

(Why) Does Ar Need to Intervene and Change Things?¹

Olav Eikeland

Abstract

One of the basic and for many, defining tenets of action research is contained in the “slogan” ascribed to Kurt Lewin: “In order to understand it, you have to change it”. The slogan clearly resembles what Francis Bacon claimed for experimental science, however, and also Karl Marx’ well known stance in his Feuerbach-theses. In this text I discuss this “change imperative” and relate it to its “pre-history” before action research. Most action researchers are not willing to subscribe to terms like “social engineering” but still call what they do for “interventions”. The text argues that what most people spontaneously think of as “change” may not be necessary for calling what is done for action research. Yet, the alternative is not to withdraw to a disengaged, spectator position. The change imperative raises important questions about what kind of change action research initiates, and what kind of knowledge results from different forms of change. The text challenges the “slogan” as to what kind of change is appropriate and legitimate in working with changes in individuals, culture, communities, and organisations, and suggests ways forward through developing forms of practitioner research and native or indigenous research. To illustrate, insights from Aristotle and Hegel are invoked. Action researchers are challenged to discuss and clarify answers to questions about what kind of change is produced, and what kind of knowledge is generated.

Key words: action research, Aristotle, art as craft, Francis Bacon, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, praxis-research

(¿Por qué?) ¿es necesario intervenir y cambiar las cosas?

Resumen

Uno de los básicos y, para muchos, definidores de los principios de la investigación-acción, está incluido en el “eslogan” atribuido a Kurt Lewin: “Para entenderlo, debes cambiarlo”. El eslogan se parece claramente con lo que Francis Bacon reclamó para la ciencia experimental, y también con la postura bien conocida de Karl Marx en sus tesis sobre Feuerbach. En este texto discuto este “imperativo de cambio” y lo relaciono con su “prehistoria” antes de la investigación-acción. La mayoría de los investigadores-acción no están dispuestos a suscribirse a términos como “ingeniería social”, pero todavía llaman lo que hacen como “intervenciones”. El texto argumenta que lo que la mayoría de la gente piensa espontáneamente como “cambio” puede no ser necesario para llamar lo que se hace en la investigación-acción. Sin

1 The text is an elaboration based on the presentation given October 10th, 2018 at the conference “Coping with the future” at the University of Agder (UiA), Kristiansand, Norway, organized by the UiA, in co-operation with NTNU Gjøvik, the European Network of Workplace Innovation (EUWIN) and the International Journal of Action Research (IJAR).

embargo, la alternativa no es retirarse a una posición de espectador desconectado. El imperativo de cambio plantea preguntas importantes sobre qué tipo de cambio inicia la investigación-acción, y qué tipo de conocimiento resulta de diferentes formas de cambio. El texto desafía el “eslogan” sobre qué tipo de cambio es apropiado y legítimo para trabajar con cambios en individuos, cultura, comunidades y organizaciones, y sugiere formas de avanzar mediante el desarrollo de formas de investigación practicante e investigación nativa o indígena. Para ilustrar, se invocan las revelaciones de Aristóteles y Hegel. Los investigadores-acción tienen el reto de discutir y aclarar las respuestas a las preguntas sobre qué tipo de cambio se produce y qué tipo de conocimiento se genera.

Palabras clave: Investigación-acción, Aristóteles, el arte como oficio, Francis Bacon, G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, praxis-investigación

Introduction

As in all kinds of practice, action research must differentiate between what a professional expert with years of studies and experience in action research should or must know and be able to do, and what novices in action research can be expected and need to know to get started (cf. Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986). Of course, age does not automatically correspond to maturity or competence. There’s a big difference between a year of experience repeated 20 times on the one hand, and 20 years of accumulated experience on the other. There is no guarantee that old people know and understand more than young. Competence is not measured in time-units but in what I have elsewhere called “pragmadequacy” (Eikeland 2008: 32-33, fn18, 73, 191, 236, fn222, etc.). Hence, to ignore the difference between novices, apprentices, experts, and virtuosos: between amateurs and professionals, or to claim there is no difference in competence-adequacy, to ignore validity-dimensions like good and bad, truth and falsehood, etc. is to undermine action research as a skill and competence. Although there are many legitimate varieties of action research (cf. Eikeland 2012), and choices and adjustments must always be made to the requirements of the concrete situation, anything does not go, not even in action research. Then again, there are advanced challenges concerning where to start with or for novices, which in action research cannot be reduced to mere didactical teaching challenges. Action research itself challenges most taken-for-granted prejudices concerning both research and learning / teaching. Novices in action research tend to start thinking uncritically from such prejudices unexamined, however, as do other conventionalists not prone to critical reflection “outside given frames”. On the other hand, there are advanced challenges of a principal character presupposing: or at least more easily available to people with, years of experience and reflection.

