What is critical in critical management studies?

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■ Introduction

Planet earth is being exploited beyond its means! Human beings are in conflict with each other and with themselves. Man as such is 'nature sick unto death' (Žižek 2008:204). Societies are in debt, and human beings are continuing the exploitation of earth and other human beings through a new management fad called 'sustainability' as they become more narcissistic, materialistic and hedonistic in evolving from *Homo sapiens* into *Homo economicus*![3] This is a direct

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3. *Homo economicus* (economic man) is defined as: a theoretical human being who rationally calculates the cost and benefit of every action before making a decision (Collins Dictionary 2016). This definition is often expanded to include the agent making the cost – benefit analysis as 'narrowly self-interested'.

result of modern man's so-called 'scientific method' of knowledge creation, characterised by a total focus on sense perception (the sensible) and a total disregard for the metaphysical. Theory creation in a social environment and the critique against these theories lack the critical element of the metaphysical and a total disregard for human nature. This is the critique against both theory and critical theory: It is lacking the non-sensible and metaphysical component that we find in human nature. The abovementioned statement by Žižek 'nature sick unto death' is not 'fashionable nonsense' (Sokal & Bricmont 1996), but these statements are supported by empirical evidence. Earth exploitation is reflected in the 'Earth Overshoot Day' report (Global Footprint Network 2016) where humanity uses 1.6 times the natural resources produced by planet earth in a year. If humans continue 'doing business as usual, we shall consume two times the resources produced by planet earth by the year 2030. This means that, every six months, we humans consume one year's resources produced by planet earth (or a planet every six months). In spite of this, we use a contradicting phrase such as 'sustainability' in both the natural and social sciences.

Societies are further overindebted. The so-called value created by organisations[4] is funded by debt as reflected in the McKinsey's (2015:4) report, which indicates that global debt equals 286% of global production. The accompanying question is: 'How can you owe 300 times more than what you can produce?' From the two arguments above, it can be concluded that value is not being created but rather being destroyed. Taleb (2013) confirms this when he states

4. Organisations in this context refer to organisations in its broadest context, from profit seeking organisations, not-for-profit organisations and institutions of government.

that 'in one day banks destroyed more wealth than what was created in a *hundred* years of banking.'

The two arguments above lead one to conclude that the collective (society) and the particular (humans) are entering a modern 'apocalyptic era' and that this so-called 'brainy man – *Homo sapiens*' is on the brink of extinction (Žižek 2011). This poses the question: 'Why did this happen?' The first clue in answering the question regarding the extinction of this 'thinking' species or 'rational man' is the Kantian view that 'human rationality lacks the power to answer metaphysical questions, since our knowledge is limited by our specific and narrowly-circumscribed capacities for organising our field of sensation' (Wicks 2015). Russel (1950:69) supports this with the view that '[*m*]an is a rational man – so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life, I have looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement.' Russel's view is enforced by the unquestioned generation of knowledge in a social context (and in particular management) through the research paradigms of positivism, grounded theory, phenomenology and causality. Keat (1980) questions Russel's views with the statement that '… positivism is unable to provide us with the basis for a rational criticism of existing social reality'. Marcuse (1964) summarised these observations with an aptly titled publication *One-dimensional man*. In the movie *The Matrix*, this 'one-dimensionality' is adequately captured by Morpheus when he informed Neo (*The Matrix* 2006):

> The Matrix is a system Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters – the very minds of the people we are trying to save. Many of them …, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it. (n.p.)

This inability of rational man to answer metaphysical questions is then the first critical element that is lacking in the generation of theory and the critique of any such theory in the social sciences.

From 'one-dimensional man' and Morpheus's statement, we (one-dimensional man protecting the system) can concur with Žižek's (2011) prediction that we are 'living in the end times', and the horseman of this modern apocalypse is the worldwide ecological crisis, imbalances in economic systems, the biogenetic revolution and, lastly, the exploding social divisions and ruptures. Evidence and key indicators to these four horsemen are abundantly available in scientific journals and popular media. What is even more surprising is that, in the face of all the available evidence to the contrary (and the arguments presented by critical theory and critical-management scholars and scientists from other disciplines), the human species carries on with 'exploitative business as usual', or should we perhaps recall Morpheus's advice to Neo?

