotes ideas that found their first expressions in the heroic poems. When one teaches economics or game theory, one relies on a picture of man as rational animal articulated by Descartes, and when one argues that project management is first an exercise in task decomposition, one has accepted the universal validity of his method. When one believes that managers are to deduce their actions from insights taken to be self-evident, one inscribes oneself in the rationalist tradition. Conversely, when one holds that managers must base their decisions on value-free evidence and that organizations and their employees behave according to law-like patterns, one has accepted the axiomatic assumptions of positivism. When one believes that organizations can only survive and grow by being innovative and that innovation has nothing to do with rationality or experience, one argues a distinctively romantic line. When one insists that managers remain always free and responsible for their decisions, one borrows from existentialism's main theme. Last, when one holds that management has become manipulative surveillance, that business schools encourage managerialism and disseminate a self-legitimizing and oppressive language, that all is at bottom a power game, that (male) conspirations are constantly working and that organizations are not to be managed on the basis of inexistent facts but led by way of narratives, symbols, or other cultural artifacts, then one has been influenced by postmodernism. Genuine innovations in management literature are extremely rare, just as they have been in Western thought. What management authors do, knowingly or not, is to isolate one thread and present it as forming either the dominating or most interesting pattern of the entire fabric. Like those of a tapestry though, intellectual threads are not meaningful by themselves; they acquire their interest and import when seen in the context of the overall drapery.

Uncovering the philosophical foundations of management thought will go a long way toward clarifying contradictions that have plagued management academia for decades, because tensions which have developed within Western philosophy have found their way in what is taught in management school today. One cannot consistently view employees as sources of new (i.e. unpredictable) ideas and as human resources whose behavior can be predicted by way of deterministic psychological theories; one cannot hold that employees are psychologically controllable, yet hold them to be morally responsible beings; one cannot teach business ethics and the view that management is or should be a science in the same breath. Similarly, one cannot conceive of consumers as rational agents, as economics or game theory assume, while at the same time being driven by an overall pleasure principle, as parts of marketing and consumer behavior theories maintain. Indeed, 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 scrupulous study of organizations and their environments as the sole source of strategy and simultaneously hope that new ideas will spring from such endeavors, for one cannot be an empiricist and a rationalist at the same time: Either ideas come from without, or from within. Either one learns from experience, or one plans (because one

knows) first, then acts second (cf. the Mintzberg–Ansoff controversy alluded to in Mintzberg, 1996). Or again, one proceeds either inductively from particulars or deductively from universals. The long-running debate about the relevance of management research (which pretends to universality) to managers (interested in particular results) is fruitfully approached in these terms (Aram & Salipante, 2003). Further, if one is passionate about what one does, then one will not accept being constrained by traditions, material contingencies, or even apparent logical difficulties. Passion and rationality are not compatible; Peters must be granted consistency at least on this point. Besides, if organizations are irrational entities (as versions of institutional theory allege), teaching management students cold analytical skills is unlikely to help them (or their employers). Last, if one believes that all the above dichotomies are misguided because language is deception and grammar God in plain clothes, that there is no such a thing as truth (or if there is, that it is unobtainable), then one is committed to a version or another of postmodernism.

After Comte, natural sciences have emerged as enterprises seeking to formalize natural laws; after Gadamer (2003: xxi–xxiii), human sciences are often characterized as exercises in understanding. Now if one believes that management is an invention and not a discovery, then management belongs to the sphere of the human sciences and what is taught in management schools finds its roots in long-standing philosophical arguments. If this is the case, studying management concepts demands reaching back to the conceptual substrata that saw them grow. Simplified as it is, the overview of Western thinking offered earlier can be read as an illustration of this view. Conversely, if one believes that, although management concepts are themselves man-made, they point to phenomena which predate man's understanding of them, then one is bound to believe that there are universal and value-free methods available to managers through which they can improve their practice. Science as positivism defines it is understandably the first candidate in the quest for a model through which these management phenomena can be discovered, codified into laws, taught, and eventually implemented; little wonder if Frederick Taylor called his methods "scientific." As Ghoshal (2005: 77) noted, this positivist, scientific perspective has emerged as the arch-dominating one within management academia over the last decades. Its price has been exacting, however, for, as Ghoshal lamented in the same contribution (and as many critics have held against Taylorism), it has meant that subjectivity, intentionality, freedom, and responsibility (the existentialists would say: "humanity") had to be taken out of whatever "equation" or law-like generalization was taught to management students. Worthy of note is that positivism is itself a philosophical tradition, built on philosophical arguments as an attempt to overcome philosophical problems. In other words, even if one believes that management is or should be a positivist science because organizations are governed by invariable laws, one must still accept the claim made above, albeit at a degree once removed: Understanding management concepts requires understanding the philosophical foundations that made their formulation possible in the first place.

