Foundations: The Roots of Idealist and Romantic Opposition to Capitalism and Management

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Bradley Bowden

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Abstract

A seminal feature of the closing decades of the twentieth century was the emergence of new postmodernist traditions opposed to industrial capitalism and its associated managerial systems. Unlike Marxism, these new traditions are idealist in orientation, giving primacy to individual identity. In exploring the origins of these postmodernist traditions, this chapter argues that their epistemological roots are located within German philosophic idealism and English Romanticism. Like subsequent postmodernist canon, these traditions shared a hostility to industrialization, an emphasis on consciousness and will, and a belief that humanity's well-being rests on a harmonious relationship with nature. German idealism and English Romanticism also shared a distrust of empiricism or positivism, believing instead that evidence and knowledge are highly subjective. In assessing the influence of these traditions, this chapter suggests that their key assumptions – and of the postmodernist traditions that they helped inspire – are misguided. The pre-industrial, bucolic existence that they favored was a world of misery, filth, and illiteracy. An emphasis on consciousness and will frequently led to authoritarian conclusions. While rejecting positivist epistemological principles, this chapter also argues that the relativist assumptions of idealism,

B. Bowden (✉)
Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD, Australia
e-mail: b.bowden@griffith.edu.au

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Romanticism, and postmodernism are in error. An objective world amenable to experimentation and inquiry does exist.

Keywords

Postmodernism · Epistemology · Philosophic idealism · Romanticism · Capitalism

The dominant narrative in the last quarter millennia of human history has been associated with a model of industrialization and urbanization that, once perfected in the North Atlantic littoral in the nineteenth century, gradually encompassed the entire globe. Industrial and financial capitalism has been the most constant, although not the universal, handmaiden of this advance. Even where capitalist, free-market models have been eschewed in greater or lesser degree – the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, North Korea, and Peronist Argentina – the inherent benefits of industrialization have been embraced rather than rejected. In all industrializing societies, capitalist or otherwise, the forms of management first pioneered in the factories of northern England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have also been adopted with little if any hesitation. Everywhere, employment came under the direction of what Pollard (1965: 6–7) referred to as a "new class of managers," able to meld revolutionary technologies with new principles of work. Intellectually and culturally, the entrenchment of this managerial elite was universally associated with an embrace of science, rationality, and a belief in economic progress as an ultimate good. Where mass opposition to new societal and managerial models emerged, it was typically rooted in discontent with the distribution of the fruits of the new order. Marx and Engels, for example, the most vociferous opponents of industrial capitalism, readily endorsed the benefits of industrialization, declaring (1848/1951: 37) in their *The Communist Manifesto* that capitalism has produced "more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together." If, Marx (1853/1951: 323) later declared, entire peoples had to be dragged toward industrialization and "progress" through "blood and dirt, through misery and degradation," then so be it.

If, during the twentieth century, it was Marxism that provided inspiration for capitalism's most significant oppositional movements, it is also true that the intellectual demise of Marxism since the collapse of the Soviet Union has seen the emergence of very different oppositional forms; movements opposed to not just capitalism but also the industrial and managerial model which capitalism long fostered. Postmodernism in its various hues informs many of these new oppositional currents, Jacques Derrida (1993/2006: 106) declaring that "never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected so many human beings in the history of the earth and humanity." In Derrida's (1998: 2) opinion, the root cause of such perceived calamities is not simply capitalism but rather the whole canon of "Western morality," "Western philosophy," and "ethnocentric" understandings of language and thought. The late Hayden White (1973a: 1–2),

arguably the most influential postmodernist thinker to emerge in the Anglosphere, similarly dismissed "the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society" as ethnocentric "Western prejudice." In such narratives, the central focus is not the matters that long concerned both capitalist managers and their Marxist foes – wealth, productivity, and employment – but rather the essence of the human spirit and intellectual liberation. This means, White (1998) explained, that research should be inspirational (rather than necessarily factual), focusing on "felt needs" that "are ultimately personal." Elsewhere, environmentalists argue that industrialization has not only defiled nature, it has disrupted the material and spiritual connections between humans and the natural world. In the view of a significant number (Lovelock 1995, 2009; Margulis 1998; Harding 2006), all living organisms exist in a myriad of interconnected ways with a natural world best perceived as living entity. Defile nature, and humanity suffers terrible consequences.

Arguably, the popular resonance of post-Marxist critiques of capitalism and management in large part reflects the fact that each draws on common traditions of thought that – although long condemned to minority status within our culture – have proved pervasive and enduring. In the Anglosphere, the roots of these oppositional traditions are most obvious in the English Romantic tradition (Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Percy and Mary Shelley, Bryon, Carlyle). Central to this Romantic tradition is belief in what William Wordsworth (1802/1935: 296) described as "eternal Nature, and the great moving spirit of things" that connects humanity to the wellsprings of its spiritual existence. Material "existence," Samuel Coleridge (1817a: 47, 257) explained, is merely an outward manifestation of an "essence" that pervades all things. Without exception, those located within the Romantic tradition perceived industrialization not as a source of wealth and advancement but rather as an existential threat to humanity's spiritual survival. It was, William Blake (1808/1969: 481) famously observed in his epic poem on *Milton*, industrialization that caused increasing numbers to spend their lives among "dark Satanic Mills" rather than "England's green and pleasant land." For Lord Byron (1816a/1994: 99), as he declared in his *Song for the Luddites*, factory workers were justified in exchanging "the shuttle ... for the sword" in defense of their traditional artisan existence. The damaging effects of modernity are also associated in Romantic canon with inhuman monstrosities, the most vivid of which emerged from a night of storytelling amid the storms of Lake Geneva's foreshore in June 1816. From these lurid tales emerged monsters who have since occupied a permanent place in the Western imagination. The *vampyre* (vampire) owes its modern existence to Lord Byron (1816b/1817) and, more particularly, his physician and fellow author, John Polidori (1819). A creature of apparent wealth and sophistication at home in London's balls and dinner parties, Polidori's vampyre – like England's growing industrial world – feeds on the innocent blood of rural youth. If the vampyre/vampire – subsequently made famous by Bram Stoker's much later imitation – is evil lurking in civilized form, the other famed creation that emerged from the June 1816 night of storytelling, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is a none too subtle warning against the beguiling promises of science with their supposed capacity to "command the thunder of heaven" and "penetrate into the recesses of nature" (1818/2005: 49).