The scenarios highlighted above generated a response from individuals and societies (those that are not in control of the system) with statements and rallying cries such as 'occupy Wall Street', 'Rhodes must fall', 'decolonisation of curriculum' and 'all-inclusive capitalism'. These are cries of a global society at war with itself. It is inevitable that these phenomena would elicit a response in the academia and from social commentators. The response is a critique of the current social order, and this prevailing social order has a name 'capitalism'. It does not matter in which fashion the essence of capitalism (the legitimatised exploitation of natural and human resources; Žižek 2008:175) is dressed up and softened by inventing new words, concepts and phrases – capitalism remains exploitation

(the final cause) through control. The critique of the current (and not so current) social 'dis'-order found its contemporary audience through the introduction of 'critical thinking' and 'critical management studies' in social and management scholarship. In applied form, one finds it in what is known as the 'Pink tide or Bolivarian revolution' in the Latin Americas.[5] What is important to note is that the first critique (in the Frankfurt School) was not only limited to the exploitation by capitalism but also to the exploitation under Marxism and other capitalist-opposing ideologies (Žižek 2008). What these concepts have in common is the common denominator of 'critique', the questioning of theory, thinking and actions in the prevailing social order (capitalism) or the in body of knowledge that supports this all-devouring social order.

This critique against the social order is not new and did not originate with critical theory. It has its origins in German idealism and romanticism that was the predominant philosophical quest in the 18th century (Taylor 1975:39). This critique arose in response to questions raised by the Enlightenment. In the 19th century, both philosophers and social commentators critiqued the social order and tried to establish an alternative such as that proposed by Karl Marx. In the 20th century, this critique continued in the Frankfurt School with their contribution to critical theory (critiquing the social order of the day such as capitalism and Marxism). This line of thought developed to where we find ourselves today with critical management studies (CMS) comprehensively presented through the work of Alvesson, Bridgman and Wilmot (2009) and Alvesson and Wilmot (2012). Apart from the

5. It may seem that I assume and take for granted that (business) management is part of the social order. This link is adequately argued by Alvesson and Wilmot's (2012:17) statement that [*m*]anagement is inescapably a social practice'.

18th-century German idealistic and romantic philosophers, other critiques mostly ignore the role of human nature.

Since Descartes and the dawn of the Enlightenment period, where the focus was on *res cogito* [rational human being] with a disregard for *res extenza* [the corporeal], led to a situation where man (*res cogito*) became divorced from the corporeal world (*res extenza*) or nature. German idealism and romanticism rejects this notion that the external world (corporeal world) can exist separate of my mind. These German idealistic philosophers, in particular Schiller, Schlegel, Hölderlin and Hegel (Taylor 1975:34–35) argued, to be human came naturally, but this unity died with the Enlightenment. The *cogitans* [mind] was divorced from the *extenza* [body],[6] which brought conflict between mind and body. The unintended consequence was that 'rational modern man had to be at war with himself' (Taylor 1975:34–35). This 'man at war with himself' provides us with the second critical element not taken into consideration in a critique against the prevailing social order. That modern man is at war with him or herself implies modern man is in continuous contradiction with him or herself. Descartes's conditions of existence (*res extenza*) clash with his inner *telos* [purpose]. To reconcile this contradiction was the objective of German idealism and romanticism (Taylor 1975:97).

The preceding brief introduction identified two critical elements of any social critique, namely the role of human nature (rational man and the inability to explain the metaphysical) and the fact that modern man is in contradiction with her of himself. The context of the social order against which this critique is aimed needs to be

6. This is known as the mind-body problem.

established and linked to the two critical elements of this critique. The discussion below is neither an attack on or a defence of the arguments on behalf of or against the current social order nor a critique or defence of an alternative social order such as socialism. Rather, it is a discussion to position the critique in order to determine what is 'critical' (or lacking) in this critique and to arrive at a reference point for continued discussion.

Philosophical positioning of the inquiry

In the quest to understand the environment and him or herself, human beings desire to know their environment and themselves. Aristotle (Metaphysics 980a-5) states that 'all men by nature desire to know.' How is this knowing generated, or how does this knowing takes place? The point of departure is the Platonic division between episteme (types of knowledge) and how we gain that knowledge, such as through our senses (seeing something) or by understanding. Aristotelian 'causes' support this movement from sense experience (material cause) to final cause or first principle. This highest level of understanding (knowing) is the most difficult as it is the furthest removed from the senses. The Cartesian separation of the *res cogito* and *res extenza* also separates man (the knowable, the observable) from the metaphysical (the non-observable).[7] This is presented in Figure 1.

The diagram (based on Plato's divided line, Aristotelian causes and Cartesian *res extenza*) provides us with a visual presentation of current knowledge generation where we as humans (researchers)

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7. In philosophy, the metaphysical concept refers to 'beyond the physical'.

