

**FROM *THEORIA* TO THEORY:
LEADERSHIP WITHOUT CONTEMPLATION**

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Abstract

This paper explores the transition of the theological and philosophical concept of *theoria* – contemplation - to the modern notion of theory. Theory derives linguistically from *theoria* and retains a connection with knowledge. However, it has lost and, moreover, typically excludes *theoria*'s focus upon the direct experiential knowledge of the divine. In keeping with the thrust of this *Special Issue*, we focus on how the secularization of the theological concept of *theoria* defines in a profound manner the limits and possibilities of thinking and theorizing work and organization. We examine the nature of *theoria* and the transitions that have led to its metamorphosis. It is suggested that dominant forms of theorizing work and organization are typically performative. This is illustrated, somewhat ironically, through a review of Spiritual Leadership Theory, which appears to promote spiritual leadership without contemplation.

The Secularization of *Theoria*

The *Call for Papers* for this special issue began with the claim that all significant concepts relating to the modern theory of work and organization are secularized theological concepts. We address this claim directly in relation to the secularization of the ancient Greek notion of *theoria*. We suggest that this secularization constitutes a transformation of a scale and significance such that the concepts are barely recognisable. Etymological dictionaries trace the concept theory from *theoria*, both from the theological writings of St Jerome (347-420 CE) and from the ancient philosophers of the 4th century BCE. Both terms are concerned with attaining knowledge but the primary focus of *theoria*, the knowledge of the divine, has not merely gone, it is excluded by dominant organizational discourses.

We focus on how the *secularization* of the theological concept of *theoria* defines in a profound manner the limits and possibilities of thinking and theorizing work and organization. We have in mind, in particular, a number of approaches to theorizing that have dominated popular organizational discourses for several decades. In contrast to approaches that at least share some features in common with the practice of *theoria*, the dominant perspectives are characterised by, to our reckoning, an impoverished conception of theory. For example, we observe a well-established trajectory within a range of utilitarian approaches to organization studies as represented in Total Quality Management, Business Process Re-engineering and Cultural Excellence programmes. By way of illustration we will review one such aspect of organization studies that has grown significantly in the last decade: Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT). We contend that, perhaps ironically, even where the relationship between humans and the divine is deemed significant the nature of

dominant modes of modern theorizing excludes serious consideration of the knowledge that may derive from *theoria*. In other words, as we point out toward the end of the article, SLT is a form of a-*theoria* par excellence. It introduces what we take to be impoverished definitions of spirituality and proceeds to operationalize them in empiricist terms to produce proxy measures of spiritual leadership and corporate spirituality. These measurements are then employed to test formal hypotheses in an attempt to establish positive correlations between spiritual leadership, workplace spirituality and corporate financial performance. SLT is thus illustrative of the argument we advance concerning the historical movement of *theoria* to theory. It exemplifies the translation of apophatic understanding, or direct encounter with the divine, into a theologically denuded, disenchanted and strictly utilitarian form of theorization.

Such disenchanted objectivism and performative purpose is entirely antithetical to an approach to understanding the complexity of organizational and leadership processes from an appreciative understanding of *theoria*. The pursuit of *theoria* would demand eschewal of the performative in favour of a more open-ended, ethically disinterested and other-centred disposition toward workplace relations and responsibilities.

As we will explore in detail in this article, *theoria* entails an engagement with the unknowable and comprises knowing beyond words. As such, its incorporation into the theorizing of work and organization, and leadership in particular, is not without difficulty. In this respect, relevant literatures include those that address leadership as distributed (Gronn, 2000; 2002) and as process (Ladkin, 2010; Stacey, 2007; Wood, 2005). Within this context, alongside others (Grint, 2007; Jironet, 2010), we believe it

is timely to undertake a reconsideration of leadership and virtue drawing on ancient traditions of ethical practice. In this article we make a particular contribution to this shared endeavour by redressing Grint's (2007) omission in excluding *theoria* from his review of the relevance of Aristotle's intellectual virtues in learning to lead.

Our discussion begins with an exploration of the disenchantment and secularization of the modern era. By contrast, it is argued that *theoria* is, by definition, enchanting and gives access to intellectual knowledge through direct experience of the divine. This mysterious practice is explored through the metaphor of seeing and as knowing beyond words. An example of theorising with resonances of *theoria* is considered from the field of psychoanalysis in Black's (2006) notion of the contemplative position. The discussion then proceeds, with unavoidable brevity, to outline pertinent aspects of the theological and philosophical transitions that have accompanied the movement from *theoria* to theory. In order to illustrate our argument concerning the shift from *theoria* to the dominance of performative theory, the article culminates with a critique of Spiritual Leadership Theory, which ironically appears to exclude *theoria* thereby encouraging the practice of leadership without contemplation.