When, where, and how, then, can or should someone start doing action research? What do they need to know? Where do we start? Do we start just stumbling along without knowing how, where, or what, or with teaching basic principles as starting points mobilising philosophical authorities as witnesses? There might seem to be a paradox in bringing in Aristotle and Hegel, as the following text does. If action research is a common-sensical approach which anyone can follow, why bother to study two of the most difficult philosophers in history, both of them old, dead, white, European males?

There is hardly an either-or here, however. Even Paolo Freire (1970: 18, 31) writes about his inspiration from Hegel but he probably did not talk much about Hegel or try to

explain his philosophy when practising his “pedagogy of the oppressed” with illiterates. Personally, I started doing action research in the mid-1980s, with car-mechanics and sales-people. But I did not talk to them about critical theory, Plato and Aristotle, or Hegel and Marx. But this is no more a paradox than the fact that people know how to speak their native language without ever having been formally educated or taught its vocabulary and grammar, or the fact that people know how to think logically without even being aware that there is anything called logic (Eikeland 1997: 59ff.). You do not teach language to novices by talking about the theory of universal grammar of Noam Chomsky, and the controversy between followers of Chomsky and followers of Wittgenstein, although it might be quite relevant and necessary at a later stage.

So, why these philosophers? Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx were all philosophers committed to the anti-dogmatic, Socratic, dialogical-dialectical insight in the necessity of starting a discussion and search-process and -progress non-didactically from *éndoxa*, i.e. from prevailing opinions and ways of speaking among people of experience, from wherever dialogue-partners are in competence, intellectually, or opinion-wise, etc. This is, for example, the content in Marx’ famous letter to Arnold Ruge from September 1844 (MEW 1: 343-346) where he writes (freely translated): “we do not anticipate the world dogmatically”...“until now, the philosophers have had solutions to all puzzles lying in their drawers (...) so that the only thing necessary for the world would be to open its mouth and be fed the truth like roasted pigeons from science”². As Marx continues, the task is not to confront the current conditions with some alternative, decoupled, “doctrinary”, and finished “system” to replace it : a utopian strategy he opposed, but to develop new principles from extant principles, immanent to and imminent in the here-and-now. Marx underestimated his philosophical predecessors, however. As Aristotle points out (against later Stoic doctrines), the tools of such a dialogue: called *tà koiná* or the intellectual “commons”, are always already in use by everyone but subconsciously, like the rules of grammar or logic (Eikeland 2008: 333ff.). Like action research then, these philosophers challenged taken-for-granted prejudices of conventional research and learning / teaching.

So, is it necessary to study and know what these or other philosophers were thinking in order to do action research? Of course not. Would it help to know and understand their way of thinking? Probably. Would it help to consult any master of the art? Probably. Should one listen to the masters’ teaching? Yes, probably, but not only. My task in the following text is not primarily to provide answers, however. It is to ask some questions concerning the self-conceptualisation and understanding of action research. I will not hide my own points of view. But my purpose is to raise questions through some historical examples, which I think action researchers need to reflect on and find answers to. The questions are “big”, that is, comprehensive, and, with a long history of emergence, controversy, and development. Obviously, then, only some aspects can be presented and discussed in a short article.

My title has a “why” in parenthesis, indicating two or more questions in one. Let me spell them out. First, “why does action research have to change whatever is studied”? This one

2 Indessen ist das gerade wieder der Vorzug der neuen Richtung, dass wir nicht dogmatisch die Welt antizipieren (...) Bisher hatten die Philosophen die Auflösung aller Rätsel in ihren Pulve liegen, und die dumme exoterische Welt hatte nur das Maul aufzusperren, damit ihr die gebratenen Tauben der absoluten Wissenschaft in den Mund flogen

question is also two questions in one, however, since it presumes that the answer is yes to the second question: “Does action research need to intervene and change things”? I will discuss this as well, since I do not agree that action research necessarily must change whatever is studied, neither to deserve the title “action research” nor to produce interesting and important learning and knowledge. There are more questions lurking in the title too. For example: “What kind of change are we talking about”? and “What kind of knowledge is produced by changes inflicted”?

My working hypothesis in this text is that action research can be done: and some action research should be done, on the one hand without intervening from the outside in what it studies, i.e. without a plan for intentionally changing it, but also, on the other hand, without positioning itself as an external, non-intervening observer; abstaining from involvement in the practices studied. There is a third alternative. At the very least, however, the answer “yes” as to whether action research needs to change things: mostly taken for granted as legitimate by action researchers, is not obviously or self-evidently true or legitimate. It needs justification³.