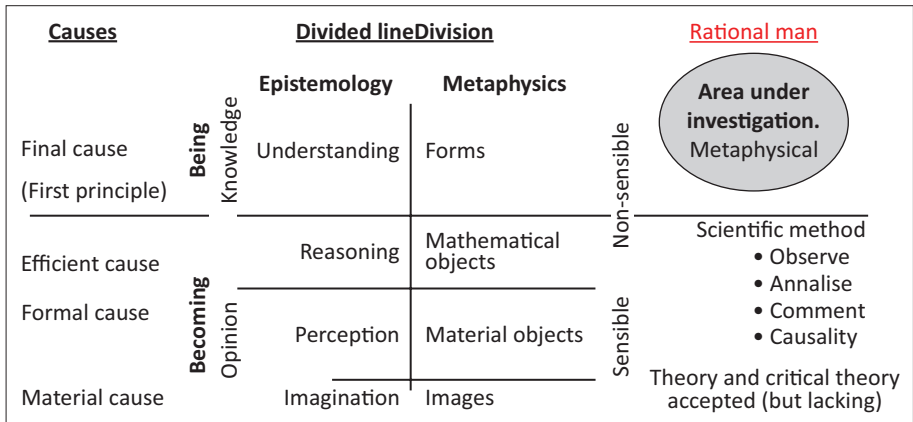| Causes			Divided lineDivision			Rational man
			Epistemology	**Metaphysics**		**Area under investigation.** Metaphysical
Final cause (First principle)	**Being**	Knowledge	Understanding	Forms	Non-sensible	
Efficient cause	**Becoming**	Opinion	Reasoning	Mathematical objects		Scientific method • Observe • Annalise • Comment • Causality
Formal cause			Perception	Material objects	Sensible	
Material cause			Imagination	Images		Theory and critical theory accepted (but lacking)

FIGURE 1: Philosophical positioning.

observe phenomena through our senses. We see something, hear something or read something that stimulates the senses and creates an image (imagination). We then look for some evidence to see if the phenomenon repeats itself through material objects. Through mathematical means, we describe the observed phenomena and assume that we have created knowledge. To move to the epistemological level of 'understanding' (to become wise), however, we need to understand the '…ness' of something. This 'wise-ness' was exhibited by King Solomon with the example of the two mothers and one child. King Solomon understood the '…ness' of 'mother-ness', which is tender loving care, doing everything to protect their child. This '…ness' lies at the metaphysical level of forms and the epistemological level of understanding.

This '…ness' or Platonic metaphysical world is represented by the Aristotelian *causa finalis* [final cause]. The final cause is preceded, by the material cause, the formal cause and the effective cause. Aristotle relates this final cause to the 'first principle', that is, the 'first thing'

that 'causes' a thing to be. He also argues that the final cause is the most difficult to understand as it is the furthest removed from the senses.

Modern man (that is, man affirmed in *res cogito* observing the *res extenza*) followed the Platonic road to knowledge creation. This knowledge can be categorised as the Aristotelian material and formal cause, but only a small part of it pertains to the effective cause and nothing to the final cause. Knowledge created by modern man ends with the Platonic knowledge level in which we use mathematics (statistics) to commit intellectual fraud (Taleb 2007:230–252) to protect the system.

This philosophical position can be summarised as one pertaining to the unknown knowns, identifying the void of the non-sensible and metaphysical created by modern man. It refers to those foundational or critical elements that we should know but do not know.

■ A social science: The unknown knowns

The discussion below is intended neither to critique nor to revisit the body of knowledge (deleting or adding) related to critical theory and critical management studies, and I am indebted to the inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the work by contemporary authors. However, a brief review of some important concepts generated by these authors is required to provide some context for the current research project. This will assist us to determine what is 'critical', that missing link to the non-sensible and metaphysical, that which is missing in the prevailing social order. The discussion does not claim

to be comprehensive but will be limited to a discussion of the prevailing literature.

The first reference that can be contributed to the enlightenment and the separation of the thinking man from the bodily man (*res cogito and res extenza*) goes back to Adam Smith (1758:13). Smith uses the example of 'making a pin', indicating how this process can be divided into 18 separate and distinct operations. The commentator in the movie *Seabiscuit* uses the example of how the work of a dressmaker is broken up into its separate activities. The result of this division is that the human being became divorced form the fruits of his or her labour. A blacksmith becomes a welder, a dressmaker becomes a button sewer, and a carpenter becomes a knob turner. Due to this separation (of value creation into separate activities that can be controlled), humans do not see the value that they create as the human being and his or her labour becomes a commodity (Marx 1867:1–7). As a consequence, their reason for existence disappears. Through customisation, humans have been alienated from their purpose or inner *télos.* This alienation is a direct result of advances in technology.