Disenchantment: A Loss of Depth in Experience

The context of the movement from *theoria* to theory is one of disenchantment and secularization. Disenchantment suggests a significant sense of loss. The term is the standard translation, following Weber, of the German *Entzauberung*, which literally means the separation from (*Ent-*) magic (*Zauber*), that is, the deprivation of mystique or the breaking of a spell. Weber appears to have borrowed the term 'the disenchantment of the world' from the writings of Friedrich Schiller (Gerth and

Wright Mills, 1948: 51, cited in Brown, 2004: 17), and it was in the Romantic period that the last significant stand, at least until the last few decades, was taken in favour of wonder and against the desacralization of the world (Holmes, 2008; see also, Bamford, 1994; Berry, 1999; Bronk, 2009; Lovelock, 1979; Roszak, 1972; Skolomowski, 1992).

Even the notion of enchantment has become disenchanted. Derived from the Latin *incantare*, its original sense was a powerful one: to chant a magical formula, an incantation, or cast a spell on someone could leave them, literally, spellbound. However, by the late 16th century, the superficial, modern sense of enchantment – for example, an enchanting cottage/ little child/ story – had already begun to drain the word of its power (*OED*, 1993; *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, 1988).

Pertinent to our purposes, an important dimension of disenchantment is the separation that may take place between lived experience and our accounts of that experience. In a similar vein, Hadot contrasts philosophy as a way of life with philosophy as textual commentary (Hadot, 2002: 150; Hadot, 1995). It is a dichotomy between lived experience and worded communication which Karl Rahner described in relation to his own theology, thus:

When I love, when I am tormented by questions, when I am sad, when I am faithful, when I feel longing, this human and lived existential reality is a unity [...] that is not *fully* communicated by the idea of this reality that makes it an object to be reflected on academically. (Rahner, 1978: 15-16)

In this sense we argue that disenchantment entails a loss of depth in the levels of connection between thought and experience. Similarly, secularization loses such depth through the denial of layers of experience. Although secular has come to mean worldly (in contrast to spiritual), the Latin *saeculum* meant ‘the period of one generation (i.e. 33⅓ years)’ (*A Smaller Latin-English Dictionary*, 1933). This devaluing or dismissal of anything but the immediate past and future has intensified greatly in recent decades, as evidenced in the time scales on which the world’s money markets operate – a movement from ‘one generation’ to ‘the instant’, from secularization to what might be called instantization. Rather in the way that tsunamis can level everything in their path, a series of cultural tectonic shifts in Western society has sent out shock waves that have erased certain dimensions of human experience, leaving a ‘wasteland of the spirit’ (Roszak, 1972: xxxiii) and reducing humans to ‘one dimension’ (Marcuse, 1964). The terminology inherited from the past, in this instance the concept ‘theory’, has been divorced from the context in which it received its meaning.

Globalization implies the worldwide spread of what is left after these tectonic shifts – in particular: rationalism, positivism, reductionism, individualism, secularization, utilitarianism, and performativity. The processes of secularization and disenchantment are clearly evident in the linguistic currency of work and organization where the performative notions of targets and the bottom line contrast strikingly with the aspirational ideals of the classical, medieval, renaissance and romantic worlds: Beauty, Truth, Being, the Good, the Real, the Sublime, the Word (*logos*) and God (*theos*) – theology – Wisdom (*sophia*) and Love (*philia*) – philosophy:

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ – that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

(Keats, 1956: 210; *Ode on a Grecian Urn*)

***Theoria* – Direct Knowledge of the Divine**

When John Cassian (c. 360-435 CE) used the Latin term *contemplatio*, it was to translate for the Western Church the notion of *theoria* (Ramsey, 2004), already in common use in the Eastern Church as a result of its engagement with Hellenistic philosophy. Eastern Orthodox theologians use the term *theoria* to this day to refer to the experience of illumination, the vision of God (Ware, 1986: 397), which precedes *theosis*, or deification, the direct or mystical union between God and man (Ware, 1982: 23). In the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, such direct contemplative experiences of God have at times been treated with suspicion and ‘condemned as quietism, illuminism, subjectivism, and so on’ (Thomas Merton in the Foreword to Johnston, 1974: viii. See also Keating, 1992: 22-6; Needleman, 1993). However, throughout the history of the church there has been clear teaching on *theoria* including, for example, St John of the Cross for whom the first stage of contemplation was the ‘prayer of loving attention’ and St Teresa of Avila, the ‘prayer of quiet’.

Seeing

The key to understanding the term *theoria* – and hence of *contemplatio* – is that its basis is in vision, seeing, observation. The root word is *thea*, meaning a sight or view; its sense extended to *theatron*, a place for seeing shows (theatre), and to *theorein*, to look at, observe, behold, consider or speculate.

The term *theoria* was already in common usage when it was employed by Aristotle and other 4th century BCE philosophers. It previously referred to a ‘specific civic institution’ (Nightingale, 2004: 3): the journey or pilgrimage made on behalf of the community to a religious festival or oracle by a *theoros* (the pilgrim, the one who goes to see). The practice of *theoria* encompassed the whole journey but with a focus upon *seeing* the event or object, often through participation in a sacred ritual. The *theoros* would return and recount the story of the journey in order to transmit to the community what had been seen.