I have used most of my career and energy on doing action research, and on trying to understand the relationships between theory and practice or theory and experience, not only in action research but more generally in understanding and researching human beings, culture, and society (cf. Eikeland 1997; 2008). However, in this text I will question basic and taken-for-granted assumptions in action research, but not to undermine or disqualify the approach. On the contrary: Action research is important, and even without mainstream research recognising, mentioning, or even realising it at all (a major academic sin, by the way), current mainstream social research itself has for decades been converging towards positions and practices pioneered by action research for more than 80 years. My personal conviction is that action research: but not all kinds of action research (cf. Eikeland 2012), should have a position as quite basic: in fact, foundational, in any mainstream future social research or even research in general. To be able to carry the weight of becoming increasingly mainstream in social research, however, which I think it ultimately will and should, action research needs refinement. Refinement means mostly making both more, and more adequate distinctions. The following are suggestions.

The following, then, are arguments and justification strategies for the importance of action research and for the necessity to think through questions raised by different forms of action research. The arguments pursued in this presentation, however, are all independent from whether action research as it has been practised since the end of the 1930ies, has achieved its often-proclaimed ends of producing both theory and practical changes. Successes and insufficiencies in the history of the “really existing action research” is a different story.

The epistemic change-imperative credo

As people acquainted with the approach will know, there is a long action research tradition for claiming that “in order to understand something, you have to change it”, attributed to

3 I will be using the expressions “thing” or “object” throughout as a shorthand for whatever is studied or handled by knowers, primarily because of the difficulty in English to express the meaning of the Germanic “*sak*” or “*Sache*” and of pragma in Greek.

Kurt Lewin by Alfred J. Marrow in his 1969 biography “The practical theorist”. This “change imperative”: as we might call it, has become a “mantra” and an article of faith among action researchers as a sort of constitutive basic rule defining the whole approach. The “credo” itself is older than action research, however. The best-known proponents of such an epistemic “change-imperative” credo, are Francis Bacon in the 17th century and Karl Marx in the 19th, who, as most people will know, have both had a huge impact until today in natural science and in social research and politics respectively.

The similaritise, at least superficially, between action research and these predecessors, are obvious. Francis Bacon’s experimentalism was explicitly directed against positioning research merely as a passive observer from a distance without influencing the subject of study. He recommends active and systematic, forced intervention in nature, meaning, as he writes in his *New Organon* from 1620: “...nature under constraint and vexed; (...), when by art and by the hand of man she⁴ is forced out of her natural state and squeezed and moulded (.....). The nature of things betrays itself more readily under vexations of art than in its natural freedom.” According to Bacon, the trouble with passive, merely receptive observation – criticizing subsequent empiricists like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, as well as 20th century positivists in this – is, as Bacon himself writes, that perception and the senses “would be sufficient of themselves if the human intellect were even and like a fair sheet of paper with no writing on it. But since the minds of men are strangely possessed and beset so that there is no true and even surface left to reflect the genuine rays of things, it is necessary to seek a remedy for this also.” (Bacon 1620: 22, 25, 95, 98)

Bacon’s diagnosis of perception as a foundation for knowledge was that it was not at all the “*tabula rasa*” of the empiricism of British philosophers coming after him. According to Bacon, perception is distorted, muddled, skewed, and biased: pre-formed and prejudiced, by so-called “idols”: First **1**) idols of the Tribe, i.e. deceptive beliefs inherent in the mind of man as such, and therefore belonging to the whole human race, secondly, **2**) idols of the Cave; or prejudices peculiar to the mind of single individuals, next, **3**) idols of the Marketplace; i.e. errors arising from the false significance bestowed upon words obscuring the very thoughts they are designed to express, and finally **4**) idols of the Theatre, or errors due to false learning in theology, philosophy, and science, defended by learned groups and therefore accepted without question by the masses. This is a very Platonic, perception- and doxa-skeptic view, by the way. It is also quite modern, or “post-modern”, anticipating the criticism of un-prejudiced perception or observation as the foundation of knowledge through the 20th century, triggered by the logical positivists’ attempt to save a concept of unprejudiced or “theory-free” data, or even by the attempt in Husserl’s phenomenology to somehow reach “below” the habitual through a form of *epokhê* (cf. Eikeland 1997: 46-48). As far as I can understand, “post-modernism”, which has reintroduced idols en masse in the wake, or *Wirkungsgeschichte*, of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1960) insights in the inevitability of “*Vor-urteile*”, hardly sees any possible remedy at all against culturally-historically-institutionally-socially-psychologically, etc. positioned and embedded, and thereby biased views “from somewhere”. To them, there is no view “from nowhere” (Nagel 1986) and “*sub specie aeternitatis*” (Spinoza). Bacon however, considered experimentation the remedy against idols; that is, “squeezing and forcing” nature in order to get to know her, like the arts do: i.e. the crafts, and also by means