Any economic activity is built on the exploitation and destruction of resources. Marx (1867) expressed it in the following way:

> Moreover, all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, the more rapid is the process of destruction. (p. 254)

This claim by Marx immediately questions the role of technology and the fashionable concept of 'sustainability'. As 'robbery' occurs, there cannot be something like 'sustainability' (apart from sustaining robbery)

as it is based on a process of destruction through the use of technological advancement. This then leads us to the next social problem, which is that advances in technology assist a 'society … [*to*] sustain its hierarchic structure while exploiting ever more efficiently the natural and mental resources' (Marcuse 1964:loc. 2795). This view is further supported by Žižek (2011) who argues that technological advances will have the following effect:

> [*T*]he global economy is tending towards a state in which only 20 percent of the workforce will do all the necessary work, so that 80 percent of the population will become basically irrelevant, … unemployed. (p. 211)

Apart from the exploitation upon which Marcuse and Žižek commented, technological advance also led modern man to (falsely) believe that technology will ultimately save the human species (and planet earth).

The nature of this social order (capitalism) is continuously under threat. John McDonnell (2015) – the British shadow chancellor – argues that 'Karl Marx has come back into fashion.' Yanis Varoufakis (2015)– the Greek Finance minister during the 2015 Greek crisis – describes the response of Greece's creditors (Troika – the IMF, the World Bank and the European Central Bank) as follows: 'What they are doing with Greece has a name: terrorism.' Perhaps the voice with the most following is that of Pope Francis (2013) who describes capitalism as the 'new tyranny', a description which he supports by a statement: 'Not to share wealth with the poor is to steal.'

Despite these views and statements, the alternatives to capitalism did not perform any better. Instead of contra-capitalism, it went under the name of 'alternative modernity'. The first response in this 'alternative modernity' was the French revolution.

Singer (1983:loc. 710), in his publication *Hegel: A very short introduction,* informs us that the French revolution was the result of criticism against the existing social order. This is a consequence of the Enlightenment where humans has the right to assert itself, to become 'free'. However, the result of this revolution (new freedom) was revolutionary terror (much the same as we see with the so-called Arab spring and the destruction of property in South Africa) with and without legal formalities that inflicted punishment through a quick death at the guillotine.

Marxism and its various variants in the form of Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism did not perform any better and is now history.[8] This modern modernity is also known as 'the great proletarian cultural revolution', the aim of which was not only to take over state power but an economic reorganisation to create a new form of everyday life, a 'new crime' that destroyed another crime (Žižek 2008:205). Žižek (2008:176–179) also argues that this proletarian revolution merely displaced the social order to turn an advanced country into a backward country. For Chairman Mao, the proletarian revolution should have taken place amongst the impoverished masses of the Third World, for example in the Latin Americas.

A workable social order might have been Bolivarianism (Pink tide) in the Latin American states. The only viable economic idea from this so-called left is the 'basic citizen's income', a form of rent

8. Even socialism in the EU is now under threat from austerity measures enforced by the troika (Varoufakis 2015).

ensuring the dignified survival of all citizens. The term 'rent' characterises capitalism in which 'rent' should be paid to the owners of capital, rent collected and paid by those who dispose of natural resources and, finally, 'rent' to the workforce. There is, however, also 'another' rent, a rent paid to all citizens of the state. This basic citizen income (independently of what you do) was signed into law in Brazil in 2004. How will this be funded? This citizen's income will be funded through 'the very profit seeking process which sustain capitalist productivity [*that is*] is to be taxed [*additionally*] to provide for the poor.' The same model was followed by other Latin American countries such as Chile and Venezuela.[9] However, Žižek (2011:233–243) is of the opinion that other countries (and citizens) are being exploited by this alternative social order and that 'something has to give'.

The discussion above, arguing that the current situation is untenable and that the alternatives did not perform any better, might lead the reader to despair. Life and particularly the social order and economic life may appear to be futile. These unknown knowns (those characteristics and/or knowledge that we take for granted without understanding where they come from and that we just 'assume') firmly fit into the Platonic epistemology of imagination, perception and opinion without understanding the driving force behind all of these so-called forms of scientific knowledge influenced by human nature.

9. In Africa (Zimbabwe) it went under the name of 'indigenisation' (Roberson 2016).

■ An observation of futility

In the South African context, the contradiction between the 'good' for capitalists[10] and the 'good' for a particular community is portrayed in the case of Xolobeni vs. Transworld (a fully owned subsidiary of the Australian Mineral Commodities Company [MRC]). The owners of capital, MRC, want to mine pristine tribal land in the Transkei area of South Africa whilst the Xolobeni community is opposed to this as it will destroy their ancestral land and life style. They have effectively (legally) stopped the mining process, but there is a resurgence from MRC to develop the mine, and this has created conflict in which some of the activists (those opposing the mining operations) were killed (Tabelo 2016).

The forecast for the community (and society) is grim. In the movie *Star Trek*, the Borg states: 'Resistance is futile. You are being assimilated. We will succeed' (*Star Trek: The First Encounter*). The statement by the Borg (*Star Trek*) is analogous to Morpheus's (*The Matrix*) statement to Neo: 'Look around you Neo. Carpenters, lawyers … They will do everything in their power to protect the system.' The Borg (capitalists) will succeed, but why will they succeed?