This notion of *theoria* was appropriated by the philosophers to refer to the act of seeing divine truths. A number, including Plato, retained the metaphor of journeying to reflect the intellectual search for truth. Aristotle, however, dispensed with the metaphor of a round-trip journey:

Rather, the act of spectating is the final goal or *telos* of this activity – nothing is produced or generated “beyond” that goal... Aristotelian theorizing is simply a matter of intellectual “vision” and is not nested in or connected to practical projects. (Nightingale, 2004: 187-8)

Medieval theology retained Aristotle’s understanding of *theoria* as intellectual virtue in the sense of essentially a receptive, rather than active, attitude of mind. The German philosopher and theologian Pieper (1999 [1952]) describes this by analogy with the contemplation of a rose: ‘to “look” in this sense, means to open one’s eyes receptively to whatever offers itself to one’s vision, and the things seen enter into us, so to speak, without calling for any effort or strain on our part to possess them’ (p.26). In a talk on contemplation and art Pieper (1990) took great pains to emphasize the

primacy of *seeing* in contemplation: ‘So, once again: to contemplate means first of all *to see* – and not *to think!*’ (p.73).

Knowing Beyond Words

Theoria was able to pass directly from Greek philosophy into Christian theology because it is based on a shared level of experience: the *direct* knowledge of the divine unmediated by concepts. Thus, Louth begins his discussion of ‘the origins of the Christian mystical tradition’ with Plato:

Mystical theology, or perhaps better, a doctrine of contemplation, is not simply an element in Plato’s philosophy, but something that penetrates and informs his whole understanding of the world. ... The soul is naturally divine and seeks to return to the divine realm. And it does this in the act of contemplation – *theoria* – of Being, Truth, Beauty, Goodness. This act of *theoria* is not simply consideration or understanding; it is union with, participation in, the true objects of true knowledge. (Louth, 1981: 1, 3)

However, notions such as *union with* or *the direct experience of* and *beyond words* are problematic, when it comes to communicating such experiences through language. It is clearly hard to express in words *any* deep experience – at least in a form that communicates to the listener or reader the actual texture of the experience (Lang, 1981). Hence the remark attributed to Robert Frost that ‘Poetry is what gets lost in translation.’ Something similar might be said of theory. It is precisely the desire to express for others the insights from their experience of *theoria* that leads poets and mystics of all religious traditions to push beyond the limits of the possibilities of language (Sells, 1994). They seek to go beyond merely *talking about* what they know

in an attempt to initiate the attentive reader into a form of knowing, which ‘is always experience, or rather it is an inner metamorphosis.’ (Hadot, 1993: 48)

In the Christian tradition, this has led to two contrasting forms of theology: the apophatic and the cataphatic. The importance of apophaticism for the discussion of *theoria* cannot be overestimated and it would not be too much to suggest that apophatic theology stands at the very opposite pole to performativity, utilitarianism and the knowledge society.

Apophasis is rooted in negation, literally ‘un-saying’ or ‘speaking-away’ (Sells, 1994: 2): ‘*apophasis* is a Greek neologism for the breakdown of *speech*, which in the face of the unknowability of God, falls infinitely short of the mark’ (Turner, 1995: 20). It is this essential *unknowability* of God, which is at the centre of apophatic theology. A key figure in the development of apophaticism was an unidentified 5th century writer, variously known as Denys the Areopagite, Dionysius or Pseudo-Dionysius:

[T]he higher we ascend the more our words are straitened by the fact that what we understand is seen more and more altogether in a unifying and simplifying way; just as now on our entry into the darkness that is beyond understanding, we find not mere brevity of words, but complete wordlessness and failure of the understanding. (Denys, in Louth, 1981: 165)

This, in essence, is the paradox at the heart of *theoria*: knowledge of great value arises when we embrace our ignorance and allow ourselves to be immersed in a thick cloud in which we lose all our familiar bearings and *do not know* either where we are or where we are going: ‘Apophasis demands a moment of nothingness’ (Sells, 1994: 31).

There is, therefore, an irony in the phrase apophatic theology: *theology* means discourse about God, whereas apophaticism recognises that no meaningful discourse about God is possible. In a state of *theoria*-contemplation, one does, in a sense, simply not know, even though, paradoxically, this is a place of deep knowing.

The second form of theology is cataphaticism, *kataphasis* meaning ‘affirmation, saying, speaking-with’ (Sells, 1994: 31), which speaks of the attributes of God rather than of unknowability: ‘it is the Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God and in that straining to speak theology uses as many voices as it can’ (Turner, 1995: 20). As Louth puts it, cataphatic theology ‘is concerned with what we affirm about God: apophatic theology is concerned with our understanding of God, when, in the presence of God, speech and thought fail us and we are reduced to silence’ (Louth, 1981: 165).

Despite the esotericism of these ideas and what might appear to be their irrelevance to work and organization, it is interesting to note that detailed analysis of interviews with leaders has revealed surprising evidence of their use of apophatic language (French and Simpson, 2006). Some un-said or downplayed their own leadership, acknowledging their ignorance before their knowledge or, at the very least, the limits to that knowledge. They questioned the everyday conception of, and projection onto, the leader as the-one-who-knows.