As the Industrial Revolution gathered pace, the concerns of the English Romantics with spiritual essence, and a spiritually infused nature, were shared by the leading exponents of German idealist philosophy, most notably Johann Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, and Arthur Schopenhauer. Like the English Romantics, this philosophic strand believed, as Fichte (1799/1910: 11) declared, that "Nature is one connected whole," a whole in which one cannot "move a single grain of sand from its place, without thereby … changing something throughout all parts of the immeasurable whole." Even more than the English Romantics, German idealism was concerned with "inner being," or what Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) subsequently referred to as *Dasein*, understandings that were to profoundly influence Jacques Derrida and, through him, the post-structuralist strand of postmodernist thought. Unlike materialist-oriented thinkers (Adam Smith, Karl Marx, etc.), with their emphasis on the mechanics of production, German idealism made individual will the central force in human affairs, Schopenhauer (1859/1969: 272) declaring, "the will is not only free, but even almighty; from it comes not only its action, but also its world." Like the English Romantics, and the postmodernist schools of thought that they helped inspire, German idealist philosophers also held that all knowledge rested, as Fichte (1799/1910: 91) explained, on subjective "representation" rather than some objectively verifiable reality. Significantly, the commonalities apparent in English Romanticism and German idealism were not simply coincidental. Instead, they were the product of both a common examination of similar problems and a cross-fertilization of ideas, Coleridge (1817b: 103–104) declaring Friedrich Schelling to be not only "the founder of philosophy of nature" but also the "great and original genius" responsible for "the most important victories" in understanding the human spirit. In Schelling's (1799a / 2004: 196) schema, Nature was no mere collection of inanimate objects. Rather, it was an active force; a force comprised of a myriad of "actants" that gave Nature its essential, active essence.

In exploring the ways in which German idealist philosophy and the English Romantic tradition have informed critiques of management and industrial capitalism, this chapter argues two main theses. First, as this introduction has indicated, we argue that post-Marxist critiques of capitalism and management – most particularly postmodernism in all its variety – cannot be properly understood unless one comprehends their intellectual roots in German idealism and English Romantic thought. Second, it is argued that, although German idealism and English Romanticism can be seen as a corrective to a crude materialist emphasis on mechanical aspects of production (capital costs, variable costs, etc.), neither provides a useful basis for a critical understanding of the modern industrial world. The belief that nature has a spiritual essence that pervades all existence proved a philosophic and scientific dead end. For if one believes that nature has a spiritual essence – as did Coleridge, Wordsworth, Fichte, Schelling, and Georg Hegel – then one must necessarily abandon explanations drawn from the physical sciences, Schelling (1799a/2004: 201) condemning "empirical science" as "a mongrel idea" and "physics" as "nothing but a collection of facts." In the hands of Georg Hegel, a belief in all-pervasive historical spirit in nature also led in distinctly totalitarian directions, Hegel (1837/1956: 29–30) declaring that "World-Historical individuals" were those who

unwittingly fulfilled the predestined purpose of the world's "inner Spirit." Although in postmodernist canon an emphasis on human consciousness and will is invariably linked to resistance to established power structures – Foucault (1976/1978: 95–96) suggesting that wherever power exists we also find alternative "discourses" that provide "swarm points" for resistance – this philosophical orientation can also lead to authoritarian conclusions. It would appear more than coincidental that both German idealism and English Romanticism culminated in the mid-nineteenth century in the idea that history is driven by "great men" and unadulterated power. For according to Thomas Carlyle (1840/2013: 21, 24), "the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of Great Men," men whom "we ought to treat ... with an obedience that knows no bounds." In German idealist philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche (1886/1989: 202) similarly argued in his *Beyond Good and Evil* that "the *fundamental principle of society* ... is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness [emphasis in original]." Certainly, it is a mistake to believe that the English Romantics were, any more than their German idealist counterparts, universal proponents of democracy and the interests of common humanity. In the wake of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, brought about by a cavalry charge into unarmed protestors seeking an extended franchise, Lord Byron (1820a/2015: 353) wrote that he would have "happily passed" his "sword stick" through the leader of the protest and "then thrown myself on my Peers." Percy Shelley (1820/1920: 61) also declared the defense of private property to be the key "foundation" of political order, while Wordsworth's (1821a/1978: 26) response to campaigns for popular democracy was to call for an arming of "the Yeomanry" and a curbing of "the Press by vigilant prosecutions."

It is also the argument of this chapter that the theoretical relativism of both German idealism and English Romanticism with regard to evidence – which has become a defining feature of postmodernism in its various hues – is also misguided. For as the English historian, E.H. Carr (1961/2001: 21), noted: "It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes." To the extent that a philosophic idealist approach to evidence has utility, it is restricted to discussions of power and the realm of ideas (language, culture, epistemology), realms where postmodernism is now well established. Conversely, it has little utility in matters relating to economics and the mechanics of production, realms where postmodernism is conspicuous largely through absence.

The remainder of this chapter comprises two (lengthy) sections. In the first, we discuss understandings of nature, consciousness, and being in German idealism and English Romantic thought and the ways in which these traditions have influenced critiques of both capitalism and management. The second section considers the Romantic and idealist understandings of evidence and knowledge, understandings that currently inform postmodernist epistemologies. In this section, we will argue that although these schools were correct in believing that we perceive the world through intellectual representations, they were in error in typically denying the objective basis for such representations.

Nature, Being, Consciousness, and Will

Postmodernism as an idealist philosophy – or, to be more exact, a loosely interconnected collection of idealist philosophies – owes an immeasurable debt to German idealist thought. Derrida's (1967/2001: 60) core concept of "trace" – which suggests that past expressions of existence and being can be deconstructed from written texts – was drawn from Martin Heidegger and the earlier work of the French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida (1967/2001: 101) declaring the power of the latter's thoughts was such as to "make us tremble." In turn, Levinas (1957/1987: 103), who suggested in his *Meaning and Sense* that in written language a "trace" is like a face behind a mask in that "a mask presupposes a face," drew his ideas from the German idealist philosopher, Edmund Husserl, Levinas completing his PhD on Husserl's philosophy in 1930. Husserl's ideas were also seminal to Heidegger's thinking, the latter advising in the opening pages of his key work, *Being and Time*, that: "The following investigation would not have been possible if the ground had not been prepared by Edmund Husserl." According to Husserl (1913/1983: 35, 149–150), empirical research – with its emphasis on science and rationality – was a source of grave error, error caused by an unwillingness to recognize that "pure consciousness" was the true wellspring of human endeavors. In turn, both Husserl and Heidegger's ideas were informed by the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who declared in his *The World as Will and Representation* that all activity – whether human or natural – is guided by its inner "being or true essence," an essence that can only be ascertained through philosophical reflection, not empirical investigation. As a series of lectures given by Heidegger (1975/1985) clear, Heidegger's ideas were also profoundly influenced by Schelling's (1809/2006) *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. In this, Schelling (1809/2006: 33) argued for the "complete freedom" of individual consciousness and will "above and outside of all nature." All of these interwoven strands of thought owe, moreover, a considerable debt to Johann Fichte, arguably the true founder of modern German idealist philosophy. For Fichte, as with the various strands of idealist philosophy that he helped spawn in greater or lesser degree, nothing is more important than the inner essence of being that pervades both individual consciousness and common bonds of existence. It being the case, Fichte (1799/1910: 7) argued that "every existence" signals within it "another existence," ideas that prefigure Derrida's (1967/2001: 254–255) central concept of *différence* (difference), where the presence of one form of existence always exists alongside an absent existence.

