Marginalization and Recovery: The Emergence of Aristotelian Themes in Organization Studies

Haridimos Tsoukas, Stephen Cummings

Haridimos
Tsoukas
Department of
Public and
Business
Administration,
University of
Cyprus, Nicosia,
Cyprus

Stephen
Cummings
Management
Group, Victoria
University,
Wellington, New
Zealand and
Warwick
Business School,
University of
Warwick, U.K.

Abstract

The past decade has witnessed a number of interesting shifts in the way people think about organizations. One of the most curious is the way in which much of the 'new thinking' is antithetical to mechanistic and rationalistic theories that have historically dominated organization and management studies. This paper investigates this shift, and argues that this new antithetical thinking can be interpreted as the re-surfacing, or recovery, of certain strands of Aristotelian philosophy, strands that were marginalized with the rise of scientific rationalism in the 17th century, before management and organization studies, as we tend to conceive of them, began. The discussion presented here demonstrates the traditional dominance of a disciplinary, mechanistic self-image in management studies, whereby the field drew its boundaries in such a way as to exclude anything 'other' than this. We argue that reconnecting organizational and management research with systems of thought other than those traditionally associated with the 'discipline', and adopting a 'kaleidoscopic' view of history, can enable researchers to think differently about key issues and inform future development. Key aspects of Aristotle's thinking are considered as a case in point.

Descriptors: disciplinary management, postmodernism, practical knowledge, agency, Aristotle

Introduction

One way of making sense of the history of ideas in organization and management theory is to investigate the answers that have been given, over time, to the following three questions. First, what *are* organizations? Second, what sort of *knowledge* do practitioners need to possess in order to manage organizations? Third, what *mode of action* should practitioners adopt towards organizational events and processes? The first question is about ontology, the second about epistemology, and the third about praxeology (Tsoukas 1944a:4; Tsoukas and Demetrios 1996).

Organization and social theorists have noted that, historically, organizations have been conceived of as machines (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Gharajedaghi and Ackoff 1984; Morgan 1986; Pondy and Mitroff 1979). Regularity, predictability, order, and efficiency were the main

features organizations were supposed to exhibit and, indeed, acquiring these features was taken to be the most important reason for formally *organizing* social action (Thompson 1967; Weber 1947). Accordingly, organization theorists have tended to see their task as discovering the law-like regularities underlying organizational behaviour. A mechanistic ontology was closely linked with a mechanistic epistemology: organizational phenomena were thought to be composed of discrete objective elements, some of which were systematically inter-connected across space and time (Pepper 1942; Tsoukas 1994b). The picture was completed with the adoption of an instrumental praxeology: practical action was predominantly conceived of as involving the manipulation of inanimate and animate resources to achieve certain ends.

This mechanistic projection, undoubtedly simplified here but broadly correct in its outline, has underpinned the development of both organization theory and practice for the better part of this century (Ackoff 1981; Burrell and Morgan 1979; Morgan 1986; Weick 1979). There are signs, however, that its influence is diminishing. Looking across the overall pattern of developments, one can see that the language now used to talk about organization and management is significantly less mechanistic than before. Recent developments in most sub-fields of management studies have in common a move away from, what Bernard Cohen (1994:76) calls 'the Newtonian style', towards a reconceptualization of their subject matter in terms of meaning, interpretation, ambiguity, conflict, context-dependence, and reflexivity (Tsoukas 1994a:2).

A few examples will suffice to make the point. In *Organization Studies*, one of the most pervasive developments has been the understanding of organizations as cultures and as political arenas (Bolman and Deal 1991; Morgan 1986; Frost et al. 1991; Martin 1992; Pfeffer 1981). Whereas earlier theorists focused predominantly on what they thought were the context-free aspects of organizations (e.g. structure, environment and technology), in more recent times, there has been a growing appreciation of the language-mediated texture of organizing and of the consequent need to understand questions of meaning and power (Pondy et al. 1983; Smircich and Morgan 1982; Moch and Huff 1989; Weick 1979). Such a conceptual shift is vividly brought into focus by contrasting Weber's (1986) description of *Entzauberung* (loss of magic) that accompanies the bureaucratization of social life, against the concern of some contemporary researchers with strengthening the 'spiritual dimension' of organizations (Bolman and Deal 1995; Cohen, C. 1994; Frost and Egri 1994; Bartunek and Moch 1994).

In strategic management, strategy is now seen by influential theorists not as the outcome of a rational process of planning, but as whatever emerges from a process of creative, often 'playful', acting (Mintzberg 1989, 1994; Weick 1987). In operations research, while the traditional concern with optimization has not disappeared, leading scholars have persistently underscored the importance of learning (and therefore the

impossibility of arriving at truly optimal decisions), interpretation, and systemic wholeness (Ackoff 1979, 1981; Checkland 1981, 1985). To a large extent, problems are seen not as objectively given entities which can be resolved by the mathematical techniques of the experts, but as subjective constructions dependent on the understandings of those who experience them (Bryant 1993; Churchman 1971; Rosenhead 1989; Tsoukas and Papoulias 1996; Vickers 1983). Likewise, in accounting, there has been a considerable interest in how accounting provides a language not for representing reality, as it was traditionally thought, but for constituting it (Boland 1989; Hopwood and Miller 1994; Manicas 1993; Morgan 1988).

What is striking about these conceptual shifts is the extent to which new approaches to management theorizing appear as the antitheses of the views that preceded them. Where earlier researchers saw clarity, researchers now see ambiguity; where there was singularity, now there is diversity: where earlier theorists searched for regularities and general theories, many now discover idiosyncrasies and particularities. This paper investigates how the history of management thought has developed in this respect, and how these developments can be accounted for. More specifically, our argument consists of three components. First, we demonstrate that the mechanistic-cum-rationalistic assumptions, upon which modern management theory has been historically built, have been so firmly entrenched that they led to the creation of a disciplinary self-image, whereby the field drew the boundaries around itself so narrowly as to exclude ideas and practices of organization and management which were not modern. Second, we argue that within these narrowly drawn boundaries, recent developments in management theory, like those mentioned above, cannot be made sense of, except as unwelcome intrusions that disrupt the smooth development of the field. Alternatively, we will interpret new thinking in management theory as, at least to some extent, the recovery of pre-modern Aristotelian themes which, although dominant in European thinking until the 17th century, were subsequently marginalized with the rise of scientific rationalism. We will illustrate this claim by looking at some of Aristotle's ideas, particularly those related to practical knowledge and a teleological understanding of the world. Finally, we outline the implications of our claims for research and pedagogy.

Drawing Boundaries: Discipline and Marginalization

Convention dictates that the history of management thought gets going, or gets 'real', around the turn of the eighteenth century. This dating is significant as wider onto-epistemological changes were also afoot immediately prior to and around this time. 'Real' management thinking situates itself within a period of history dominated by the rational–scientific system of thought. If a field wished to be taken seriously, at

the time of the 'official' founding of management thought, it had to shape itself just so (Cohen 1994); it had to act like a rational science, and management theory has clearly been shaped by the desire of early theorists to conceive of it as such (Barnard 1968; Pugh et al. 1975; Simon 1976; Taylor 1911; Thompson 1967).

The founding fathers of management sought to apply rational scientific practices to organization with the view of improving its performance (Babbage 1989; Smith 1976; Taylor 1911; Ure 1835; cf. Thomas 1993: Ch.2). By and large, they all saw organizations as machines, while human agency was thought to be too variable and, therefore, unreliable to be relied upon. Ure's writings, for example, are indicative of the mechanistic-rum-rationalistic thinking that was increasingly coming to dominate the 19th century industrial *zeitgeist*. He does not hide this enthusiasm for science, since 'science now promises to rescue [. . .] business from handicraft caprice, and to place it [. . .] under the safeguard of automatic mechanism' (Ure 1835:372). Later, Ure notes that the 'right principle of manufacturing industry' is 'wherever a process requires particular dexterity and steadiness of hand' to withdraw this process 'as soon as possible from the *cunning* workman, who is prone to irregularities of many kinds', and place it in the 'charge or a peculiar mechanism, so self-regulating, that a child may superintend it' (Ure 1835:380). The main difficulty in the way of progress for Ure is 'training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton' (Ure 1835:376). One finds similar remarks in the writings of Babbage (1989) and, of course, Taylor (1911).

The idea that a universally valid science of organization and management is possible has been, until relatively recently, a constant theme throughout the development of management theory (Barnard 1968; Simon 1976; Thompson 1967; Pfeffer 1993). What is interesting to look at is how this development (and the associated claims to scientifically validated knowledge) has been charted by historians of management. This is important, for disciplines must be conceived of as starting somewhere, and where they are seen to begin provides interesting insights into how the purveyors, members, or observers of a discipline, see themselves.