Thus, even within the discourses of theology, the movement from apophasis to cataphasis could be seen as a form of disenchantment. At times in the history of the

Church the tension between these two perspectives has turned into open warfare. In particular, this has occurred at moments when the apophatic impulse has been actively discouraged as, for example, in the Hesychast controversy in 14th century Byzantium (MacCulloch, 2009: 482-491) or the condemnation of Quietism in 17th century France (Thompson-Uberuaga, 2005).

Fundamentally, the issues outlined here relate to *depth*; that is, to the question of which levels of experience are accepted as valid and which are excluded. As Hadot writes in relation to the wisdom of Plotinus, ‘It is mystical wisdom, which has no meaning for whomever has not experienced divine union’ (Hadot, 1993: 72). In relation to the exclusion of *theoria* from thinking and theorizing work and organization we are, therefore, alluding to a transformation in the legitimacy of certain forms of experience. This entails the removal of levels of meaning through the denial of dimensions of experience. Thus, one feature of the disenchantment of modern organizations is the exclusion from the practice of theorizing experience of that mystical wisdom, which is derived from *theoria*.

The Contemplative Position

Before we proceed in the next section to outline the theological and philosophical shifts that have accompanied the movement from *theoria* to theory, and the implications for theorizing work and organization, it is helpful to provide an example of modern theorizing with resonances of *theoria*. This is found in a discipline where the original visual sense of *theoria* remains significant: psychoanalysis. Whilst not pervasive, it is possible to find in this field of literature a conception of theory as a frame of mind, a *way of seeing*. For example, Bollas (2007) suggests: ‘Theories are

views. Each theory sees something that the other theories do not see'; they are '*forms of perception*' (p.5, 77, original emphases). In this Bollas retains the notion of theory as *the practice of seeing* rather conceiving of theory as essentially different from practice.

Through this metaphor of seeing it is possible to illustrate the difference between modern conceptions of theory and the ancient notion of *theoria*, which is simultaneously knowing and practice. To express this in another way, *theoria* is not a means of gaining empirical knowledge discovered *through* the gaze, it *is* the gaze.

The visual metaphor, however, is not sufficient for our purposes because *theoria* cannot be understood merely as seeing. Again, we are able to find an illustration in the field of psychoanalysis that shares similarities with *theoria* both in the nature of the practice described and in terminology. We refer to Black's (2006) suggested case for a contemplative position, using Melanie Klein's idea of positions as 'different sorts of consciousness' (p.75). Black uses insights drawn from both neuroscience and psychoanalysis to propose a developmental origin for the contemplative frame of mind. He suggests that it represents a reactivation of what he calls the proto-verbal stage of development in a human being, the period before the age of around 18 months, where 'the largely nonverbal right hemisphere is dominant' (p. 70). This is an idea that is reminiscent of Damasio's discussion of the role of wordless knowing in the emergence of consciousness (Damasio, 2000), which bears some resemblance to apophatic theology.

Black describes moments of contemplation as having their origin in ‘times of tranquillity with the mother in the earliest phases of babyhood, which are then inscribed in implicit form in the nonverbal structures of the right brain’ (2006: 75). He suggests that the shift in dominance from the right to the left hemisphere, ‘which is primarily associated with verbal activity’, is accompanied by losses as well as gains, losses which ‘are above all to do with the immediacy and vividness of experience’ (pp. 70-1). This resonates with the metaphor of contemplation as seeing but with an enhanced appreciation of what this might mean: to see in this way – immediately, vividly, without words – suggests a profound or, at least, more direct connection with reality than is achieved through other forms of consciousness. Black (2006:75) suggests that it is possible to conceive of the contemplative position as ‘a further layer ... which can be accommodated without prejudice to the existing developmental and structural models which psychoanalysis employs... This “contemplative position” is one from which the experience of being alive in the world can be perceived and thought about without the need for immediate action’ (see also Grotstein, 2007: 121-134).

Theological and Philosophical Transitions

We have so far considered the loss of depth of experience that is characteristic of the disenchantment and secularization of the modern age. We then contrasted this with the enchanting possibilities of divine knowledge in *theoria*. Now we offer a review of some of the theological and philosophical transitions that have accompanied this movement from *theoria* to theory. Clearly we cannot claim to offer anything more than the most selective review of cultural history over this time period. The range of approaches to theology and philosophy separately is vast, let alone considering the

interplay between them. Instead, we use in particular the works of Pieper and Hadot because they share the ability to translate and interpret the philosophical traditions of ancient philosophy and the theological traditions of Christianity and explicitly consider the place of *theoria* in both spheres. We draw on both theology and philosophy because, in terms of their origins, they share an understanding of the depth of experience in which *theoria* is grounded:

Both the philosopher and the theologian seek to discover how the world as a whole is constituted and, above all, what man's [*sic*] ultimate situation is. It is this universality of their questions which marks off both philosophy and theology from all other disciplines. Every other discipline establishes itself by adopting a selective view-point; no other discipline asks about the universe as a whole. (Pieper, 1963: 149; see also 1999/1952b)