The Foucauldian strand of postmodernism is also deeply rooted in German idealist thought. As Hayden White (1973b: 50) indicated in one of the first, and most insightful, studies of Foucault's work within the Anglosphere, Foucault's ideas represent "a continuation of a tradition . . . which originates in Romanticism and which was taken up . . . by Nietzsche in the last quarter of the nineteenth century." Like Nietzsche, who declared that through acts of will it is always possible to break the "invisible spell" of societal mores (Nietzsche 1886/1989: 31, 27), Foucault (1966/1994: xx) believed that we can break free of the "fundamental codes" of "culture" through acts of will. Like Nietzsche (1889a/1990) – who argued in his

Twilight of the Idols that all causal explanations (morality, economics, religion) should be rejected as "false causality," it being the case that only the exercise of will should guide behavior and explanations – Foucault rejected causal explanations (White 1973b). By leaving "causes to one side," Foucault (1966/1994: xiv, xviii) declared in *The Order of Things*, one is able to better focus on "transformations" that "shatter" and "destroy" existing understandings. In terms of intellectual heritage, this Foucauldian/Nietzschean emphasis on consciousness and will as transformative forces – and the commensurate dismissal of other factors – owes a clear debt to Schopenhauer's (1859/1969) *The World as Will and Representation*. Like Foucault and Nietzsche, Schopenhauer (1859/1969: 67–68) dismissed "the application of the law of causality" to human affairs. For the problem with the "law of causality," Schopenhauer (1859/1969: 99, 275) concluded that it can "never get at the inner nature of things," the inner sanctum where one finds "the will-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world." Nietzsche – and through him Foucault and the wider bodies of Foucauldian thought – also owes a debt to Schelling, who first identified human freedom with the ability to *choose* evil. Whereas previous philosophers had seen evil as something to be overcome, Schelling (1809/2006: 23–24) identified the capacity for *both* good and evil as the "most profound" issue "in the entire doctrine of freedom." Given that acts of will are the expression of human essence, Schelling (1809/2006: 36, 52) logically concluded that whoever lacks the will "to do evil, is also not fit for good." It was this total and utter emphasis on individual will and freedom, and its capacity to move beyond all imposed constraints, which became the defining hallmark of Nietzschean philosophy. When, therefore, Nietzsche (1883/1970: 299) indicated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that "evil is man's best strength" and that "Man must grow better and more evil," he was asserting freedom of individuality beyond the constraints of the social world, rather than the evil per se.

Within the considerable body of postmodernist thought in business and management studies – and more particularly business and management history – ideas that have their roots in German idealism (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Husserl, Schopenhauer, Schelling) are today almost de rigueur. In *A New History of Management*, for example, the authors (Cummings et al. 2017: 40–41, 332) declare their intention to write a Foucauldian-inspired "counter-history" that will "overturn accepted continuities and discontinuities," thereby bringing about a "blurring of the boundaries with regard to what management could be." This "unsettling," we are informed, will "help us question and see alternatives" as to "how we live and evaluate our lives" (Cummings et al. 2017: 333). A new questioning can, in short, overturn material realities imposed by economics, occupational status, and educational attainment. Elsewhere, we are advised (Clark and Rowlinson 2004: 331, 341) that a "historic turn" in the way we research organizational studies can challenge the "efficiency principle" that shapes businesses' behavior, opening up in lieu "a view of history as flux, with continued crises, conflicts and dilemmas." Similarly, leading figures in management and organizational history (Booth et al. 2009: 89) inform us of the utility of "consciously fictive counterfactual narratives" in undermining existing "perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, values and so on." In like fashion an article

co-authored by Roy Suddaby, the PDW Chair of the Management History Division, entitled "Craft, magic and the re-enchantment of the world," embraces a Nietzschean emphasis on will and "arationality," whereby "rhetoric" becomes "magical because it initiates action" (Suddaby et al. 2017: 294).

If there are clear linkages between concepts rooted in German idealist philosophy and current understandings in management history, it is also the case that the English Romantic tradition has had a powerful resonance. Although the youthful radicalism of many of the Romantic poets, most particularly Coleridge and Wordsworth, soon gave way to Tory conservatism, they nevertheless continued to underpin – as the great English labor historian, E.P. Thompson (1963: 945) remarked – "a resistance movement" opposed to the new industrial capitalism and "the enunciation of the Acquisitive Man." Like German idealist philosophers, those located within the Romantic tradition were concerned with fostering feeling, emotion, and spiritual being, not rationality and empirical understanding. As Coleridge (1817a: 47) put it, the purpose of literature should not be one of description but rather a spiritually uplifting journey of discovery into human essence "in its primary signification." For Wordsworth (1802/1935: 295–296) as well, the "great poet" was the one responsible for "new compositions of feeling" that proved "pure and permanent."

Universally, the English Romantics perceived the advance of industrialization and urbanization as a social and environmental blight. In Wordsworth's (1814/1853) *The Excursion*, the new industrial factories become places of demonic misery where humanity's body and soul are sacrificed for profit, it being observed in the case of one establishment that:

> . . . as they issue from the illuminated pile,
> A fresh band meets them, at the crowded door –
> . . . Mothers and little children, boys and girls,
> Enter, and each the wonted task resumes
> Within this temple, where is offered up
> To Gain, the master idol of the realm,
> Perpetual sacrifices.

In Blake's (1804/1969) epic poem, *Jerusalem*, the Satanic character of the new "looms" and "mills" is depicted in even starker terms, it being recorded that:

> . . . to those who enter into them they seem the only substances;
> . . . Scotland pours out his Sons to labour at the Furnaces,
> Wales gives his Daughters to the Looms; England nursing Mothers
> Gives to the Children of Albion . . .
> They compell (sic) the Poor to live upon a crust of bead
> . . . The living and the dead shall be ground in our rumbling Mills,

Lord Byron, in addressing the House of Lords (Parliament of United Kingdom 1812: 2), likewise vigorously condemned the new factories, observing that "machines" had "superseded the necessity of employing a number of workmen, who were left in consequence to starve." Similarly, for Percy Shelley (1820/1920: 11), "modern

society" had become an all-consuming engine, "wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed."