Consider, for example, the following quotation from a popular history of management text: 'The seeds of management thought were not planted when people started "doing management", they were sowed, quite literally, into the soil of human history when people started trying to make sense out of what was being done. Management as a discipline began when people started systematizing it, codifying it, and developing prescriptions for how to manage it better. Eventually, theories that could be taught and learned emerged. That was the beginning of management.' (Duncan 1990:2). Interestingly, Duncan admits that 'we certainly could begin in the fourteenth century with Machiavelli' and that 'no doubt we could learn much from Moses, perhaps Jethro, and maybe

even old "Nick". But to take management back that far', would, according to this historian, 'be an illusion, a myth, a fairy tale. Of course there were managers and organizations, and some people understood management processes and leadership. *But there was no discipline management* (emphasis added).

The tacit assumption here is that management as a phenomenon may be old but its systematic study is new. It follows from this that when we study management today we must study it within the period in which it was first constituted as a scientific field. Neither the notion that we may be 'imprisoning' ourselves through identifying 'management' with 'discipline management', nor the arbitrary nature of his 'boundary', given the admission that things were certainly managed prior, seem to cross Duncan's mind.

Duncan is not alone in holding this perspective; his views are reinforced, less dramatically perhaps, by several others (see, e.g. Roth 1994; Robbins 1991, 1993; George 1968; Pollard 1974). The point is that, for most management historians, the field really begins around, or cahoots with, the advent of scientific rationalism and the industrial revolution. Some historians are adamant about this. Pollard (1974:3) states that 'books written on management topics before [Taylor] where so far removed from modern management as to have little significance today'. He, therefore, pays them no mind. Others might concede an opening chapter or two which glosses over Egyptian pyramids, examples from the Bible, perhaps some ancient Greeks and Romans, the running of monasteries, and maybe even excerpts from Machiavelli, but these things are generally dredged up on the basis of meeting our modern conception of management. We may live life forwards, but historians of management tend to understand it for us backwards, in *modern*, mechanistic terms.

For instance, the building of the pyramids is only discussed in these histories because of the fact that a large group of people were ordered towards a common goal, labour was broken down, standardized and specialized, and a minimum wage was set (see, e.g., George 1968:4–9), not because of the crucial link between work and spirituality in this instance. Robbins (1991:31) notes that, 'someone had to plan what was to be done, organize people and materials to do it, lead and direct the workers, and impose some controls to ensure that everything was done as planned', and wonders: Who told each worker what to do? Who ensured that there would be enough stones at the site to keep workers busy? The answer to questions such as these is management. However, to realise how problematic such an approach is, it suffices to ask, along with Winch (1958:107), whether, by analogy, the notion of 'force' had the same meaning within the Aristotelian and the Galilean systems of thought. The answer, of course, is that it did not: the same notion was used in both systems, but in very different ways. To discuss therefore the building of pyramids from the point of view (our *modern* point of view) of labour division, standardization, and task specialization,

appears to disregard the radically different meaning of work in that society at that time (Joyce 1987). Interestingly, the role of slavery in these ancient societies is also rarely alluded to. Seeing slave labour as a precursor of wage labour is perhaps too close to the bone.

George's (1968) first two chapters do deal with periods prior to the Duncan's beginning of the discipline. The first is a chapter on ancient to classical Greek and Roman times called 'The Beginning of Management'. However, he concludes it thus: '[. . .] in these early times, management thought existed, but only in a somewhat nebulous and unsophisticated state [. . .] the principles were not united in a scheme of management thought, nor is there any evidence of any chronological building of various management techniques upon previously conceived ones' (George 1968:26). The second chapter, 'Management During the Medieval Period', ends with: 'From the viewpoint of management thought, the period is not especially noteworthy' (George 1968:45). The third chapter on management thought in the 1700s is given the telling title: 'A Managerial Awakening'. It begins: 'Thus far we have reviewed some of man's managerial practices from the dawn of history through the 1600s. By the beginning of the 1700s, however, a series of happenings had had a real impact on managerial practices' (George 1968:46).

Mainstream management historians do admit a certain intellectual debt to systems of thought prior to the dominance of scientific rationalism. Yet this debt does not necessarily see such systems of thought as being within the field's domain. It is not until the 1700s that happenings have a 'real impact on managerial practices'. George tells his readers that the medieval period is 'not especially noteworthy'. The ancient and classical periods' worth appears to be diminished by the lack of 'principles united in a scheme of management thought' and the lack of 'any chronological building of various management techniques upon previous conceived ones'. Management thought becomes noteworthy only after the industrial revolution and the ascent of scientific rationalism. Any system of thought on organizations and their management before the industrial age is seen as foreign, outside the field of play. Similar processes of privileging certain systems of thought and marginalizing others, may be discerned in the pages of Pollard (1974), Wren (1987), Robbins (1993) and Roth (1994).

Even beyond mainstream management history texts, one can discern intriguing boundaries drawn around the subject in the pages of business history journals. Selecting as a sample two premier international academic journals devoted to business history, and surveying the topics of the papers published in these fora, highlights clear, all be they unstated, boundaries. *Business History*, has published, at the time of writing, 343 papers over the past 20 years. None have focused on a period prior to 1675. No papers could be said to have investigated thought systems which could not be associated with a modern industrial world view. *Business History Review* has published 720 papers in its 41-year history.

Of these 720, three took as their object, periods prior to the European renaissance but none looked at the West prior to medieval times. Of the 720, only one paper, on Japanese feudal systems from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries (Carosso 1973), looked beyond systems that could be said to have led directly to, or be an essential part of, the modern industrial experience. The paper on Japanese feudal systems highlights that business and management does exist outside the set domain, but this is one paper out of 1063!

Some de-limiting process must be operating. Beyond the difficulty of securing archives the further one goes back into history, there seems to be a firmly entrenched set of background assumptions that helps sustain the view concerning the conventional boundaries drawn around the field. While it is recognized that management as a practice is indeed a time-old activity, it is assumed that such an activity has certain intrinsic properties which it has been possible to study and codify only in the last couple of centuries. Since the formation of management theory as a discipline, the argument goes, we have been able to accumulate the requisite knowledge in order to find out what those properties are. Management theory, therefore, may have a long pre-history, not particularly useful to be sure, but its real history did not start until quite late.

There are two problems with these assumptions. First, as argued earlier, the object of study (i.e. practices of organization and management) is de-contextualized and the result is the tendency to view earlier historical phenomena through the cognitive categories of modernity, rather than understanding those phenomena in their own terms. Second, through identifying 'management' with 'discipline management', the boundary around the field is drawn so narrowly that makes it difficult to facilitate truly innovative thinking about key issues in the field. Furthermore, even when developments in management theory go beyond its conventionally drawn boundaries, as those developments briefly reviewed in the introduction do, there seems to be a difficulty in accounting for them except to say, disapprovingly, that they are 'chaotic' and 'incoherent', making management theory resemble 'a jungle' (Koontz 1980:186) or, to continue the metaphor, more 'a week patch than a well-tended garden' (Pfeffer 1982:1–2; see also Bennis 1973; Pfeffer 1993). As the argument that follows will demonstrate, what we are witnessing now in management theory is, in part at least, the gradual 'come-back' of ideas prevalent prior to the privileging of scientific rationalism and mechanistic thinking, but marginalized since. Unless one is prepared to look beyond the conventional boundaries of the field, one will find it difficult to account for those developments that seem to be diametrically opposed to the hitherto dominant orthodoxy.

On the Recovery of Ideas: A Kaleidoscopic View of History

How can we get outside of the 'box' described above and think differently about management? How can we make sense of, and further build

on, recent developments in management theory which appear to fall outside the received wisdom? Stephen Toulmin outlines a number of possible responses to the shifting times we come to inhabit with regard to his particular sphere of interest, philosophy: 'philosophy has limited options' he notes. 'It can cling to the discredited research program of the purely theoretical (i.e. ''modern'') philosophy, which will end up by driving it out of business; it can look for new and less exclusively theoretical ways of working, and develop the methods needed for a more practical (''post-modern'') agenda; or it can return to its pre-17th-century traditions, and try to recover the lost (''pre-modern'') topics that were sidetracked by Descartes, but can be usefully taken up for the future.'(Toulmin 1990:11). It is this third option that we wish to pursue with regard to management theory.