In modern organizations a prevailing notion of theory is as a contrast to practice. For Aristotle nothing in the philosophical life – the *bios theoretikos* – was farther from this conception of theory than *theoria* (see Hadot, 2002: 86). The *bios theoretikos* is the philosophical and contemplative life, 'the life devoted to seeing' (O'Loughlin, 1978: 37). Leclerc (1961) argues that from the ancient Greek philosophers and the Neoplatonists this understanding of the *bios theoretikos* 'passed, with a modified meaning adapted to the Christian regime, into the terminology of ancient Christian mysticism', and that in the monastic Middle Ages *philosophia* still designated 'not a theory or way of knowing, but a lived wisdom, a way of living according to reason' (Leclerc, 1961: 100, 101).

Hadot (1995) argues that for the ancient Greeks philosophy was both a way of life and philosophical discourse and that both were valued but only when practiced together, their separation being seen as a departure from wisdom. He writes of *philosophy* and philosophical *discourse* as, ‘incommensurable – but also inseparable. There is no discourse which deserves to be called philosophical if it is separated from the philosophical life, and there is no philosophical life unless it is directly linked to philosophical discourse.’ (Hadot, 2002: 174.)

It is as a response to this tension between philosophy as a way of life and philosophical discourse that the ancient schools of philosophy saw dogmas as secondary to practice: ‘more than theses, one teaches ways, methods, spiritual exercises’ (Hadot, 1995: 341). The purpose of these methods and spiritual exercises was to build a coherent inner representation of reality that constituted a guide to everyday living. They were practised with a disciplined and purposeful intent following the *logos* or guiding principle (Brient, 2001 - see below).

Our earlier discussion of apophaticism and cataphaticism illustrates a similar tension within theology between way of life and discourse. It is powerfully exemplified in the commitment of the desert fathers and mothers of the 4th century C.E. ‘to eschew speculation in favour of a practical, ethical hermeneutic’ as Burton Christie (1993: 135) observes:

[T]he desert fathers held integrity of words and life to be so important [that] the question of how to bring one’s life into conformity with Scripture became a burning question. They were convinced that only through *doing* what the

text enjoined could one hope to gain any understanding of its meaning.

(Original emphasis)

An Ethics of Disinterestedness

The tensions between *theoria* and theory, between philosophy/theology as a way of life and philosophical/theological discourse, between apophaticism and cataphaticism, between depth and disenchantment, are also reflected in the traditional distinction within Christianity between two forms of *living*: the contemplative life, the *vita contemplativa*, and the active life, or *vita activa*. In the same way that modern discourses have marginalised, even excluded, *theoria*, modern approaches to work and organization have also tended to exclude the contemplative in favour of a very particular understanding of the active.

Brient (2001: 20) argues that this fundamental change in mentality has taken place since the Middle Ages:

In this transition human self-understanding gradually shifted from that of the spectators and admirers of divine creation to that of (as Descartes put it) ‘lords and masters of nature’. If knowledge of the world is gained passively by contemplation in the Middle Ages – spelled out in terms of either divine illumination or abstraction from sense perception – it is won through active reconstruction in the modern age.

Brient suggests that this shift has been characterised by a movement from the ‘blissful repose of the *vita contemplativa* to that of the laborious reconstruction of the *vita activa*’ (2001: 24); that *theoria* changed in meaning to become the modern scientific

notion of hypotheses to be tested through empirical experimentation. As humans are no longer seen to be at the mercy of the gods this process has led to the emergence of a culture dominated by the work ethic and at odds with the receptive ethic of contemplation.

Brient's critique of this shift focuses on the consequent difficulty of establishing an ethical framework to guide human action. The utilitarianism that characterises the *vita activa* struggles to find any basis for final judgement because any end merely becomes a means in another endeavour. However, when pursued through successive iterations of means and ends, meaning eventually becomes meaninglessness.

Brient concludes that humans have a need for a governing principle (*logos*) through which human conceptualisations (hypotheses) can remain connected and therefore meaningful. She argues that such a principle will always remain an act of faith without which it is difficult to establish an ethical framework. This ethical problem is confounded by three issues: the secularization of society; the fading of the relationship between theory and ethics; and the impact of utilitarian philosophy, which manifests as an unenlightened economism, detaching the management decision-making process from any form of robust moral or ethical code:

The New Manager does not have to make difficult value-judgements, he [*sic*] simply follows a quasimathematical model; New Managers are executors of the economic principle. (Huehn, 2008: 831)

It is probably not an overstatement to suggest that reference to an ethics of utility is misleading if applied to the *vita activa* of modern organization in that a desire for

material goods and power has tended to replace any notion of ethics or the moral good. For the New Manager, according to Huehn (2008), organizational theory tends to be used as just one of the many tools employed in the pursuit of improved economic performance. For the New Manager, theory has also lost its ethical dimension in its detachment from practice.