The Romantic hostility to industrialization manifested itself in two generalized responses, each of which has had an enduring legacy. First, in rejecting the emerging industrial world – which, other than for Blake, an engraver by trade whose poetry conveyed an intimate understanding of the lived experiences of factory life, was always something alien and spiritually distant – we find a Romanticization of bucolic life. In Wordsworth, this famously involved an embrace of those whom he (Wordsworth 1800/2009: 142, 144) described in the "Preface" to his (and Coleridge's) *Lyrical Ballads*, as those living a "low and rustic life," a lifestyle in which "the essential passions of the heart" inevitably "find a better soil." With Byron, nobility of soul is found among the peasantry of Switzerland, Italy, and Greece, one of his letters recording that he (Byron 1816c/2015: 233) could not adequately describe the impact of his acquaintance with shepherds of the Swiss mountains: a people "pure and unmixed – solitary – savage and patriarchal." Representation of the Swiss peasantry as living a life of freedom in harmony with nature also characterizes both Mary Shelley's short novel, *The Swiss Peasant*, and the poetry of her husband (Shelley 1816/1965: 231), who recorded in *Mont Blanc* how:

> The wilderness has a mysterious tongue . . .
> So solemn, so serene, that many may be
> . . . With Nature reconciled

The second enduring legacy of the Romantic tradition, following on, as an almost inevitable condition of the first, is the positing of a spiritual existence is nature that becomes the wellspring of the human spirit. To Wordsworth (1802/1935: 295–296), as we have noted in the introduction to this chapter, "human nature" can only achieve fulfillment when it is reconciled with "eternal Nature, and the great moving spirit of things." Similarly, Thomas Carlyle (1840/2013: 145) – in rejecting the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham that underpinned the liberal, free-market ethos of Victorian England – warned that "he who discerns nothing but Mechanism in the Universe, has . . . missed the secret of the Universe altogether." Whereas for Carlyle (1840/2013: 91, 78), however, the operation of nature represented "the realised Thought of God," for Percy Shelley (1816/1965: 229), it was the "everlasting universe of things," and for Coleridge (1817a: 47, 255), it was spiritual "essence," "present at once in the whole and every part" of material existence. It is with Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, moreover, that we find the fullest expression of the concept that nature has a spiritual being, a *natura naturans* that provides "a bond between nature in the higher sense" and humanity's "soul" (Coleridge 1817a: 257). Although Coleridge (1817b: 102) indicates that he developed his ideas before his inquiries into German philosophy, they are nevertheless articulated within a German idealist framework. Fichte's philosophy is described by Coleridge (1817b: 101) as providing the "keystone of the arch" for his conceptualizations, while Schelling's *Philosophy of Nature* is declared a work of "original genius" (Coleridge 1817b: 103).

Like German idealist philosophy, where Schelling (1799a/2004: 201) lambasted "physics" and "empiricism" for studying the "body" of nature rather than its "soul," English Romanticism was associated with a distrust of science, rationality, industrial progress, and the new mechanics of management. As noted in the introduction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* embodies this distrust in monstrous form. In a story that has seeped deep into the popular consciousness (albeit typically in cinematic rather than literary form), we follow Victor Frankenstein's slide into a spiritual abyss, an abyss caused by infatuation with scientific experimentation. Fostered by his chemistry lecturer, who informs Frankenstein that science has penetrated "into the recesses of nature, and shows how she works in her hiding places" (1818/2005: 49), this infatuation leads him beyond the bounds imposed by the natural world. Unlike Frankenstein himself, his monstrous creation at least has the wit to understand the significance of this transgression, reflecting "How, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things" (1818/2005: 102). Within Romantic canon, we also find a near universal hostility directed toward the managers of the new industrial era, a class of people associated with exploitation rather than innovation. To Wordsworth's annoyance, this new class – having benefited from "the invention of machinery" that drove rural spinners and weavers out of existence (1835/1974: 223) – also despoiled his beloved Lake District, buying up "the ancient cottages" as holiday retreats. To Percy Shelley (1820/1920: 11, 42–43), the "new aristocracy" was essentially parasitic in nature, responsible for "the augmentation of misery," a process that left children, hitherto "at play before the cottage doors of their parents," as "lifeless and bloodless machines." In Polidori's (1819: xix–xx) *The Vampyre*, we see a similar parasitic monster, a "human bloodsucker" who feeds on "the young and the beautiful" but who is feted in London society. In academia today, one does not need to look far in business and management studies to find echoes of this questioning of managerial legitimacy. In *A New History of Management*, we are informed (Cummings et al. 2017: 177) that business organizations today are associated with "unprecedented economic, social and environmental crises," crises where a "critical questioning" will inevitably bring into doubt the "legitimacy" of "business schools," if not business itself. Elsewhere, we are advised (Clegg and Kornberger 2003: 60, 84) that modern organizations are "iron cages" and "psychic prisons," places where new "performance-management technologies" condemn workers and clients alike to prisonlike "panoptical arrangements" (Fourcade and Healy 2013: 559).

Present at the very birth of industrial capitalism and modern systems of management, it is evident that the English Romantic tradition cast both these revolutionary forces for change in a halo of illegitimacy that each has never fully escaped. If the Romantic critique lacked the institutional coherence of the subsequent Marxist denunciations of industrial capitalism, the fact that it appealed to consciousness, feeling, and emotion – rather than revolutionary violence – arguably added to its enduring presence in our culture.

In summing up the Romantic tradition's significance, E.P. Thompson (1963: 915) argued – in the final page of his *The Making of the English Working Class* – that the inability of "Romantic criticism" to ally itself with "social radicalism" was a "lost"

moment in history, a failure that left all of us "among the losers," condemned to generations of inequality and suffering. This is a difficult conclusion for a management historian to support. Far from it being the case, as Wordsworth (1800/2009: 122, 124) advised, that a "low and rustic" life embodied the "beautiful and permanent forms of nature," for most a pre-industrial rural life involved an existence steeped in filth, illiteracy, and premature death. Coleridge (1817a: 32) was, among the English Romantics, highly unusual in recognizing this fact, dismissing Wordsworth discussions of rural life as fictive creations, creations that ignored the brutal labor of rural life that typically produced a population that was "selfish, sensually gross, and hard-hearted." Nor should we suppose that the opposition of those within the Romantic traditions to the advance of industrialization indicated farsighted concern for the plight of the poor. As a philosophic tradition, English Romanticism looked backward, not forward. Byron was, as Cochrane (2011: 15) has observed, only "a revolutionary" when "abroad." In England, he was "a conservative." As noted earlier, Byron was also an opponent of working-class campaigns for universal franchise. Of those fighting for such principles, Byron (1820b/2015: 356) wrote to a fellow peer, "our classical education should teach us to trample on such unredeemed dirt." Similarly, Percy Shelley (1820/1920: 82–83) regarded the industrial working class as morally abased, "sinking into a resemblance with the Hindoos." Wordsworth opposed property taxes to pay for the alleviation of the poor. The more you increase "the facilities of the poor being maintained at other people's expense," Wordsworth (1821b/1978: 39) complained, "the more poor you have." The conceptions of nature expounded by both English Romantics and German idealists were also profoundly misguided, the American physicist, Bernard Cohen (1948: 208), dismissing the "natural philosophy" that they espoused as "the lowest degradation of science," a "nightmare" that science only freed itself from with difficulty.