As a means of pursuing his third option, Toulmin returns to Montaigne. MacIntyre (1985), alternatively, invokes Aristotle, but for much the same purpose. We also seek to return to Aristotle, in particular his views on practical knowledge and narrative rationality, and means and ends, facts and values, in an attempt to both inform current developments in management theory, and provide impetus and inspiration for further thinking in these areas. Why Aristotle? For two reasons. First, because, as Toulmin (1990) and MacIntyre (1985) among others have documented, Aristotelian thinking was the very system of thought which scientific rationalism successfully fought and ultimately marginalized after the 17th century. For those who want to develop alternatives to scientific rationalism, returning to some pre-modern themes and looking at them in a new light may be a source of inspiration and a catalyst for imaginative reconceptualization. Aristotle's thinking is significantly different from the hitherto dominant mechanistic orthodoxy in the social sciences to make it both challenging and inspiring. Second, revisiting Aristotle makes sense because Aristotle wrote about certain issues which continue to concern us, even today. As two eminent philosophers recently remarked: 'Plato and Aristotle [. . .] asked: ''How should one live?'', and that question is as pressing now as it was in 400 BC' (Purnam and Putnam 1996:14).

In the next section we will demonstrate how fragments of Aristotle's thinking, marginalized three centuries ago by scientific rationalists, can be seen to be making a comeback in the social sciences in general, and in organization studies in particular (see Badaracco and Webb 1995:25; Collins 1987; Cummings 1996; Dobson 1994:856; Mangham 1995; Solomon 1992: Chs. 10–16). However, before we do this we must first forgo the notion that the development of thinking about organization and management is underpinned by progression — the assumption that we are part of a continuous progress in supplying ever more adequate unifying conceptions.

Rather than assume that we today know more about management than people ever did, we advocate an alternative view. We suggest that while we have learnt much over the past 300 years, we have, at the same

time, sidelined, forgotten, or unlearned some things as well. Rather than see the history of management thought as a 'stairway to heaven', upwards and onwards towards the set of unifying theories that provide us with some measure of certainty, we advocate a view of history as a 'kaleidoscope'. This is a view perhaps best expressed in some of Michel Foucault's key works.

Foucault (1966) approached the past as if it were a kaleidoscope containing a number of discrete fragments, not a collective and cumulative learning process: it reveals a pattern, but one largely shaped by contingencies. To move from one *episteme* (Foucault's neologism for, roughly, a particular period's matrix of thought-cum-practice) to another was to 'twist the kaleidoscope', and create a new pattern. The sequence of patterns obeys no inner logic, conforms to no universal norm of reason and evinces no higher purpose. History, therefore, cannot be regarded as a form of progress, for the latest pattern is 'neither more true or false than those that proceeded it'. (Veyne related in Miller 1993:152). The fragments that have been, create the mix from which the present is formed (Noujain 1987:160).

It is therefore not surprising, if one takes this view, that fragments from the past may reappear from time to time, although they may be in different contexts. It may pay, then, to look beyond our own historically formed systems of thought to fragments that have lain hidden from view (Cummings 1996:255). The point about rediscovering Aristotle, for example, is that he thought *differently*, not greater or less than, modern social scientists. His conception of practical reason as well as his teleological understanding of the world are relevant for us today *and*, simultaneously, are different from the hitherto dominant *zeitgeist*. It is this tension between relevance and difference that enables us, late-modern (or post-modern) individuals, to creatively appropriate the insights of great thinkers from the distant past. In the next sectioin we will show how recent developments in organization studies concerning the new emphasis on narrative rationality, and the conceptualization of organizations as communities-of-practice, can be interpreted as the recovery of certain Aristotelian themes.

Twisting the Kaleidoscope Back

Practical Knowledge: *Phronesis* and Narrative Rationality

Historically, organization theory has been shaped by the desire of early theorists to conceive of it as a science. What justified their belief that a science of administration was possible? Barnard's (1976:xlvi) answer was that '*abstract principles* of structure may be discerned in organizations of great variety, and that ultimately it may be possible to state *principles of general organization*' (emphasis added). In other words, a science of administration is thought to be possible because behind all

the apparent variety discernible in organizations, there is an underlying order which can be captured by social scientists with their method of inquiry. The promise was seductive: peel away the contingent, historical, context-influenced, and time-dependent features of organizations and you will grasp their pure, intrinsic properties.

It is no accident therefore that one of the foundational assumptions of organization theory has been the conception of 'formal organizations as abstract systems' (Barnard 1968:74) — namely as sets of formal rules which are operative under the norms of formal rationality (Simon 1976; Thompson 1967). On this view, organization theorists search for the regularities manifested in organizations, etablish their validity, and codify them in the form of rules (i.e. 'if, then' statements). Practitioners can then put these rules into practice with confidence (cf. Tsoukas 1994a:5, 1994b:776). In this way, the decontextualized ideal is upheld: formal-cum-abstract knowledge is privileged over practical knowledge. The tyranny of the particular, of the local, and of the timely is thus escaped (Toulmin 1990:30–35).

However, it has been increasingly recognized in organizatiion studies that formal-cum-abstract knowledge is of limited utility to practitioners (Argyris 1972; Brown and Duguid 1991; Nonaka 1994; Spender 1992; Orr 1990; Schon 1983, 1987; Tsoukas 1997; Weick and Browning 1986). Several ethnographic studies have confirmed what may have been untuitively obvious all along. Whether we study the work of photocopier service technicians (see Brown and Duguid 1991; Orr 1990) or the clinical practice of medical doctors (Good 1994; Hunter 1991), or reflect on Captain Vere's dilemmas in Melville's *Billy Budd* (Vargish 1991; Winch 1972), we can detect a common element: competent practical action is much more than just an instrumental application of formal-cum-abstract formulae. It involves the use of *practical knowledge*, the very knowledge the conventional scientific approach sought to discredit and replace (cf. MacIntyre 1985; Toulmin 1990), or at least formalize (Hagueland 1985; Masuch 1990).

Anybody approaching issues such as these cannot afford to ignore Aristotle. Indeed, Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* is perhaps the text *par excellence* for anyone concerned with the question of what exactly practical knowledge is about. Contrasting Aristotle's thinking with that of contemporary management and social researchers on this subject, one is struck by the extent to which recent theorists appear to be resurfacing issues that were central to the Aristotelian mode of thought. In this section we explore Aristotle's understanding of practical knowledge, show how this understanding is making a comeback today in organization studies, and demonstrate how a better grasp of his ideas might further inform the development of the field.

There are three intellectual virtues, according to Aristotle, the possession of which, along with the possession of moral virtues, will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* (well being). First, there is scientific knowledge (*episteme*), which consists of deductions from basic prin-

ciples. In Aristotle's (1140b 30) words: 'Scientific knowledge is judgement about things that are universal and necessary; and the conclusions of demonstration, and all scientific knowledge, follow from first principles'. Second, there is craft knowledge (*techne*), which is about how to make things; about 'contriving and considering how something may come into being which is capable of either being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing made' (1139b 31). Third, there is practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which deals with both universals and particulars. More precisely, *phronesis* is knowing what is good for human beings in general as well as having the ability to apply such knowledge to particular situations, or, as Aristotle remarks, it is the 'reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods' (1140b 6). Who has practical wisdom? Pericles is such a man, says Aristotle, as well as those 'who are good at managing households or states' (1140b 6). Pericles and men like him are practically wise because 'they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general' (1140b 6). In other words, it is the ability to see the common good and put it into practice, to combine 'political acumen and practical intelligence' (Plutarch, *Themistocles* 2), that marks out practically wise individuals.

In Aristotle's framework, practical wisdom is clearly the highest intellectual virtue. While it includes a general awareness of the highest human goods, it also involves the appreciation of particular facts; its function is to put into practice the values that the moral virtues provide. Why is such a function necessary? Because, as Hutchinson (1995:208) comments, 'it is possible to have the right values without knowing how to achieve them in practice — a sort of moral clumsiness. Likewise it is possible to know how to execute objectives without having the right values, in which case we are perhaps clever, but not wise. It's better to have sensible virtue than naive virtue, and better to have virtuous good sense than amoral cleverness' (see also Gadamer 1989:312–3; MacIntyre 1985:152; Taylor 1993:57).

Notice that while for Aristotle both craft knowledge and practical wisdom are types of practical knowledge (in contrast to scientific knowledge which is theoretical), he also draws a subtle but crucial distinction between craft knowledge and practical wisdom: the former studies things with an eye to *production*, the latter with an eye to *action* (Reeve1992:74–5). Why is the difference between action and production important? Actions, for Aristotle, 'are for their own sakes or because of themselves; productions are for the sake of or because of their products' (Reeve 1992:75). In performing an action the end is *acting well*, that is acting 'with regard to the things that are good or bad for man' (1140b 4–7), and this end is part of the performance of action. However, in producing an object the end is that object itself (Gadamer 1989:314–8). As Aristotle (1140b 6) put it: 'while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end'.