This is in stark contrast to Aristotle's *theoria* and his, to modern thinking, paradoxical notion of theoretical praxis, which

... consists in choosing no other goal than knowledge. It means wanting knowledge for its own sake, without pursuing any particular, egoistic interest which would be alien to knowledge. This is an ethics of disinterestedness and objectivity. (Hadot, 2002:81)

The notion of objectivity may evoke comparison with modern scientific theory but it is important to note that the latter relates to the espoused *practice* of science rather than to theory itself, which is typically used in an interested manner: science is methodologically rather than ethically disinterested. We thus return to an important feature of *theoria*, that it is a practice that is valued *as an end in itself*. A love of wisdom for its own sake will involve a disinterested acceptance of the nature of things without an egoistic drive to manipulate and control circumstances to one's own ends.

Work and Leisure

A similar thesis is proposed by Pieper (1999 [1952]) in his famous essay on 'Leisure'. He is more direct than Brient in his critique of a culture of work and calls for the re-establishment of a culture of leisure. By this he is promoting a return to the

Aristotelian notion of leisure and not what Sperry (2001) has referred to as alienated leisure; that is, the simple absence of a requirement for productive work. In the ancient tradition, by contrast, leisure is associated with connectedness, with growth in knowledge and with understanding of the truth. The Greek term for this conception of leisure is *skhole*, the linguistic root of school.

It is in this sense that, for Pieper, leisure and contemplation are intimately linked. He contrasts work, the laborious construction of reality, with leisure, understood as a receptive attitude of mind, an acceptance that embraces creation and one's place within it. The tone of such leisure is celebratory, concerned not with what one has *done* or *not done* but with who and that [*sic*] one *is*. He suggests that the modern world – and we would add the modern organization – has lost the capacity to engage in life in this way and argues that the contemplative practice of leisure requires a largely forgotten form of understanding. In keeping with our exploration of the shift in meaning from *theoria* to theory and commenting upon the period of transition also identified by Brient, he suggests that:

The Middle Ages drew a distinction between the understanding as *ratio* and the understanding as *intellectus*. *Ratio* is the power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions. *Intellectus*, on the other hand, is the name for the understanding in so far as it is the capacity of *simplex intuitus*, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye. The faculty of mind, man's knowledge, is both these things in one, according to antiquity and the Middle Ages, simultaneously *ratio* and *intellectus*; and the process of knowing is the action of the two together. The mode of discursive thought is

accompanied and impregnated by an effortless awareness, the contemplative vision of the *intellectus*, which is not active but passive, or rather receptive, the activity of the soul in which it conceives that which it sees. (1999 [1952]: 9)

Pieper is suggesting a return to a mentality that is both *ratio* and *intellectus*, acknowledging our need for reason *and* receptiveness, theory and *theoria*. However, modernity's dominant desire for, or fantasy of, control is not easily relinquished. Our view of ourselves as 'lords and masters of nature' achieved through a work ethic is not comfortably ceded, even partially, to a view of ourselves-in-the-world open to a simple intuition of truth when guided by an ethic of leisure and disinterestedness.

Leadership Without Contemplation?

Taking the wide historical canvas we have painted as a backdrop, our intention now is to offer a far more focussed critique of a contemporary example of theorization in order to illustrate our argument concerning the shift from apophatic *theoria* to performative theory. We have chosen to examine current theory in the organization studies field of workplace spirituality and, more particularly, the related sub-genre of spiritual leadership theory (SLT) because of their thematic resonance with our concerns.

Notwithstanding the long history of philosophical and social theoretical interest in the relationship between religion, spirituality and work, so called workplace spirituality emerged as an identifiable subspecies of organization studies a little over a decade ago. This is not the place to offer an exhaustive review of the burgeoning literature in

this field, so we point the reader to authors who have undertaken the challenging task of mapping the domain (Benefiel, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Izak, 2011; Lund Dean et al., 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Reave, 2005). Of particular interest for our purposes are contributions that theorize and research workplace spirituality in hypothetico-deductive terms, since scholarly activity of this nature is becoming a mainstream approach to the topic, particularly in North America. Generic examples of positivist theorization and study of workplace spirituality would include, inter alia, Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), Giacalone et al. (2005), Milliman et al. (2003). Within the sub-genre of spirituality and leadership, Louis Fry has had a notable influence through his published work on spiritual leadership theory (SLT) and the empirical programme that this has given rise to (Fry, 2003, 2005, 2008).

One of the main difficulties facing proponents of this self-proclaimed new paradigm of workplace spirituality is arriving at a meaningful definition of terms. In particular, the aspiration of this approach to render spirituality measurable requires a great deal of elision, attenuation and condensation with respect to the history of spiritual enquiry and experience. Consider, for example, the definition of workplace spirituality offered by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003b): *‘a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy’* (p. 13, original emphases). This attempt to define workplace spirituality is, we suggest, highly contestable. Can the complexity and diversity of human experiences of spirituality meaningfully be reduced to the

expression of reified organizational values and culture, albeit those that purport to promote workplace transcendence, connection, compassion or joy? We think not.