Gibran (1974:41–57) informs us through his essay entitled 'Satan' about the dilemma in which theoreticians, critical commentators, managers and ordinary humans find themselves on a daily basis. The essay introduces us to a priest walking through an abandoned village street on a cold rainy night and hearing a groan of suffering coming from the dark. Upon investigation, he encounters an individual severely injured by an attack and close to death. Upon

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10. The term 'capitalists' is used in its Marxian form, meaning the owners of capital, those with the money (Marx 1867:135).

further investigation, the priest determines that it is Satan lying there. Satan begs the priest for help. Upon seeing the priest's hesitation, Satan engages in a discussion with the priest and informs the priest that their destiny is entwined – they cannot do without one another. If Satan dies, what will the priest do as there will be no work to do? There will be no sinners, no evil and no hunger. It is not only the priest that will be without work but also people in other occupations such as doctors, nurses and lawyers. Furthermore, what about the priest's duty to save sinners? In the end, the priest picks Satan up, dresses his wounds and saves him.

This is the same dilemma in which we as theoreticians and managers in business and society find ourselves. We critique management but are managers. We critique capitalism whilst we partake in the processes and proceeds of capitalism. We ask for a different social system than capitalism, but we require the fruits (profits) of capitalism to power a different social system. We ask for critical thinking but are one-dimensional ourselves. This is the second critique against critical theory and critical management studies (or for that matter social studies): We are part of this contradicting system, no matter how violent it is.

Zizek's (2008:151) interpretation and commentary that 'not even Hitler was violent enough' and that 'the killing of 30 million Chinese during the cultural revolution' was not enough to stop capitalism, reflects on the futility of fighting the system (capitalism) and can serve as a wake-up call that something else (instead of a revolution – a violent reaction) is required to reach a breaking point where 'good' can be interpreted as 'good' for society and not only for individuals. The aim is for humans (and creation) to co-exist without any form

of exploitation, sub-ordination and control. This requires that humans need a return to their reason for existence, their purpose in life and their relationship with nature. It requires a reconnection to the sensible and the metaphysical, a reconnection with what we observe through our senses and mind with the metaphysical – that which our senses cannot observe and our mind cannot comprehend. It requires a change in human nature.

We can now establish a point of reference, not only in terms of this discussion but also for future discussions. Do we stay comfortable in our contradicting social environment, ignoring our *télos* or higher purpose (the metaphysical), do we stay biased and 'one-dimensional', or do we change?

◼ Human nature

This section introduces the nature of modern man in an attempt to align what is critical in the contemporary social order with the way forward. The two concepts that will be presented is the birth of modern man through 'enlightenment' and its related concept 'freedom'.

◼ The birth of modern man

Any social science is confronted by contradictions. The analogy of a coin serves as the best example here. A coin consists of three sides. Initially one would think that a coin has a heads side and a tails side, but the link between these two opposites is the side of the coin (the third side) that represents reality (though not yet truth). This also establishes the unspoken reality of research and knowledge creation.

Knowledge is a representation of reality at a specific moment in time and space presented to us through our senses. It is not the truth as Cooper (2012:44–46) informs us that the truth 'is unchanging, always the same.' The moment one introduces the human agent who is predictably irrational (Ariely 2008), one cannot use the term 'truth'. Rather, one should use the term reality as it is bound through the senses in time and context. The defining moment for rational man in time and context was when Descartes stated: '*esse est percipi*' [I think therefore I am]. This is the birth of modern man where the existence of the self is demonstrated and everything outside of the self is in doubt, even God (Taylor 1975:6). According to Kant (Taylor 1975:66), the birth of enlightenment also leads to the notion of rational freedom, and it is not only rational freedom that all humans desire but 'freedom' *tout court*. This 'freedom' is then also an essential requirement for separating man from the metaphysical – those unknown knowns that can bound man in its rationality.

The contradiction of freedom

One of the outcomes of enlightenment, and one that is used as a morally laden concept today, is the concept of freedom. In the context of social science and more specifically management, one has to ask: What does freedom mean? Marx (1867:135–136) informs us that, in a free market (as presented by capitalism), the owner of money and the owner of labour meet in the market and deal with each other on the basis of equal rights. Both are therefore equal and free in the eyes of the law. If the owner of labour sells himself to the owner of capital, he or she '… converts himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity [*labour*]

into a commodity' (Marx 1867:135). Žižek (2008:205) explains this relationship as follows: As an individual, you have the freedom of choice (rational choice) to decide about your actions. The moment you exercise your choice (actually doing it), you become a slave not only of yourself but also of the master. You exercise your freedom to be employed by an organisation (Marx's owner of money), but the moment you sell your commodity (labour) you become the slave of the master (the owner of money). The same argument applies to any other inherent human commodity that you exchange for something else: the master-slave relationship is being established. Hegel (Singer 1983:loc. 756) informs us that 'this term "freedom" is an indefinite, and incalculably ambiguous term ... liable to an infinity of misunderstandings, confusions and errors.' According to Hegel, freedom is when we can freely choose between alternatives based on reason and not be coerced by external circumstances. However, the contradiction in freedom in the modern organisation is that '[*you can*] reason about whatever you want and as much as you want – but obey!' (Žižek 2008:87).