In other words, there is an internal relationship between acting and the standards in terms of which acting is judged, which is not there when producing artifacts. In the latter case, production is judged simply in terms of the appearance of the object to be produced — the end is given, only the steps to be taken to achieve it need to be considered (Bernstein 1983; Francis 1994:249; Hutchinson 1995–206). That is why, for Aristotle, craft knowledge is ultimately subordinate to *phronesis*, because in human affairs the moral virtues and practical knowledge go together: 'it is impossible to be practically wise without being good' (1144a 18). Practical wisdom involves knowing the right values *and* being able to put them into practice in concrete situations.

Apart from being inherently value-laden, what is it about practical matters that requires human agents to have practical wisdom instead of merely scientific or craft knowledge? Drawing on Aristotle, Nussbaum (1990:70–75) points out three reasons. To begin, practical matters are mutable; they change over time. Any set of rules for guiding action is of necessity based on what action was undertaken in the past. However, action will also occur in the future, and the future may be different from the past. New problems will inevitably come up calling for flexible and imaginative responses (Brown and Duguid 1991; Tsoukas 1994b, 1997).

Second, practical matters are inherently indeterminate or ambiguous (*aorista*). No definition can ever exhaust the thing defined, for every definition is produced by *someone* and, thus, depends on one's perspective and purpose (MacIntyre 1985:97–8; Rorty 1991:97–101). The relatively recent emphasis in organization studies on indeterminacy, ambiguity, and interpretation (Bolman and Deal 1991; March and Olsen 1976; Morgan 1986; Feldman 1991; Weick 1979) recovers similar themes, and could well be further informed by these ancient ideas.

Lastly, as Nussbaum (1990:74) remarks, 'Aristotle suggests that the concrete ethical case may simply contain some ultimately particular and non-repeatable elements'. Consider, for example, Melville's *Billy Budd*, a novella often commented upon for the moral dilemmas it presents. In it, Captain Vere, a naval officer during wartime, must pass a judgement on Billy Budd, a sailor of exemplary character who, when falsely accused of treason by a petty officer, struck and accidentally killed him. Billy Budd is innocent but the military law states clearly that during wartime, homicide in the ranks must be punished by death. Melville masterfully shows Captain Vere's predicament: should his personal understanding of the facts take priority over military rules? Moreover: whatever answer is given in this particular case, should it also apply to other similar cases? Discussing Melville's story, writers as diverse as Vargish (1991:89–90), Winch (1972:155–170), and Hunter (1991:38–40) have pointed at the ungeneralizability of moral decisions. In Hunter's (1991:39) words: 'No sure answer is to be found in even the clearest principles. Those who decide must match a clear general

principle to a particular case whose features are not accounted for in, and may indeed contradict, the prevailing rule'. In adopting this view, these authors espouse a form of Aristotelian casuistry (i.e. 'case ethics' — see Mckinney 1995:331–335; Jonsen and Toulmin 1988; Toulmin 1990:188).

Thus, for Aristotle, to deal successfully with practical matters one needs practical knowledge, which means that one needs to be equipped with *phronesis*. When facing practical matters, whether one is acting wisely or not depends on one's 'readiness not just to calculate the timeless demands of intellectual formulae, but also to take decisions *pros ton kairon* — that is, "as the occasion requires" ' (Toulmin 1990:190). How could this be done? How could the universal and the particular be brought together? In what form could practical knowledge be expressed? It is questions like these that have led several organizational researchers to argue recently for the importance of narrative rationality in management (Bolman and Deal 1991; Brown and Duguid 1991; Morgan 1986; Schon 1983, 1987; Tsoukas 1997; Weick and Browning 1986). For those researchers, the *narrative* form and its associated rationality is the best medium for thinking practically, and for becoming practically wise.

Narrative thinking involves the building of a convincing story which attempts to show the coherence between the actions of the individuals involved in a particular situation and the meaning of the situation for them (Taylor 1985; Ricoeur 1991). Such a story will certainly contain knowledge of regularities, or scientific principles, or general values, insofar as they have been available, but will also include the details of particular contexts, local circumstances, and timely events. Knowledge that is narratively organized helps actors integrate the general and the particular. Unlike the propositional structure of conventional scientific accounts (namely, a structure consisting of 'if, then' statements), the structure of narratives is such that it allows a multiplicity of events to be flexibly connected along time (Neustadt and May 1986:91–133; Griffin 1995:1251–3). Indeed, *time* is a crucial feature of narratively organized accounts, whereas, as Bateson (1979:63) has noted, in propositionally organized knowledge, time has no place (see also Tsoukas 1994a:7). Organized around concrete events, narrative knowledge helps provide practitioners with unexpected clues which may trigger new ways of thinking, and thus initiate fresh courses of action (Orr 1990; Spender 1992; Weick and Browning 1986). Furthermore, narrative knowledge allows the actions of concrete individuals and their social interactions to be preserved, and local contexts to be taken into account (Brown and Duguid 1991; Daft and Wiginton 1979; Weick 1979). That also gives narratives a mnemonic value since they are registered in, and recalled from, human memory more easily than sets of abstract propositions.

To sum up, the relatively recent interest by several organizational theorists in narrative rationality has a distinctly Aristotelian echo. Aristotle's

emphasis on the indispensability of *phronesis* for human action tallies with the importance now placed on practical knowledge. The formal-cum-abstract mode of reasoning which was so highly exalted by the early organization theorists (see, e.g., Thompson 1956–57:103) is now seen as too crude to account for a multifaceted and ambiguous reality. Practical knowledge is no longer conceived in quasi-algorithmic terms, as the application of generic formulae, but in terms of acting wisely, being able to close the 'phronetic gap' (Taylor 1993:57) that almost inevitably exists between a formula and its enactment.

Reconnecting Means and Ends, Facts and Values

It has often been noted that one of the distinguishing features of formal organizations is the pervasive distinction between *means* and *ends* or *doing* and *thinking* (Weber 1948:169–198; Taylor 1911; Mintzberg 1989; Perrow 1986; Schipper 1996). Likewise, in organization studies, the opposition between *facts* and *values* has historically won wide-ranging acceptance. For example, Simon (1976:250) has persistently argued that, in administrative science, unless we keep facts uncontaminated by values we risk not being scientific. As he put it, with admirable clarity:

'The proposition "Alternative A is *good*" may be translated into two proposi-tions, one of them ethical, the other factual: "Alternative A will lead to max-imum profit". "To maximize profit is good". The first of these two sentences has no ethical content, and is a sentence of the practical science of business. The second sentence is an ethical imperative, and has no place in any science'.

According to Simon, therefore, ultimate goals such as particular notions of profit, efficiency, or human conduct, cannot be debated within scient-ific discourse. Moreover, given the 'fixed and official jurisdictional areas' (Weber 1948:196) that are characteristic of formal organizations, ultimate goals cannot be debated within them either (Jackal 1988). Within such a dualistic way of thinking we have to choose: either we follow the canons of the scientific discourse and thus accumulate factual statements but stay mute on important questions concerning end pur-poses and values; or we comprehend ourselves as moral creatures only and, thus, become unwilling to be concerned with the empirical regular-ities of the world. This is certainly a problematic situation to be in.

The problems flowing from such a view of organizations and manage-ment theory have been exposed by several researchers in the last forty years. On the one hand, some researchers have been concerned with the multiple dysfunctions for individuals, groups and organizations that are caused by the extreme separation of means and ends (Argyris 1957; Hackman and Oldham 1980; Pasmore and Sherwood 1978). Indeed, in a sense, most efforts for organizational change and work reform in the

last thirty years can be seen as successive attempts to fight the deleterious effects of bureaucratic fragmentation, and integrate, insofar as it is feasible, doing and thinking at several levels: the individual, the group, or the department (Emery 1978; Davis and Cherns 1975; Peters and Waterman 1982). On the other hand, other researchers, more radically, have pointed out the profoundly dehumanizing effects of the modern bureaucratic mentality and the split between facts and values that it has caused (Fromm 1976; Marcuse 1964; Bauman 1989; Horkheimer 1974).

Despite the different research agendas followed by these critics, they do share the view that organization and management, conceived and practised with this split in mind, is at best often dysfunctional and, at worst, outright wrong. If this is accepted, might it be the case that we need to rethink these fundamental distinctions? Can the split between means versus ends, and facts versus values be overcome? Are they not obviously sensible, even natural, distinctions?