A similarly attenuated definition is offered by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) for whom spirituality at work consists in '*the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community*' (p.137, original emphases). Once again, from the standpoints of theological enquiry and studies of comparative religion this is a deeply contestable assertion. From an organization studies perspective, moreover, it raises far more questions than it answers. Who or what is doing the recognition here and from what subject position? What is meant by inner life and nourishment in this context? Amongst other things, this definition elides all debate and literature in organization studies that has been concerned with workplace alienation of employees and the potential absence of community in work organizations.

It would require another paper fully to develop this critique of workplace spirituality definitions but our immediate purpose is to question how credible any subsequent attempts to operationalize and measure workplace spirituality might be if they are building on such shaky definitional foundations. This becomes a crucially important question once one considers that advocates of new paradigm research in this field see themselves explicitly as advancing an objectivist organization science (see, for example, Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003); a science, moreover, that holds out the possibility, in principle, of complete explanation through the incremental accumulation of well-theorised empirical knowledge. Invoking licence from writers, such as, Kuhn (1970) and Burrell and Morgan (1979),

proponents of this approach see themselves as pioneers of a new functionalist paradigm, which, although embryonic in form, promises to become a fully fledged 'normal science' in due course. Such claims to objectivity, normalization and complete knowledge serve to illustrate precisely the move from an apophatic conception of *theoria* to a disenchanting and, as we argue shortly, *performative* form of theorization. It is all the more ironic that such a development has occurred within a field of study that is sympathetic to the notion of human spirituality in the workplace. The rendering of spirituality in organization scientific terms, however, is inimical to the idea of *theoria* that we are seeking to advance.

The new paradigm attempts to theorize workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership in ways that make the concepts amenable to *measurement* and hypothetico-deductive modelling. Fry *et al.* (2005), for instance, employ a Spiritual Leadership Theory questionnaire that includes a 1–5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert response set to measure such constructs as, vision, altruistic love, meaning/calling, organizational commitment and productivity. In a similar vein, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) developed a 34-question instrument with a 7-point Likert-type scale based on psychometric data from 689 respondents. It was deployed in a subsequent study of healthcare organizations by Duchon and Plowman (2005). More recently, Martin and Hafer (2009) sought to test empirically the relationship between emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and performance using a modified version of the Ashmos and Duchon instrument and other measures.

We see from these examples that proponents of the new paradigm purport explicitly to analyse the relationship between corporate spirituality and organizational

performance or spiritual leadership and organizational performance. The case is made starkly by Krahnke et al. (2003) when they assert that:

To have confidence that our suppositions are more than personal assumptions requires the dispassionate objectivism afforded by the scientific method... [O]rganizations need conclusive evidence *connecting workplace spirituality with bottom line performance*; anything less would bring into question their fiduciary responsibility to stockholders and their moral responsibility to stakeholders. For workplace spirituality to be a viable construct in improving organizations and the people in them, it requires a degree of confidence we can only attain through scientific measurement (pp. 397–398, added emphases).

In this quotation we see a particularly strong claim regarding the scientific imperative to generate viable knowledge of workplace spirituality through accurate measurement of the phenomenon combined with a *moral imperative* to link that knowledge to corporate financial performance.

It is, we contend, based on a highly *reductive* and utilitarian view of corporate responsibility which, *pace* Friedman (1962), privileges the shareholder over other stakeholders, including employees. Krahnke *et al.*'s proposition also entails an implicit erosion of the traditional fact-value distinction that has typified positivist social scientific research throughout its post-Enlightenment development (MacIntyre, 2007). To that extent it accords closely to the postmodern model of knowledge, characterized by the emergence of performativity, identified by Lyotard (1984). According to Lyotard, the search for Truth is replaced by a search for the Efficient

under what he terms the ‘principle of optimal performance’ (Lyotard, 1984:111). An economic episteme based on the utilitarian language game of more output for less input displaces the scientific episteme under the condition of postmodernity. Lyotard theorises this new basis of knowledge – the optimisation of input to output – as *performativity* (1984:112). One consequence of post-industrial society's privileging of the ends of action over its means is that knowledge ceases to be a valid end in itself. Knowledge is assessed economically not by its truth-value but by its *exchange-value*; that is, it is produced in order to be sold. It becomes subsumed within a flow of capital exchange as part of the consolidation of consumerism within post-industrial societies.