In confronting this contradictory nature of social science and management, we require a radical new way of seeing reality, a new way of seeing life. But how do we change? Hadot (1995:28) provides us with a solution in that '[*p*]hilosophy is an art of living that cures us of our illnesses by teaching us a radical new way of life.' Before Hadot, Plutarch informs us of the following (Eikeland 2008):

> [*T*]he multitudes who come to Athens to school were, at the outset, wise, later they became lovers of wisdom, later still orators, and as time went on, just ordinary persons, and the more they laid hold on reason the more they laid aside their self-opinion and conceit. (p. 51)

■ Ancient Greek philosophy as a response: Human purpose and human action

Van der Linde (2015) expresses the opinion that a Copernican revolution[11] is required in management thought, that is, a new way of thinking about management. Although I accept the argument that theoreticians and practitioners of management require a new way of thinking about management, I am of the opinion that it will be a futile exercise as human thinking is mediated by its experience and already tainted by being in the 'system'. Therefore, only critiquing the system, as is done in critical theory and CMS, will not suffice. A change in the social order and management practices requires action.

In contemporary scholarship, this 'action' is supported by Alvesson and Wilmot (2012:25), arguing that critique does not end with critical reflection on the phenomena under observation. Rather, it also requires practice that must be actively engaged with and struggled for. I agree with this argument that action (doing) is required as it was adequately expressed by Socrates: '[W]hen Hippias demanded the definition of justice from Socrates, he finally responded with these words: instead of speaking of it, I make it understood by my acts' (Hadot 1995:23). In ancient Greece, the motivating force behind the best human life was informed and practiced by *lôgos* [reasoned speech] and *práxis* [doing] aimed at *phrónêsis* [the right thing], hence Socrates's statement.

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11. Kant refers to his 'Copernican revolution'. As Copernicus changed our thinking about the universe, Kant changed our view of how we think about knowledge (Wall 2005:239).

■ Why ancient Greek philosophy to guide modern human action?

All critical commentators would agree that a new way of thinking about the prevailing social order and management is required. The question must then be asked: Why ancient Greek philosophy? Hadot (1995:19–29) provides us with arguments in favour of returning, through Greek philosophy, to the ancient Greek way of life.

One of the consequences of the enlightenment and the resultant modern man is the separation between mind and body (or, the mind-body problem), a separation between the sensible and the non-sensible or metaphysical. Eighteenth-century German philosophers attempted to reconcile mind and body, but modern man in the form of *Homo economicus* still treats them as separate. In ancient Greek philosophy, there is no separation between mind and body. It is a living *práxis* based on and supported by *lôgos* [reasoned speech] in achieving *phrónêsis*.

The focus in education (particularly in developing countries) today is on transferring facts – assumed to be knowledge. Technology such as Google provides us with 'Just-in-Time Knowledge' (JIK) or 'knowledge on demand'. Einstein informs us that '[*e*]ducation is not the transferring of facts but the stimulation of the mind to think.' This is what ancient Greek philosophy has as its purpose. The philosophical discourse was aimed at 'forming' rather than 'informing', at 'becoming' rather than at 'being'. The subjects (humans) are being formed by transforming their souls – a reconnection with the metaphysical. The experience gained in

solving a problem was not the solution itself but the wisdom[12] and experience gained on this road towards the solution; was in the way that you do it, the *práxis.*

A new way of thinking provides us with the theoretical concepts of how society (and therefore management) should operate. However, theory is never an end in itself and must be put in the service of practice. Aristotle enlightens us with the following statement in Metaphysics (981a14): '[A]nd we even see men succeeding more than those who have theory without experience.' But where does this *praxis* start?

The starting point in this (*praxis*) transformation process is '*Gnothi seauton*' [know thyself]. In knowing yourself, you know your place in the natural and cosmic order (and your relationship to God), you know your limitations, you know your relationship with other human beings, you know your relationship to nature, and lastly, you know your purpose (final cause or first principle). This is presented in the Platonic movement from 'becoming to being' (from sense knowledge to wisdom). It requires a reasoned action in every aspect of the subject's life and in the life of the city – which was accepted universally in Athens for living the 'good life'.