They are sensible indeed, but only within a modern discourse. After all, since Descartes and Leibniz, the whole idea of finding a 'rational method' has been predicated on the assumption that there are certain 'clear and distinct ideas' as well as certain basic 'sensory impressions' which are available to us all (Toulmin 1990:199). Personal or cultural idiosyncrasies and inherited traditions needed to be brushed aside for pure reason to shine through. However, if one goes past Descartes, Leibniz and Newton, one will see that right up until the 16th century a different discourse was in place in Europe, a discourse largely shaped by Aristotle's thinking (MacIntyre 1985; Toulmin 1990). Within this discourse the above-mentioned oppositions did not even arise. To the extent, therefore, that it is increasingly recognized that some of the foundational distinctions upon which modern organization studies has been based are not natural, nor useful, and may even be harmful, it is worth revisiting Aristotle in order to see how it might be possible to reconnect means and ends, and facts and values.

A key notion in Aristotle's thinking was the teleological understanding of the world: individuals and objects are primarily defined in terms of the *purposes* they characteristically have, or the roles they are expected to fulfil (see also Ackoff 1981:21–23; Mangham 1995:84–85; Mulligan 1987). The concepts of a knife or a farmer, for example, cannot be defined independently of the concepts of a *good* knife or a *good* farmer respectively. Because we know that a knife is a tool for cutting things (that is to say, we know what its purpose or *telos* is), we can draw the conclusion that the sharp knife is a good knife.

Similarly, from such factual premises as 'He has more customers than any other carpenter in town', and 'He repeatedly wins prizes for his artifacts in the local festival', we can draw the evaluative conclusion that 'He is a good carpenter'. We can do this because to think of someone as a farmer, a carpenter, or a manager is to think of them as having certain purposes by virtue of their respective roles. Answers to the

question of how they ought to behave follow from the roles they have to play. A teleological understanding of human beings conceives of them not as ahistorical selves or abstract individuals (this is a much later, modern invention) but as persons defined by their social, cultural and historical circumstances. Purposive concepts, therefore, transform evaluative judgements into factual statements (MacIntyre 1985:57–59).

From the above it follows that in the Aristotelian tradition to call something good is to make a factual statement. To ask, for example, 'what is a good captain?' is *not* to come up with a list of attributes that good captains share (as modern contingency theorists would have it), but to point out the things that *those* who are recognized as *good* captains *do*. Notice how, following this way of thinking, concepts are not defined as abstract entities (this is a very modern practice that took roots after the Aristotelian tradition had been discredited); and they are not separated from practices or particular contexts (Feyerabend 1987:113). To call a particular action good or just or effective, is to say that this is what a good leader would do in such a situation — that is, to make a factual statement (MacIntyre 1985:59).

The collapse of the distinction between factual and evaluative statements implies that a community teaches its junior members what a good captain, farmer or manager is, not *in abstracto* but *in concreto* — by observing and, if possible, participating in historically developed practices. Consequently, teaching practical skills is not about teaching abstract rules and technical means for the achievement of exogenously given goals, but, in effect, initiating the taught into the traditions of a community of practitioners — teaching them both the communal goals *and* the means for achieving them (Solomon 1992; Dobson 1994:85). For Aristotle, such a community was the *polis* (city-state). In a parallel manner, for contemporary philosophers such as MacIntyre (1985), and organization theorists such as Brown and Duguid (1991), and Schon (1987) it is 'the practice'. What all these scholars converge on is the acknowledgement that participating in a community requires the acceptance of the authority of its conventions, norms, and standards by those entering it. Although communities have histories, and are marked by conflict as to what conventions and standards should prevail, debate can nonetheless be said to be rational for it is governed by certain canons of relevance (Mulhall and Swift 1992:82–85). Thus, participation into the life of the community entails the acceptance of both its historically developed norms and standards (its *nomoi*, laws), *and* the possibility of individuals debating them and, consequently, changing them. After all, this is what politics was for Aristotle: a collective activity whose object was to arrive at decisions on public matters (*ta koina*) after a process of collective deliberation (Castoriadis 1991:160). Being part of a community *and* debating its norms and standards were inextricably linked (Solomon 1992).

One of the relatively recent developments in organization studies is the

recognition that management is a *political* process (Handy 1985:222–3; Morgan 1986:141–198; Bolman and Deal 1995:240; Pettigrew 1973). The epistemological implications of such a view are significant: it means that when decisions are made, and actions are taken, we should not think that it is the technology, or the environment, or the society that *causes* them (this is our modern discourse in operation, compelling us to seek for impersonal causes and set aside the explanatory significance of human agency — see MacIntyre 1985; Taylor 1985), but rather that they have come about as a result of the practical reasoning of the actors who have been involved in them. Insofar as organizational theorists are prepared to re-instate human agency to its proper epistemological status, they cannot help but recover the ancient Greek distinction between *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (law), and the realization that it is humans in practical contexts who make laws and take decisions.

Moreover, on this view, politics is not seen as just one more contingency to reckon with (Hickson et al. 1974; Pfeffer 1982), but as the distinguishing feature of deliberative human communities. Such an understanding of politics stems from the fact that the human world is intrinsically uncertain, not fully ordered, and that nobody has (or could have) the 'right answers'. Commenting on the ancient Greek conception of politics, Castoriadis (1991:104) grasps the nettle: 'If the human world were fully ordered, either externally or through its own ''spontaneous operation'', if human laws were given by God or by nature or by the ''nature of society'' or by the ''laws of history'', then there would be no room for political thinking and no sense in asking what the proper law is or what justice is. [. . .] If a full and certain knowledge (*episteme*) of the human domain were possible, politics would immediately come to an end [. . .]'. Thus in the social domain in general, and in organizations in particular, uncertainty, ambiguity and politics must go together.

Back to the Future: Implications for Theory and Practice

The 17th century witnessed a significant turn in the way in which humans sought to think about the world. Philosopher-historian Stephen Toulmin (1990:30–35) depicts this turn, a shift from renaissance humanism to scientific rationalism, in terms of four dimensions: from a concern for the spoken word and the speaker to a concern for the objective written word; from an emphasis on the particular case to the universal law; from local knowledge to general knowledge; and from timely action to timeless theory. Toulmin (1990:200) sums up the shift as a new search for a 'rational method' motivated by a 'decontextualized ideal'. 'After 1630', he notes, '[scientists and] philosophers ignored the concrete, timely, particular issues of practical philosophy, and pursued abstract, timeless, and universal issues' (Toulmin 1990:186).

As a result of the hitherto accumulated experience, notably the frustration of the high hopes generated by the rise of modernist thinking, Toulmin persuasively argues that over the last thirty years we have been witnessing a swing of the pendulum back to some pre-modern (mainly Aristotelian) themes and concerns. Recent developments in management theory echo this broader cultural swing: the decontextualized ideal, so strongly evidenced in the development of management thought, is being increasingly challenged.

What makes us think of the pendulum now swinging *back*, or, to put it differently, that new thinking in management theory can be seen, in part at least, as a *recovery* of, or *re-awakening* to, Aristotelian themes? Could recent developments not simply be parallelling similar concerns in ancient thought or in 16th-century European thought? While such an argument could doubtless be made, it would not be plausible. For to argue that recent intellectual shifts merely happen to mirror similar developments twenty-five centuries ago would be to conceive of intellectual changes as a-historical and disconnected. If the preceding analysis is accepted, it follows that it is far more plausible to conceive of recent changes in social theory in general, and management theory in particular, as the recovery, at least in part, of ideas that were *historically* set aside in the heyday of modernity, rather than as developments which happen to be similar to the ideas of Aristotle in the fifth century BC. After all, the Aristotelian tradition was alive and well as recently as 300 years ago. It is only now, with the benefit of experience, and the confidence that comes from feeling secure about the future of the social sciences, that we may realize that the 17th-century quest for certainty was chimeric. Contrary to Descartes' wishes, we have found no universally acceptable ideas as 'clear and distinct' as those found in Euclidean geometry — the Cartesian paradigm of rational inquiry (Toulmin 1990; MacIntyre 1985; Taylor 1985; Rorty 1991).