More fundamentally, the idea that we should abandon the modern industrial world and retreat to some "deep Vale" where there supposedly "abides a power and protection for the mind" (Wordsworth 1888: 31) is delusionary. Yes, it is true, as Blake (1808/1969: 481) recorded, that the new industrial factories appeared as "dark Satanic Mills" to people used to a rural existence and that the poor who worked within their walls initially did so "upon a crust of bread" (Blake 1804/1969: 656). Yes, it is true Byron, as (Parliament of United Kingdom 1812: 2) complained, that rural unemployment was the initial handmaiden of industrialization as "one man performed the work of many." It is, however, folly to believe that pre-industrial rural life was an idyllic world, where a mother was left to happily "rock the cradle of her peevish babe" (Wordsworth 1814/1853) and children to "play before the cottage door" (Shelley 1820/1920: 42). As Thompson's (1963: 320) own account of country weavers makes clear, poverty was their constant companion as family members worked without end, surviving on a diet of "oatmeal and potatoes" mixed "with old milk and treacle." The fact that the first generations to enter the new industrial factories suffered poverty is thus undoubtedly true but hardly historically unique. As Braudel (1946/1975: 725) noted, the "price of progress" has historically been "social oppression," in which only "the poor gained nothing." What is historically unique about the Industrial Revolution and its associated management systems is that by

1850 – two generations after its commencement – the poor had become major beneficiaries. As managers concerned with increased productivity quickly realized, the presence of children in a highly capitalized work environment was more of a hindrance than a help. Accordingly, child labor collapsed. By 1851 (Kirby 2011), only 30% of English and Welsh children worked. Of those who did, only 15.4% of males and 24.1% of females were found in factories. As the new industrial factories demanded literate workforces, attendance at school becomes the social norm, rather than the exception. For the great majority, in short, Romanticized hankering for a bucolic existence was something best left to poetry and literature.

Evidence and Knowledge

It is a peculiar if fundamental fact of research that debates about evidence and knowledge, and of the relationship between the two, is as contested today as they were in the ancient world. Thus we read in the pages of *Academy of Management Review* "that there is a 'literary' or 'fictive' element in all historical and scientific writing" and that "objectivist history" (i.e., one constructed around "facts") "is clearly inimical" to critical "reflexivity" (Rowlinson et al. 2014: 257, 254). Elsewhere, we are advised (Munslow 2015: 129) that we should profoundly question – if not reject – methodologies that are "realist, empiricist," that we should be "rhetorically reconfiguring the past" (Suddaby and Foster 2017: 31), and that useful business-related research can be based on "grounded fictionalism" (Foster et al. 2011: 109). Such approaches are deliberately subversive of established Western canon. For as Derrida (1998: 2) realized, by attacking the principles of language and epistemology upon which Western business endeavor is constructed, one is attacking its very foundations. There is thus much more than hyperbole to the claim by the Dutch postmodernist, Frank Ankersmit (1989: 142), that "The postmodernists' aim is to pull the carpet out from under the feet of science and modernism." If, however, we are to take such critiques seriously – rather than simply dismiss them out of hand as too many of their critics are wont to do (see, e.g., Gross et al. 1996; Windschuttle 2000) – then we need to first understand the origins of postmodernism and its roots in philosophic idealism. This, in turn, requires a comprehension of how German philosophic idealism and English Romanticism emerged in part as responses to British empiricism, a tradition intimately connected to the rise of industrial capitalism and its associated managerial systems.

In origin, the conflict between empiricism and philosophic idealism – and the fundamental principles at stake – can be traced back not centuries but millennia, the former finding its first cogent expression in Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, a work that has provided a guiding star for countless generations of historians. In Thucydides' (431 BCE/1954: 47–48) opinion, research should always be based on "the plainest of evidence," evidence based either on one's own observations or on "eye witnesses" whose accounts one "checked with as much thoroughness as possible." Although Thucydides' formulation did much to inform the empiricist or positivist tradition that emerged in Britain from the mid-seventeenth

century, in the ancient world it was not shared by the higher minds of Greek philosophy, most particularly Plato and Aristotle. For Plato (380 BCE/2003: 239–248), as he indicated in *The Republic*, it was evident that we do not perceive the world directly but rather through mental "representations," perceptions that we make sense of by giving them generalized mental "forms" which become the basis for reasoned thought. Thus, we categorize certain shapes as geometric "circles" even though it is probable that no perfect "circles" exist in nature. The problem for Plato, as for subsequent philosophers, was to distinguish not only between "representations" that are real from those that are based on illusion (*eikasia*) but also – in terms of the conclusions that we draw from evidence – between "knowledge" and unfounded "belief." To get around these difficulties, Plato chose to regard understanding as a series of hierarchical steps, a solution that caused him to conclude that only a trained elite was capable of comprehending "true reality." In confronting the same issues, Aristotle (c.330a BCE/1941: 689–670, 712–713) distinguished between "practical" and "empirical knowledge" on one hand (i.e., medicine, carpentry, etc.) and "natural science" and "theoretical knowledge" on the other. For Aristotle (c.330a BCE/1941: 712, 860–861) however, such "empirical knowledge" can never do more than provide a basis for "action" by what he called "practical" and "productive science" (i.e., engineering). Conversely, "truth" and "natural science" – which Aristotle (c.330a/1941: 861) associated solely with theoretical physics, mathematics, and theology – can only involve understanding of the inner "essence" of things that "suffer no change," a category within which he fallaciously included "the heavenly bodies" (Aristotle c.330a/1941: 859).