A good life

Instead of a 'Copernican revolution' or new way of thinking about management, I propose that we as management theoreticians, managers and human beings review and rediscover the wisdom and

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12. The term 'wisdom' is used in the Platonic context where knowledge is formed by mathematical objects whilst wisdom is formed by Forms, an understanding of the metaphysical or in ordinary grammar, the '…ness' of something.

concepts from the ancients and those who came before us. I propose that we practice what we preach and turn our thinking into *praxis.* In this context, I recommend that we as theoreticians and managers follow German idealism and its romantic approach of turning to the Greek city states (polis – of which Athens is the best known) where individuals in society (the particular in the collective) strove for the 'good life'. In this context, the term 'good life' according to Aristotle (Nicomachean ethics and politics) means a virtuous life that takes into consideration the end (or first principle). My approach will thus start with the Athenian collective or polis where the first principle (or the end) to be achieved is established by the Athenian Oath.

After the 2008 financial disaster, the alumni of Harvard University, the class of 2009 (MBA OATH 2009), rediscovered the Athenian Oath and started a movement in which they encouraged people with an MBA (read 'management and managers') to make a pledge according to the ancient Athenian Oath. This oath was pledged by all males coming of age in the polis (city state) of Athens, and it guided their actions and activities within the city state. This Athenian Oath reads as follows (translated) (National League of Cities 2013):[13]

> We will never bring disgrace to this our City by an act of dishonesty or cowardice. We will fight for the ideals and sacred things of the City both alone and with many. We will revere and obey the City's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reference and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught. We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus in all these ways, we will transmit this City not only, not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us. (n.p.)

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13. The expanded version of the Athenian Oath as adapted by the Alumni of Harvard, class of 2009, is available at www.mbaoath.org

Two concepts underpinning the oath, namely *télos* and *phrónesis,* are fundamental to living the 'good life' in society (*polis*).

▎ *Télos*: Purpose

The first constituent part of the good life is the end or *telos*.[14] This part deals with our purpose, our aim, what we want to achieve. In contemporary management vocabulary, the concept of *télos* is also known as an objective, goal, target or vision. The example used by Aristotle is that of a target with a bullseye. The bullseye represents our aim: What we want to achieve is to hit the bullseye. Hitting this bullseye every time is the perfection of our *práxis.* As indicated above, this is a very simplistic view of *télos.* However, no discussion on teleology can proceed without an understanding of the Aristotelian concept of *causa* [causes] of which the final cause or *causa finalis* is the last cause (the Aristotelian causes, in order, are the material cause, formal cause, efficient cause and final cause).[15] This final cause is not only applicable to nature and natural things but also to humans and society. It attempts to answer the question: 'Why are we (humans) here, what is our purpose in this city (society)?' Aristotle links final cause to the concept of 'first principle' or *télos*, but he also makes it very clear that this is the most difficult level of understanding to achieve and to perform when he states the following: '… the most universal, are on the whole the hardest for men to know; for they are the furthest from the sense' (Metaphysics 981a26).

14. Although the original ancient Greek words are used with an English translation, the translation in itself may be inadequate to provide the correct meaning of use in the original text (Hadot 1995:vi).

15. For a thorough reading of the Aristotelian causes, the reader is referred Aristotle's *Physics, Metaphysics and Categories.*

The essence of human *télos* or our purpose in this city is reflected in the last sentence of the Athenian Oath where it is stated that the goal is to '… transmit this City not only, not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.' Our *télos* as human beings is a fundamental requirement for our existence. This *teleological* approach is reconfirmed and supported by Pope Benedict when he speaks of reason. According to Žižek (2011:92), he '… speaks of a pre-modern teleological reason, the view that the universe is a harmonious whole in which everything serves a higher purpose.'

The other elements of the oath inform us about what we need to do and how to do it (the doing). This is reflected in the concept of *phrónêsis.*

■ *Phrónêsis* or the golden mean

The second constituent part of living the 'good life' is the action or activity (the doing) that needs to take place to achieve the end or first principle. This second part in striving to achieve the end (the oath pledged) – often taken for granted – is the concepts of *phrónêsis* and *phrónêmos.* In modern terminology, *phrónêsis* is known as the golden mean, and *phrónêmos* is a human being acting virtuously (that is, acting through reasoned deliberation).

What is this *phrónêsis* or golden mean then? The easiest way to describe it is as the mean between two contraries or two excesses. The example mostly used (by and since Aristotle) is that of a soldier. The contradiction is that a soldier can either be a coward (a deficiency), at the one extreme, or reckless (also a deficiency), at the other extreme. However, if the soldier does the correct thing (defend,

attack, fight), he is courageous. This courageous soldier is then acting (doing the right thing) through reasoned deliberation (without taking into consideration bodily pleasure and harm – which are driven by the senses). This 'doing' attitude from ancient Greek history is also reflected in the battle of Thermopylae. (In this instance, the soldiers were Spartans and not Athenians, but the underlying principles were practiced in all of the Greek city states).