Could it be that this re-surfacing of ideas is nothing but a nostalgic flash back or a fundamentalist call for a 'return to the basics'? It certainly could, but this is *not* how we see it. Rather we view such developments in terms analogous to those used in psychoanalysis (Lyotard 1989:7): as a re-connection with our marginalized (or repressed) intellectual past so that we can come to a better awareness of our current difficulties, expand our range of experiences and, therefore, envisage new possibilities for action. Historical circumstances inevitably distance us from our intellectual past, but a historical understanding can, as Gadamer (1980:83) has noted, bring the past near 'so that it speaks with a new voice'. At the same time it needs to be noted that not all of Aristotle's ideas are 'coming back', nor should they. The context which we inhabit today furnishes very good reasons not to subscribe to Aristotle's metaphysical biology, or to agree with his defence of slavery (MacIntyre 1985:162–163). Nevertheless, many other aspects of his thinking, particularly his concern with practical knowledge, community, and social teleology, are helpful to us today. We have tried here to

illustrate how an investigation of some strands of Aristotelian thinking could help us to better understand the nature of practical knowledge, and reconcile facts with values, and means with ends — issues which are timely and important to the theory and practice of management.

The Value of Historical-cum-Comparative Thinking

Feyerabend (1987) remarked that all intellectual changes come from the irregular juxtaposition of traditions and 'faulty' logic that spawns invention, as opposed to an emphasis on consonance and sameness of relations that leads to refinements within existing boundaries. Similarly, in his manifesto for post-modern thinking, Lyotard (1984:xxv) invites his readers to opt for the 'inventor's paralogy', not the 'expert's homology'. On a similar line, the analysis presented here has suggested that exploring any historically earlier, or other, systems of thought may be immensely useful, because this practice helps us think innovatively about our field. The value from a historically-based understanding of ideas is the same as that derived from *comparative* understanding: what we tend to think of as being necessary truths, may well turn out to be historical contingencies (Rorty 1991:208; Tsoukas 1992:160).

For example, a comparative look at the economic success of East-Asian economies reveals that the link between capitalism and individualism, far from being necessary, as Weber (1947) thought, is a mere accident of history (Berger 1987:170). Likewise, Weberian notions of bureaucracy, instead of being intrinsic properties of modern organizations, turn out to be historically acquired features, contingent on the particular culture and circumstances (i.e. 18th and 19th century Anglo-Saxon societies) within which modern organizations first emerged (Whitley 1992). Finally, the history of ideas shows that the modern identification of rationality with formal-cum-abstract reasoning for finding the best means to achieve given ends, is a *historical* development that occurred three centuries ago — the Aristotelian conception of rationality (*orthos logos*) emphasized final ends not means (Horkheimer 1974:Ch. 1; MacIntyre 1985; Taylor 1985; Toulmin 1990). For anyone interested in transcending the limits of procedural rationality, Aristotle's work (and the classical Greek tradition in general) is a challenging source of inspiration (Dobson 1994; MacIntyre 1985; Taylor 1985).

The preceding illustrations underline the highly contextual nature of social phenomena. More generally, a historical-cum-comparative approach can help us see 'the contingency of our dearest biases and most accepted necessities, thereby opening up a space for change' (Flynn 1994:32). From a historical point of view, one can always find traces or fragments of the future in the past, although the sum pattern of each *episteme* (in Foucault's sense of the term) will always be unique. Given that the one thing we can say about the future is that it will be different from the present, we may be more likely to see different possibilities for the future in pasts removed somewhat from the

present, than in the here and now itself. Adopting a 'kaleidoscopic', rather than a 'cumulative', view of history, we can begin to appreciate the past, particularly the past outside the boundaries of our tradition, as a rich seam of ideas, the contemplation of which may enable us to think differently and innovatively about organization and management.

In management theory, adopting a historical-cum-comparative approach towards the notions of organization, strategy, leadership, decision making, corporate culture, and so on, will prove insightful and liberating (Barley and Kunda 1992; Dobbin 1995; Shenhav 1995; Hendry 1992). It will almost certainly show that our most cherished beliefs are not necessary truths but historical constructions, and, as such, they may be changed. By way of illustration, consider the notion of 'assembly' that has become virtually synonymous with industrial capitalism.

In the first half of the 19th century, the concept of assembly in Britain was closely associated with craft work. The production of firearms, for example, was organized around small establishments, an extensive division of labour, and dependence on skilled craftsmen (Rosenberg 1969:29–36). When, in 1853, the British Committee on the Machinery of the United States visited American manufacturing establishments in the north-eastern states, it was so astonished to see American workers assemble firearms by putting together standardized and interchangeable parts, that, in its report, the Committee enclosed the term 'assembly' in quotation marks. As Rosenberg (1969:57) remarks, 'the notion of assembling a firearm, with the use of ''nothing but the turn screw'', was completely strange to men who had had previous experience with craft methods of gun production'. A historical analysis of 'assembly' (and of the factory system in general — see Littler 1982; Jones 1982) makes us see that to assemble a product did not always involve standardized mass production as one might have expected today. Situating current ideas and practices in their historical contexts helps us see that at some other time, at some other place perhaps, they had a different meaning. Moreover, the meaning they have today is a particular historical construction; it emerged and got established at particular spacio-temporal junctures. A historically-informed investigation can show the contingency of meaning, and shed light on the social processes through which particular definitions of reality become dominant and get institutionalized (Barrett and Srivastva 1991:241–2).

The Way Ahead: Searching for the Local, the Timely, and the Particular

From a pedagogical point of view, a contextually-sensitive, historical approach to organization and management will lead us to question the way in which students are currently educated, and how the knowledge they are imbued with enables, or disables, them to think differently. Most management and OB textbooks still assume a rather formalistic

view of management (Barrett and Srivastva 1991:232–5; Fineman and Gabriel 1994; Thomas 1993). Their motto appears to be: here are some models validated by scientific research, which will be of some help to you in explaining and predicting others' behaviour (see Robbins 1993:4). An awareness that concepts and models in management theory are history and context-dependent is more often than not absent. Aside from a few opening pages in which 'the evolution of management thought' is briefly examined (in terms that show how our current understanding of management is more developed or evolved than our predecessors), the rest is about social scientific models presented as necessary truths. Following such an approach, it is unlikely that the critical ability of readers will be strengthened, or that their imagination will be enhanced. Reading these textbooks, one is often left with the impression that throughout history, the most overriding concerns of human beings regarding work were the division, standardization, planning, and control of labour. How different cultures, or even the same culture at different points in time, attached different meanings to work and therefore organized labour differently, is not usually pursued. Extending the boundaries of management theory beyond what the self-image of the field has historically allowed, will enable us to examine alternative thought systems and thus challenge and potentially transform our own self-understandings.

If the preceding analysis is accepted, it is clear that management theory ought to follow a line of inquiry which is closer than it has hitherto been to history and anthropology. Indeed, as Toulmin (1990:188) and Rorty (1991:206) have pointed out, perhaps a good indication of how the Western culture *in toto* has begun to be increasingly concerned with the local, the timely and the particular, is the current revival of anthropology (Harvey 1990). This is not particularly surprising given that now, more than ever before, there is a strong awareness of the diversity of cultures and of societal institutions existing in the world. Recognizing the contextuality of organization and management does justice to this diversity and, judging by the proliferation of both relevant academic publications and articles in the business press, there are signs that this is the direction towards which management theory is moving. Perhaps it will not be long before management-theory textbooks become less concerned with 'principles of general organization' (Barnard 1976:xlvi; Thompson 1956–57:103) and more interested in genealogical analyses of history-dependent and context-specific organizations: the factory, the clinic, the hospital, the asylum, the prison, the government agency (Foucault 1975, 1977). Such a mode of inquiry will be short in offering generic models of organization and management, but rich in sketching the historical processes that gave rise to the preceding types of organization, in particular contexts.

Moreover, more attention is increasingly being paid (and it will very probably continue to be so) to *human agency* and to the role of *contingencies* in accounting for organizational phenomena. This emerging

fascination with agency and contingency has been brilliantly captured by *The Economist*, in an article attempting to explain the astonishing current revival of interest in Greek and Latin classic authors:

'A generation ago it was intellectually disreputable to pay much attention to individuals in history: human events were to be explained in terms of slow-moving, impersonal forces — capital, labour or demography, for example — and these were, in theory, law-governed and predictable. Yet while such forces do play a role, recent unforeseen upheavals — the end of apartheid, the collapse of communism, the wars of Yugoslav succession — have shaken confidence in a purely long view of human events. It is no longer convincing to treat history as slow and implacable, like the shifting of the earth's tectonic plates: chance counts and accidents matter; individuals do make a difference.' (*The Economist*, May 18 1996, p. 86)

What the Greek and Latin classics have to offer, argues the same magazine, is precisely what scientific rationalism sought to displace: an appreciation of the crucial role of human agency in human affairs. It remarks: '[A] tale involving the spiteful and admirable acts of Achilles or Odysseus will probably make more sense to a world interested in the impact of individuals than it would be to a world concerned with law-like forces. [. . .] It is no accident that with the revival of the classics there has been a rise in the art (or in the volume) of biography' (*The Economist, op.cit*). This paper has attempted to show how redrawing the boundaries of management theory enables us to bring forward hitherto marginalized systems of thought, particularly Aristotelian thinking. As argued earlier, Aristotle's concern with human agency, practical knowledge, and social teleology is sufficiently different from the hitherto dominant orthodoxy to both challenge us and open new vistas.