In the ancient world, the most significant attempt to reconcile conflicting views on evidence and knowledge was found in Book X of St. Augustine's (c.400/2007) *Confessions*, one of the most significant (if overlooked) works of Western philosophy that subsequently underpinned much of the thinking of both Immanuel Kant and (to a lesser degree) German idealist philosophy. Like Plato, and unlike Aristotle, St. Augustine (c.400/2007: 153–157) believed that perception was based not on "the things themselves" but rather mental "images" generated by the objects of our senses. Similarly, he held that we "intuit" within ourselves concepts that do not exist in the natural world, i.e., mathematical representations. Where St. Augustine (c.400/2007: 152) differed from Plato was in giving a primacy to the natural "reason" of human beings "to judge the evidence which the senses report."

Long dormant, the problematic nature of the relationship between evidence and knowledge was again brought to the fore in arguably the greatest "debate" in the history of ideas, waged between David Hume (1739b/1896, 1748/1902) – the most original thinker that British empiricism has produced – and Immanuel Kant (1783/1902, 1787/2001), a central figure in German philosophy. This "debate" – the term used advisedly as Hume died in 1776, prior to Kant's refutation of his conclusions – was inspired by Hume's (1748/1902) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, which was a popularization of his earlier (1739a/1896) three-volume *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Such were the originality of Hume's insights, Kant (1783/1902: 7) declared, that they proved to be "the very thing" which interrupted him from his "dogmatic slumber," giving his own "investigations" a "new direction."

The revolutionary nature of Hume's insights stemmed from two key theses. First, in giving absolute primacy to physical evidence and experience, Hume (1748/1902: 36) argued that it is impossible to establish through either reason or experimentation any "law of causality." To the extent that we can draw cause-effect relationships, Hume (1748/1902: 43) added, these result from "the effects of custom" – what we generally think of common sense based on long experience – "not of reasoning." Seen from this perspective, everything in history becomes particular. Subsequently, several centuries after Hume, when G.R. Elton (1967/1969: 42) declared in his much read *The Practice of History*, that "[f]ew practicing historians would probably nowadays fall victim to the search for laws," he was therefore not making a new observation. Rather, he was restating what had become a bedrock principle of the British empiricist tradition within which he was located, a tradition that caused Elton (1967/1969: 74) to conclude that "history . . . will always be able to say: this once existed or took place, and there is therefore truth to be discovered."

If the first of Hume's key theses made verifiable evidence and experience the central component, his second insight – that human behavior is driven primarily by "passions" and emotion – stands in at least partial contradiction to his first. Devoting the second volume of his *A Treatise of Human Nature* to "passions," Hume (1739b/1896: 241) accurately observed that – unlike reason – "'tis evident our passions" are "not susceptible" to rational "agreement or disagreement." Having identified "passions" as a central explanatory factor in human behavior, however, Hume confronted the problem of how to best weave an understanding of emotion into an avowedly empiricist framework. Hume's (by no means perfect) solution to this problem – which was to have immeasurable significance for disciplines such as economics and management – was obtained through his identification of "self-interest" as humanity's preeminent emotion. As Hume (1739b/1896: 266) expressed it, "Men being naturally selfish . . . they are not easily induc'd to perform any action for the interest of strangers, except with a view to some reciprocal advantage."

Immanuel Kant, in countering Hume's treatises in ways that had profound significance for Western research – Popper (1934/2002: 23) observing that Kant was "the first to realize that the objectivity of scientific statements is closely connected with the construction of theories" –studiously ignored Hume's insights into the role of "passions," focusing instead of how we can understand causal relationships. Like Plato and St. Augustine – and unlike Aristotle, Hume, and the wider empiricist tradition – Kant (1783/1902, 1787/2001) argued that we perceive the material world indirectly through mental "representations," representations that can often deceive (i.e., the apparently fixed nature of the "heavenly bodies"). Like St. Augustine – and unlike subsequent exponents of both German idealism and postmodernism – Kant (1787/2001: 348) also believed that the objects of our "representations" *do* have an independent existence, "actually and independently of all fancy." Significantly, Kant (1783/1902: 43) vociferously rejected charges that he was himself a philosophic idealist – charges that grew ever louder after his death – declaring in his *Prolegomena* that "My idealism concerns not the existence of things . . . since it never came into my head to doubt it, but it concerns" only the ways in which "things" are represented in our "imagination." Where Kant differed from his

predecessors was in making the *testing* of concepts drawn from observation the central plank in his "law of causality." Kant, in coming to this solution to the problem of establishing causal links, effectively outlined principles for research using inductive logic, albeit in ways that avoided the express use of the term.

If Kant believed that, in finding an (imperfect) solution to what he (Kant 1783/1902: 7) referred to as "Hume's problem" – i.e., we can never by reasoned analysis determine causal relationships – it was nevertheless the case that the emergent German idealist traditions quickly honed in on the two obvious weak points in Kant's theorizing. First, in highlighting matters relating to being, consciousness, and will, German idealist thinkers – most notably Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and Nietzsche – picked up the core aspect of Hume's philosophy that Kant had largely ignored: the role of passions, emotion, and feeling. The second problem that German idealism identified in Kant's thinking was the relationship between evidence and knowledge, an area where Kant (1783/1902, 1787/2001) in truth advanced epistemology little further than St. Augustine (c.400/2007), both relying on the powers of reason to distinguish between objective reality and illusion. Indeed, despite the complexity of Kant's thinking, his conclusions in relation to evidence were closer to Hume than subsequent idealist philosophers. As Kant (1783/1902: 102) concluded in his *Prolegomena* "there is something real without us which not only corresponds, but must correspond, to our external perceptions . . . This means that there is something empirical, i.e. some phenomenon in space without us." Inherently logical, this is nevertheless a point whose veracity we can never be sure of. It is theoretically possible that the external world is all illusion. In pursuing this exact point, German idealist philosophy established its raison d'être. Within a few years of Kant's articulations, a far more subjective view of evidence found voice in Johann Fichte. Outlining positions that became de rigueur in German idealist philosophy, Fichte declared "that all reality . . . is solely provided through imagination" (Fichte 1794/1889: 187) and "that what thou assumes to a consciousness of the object is nothing but a consciousness of thine own supposition of an object" (Fichte 1799/1910: 62). Now, it is true that similar, radical idealist positions were argued long before Fichte. Emphasizing the primacy of consciousness over sensory perception, René Descartes (1641/1991: 149–150) had declared in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* that it is equally possible to "persuade myself" that either "nothing has ever existed" or the reverse. Even more radically, the English cleric, George Berkeley (1710/1996: 24), concluded that all "things that exist, exist on in the mind, that is, they are purely nominal." Where German idealist philosophy differed from these earlier studies was in its establishment of a whole *school* of thought, a school that linked a subjective and relativist view of evidence with consciousness and will.