An important characteristic of *phrónêsis* is the existence of a continuum between two extremes (Categories 10b26–13b12). The more experience you gain (through deliberation and doing) in pursuing the *télos,* the more it will become a *héxis* ([habit] – a thing that you do unconsciously without even thinking about it) of doing the right thing. Aristotle (Eikeland 2008:63) indicates three qualities that the agent must possess in order to act virtuously. Firstly, they need to act with knowledge. This knowledge is aligned with the *télos.* Secondly, the doing (actions) must be chosen for its own sake and not be determined by ulterior motives. Lastly, these actions must spring from an unchanging, virtuous character.

One of the activities required in the Athenian Oath (*We will revere and obey the City's laws*) can serve as an example of *phrónêsis.* You cannot obey and act according to one law of the polis. You need to obey and act according to all the laws of the polis. This acting (instead of thinking) was adequately demonstrated by Socrates in Plato's '*The death of Socrates*' (Plato 1997) where, until his death, Socrates revered and obeyed the city's laws (which was a direct cause of his being sentenced to death).

As a human being, through knowing your inner purpose (*télos*), through applying rational reasoning (*lôgos),* you will be doing the

right thing (*phrónêsis*), and by gaining experience (doing it consistently), you will live the 'good life'. This good life that you practice according to your *télos* needs to become a *práxis* through a reasoned, deliberated *lôgos.*

The quest to re-think management is not a new phenomenon or a social fad but a continuous process that started with the advent of management. The critique against management (and social sciences) at this point in the evolutionary process is the 'one-dimensionality of man'. This one-dimensionality is informed, maintained and supported by the 'system'. Nigel Farage (the UKIP leader in the UK) expresses the frustration of ordinary citizens in society with the prevailing system through the following statement after the Brexit referendum by saying the following (Farage 2016):

> We have fought against the multinationals, we have fought against banks, we have fought against lies, corruption and deceit, and today honesty, decency and belief in nation, I think now, is going to win. I hope this victory brings down this failed project … (n.p.)

This failed project is a reference to the European Union, which, from a critical perspective, is just another form of central control.

The reader is further referred to the deliberation in the section where it was argued that, under the auspices of *liberté* [French revolution], a new form of exploitation was established, namely democracy. Žižek (2009:183) reports that '[*t*]oday the enemy is not called the Empire or Capital. It is called Democracy.' The terror created by democracy was clearly illustrated during the referendum in the UK on 23 June 2016 where democracy exhibited its reign of terror with the 'Brexit' vote. Financial markets were in turmoil, and the so-called 'technocrats' in the European Union are already calling

for another form of capitalism with Adler (2016:n.p.) reporting that '[t]hat's why you've been hearing the words "EU" and "reform" of late from the nervous mouths of some you'd least expect, such as Germany's Angela Merkel, and Donald Tusk.'

The current critique against the social order and exploitation (natural and mental) will carry on unabated. Crises created by modern man will become more frequent and more severe as it wants to disrupt the current social order, the one-dimensionality of human thinking.

A critical re-think is only that: think. Action is required, but it cannot be in the form of a revolution (which only results in terror). The required action is *práxis* linked to a higher purpose (*télos),* a re-connection with the metaphysical that will create a whole that recognises the natural and cosmic order in which humans exist.

◼ Chapter 2: Summary

Critical theory and critical management studies entail a critique against the prevailing social order and management. This critique is based on the 'sensible' world – that world that we perceive through our senses – and the assumption of a rational human being. This critique is questionable as it ignores human nature, which belongs to the non-sensible and metaphysical world. The impact of management thinking on society and nature is based on the sensible world that results in the exploitation of humans and nature. The only way to change this impact is not by 'creative' or 'new' thinking but by understanding human nature that drives this behaviour. To investigate the causes of this exploitation, we need to look at

human nature. The discussion starts with the Cartesian enlightenment that separates mind from body (*res cogitans and res extenza*). This separation created modern rational humanity that is in continuous contradiction with itself and divorced from the natural and cosmic order, a divorce which resulted in humanity becoming one-dimensional. This divorce was further entrenched by Adam Smith who broke up the value creation process into activities. A blacksmith became a welder, and according to Marx, the labour of the labourer became a commodity. This divorce between mind and body, between the labourer and the fruits of labour, between human and nature is a critical issue that is ignored by the critique of any social order. To align mind and body, to reconcile humans and nature, we need to turn back to ancient Greek philosophy and the concepts of *télos, práxis* and *phrónêsis.* The doing then becomes more important than the thinking.

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Chapter 5

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