To conclude, the primary reason for examining current concepts, distinctions, and models in management theory in a historical-cum-comparative light, as we have done here, lies in the creative *tension* such a mode of inquiry brings about. By relativizing the present, it is shown to be one 'plausible world' (Hawthorne 1991) among others, neither more nor less 'natural' than potential alternatives, but different. In the final analysis, a historical-cum-comparative understanding stretches the imagination and reminds us that today's necessities were yesterday's contingencies. In doing so it makes it possible for us to think afresh, and see a little further than the horizon of the present permits. However, in saying all of this, we do make the assumption that thinking *differently* is something that management theory takes to be important. If this is so, then, as Vidal (1994:508) remarks, we may well start to 'recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty'.

References

Ackoff, Russell
1979 'The future of Operational Research is past'. *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 30:93–104.

Ackoff, Russell
1981 *Creating the corporate future.* New York: Wiley.

Aristotle
1980 *The Nicomachean ethics.* Transl. D. Ross, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Argyris, Chris
1957 *Personality and organization.* New York: Harper and Row.

Babbage, Charles
1989 *The economy of machinery and manufactures,* 4th ed. (first published 1832). London: William Pickering.

Badaracco, Joseph, Jr., and A. P. Webb
1995 'Business ethics: A view from the trenches'. *California Management Review* 37:8–28.

Barley, Stephen, and Gideon Kunda
1992 'Design and devotion: Surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37: 363–399.

Barnard, Chester
1968 *The functions of the executive.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barnard, Chester
1976 'Foreword' in *Administrative behavior.* H. Simon, xlvii–xlvi. New York: The Free Press.

Barrett, F. J., and S. Srivasta
1991 'History as a mode of inquiry in organizational life: A role for human cosmogony'. *Human Relations* 44:231–254.

Bartunek, Jean M., and Michael Moch
1994 'Third-order organizational change and the Western mystical tradition'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 7:24–41.

Bateson, Gregory
1979 *Mind and nature.* New York: Bantam.

Bauman, Zygmunt
1989 *Modernity and the holocaust.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bennis, Warren
1973 *Beyond bureaucracy.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Berger, Peter
1987 *The capitalist revolution.* Aldershot, UK: Gower.

Bernstein, Richard J.
1983 *Beyond objectivism and relativism.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Boland, Richard J.
1989 'Beyond the objectivist and subjectivist: Learning to read accounting as text'. *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 14: 591–604.

Bolman, Lee, and Terence Deal
1991 *Reframing organizations.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Bolman, Lee, and Terence Deal
1995 *Leading with soul: An uncommon journey of spirit.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, John Seely, and Paul Duguid
1991 'Organizational learning and communities of practice'. *Organization Science* 2:40–57.

Bryant, Jim
1993 'OR enactment: The theatrical metaphor as an analytic framework'. *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 44: 551–561.

Burrell, Gibson, and Gareth Morgan
1979 *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis.* London: Heinemann.

Carosso, V. J.
1973 'The development of Za in medieval Japan'. *Business History Review* 47:438–465.

Castoriadis, Cornelius
1991 *Philosophy, politics, autonomy.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Checkland, Peter
1981 *Systems thinking, systems practice.* New York: Wiley.

Checkland, Peter
1985 'From optimising to learning: A development of systems thinking for the 1990's. *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 36:757–767.

Churchman, C. West
1971 *The design of inquiry systems.* New York: Basic Books.

Cohen, C.
1994 ' "Magic" and a voluntary organization: The implications for Community OR'. *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 45:255–260.

Cohen, I. Bernard
1994 'Newton and the social sciences, with special reference to economics, or the case of the missing paradigm' in *Natural images in economic thought.* Philip Mirowski (ed.), 55–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, D.
1987 'Aristotle and business'. *Journal of Business Ethics* 6:567–572.

Cummings, Stephen
1996 'Back to the oracle: Post-modern organization theory as a resurfacing of pre-modern wisdom'. *Organization* 3:249–266.

Daft, Richard, and John Wiginton
1979 'Language and organization'. *Academy of Management Review* 4:179–191.

Davis, Louis E., and Albert B. Cherns
1975 *The quality of working life,* Vol. 1. New York: The Free Press.

Dobbin, Frank
1995 'The origins of economic principles: Railway entrepreneurs and public policy in 19th-century America' in *The institutional construction of organizations.* Richard W. Scott and Soren Christensen (eds.), 277–301. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dobson, J.
1994 'Theory of the firm: Beyond the Sirens'. *Economics and Philosophy* 10:73–89.

Duncan, W. J.
1990 *Great ideas in management: Lessons from the founders and foundations of managerial practice.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Emery, Fred E.
1978 'The assembly line: Its logic and its future' in *Sociotechnical systems.* William A. Pasmore and John J. Sherwood (eds.), 339–347. San Diego: University Associates.

Fieldman, S. Martha
1991 'The meaning of ambiguity: Learning from stories and metaphors' in *Reframing organizational culture.* Peter J. Frost, Larry Moore, Meryl R. Louis, Craig C. Lundberg, and Joanne Martin (eds.), 145–156. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Feyerabend, Paul
1987 *Farewell to reason.* London: Verso.

Fineman, Stephen, and Yiannis Gabriel
1994 'Paradigms of organizations: An exploration in textbook rhetorics'. *Organization* 1:375–400.

Flynn, Thomas
1994 'Foucault's mapping of history' in *The Cambridge companion to Foucault.* Gary Gutting (ed.), 28–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, Michel
1966 *The order of things: An archaeology of the humanities.* London: Tavistock/Routledge.

Foucault, Michel
1975 *The birth of the clinic.* New York: Vintage.

Foucault, Michel
1977 *The birth of the prison.* London: Allen Lane.

Francis, J. R.
1994 'Auditing, hermeneutics, and subjectivity'. *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 19:235–269.

Fromm, Erich
1976 *To have or to be?* London: Abacus.

Frost, Peter, and Carolyn Egri
1994 'The Shamanic perspective on organizational change and development'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 7:7–23.

Frost, Peter J., Larry Moore, Meryl R. Louis, Craig C. Lundberg, and Joanne Martin, *editors*
1991 *Reframing organizational culture*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg
1980 'Practical philosophy as a model of the human sciences'. *Research in Phenomenology* 9:74–85.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg
1989 *Truth and method*, 2nd ed. London: Sheed and Ward.

George, C. S. Jr.
1968 *The history of management thought*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gharajedaghi, Jamshid, and Russell Ackoff
1984 'Mechanisms, organisms, and social systems'. *Strategic Management Journal* 5:289–300.

Good, J. Byron
1994 *Medicine, rationality, and experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Griffin, L. J.
1995 'How is sociology informed by history?' *Social Forces* 73:1245–1254.

Hackman, Richard, and Greg Oldham
1980 *Work redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hagueland, John
1985 *Artificial intelligence: The very idea*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Handy, Charles
1985 *Understanding organizations*, 3rd ed. London: Penguin.

Harvey, David
1990 *The condition of postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hawthorne, Geoffrey
1991 *Plausible worlds: Possibility and understanding in history and the social sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Henry, John
1992 'Business strategy and business history: A framework for development'. *Advances in Strategic Management* 8:207–225.

Hickson, David, C. Robert Hinings, Charles MacMillan, and J. Schwitter
1974 'The culture-free context of organization structure: A trinational comparison'. *Sociology* 8:59–80.

Hopwood, Anthony, and Peter Miller
1994 *Accounting as social and institutional practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horkheimer, Max
1974 *Eclipse of reason*. New York: Continuum.

Hunter, M. Katherine
1991 *Doctors' stories*. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press.

Hutchinson, D. S.
1995 'Ethics' in *The Cambridge companion to Aristotle*. Jonathan Barnes (ed.), 195–232. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jackal, Robert
1988 *Moral mazes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jones, S. R.
1982 'The organization of work: A historical dimension'. *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 3:117–137.