Our ethical concern about the programmes of theorizing and empirical research outlined above centre on the fact that attempts to measure employee spirituality, leader/follower spirituality or, indeed, corporate spirituality, involve the positioning and subjectification of persons within reductive, instrumental matrices. Individual and collective responses – indeed, individual and collective spirit – are rendered as statistics suitable for techno-calculative manipulation within an objectivist scheme. A performative attitude toward the social scientific investigation of workplace spirituality and leadership thus *necessitates*: (a) a highly attenuated and narrow conception of spirituality; (b) egocentric notions of leader/follower relations; and (c) an impoverished conception of *theory*. While the science of workplace spirituality may be couched within a rhetoric of value neutrality and apolitical contribution to knowledge, it not only contributes to the maintenance of an economic and political status quo but threatens further to invade the subjectivity of the employee under the performative auspices of managing spirituality.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued, in necessarily broad and generic terms, that modern understandings of theory evolved from ancient Greek conceptions of *theoria*. We have traced not only an etymological relationship between *theoria* and theory but also sought to point to the bifurcation of theology and philosophy - notions which were inseparable within Greek philosophical thought and practice, as they have also been, for example, in St Augustine's *City of God* or in the writings of Marsilio Ficino in the 15th century. This bifurcation became the *mise-en-scène* for subsequent Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment development of an increasingly disenchanted and denuded conception of theory; one which came to owe much to utilitarian philosophy at the expense of the apophatic attitude that, we claim, characterized certain forms of *theoria*.

We have outlined the ways in which the act of holding together both the active and the contemplative is how classically informed philosophy understood mind, in its two faculties of *ratio* and *intellectus*. However, modern organizations and society have tended to let go of an appreciation of the latter, depending upon reason and argument for their certainties. *Theoria* has given way to theory thereby shifting the ground of philosophy itself. This has allowed modern selves to forget their vulnerability and dependence, asserting themselves within the world, believing that there is nothing that they cannot achieve if only they apply themselves with sufficient vigour and dedication. Developments since the Middle Ages have demonstrated the power of theories to subdue creation, increase our prosperity and improve health. However, ours is also a world under strain and out of balance and deeply in need of more ethical

forms of leadership. Struggles and debates continue over what this might mean— if not an ethics of utility – let alone how it might be achieved.

Modern experience, we contend, is also far removed from the experiences and potential of *theoria*. The philosophies of antiquity (as seen through the eyes of Hadot Pieper, Brient and others) offer contemplation as a vehicle for sensitising humans to the universe and to nature through cultivation of a receptive attitude. Whilst this does not necessarily generate knowledge in the modern scientific sense, it might open contemporary minds to an awareness of the relations that exist in the wider community and in the organizations of which they are a part. However, as Brient suggests, this will always be an act of faith and the modern mind has become more at ease with the apparent certainties of theory than the challenges of developing a capacity to live more fully in the present through the practice of *theoria*.

Consequently, in the modern context it is difficult to conceive of a norm of work and organizational practice that is guided by *theoria* as well as theory. Our critique of SLT was intended to demonstrate how, even within a field of study that is ostensibly concerned with, and sympathetic to, workplace spirituality, performative and disenchanted theory wins out over *theoria*.

However, even if *theoria* cannot be expected to become a norm of work and organizational practice we might consider what forms of theorizing might permit an ethics of disinterestedness to take root and to evolve. We have demonstrated that some theory in the field of psychoanalysis resonates explicitly with psychoanalytic practice. Within organization studies there are also examples of theorizing that share some connection with *theoria* as we understand it.

The social sciences have recently been experiencing what Garber et al. (2000) refer to as an ethical turn; one which privileges corporeal enactment of ethics over rational and cognitive theorization associated with Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy. Drawing inspiration from such post-structural philosophers, these approaches seek to reintroduce the situated facticity of the body into an apprehension and appreciation of ethical moments. Derrida (1995, 1999) argues, for instance, that the truly ethical impulse occurs in a moment of undecidability that presents itself outside the ambit of moral norms, codes or laws. If one is simply following a prescribed ethical norm in acting, Derrida maintains, then the action is not genuinely ethical since it is rooted in a false sense of *the known*, or *the certain*; decisions must always undergo a ‘trial of undecidability’ (Derrida, 1988: 210). Influenced by the writing of Levinas, ethics is here conceived – or more properly *manifest* - on the basis of face-to-face encounters with others and situations that are pre-cognitive, pre-reflective and pre-gnostic (Derrida, 1999).

Rhodes and Pullen (2009) have applied these forms of post-structural arguments to organizational settings in which, they contend, demands for corporeal enactment of ethics always *exceed* formal organizational principles, codes or rules. They work with Diprose’s notion of an ‘ethico-political’ process (Diprose, 2000) to posit a corporeal ethics of generosity which takes purchase against the kinds of non-ethics instantiated through corporate codes of ethics. The spirit of generosity and altruistic concern for the other is not something that can be legislated for or controlled by formal organizational codes; rather, it is rooted *a priori* in human relationship. This particular

take on corporeal ethics, moreover, may have promising applications in the field of the ethics of care (Gabriel, 2009; Latimer, 2011; Letiche, 2008).

Our point in drawing attention to this ethical turn in social science generally, and organization studies in particular, is to suggest that there is potentially a close parallel between post-structural notions of corporeal ethics and the *experience* of apophatic *theoria* which would be fruitful to explore further. As with our characterization of *theoria*, the corporeal ethical moment entails a form of situated connectedness that is beyond words, conception and seeing. In short it has to be *experienced* rather than known in any rational sense (see also Case and Gosling, 2007). Developing and articulating the relationship between *theoria* and a secular *embodied ethics* would, we suggest, be one useful agenda to take forward from this paper.

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