The very concept of management education is predicated on the assumption that there exists a body of knowledge without which the practice of management is defective. Since technical knowledge does not age well and tends to be industry-specific, this body of knowledge must be of a sort that endures through time and is generic enough that managers require it in as many of their activities as is possible. Now if management is "getting things done through people," then managers do not do anything by themselves (they have others doing it for them) except communicating in all its forms, orally and in writing: As the Sophists saw in their own ways, management is first and foremost a linguistic practice and rhetoric the most important skill of managers. Besides, if one accepts that thinking is talking to oneself (as Socrates explains to Theaetetus in Plato's eponymous dialogue), then reasoning is illusory if one's internal dialogue is muddled by terminological confusions. One cannot make meaningful decisions, study insightfully organizations, or ponder over one's place in the world if one does not understand the tenets and consequences of the words one uses to frame the problems one is trying to solve: Be it in management research, education, or practice, genuine understanding consists in recognizing one's biases lurking underneath one's apparent detached objectivity. To communicate meaningfully and effectively with their peers, students, or subordinates or to talk to themselves when engaging in decision making and reflective practice, managers and those who study management have little option but to be sensitive to language. Philosophy is the discipline of choice to develop this skill, because paying attention to the meaning of the words one uses is the first demand, and thus the first learning outcome of philosophy.

To train is to instruct through drills and rehearsals designed to inculcate procedures, routines, and standards that deliver tangible and predictable results. In line with the view that managers are paid to

deliver on measurable objectives, management schools have long presented themselves as places where management training was taking place. In a Platonic world such as the Western one, however, no amount of training will by itself legitimize community or business leadership; training must be supplemented by education, that is, by an understanding of the reasons and concepts which make training valuable in the first place. Plato demanded that rulers be philosophers because he saw that even if philosophy teaches conceptual understanding at the expense of practical knowledge, practical knowledge is of no value without conceptual understanding. Knowledge without understanding is only a particular without a universal, a means without an end, or again a solution without a problem. In other words, when management schools pride themselves on delivering purely instrumental education, they forget that this education makes little sense outside of the philosophical foundations that not only justify this education, but also make its articulation possible.

More generally, what is really important about any philosophical perspective is not what it explains, but what it assumes and permits. Identifying the philosophical foundations of management thought is an exciting research program for philosophers and management academics alike. For the former, it represents the opportunity to showcase the tangible manifestations of a discipline often derided for its practical irrelevance; for the latter, it promises to ground within a broad (which is not to say united) framework a body of knowledge often indicted for its internal dissentions. Exposing the philosophical foundations of management concepts also reveals how vulnerable, at least debatable, these concepts are. No definitive standard for deciding which philosophy is superior has emerged to date. In that sense, a course in philosophy is always a course in critical thinking: As the course unfolds, powerful and well-rehearsed counterarguments become available to refute any given philosophical position. Analyzing management concepts through the lens of philosophy thus emerges as a sobering enterprise, one able to poke holes in the "pretense of knowledge" that management academia has been charged for fueling (Ghoshal, 2005: 77). Incidentally, it will also deflate the "know-it-all" arrogance that many critics believe management schools foster in their students (e.g., Mintzberg, 2004: 36ff).

If all the above has any value, then the study and the practice of management is 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 or theories without insights into the worldviews upon which they rest and the consequences they lead to can only result in superficial, narrow, and short-lived learning. One only really knows a concept or theory when one understands where it starts and where it stops, that is, when one is able to argue against it. Only then one appreciates what one still has to learn: a crucial stance in a postmodern world without firm foundations, the outline of which is perpetually shifting. Courses in Western philosophy have, therefore, their place in management schools' core curricula: Not only is philosophy necessary for management students truly to make sense of what they are supposed to learn, but also it provides them with indispensable critical and lifelong learning skills. Without them, students, academics, and managers alike can only remain the slaves of their unrecognized prejudices and contradictions, of the orders they receive from above, or of the bottom line. They are bound to become the robotic executants of a framework reduced to a purely technical perspective running its course uncontrollably. Now perhaps more than ever, "convictions are prisons" (Nietzsche, 2003: 184). As for the impossibility of deciding which, among the worldviews that developed over the history of Western thought, is superior, it must not be received as a paralyzing dilemma. As the existentialists stressed, if one is to live, one is to act, and if one is to act, one is to choose: To paraphrase the saying attributed to Kurt Lewin, "there nothing as practical as a good philosophy." Management, just as life in general, is philosophy in action. Management academia must come to terms with the meaning of this conclusion.

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