Jonsen, R. Albert, and Stephen Toulmin
1988 *The abuse of casuistry: A history of moral reasoning*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Joyce, P., *editor*
1987 *The historical meanings of work.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Koontz, Harold
1980 'The management theory jungle revisited'. *Academy of Management Review* 5:175–188.

Littler, Craig
1982 *The development of the labour process in capitalist societies.* Aldershot, UK: Gower.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois
1984 *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois
1989 'Defining the postmodern' in *Postmodernism: ICA documents.* Lisa Appignanesi (ed.), 7–10. London: Free Association Books.

MacIntyre, Alasdair
1985 *After virtue*, 2nd ed. London: Duckworth.

Manicas, Peter
1993 'Accounting as a human science'. *Accounting, Administration and Society* 18:147–161.

Mangham, Ian
1995 'MacIntyre and the manager'. *Organization* 2:181–204.

March, James, and Johan Olsen
1976 *Ambiguity and choice in organizations.* Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget.

Marcuse, Herbert
1964 *One-dimensional man.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Martin, Joanne
1992 *Cultures in organizations: Three perspectives.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Masuch, Michael
1990 *Organization, management, and expert systems.* Berlin: de Gruyter.

McKinney, H. Ronald
1995 'The new casuistry vs. narrative ethics: A postmodern analysis'. *Philosophy Today* 39:331–344.

Miller, James
1993 *The passion of Michel Foucault.* New York: Simon and Shuster.

Mintzberg, Henry
1989 *Mintzberg on management: Inside our strange world of organizations.* New York: Free Press.

Mintzberg, Henry
1994 *The rise and fall of strategic planning.* Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Moch, Michael, and Anne Huff
1989 'Power enactment through language and ritual' in *Readings in managerial psychology.* Harold J. Leavitt, Louis R. Pondy, and David M. Boje (eds.), 367–388. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morgan, Gareth
1986 *Images of organization.* Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

Morgan, Gareth
1988 'Accounting as reality construction: Towards an epistemology for accounting practice'. *Accounting, Organization and Society* 13: 477–485.

Mulhall, Stephen, and Adam Smith
1992 *Liberals and communitarians.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Mulligan, T.
1987 'The two cultures in business education'. *Academy of Management Review* 5:491–500.

Neustadt, E. Richard, and R. Ernest May
1986 *Thinking in time: The uses of history for decision makers.* New York: The Free Press.

Nonaka, Ikujiro
1994 A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organization Science* 5:14–37.

Noujain, E. G.
1987 'History as genealogy: An exploration of Foucault's approach to history' in *Contemporary French philosophy.* A. P. Griffiths (ed.), 157–174. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, C. Martha
1990 *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Orr, E. Julian
1990 'Sharing knowledge, celebrating identity: Community memory in a service culture' in *Collective remembering*. D. Middleton and D. Edwards (eds.), 168–189. London: Sage.

Pasmore, William, and John Sherwood
1978 *Sociotechnical systems*. San Diego: University Associates.

Pepper, Stephen
1942 *World hypotheses*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Perrow, Charles
1986 *Complex Organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Peters, Thomas, and Robert Waterman
1982 *In search of excellence*. New York: Warner.

Pettigrew, Andrew
1973 *The politics of organizational decision-making*. London: Tavistock.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey
1981 'Management as symbolic action: The creation and maintenance of organizational paradigms'. *Research in Organizational Behavior* 3:1–52.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey
1982 *Organizations and organization theory*. Boston: Pitman.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey
1993 'Barriers to the advance of organizational science: Paradigm development as a dependent variable'. *Academy of Management Review* 18:599–620.

Pollard, H. R.
1974 *Developments in management thought*. London: Heinemann.

Pondy, Lousi R., Gareth Morgan, and T. Dandridge
1983 *Organizational symbolism*. Greenwich, CN: JAI Press.

Pondy, Louis R., and Ian Mitroff
1979 'Beyond an open system model of organization' in *Research in Organizational Behavior*. Barry M. Staw (ed.), 1:3–39. Greenwich, CN: JAI Press.

Pugh, Derek S., Roger Mansfield, and Malcolm Warner
1975 *Research in organizational behaviour: A British survey*. London: Heinemann.

Putnam: Hillary, and R. A. Putnam
1996 'What the spilled beans acan spell: The difficult and deep realism of William James'. *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 4864, June 21, pp. 14–15.

Reeve, C.D.C.
1992 *Practices of reason*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ricoeur, Paul
1991 *From text to reality*, Vol. 2. London: Harper and Row.

Robbins, Stephen
1991 *Management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Robbins, Stephen
1993 *Organizational behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rosenberg, Nathan
1969 *The American system of manufactures: The report of the Committee on the Machinery of the U.S., 1855*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rosenhead, Jonathan
1989 *Rational analysis for a problematic world: Problems structuring methods for complexity, uncertainty and conflict*. Chichester: Wiley.

Rorty, Richard
1991 *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roth, W.
1994 *The evolution of management theory: past, present, future*. Delray Beach, FL: St. Lucie Press.

Schipper, Frits
1996   'Rationality and the philosophy of organizations'. *Organization* 3:267–289.

Schon, Donald A.
1983   *The reflective practitioner.* Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

Schon, Donald A.
1987   *Educating the reflective practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shenhav, Yehuda
1995   'From chaos to systems: The engineering foundations of organization theory, 1979–1982'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40:557–585.

Simon, Herbert
1976   *Administrative behavior*, 3rd ed. New York: The Free Press.

Smircich, Linda, and Gareth Morgan
1982   'Leadership: The management of meaning'. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 18:257–273.

Smith, Adam
1976   *Wealth of nations: An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations.* (first published 1784). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Solomon, Robert
1992   *Business ethics and excellence.* New York: Oxford Unversity Press.

Spender, J.-C.
1992   'Knowledge management: Putting your technology strategy on track' in *Management of technology*, Vol. 3. T. Khalil and B. Bayraktar (eds.), 404–413. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Management of Technology, February 1992, Miami.

Taylor, Charles
1985   *Philosophy and the human sciences: Philosophical papers*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Charles
1993   'To follow a rule . . .' in *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives.* Craig Calhoun, E. LiPuma, and M. Postone (eds.), 45–60. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Taylor, Frederick W.
1911   *Principles of scientific management.* New York: Free Press.

Thomas, Alan
1993   *Controversies in management.* London: Routledge.

Thompson, James D.
1956–57 'On building an administrative science'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 1:102–111.

Thompson, James D.
1967   *Organizations in action.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Toulmin, Stephen
1990   *Cosmopolis: The hidden agenda of modernity.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tsoukas, Haridimos
1992   'The relativity of organizing: Its knowledge presuppositions and its pedagogical implications for comparative management'. *Journal of Management Education* 16: S147–S162.

Tsoukas, Haridimos
1994a 'Introduction: From social engineering to reflective action in organizational behaviour' in *New thinking in organizational behaviour.* H. Tsoukas (ed.), 1–22 Oxford: Butterworth/Heinemann.

Tsoukas, Haridimos
1994b 'Refining common sense: Types of knowledge in management studies'. *Journal of Management Studies* 31: 761–780.

Tsoukas, Haridimos
1997   'Forms of knowledge and forms of life in organized contexts' in *In the realm of organization*, Robert Chia (ed.), forthcoming. London: Routledge.

Tsoukas, Haridimos, and B. Demetrios Papoulias
1996   'Creativity in OR/MS: From technique to epistemiology'. *Interfaces* 26:73–79.

Ure, Andrew
1835   *The philosophy of manufactures.* London: Charles Knight.

Vargish, Thomas
1991   'The value of humanities in executive development'. *Sloan Management Review* 32:83–91.

Vickers, Geoffrey
1983   *The art of judgement.* London: Harper and Row.

Vidal, Gore
1994   *United States: Essays 1952–1992.* London: Abacus.

Weber, Max
1947   *The theory of social and economic organization.* Transl. A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons. New York: The Free Press.

Weber, Max
1948   *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology.* Edited by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. London: Routledge.

Weber, Max
1986   *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.* Transl. T. Parsons. London: Allen-Unwin.

Weick, Karl
1979   *The social psychology of organizing.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weick, Karl
1987   'Substitutes for strategy' in *The competitive challenge: Strategies for industrial innovation and renewal.* D. J. Teece (ed.), 221–223. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Weick, Karl, and Larry Browning
1986   'Argument and narration in organizational communication'. *Journal of Management* 12:243–259.

Whitley, Richard
1992   *Business systems in East Asia.* London: Sage.

Winch, Peter
1958   *The idea of a social science.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Winch, Peter
1972   *Ethics and action.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wren, D.
1987   *The evolution of management thought.* New York: Wiley.