Although German idealism is universally characterized by an emphasis on consciousness and a distrust of "empirical" evidence and "experimental science" after Fichte it nevertheless bifurcated into two broad streams, albeit ones characterized by fluid rather than rigid borders. The first of these – exemplified in the work of Schelling and Hegel – believed that the "essence" that pervades all things reflects a deist being, a divine force that was to Schelling (1809/2006: 10) the "invisible driving force" in nature, and to Hegel (1837/1956: 36) a "God" whose

"plan" determines "the History of the World." The second stream, which is seminal to understanding postmodernist critiques of capitalism and management, is best exemplified in the work of Schopenhauer and, subsequently, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger, a stream that tied understanding and knowledge to *individual* consciousness and will. In rejecting what he referred to as Kant's "realistic dogma," Schopenhauer (1859/1969: 15) demanded that we "absolutely deny to the dogmatist the reality of the external world . . .The whole world of objects is and remains representation, and is for this reason wholly and forever conditioned by the subject."

It does not take much imagination to see how Schopenhauer's ideas – which were seminal in Nietzsche's philosophy – flowed through Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger to Foucault. Whereas for Schopenhauer (1859/1969: 275) it was "the will to live" that gave "the individual" the power to overcome all else, "even at the sight of death," for Nietzsche (1883/1970: 137) it was "the will itself, the will to power, the unexhausted, procreating life-will." Similarly, for Foucault (1976/1978: 94), power is, primarily, "not an institution" or "a structure" but rather something that is "immanent" and "internalized." For Heidegger (1927/1962: 61), it was also the case that knowledge and "knowing" are primarily due to inner "being," what he referred to as *Dasein* or "Being-in-itself." With Schopenhauer, representation, knowledge, and will are also interwoven in a single whole with speech and language, the claim being that "this world is, on the one side, entirely *representation*" and, on the other, "entirely will" (Schopenhauer 1859/1969: 4). Again, one does not need much imagination to see how such ideas have flowed through to recent postmodernist critiques. For Nietzsche (1874: 28), also drawing on Schopenhauer, what is important in representation is its relationship to an active will, it being the case that "great things never succeed without some delusion." Similarly, for Foucault (1966/1994: 305) – who (wrongly) declared Nietzsche to be "the first to connect the philosophical task with a radical reflection upon language" – representations of language are primarily mechanisms through which "codes of cultures" are enforced – and disrupted (Foucault 1966/1994: xx–xxi).

If the roots of postmodernist canon in German philosophic idealism are self-evident, we should not neglect the debt that this canon owes to English Romanticism. Again, it is not hard to find evidence of this connection, the late Hayden White (1973b: 50) accurately noting (as we have previously indicated) that Foucault's ideas were part of a tradition "which originates in Romanticism": a tradition united by "a common antipathy" to Enlightenment "rationalism." It is, however, through the influence of White himself that we find the principal mechanism through which the shared conceptions of the Romantic tradition – with its hostility to industrialization and a belief in the poetic imagination – enter into postmodernist canon. Described by Rowlinson et al. (2014: 251) as "a leader philosopher of history" whose approach "embodies the kind of history that we mean," White's own intellectual roots in Romantic opposition to industrial capitalism are indubitable. As White (1982: 12) – reflecting on his own conceptions – noted on one occasion, "Romanticism represented the last attempt in the West to generate a visionary politics on the basis of a sublime conception of the historical process." Like

Coleridge (1817b: 164), for whom literature should always act as a source of inspiration for humanity's "philosophic consciousness," for White (1973b: ix–x), any "historic work" must first and foremost be a "poetical act." Like Blake (1799/1980: 10), for whom "this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination," for White, "History's subject matter is a place of fantasy" (White 2005: 333), a place where the borders between the "truthful" and the "purely imaginary" are dissolved (White 1966: 130). As with Percy Shelley (1820/1920: 111), for whom the supposed "capabilities for happiness" created by the Industrial Revolution merely ensured an "augmentation of misery," for White (1973b: 2), "modern, industrial society" merely provided for the spiritual degradation of Western society and an associated intellectual subservience by other "cultures and civilizations." White also owed a very significant intellectual debt to the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico (1744/1968: 186), for whom the use of metaphorical imagery in any narrative account was recommended as a means of recapturing the "vast imagination" that had been lost with the advance of civilization and urbanization.

As with German philosophic idealism, whose creed has gained contemporary expression in management and business history via Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault, one does not need to look far to see the influence of White and, through him, the Romantic poetic tradition. In assessing the state of organizational and management history, Munslow (2015: 132) places White at the top of his "list" of historical thinkers, declaring his ideas as seminal to the "epistemological insurgency" against "empirical-analytical-representationalist historying." In discussing the critical principles upon which management history should be based, Jacques and Durepos (2015: 96) also assign "White's theory" a primary place in their thinking, a theory which they argue opens up "the emancipatory potential of our discipline in the present and future." Similarly, Durepos and Mills (2012: 84–86), in outlining their conceptions of "ANTi-History," declare that their own "insights" draw on White's "elementary thoughts," thoughts which they argue have been seminal in shifting "historiography" away from "a focus on *truth* [emphasis in original]" toward an understanding of the "socially constructed nature" of historical writing. Elsewhere, the feminist historians, Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (2009: ix) declare that "the work of Hayden White" is the "[m]ost influential" force in recent historiography, demonstrating that historical writing is (supposedly) built around "creativity and textuality" rather than any claim to factual accuracy.

One does not need to regard postmodernism with totally antipathy to comprehend the problems that stem from grounding historical research – most particularly in business and management history – in subjective understandings of consciousness, will, and the poetic.

Not only can such an emphasis lead to a lack of thought being given to the material conditions of existence, it also often leads to sweeping epistemological generalizations being made without due consideration as to the implications that necessarily follows when one grounds one's ideas on such premises. If we are to "return to basics" in order to better comprehend our collective intellectual premises, a good place to start is the eighteenth-century "debate" waged between Hume and Kant. For Hume (1748/1902: 19, 30), as for the generations of positivist scholars

who followed in his wake, "our thoughts" are always "confined within very narrow limits," limits that cause us to err whenever we move beyond "observation" and "experience." Accordingly, we will always search "in vain" for the "general causes" of things, given that experience restricts our observations to matters particular. Among positivist scholars, the legacy of Hume's dictates is seen in an emphasis on "verifiable" evidence, "facts," and a distrust of grand theorizing, attributes that make positivists natural foes of postmodernism in its various hues, even though (paradoxically) both schools of thought share a common distrust of generalizable "laws." Accordingly, positivist scholars typically seek to "refute" postmodernist-informed methodologies by pointing to factual errors in the latter, Tyson and Oldroyd (2017, 13), for example, finding most objectionable the willingness of "critical accounting" researchers to "wilfully distort or omit key factual information" so as to bolster "a moral stance." The problems with such positivist "refutations" are manifold. As Plato, St. Augustine, Kant, and others long appreciated, we only make sense of our "observations" through conceptual representations and generalizations. Typically, moreover, our conceptual generalizations either do not correspond to the objective world (i.e., the improbability of perfect "circles" existing in nature), or they only have meaning within a wider scaffolding (i.e., something is "high" only in comparison to something else). To complicate matters further, many of the conceptualizations that frame our thinking – democracy, freedom, emancipation, profit – do not have a material existence. How then to make sense of the world without embracing the philosophic relativism of idealist thought or postmodernism? The answer to this question, we suggest, is the necessarily imperfect path suggested by Kant, Popper, E.H. Carr, and others, whereby we start from concepts, concepts that we continually seek to find evidence for in the world of material existence. Now, it must be admitted, as Berkeley (1710/1996: 24) once asserted, that it is possible that the material world is only illusionary spirit and that all "things that exist, exist only in the mind." If, however, it remains the common experience of humanity that our generalized conceptualizations are continually supported by the "observation" and "experience" that Hume held so dear, then we can also logically endorse Kant's (1787/2001: 348) conclusion that there is in all probability a "material" world "actually and independently of all fancy." And if we accept these propositions, then there is no need to heed the siren calls of postmodernism, philosophic idealism, or Romanticism, each of which in their own ways asserted a subjective and "relativist" view of evidence.

Conclusion

For most of the twentieth century, the principal foe of Western capitalism and management was Marxism. For all the bloodshed that the Marxist challenge entailed, however, it was nevertheless the case that Marxism shared much common ground with its capitalist enemies. In terms of social purpose, Marxism shared the view that industrialization was to humanity's benefit. In terms of ideas, Marxism was a materialist philosophy. Like the exponents of classical economics (Smith, Mill, Marshall), Marxists believed in the verifiable nature of evidence. There were always,

however, intellectual currents that shared few if any of the assumptions of either classical economics or Marxism. Of enduring significance among these alternative intellectual traditions were German philosophic idealism and English Romanticisms, each of which placed the human imagination, consciousness, and will at the center of their thinking, attributes which have since become a defining feature of the various forms of postmodernism. Like Jacques Derrida (1967/2001), who believed that within language every expression of being occurs alongside an absent existence, German idealism concluded that "every existence" signals "another existence" (Fichte 1799/1910: 7). Like Hayden White (2005: 333), who believed that history "is a place of fantasy," English Romanticism concluded that the world that we inhabit is primarily one of "imagination" (Blake 1799/1980: 10) and that historical writing should be based on the understanding that a "vein of poetry exists" at the "heart" of humanity (Carlyle 1840/2013: 79–80). Like Foucault (1976/1978: 100), who wrote that "power and knowledge are joined together," Coleridge (1817b: 114) recorded that "Knowledge is power." Similarly, in German idealism, we find the belief that "knowledge" represents assertion of "will" by one party over others (Schopenhauer 1859/1969: 337). Also pervading the canon of both German idealism and English Romanticism is the view that industrialization initiated an unprecedented "augmentation of misery" (Shelley 1820/1920: 11), a world of "dark Satanic mills" (Blake 1808/1969: 481) that reduced all within its grip to the status of "herd animals" (Nietzsche 1889a/1990: 130).

Within contemporary business and management history, the understandings that underpinned German idealism and English Romanticism now provide foundations for "critical" and postmodernist perspectives hostile to industrial capitalism and its associated systems of managerial endeavor. Thus we are advised that postmodernists consider "modernist criteria of truth or falsity" as irrelevant in "assessing how the past is re-presented" and that there is a fundamental social "truth" in the "fictive" (Munslow 2015: 139). Hostility to the whole structure of modern industrial society also provides a bond between contemporary postmodernist belief and earlier idealist and Romantic critiques. Accordingly, we are informed that "modernism" is an "utter failure" (Durepos 2015: 161); that "Truth and knowledge . . . are weapons by which a society manages itself" (McKinlay and Starkey 1998: 1); and that current managerial models are complicit in "unprecedented economic, social and environmental crises" (Cummings et al. 2017: 177).

As idealist philosophies, German philosophic idealism and English Romanticism have all benefited from the fact that appeals to imagination, individual consciousness, and the "poetic" are inherently more beguiling than explanations grounded in economics and the base nature of material existence. It has also been the contention of this chapter that postmodernism has benefited from the inherent difficulties that empiricist or positivist epistemologies have in countering the "relativism" of those who stand as heirs to the intellectual traditions of German idealism and/or English Romanticism. As we have noted, the apparent solidity of many positivist defenses crumbles when confronted with the fact that many of concepts central to our understanding do not exist in physical form (profit, freedom, etc.) and that even things do only have meaning when located in a wider intellectual scaffolding.

If the appeals of philosophic idealism, Romanticism, and postmodernism are indubitable, it is nevertheless the case that the underlying premises of these traditions are misguided. In terms of epistemology, it is far more likely that the material world does exist, as Kant (1783/1902: 102) observed, "as something real without us" than the reverse (i.e., the perceived world is a figment of our imagination). Once we accept this premise, then we can continually test our concepts and generalizations against evidence, i.e., that if my employees attend work every day, my output will be higher than if they do not. The association of modern capitalism and management with a universal "augmentation of misery" is also misguided. Rather than it being the case that "never have violence, inequality, exclusion . . .affected so many human being in the history of the earth" (Derrida 1993/2006: 106), capitalism and management have been associated with the advance of democracy and literacy and rising living standards. As the labor historian, E.P. Thompson (1963: 452), noted, industrial capitalism also opened up unprecedented opportunities for women as "independent wage earners," free from "dependence" on male relatives. Similarly, demand for child labor quickly collapsed in every industrializing nation as managers focused on productivity as the primary source of economic gain. It is also a mistake to associate philosophic idealism, with its emphasis on consciousness and will, as inherently democratic and emancipatory. On the contrary, a prioritization of individual will have a tendency to lead its exponents in anti-democratic directions. It is thus hardly surprising that most Romantic and idealist thinkers regarded common humanity with undisguised disdain, dismissing such citizenry as "unredeemed dirt" (Byron 1820b/2015: 356) and "the lowest clay and loam" (Nietzsche 1874: 39). Yes, it is true that Romantic literature and idealist philosophy make us think about individuality and our relationship with the natural world. Their words remain, as intended, spiritually uplifting across the space of centuries. They are, however, poor guides for either practical action or research.

Cross-References

- ▶ Intellectual Enlightenment: The Epistemological Foundations of Business Endeavor
- ▶ Economic Foundations: Adam Smith and the Classical School of Economics
- ▶ The Intellectual Origins of Postmodernism

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