4 For grammatical gender reasons, Bacon writes about nature as female.

of what he, quite interestingly, calls “Platonic induction” (he could equally well have called it Aristotelian): “analyzing nature by proper rejections and exclusions”, in contrast to the more prevalent and simpler enumerative induction, which he calls childish.

Concerning action research, it is hardly a coincidence that Kurt Lewin had a background from experimental psychology in Germany. With Kurt Lewin, action research emerged in the US from this experimental tradition, bringing the “change-imperative” along to action research as it moved experiments from isolated laboratories to local communities, work places, schools, and families. As late as in 1978, Don Campbell (1978), the “godfather” of modern quasi-experimentation and even of “evidence-based” practice, confirmed the close relationship between experimentalism and action research, and as many will know, the Norwegian tradition of action research at the Work Research Institute started in the 1960ies as “field experiments”, fully in line with Kurt Lewin’s thinking. Lewin used the expression “social engineering” too, however, almost as a synonym for action research. Most current action researchers are not prepared to accept this synonymity. Many continue speaking about action research as “intervention research”, however.

A couple of centuries after Bacon, Karl Marx wrote his famous Feuerbach-theses where he states in thesis two, that “the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth – i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.” He ends up with his famous thesis eleven: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” It is worth emphasising, though, that Marx’ point was hardly to promote any arbitrary change as a value in itself. As it says in thesis eight: “All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension (Begrreifen) of this practice”. Comprehension, das Begreifen, of practice is necessary and an aim, and promoted changes should, of course, spring from or be in accordance with the comprehension. This, clearly, is the meaning of the action research mantra as well. “In order to understand” means “understanding” is the end, “changing it” a means.

The epistemic change imperative is not only a few centuries older than Kurt Lewin, however. It can be found, in a language very similar to Bacon’s, in the Hippocratic texts from the 5th century BC as well, as when it says in the text *On the art (of medicine) (Perì tékhnês, XIII.1-20)* that “when (...) nature herself will yield nothing (mê mênúontai) of her own accord, medicine has found means of compulsion (anáγκas), whereby nature is constrained or forced (biastheisa), without being harmed (azêmios), to give up her secrets (methíêsin)”.

The important thing to notice in both Bacon and the Hippocratic text is that they talk explicitly about how art: that is, craft, intervenes and changes what it handles and studies according to the artisans own understanding and plans. Bacon treats “art” as synonymous with or at least as a vital supplement to science. Aristotle, who is the source of the medieval tradition Bacon goes against, does not conflate such concepts, however. He keeps these and several others distinct. Tékhnê or art as craft, is one among many ways of knowing in Aristotle (Appendix, table⁵). For Aristotle, art is defined by the fact that the principles and sources of

5 I relate to the table of knowledge forms in the appendix, but I will not explain it in detail since I have done so in several other publications (cf. Eikeland 1997, 2008, 2012 and others).

change in the thing studied or handled do not reside in that thing itself but in the external craft-individuals who intervene and change it according to their plans and skills. This means the change is not natural, that is, as the thing itself would have moved, changed, evolved, developed, or transformed by itself. The change is literally “artificial”; made or created by art. So, in Aristotelian terms, the beginning of modern science as experimental, was a conflation of science and art as craft. The question is whether this was a confusing conflation of muddled thinking, or a necessary, organic fusion. I will leave that question open for now.

In Aristotle’s terminology, anyhow, the kind of change recommended by the initiator of modern experimentalism, was exactly what both Bacon and the Hippocratics call it; something imposed on an object by rules of art (*tékhnê*). In Aristotelian terms, it was neither *epistêmê*, nor *praxis* (with an *x*), just to mention a couple of other forms (cf. table in Appendix). *Epistêmê* for Aristotle was theory, that is, aiming to understand things as they were naturally, having the principles of change, movement, development, or transformation in themselves, not imposed from outside. The theoretical question was “what is their nature?”, not necessarily what happens “in nature”, however, since in nature, many different “natures” collide and influence each other coincidentally and “artificially”. Art was concerned with understanding, introducing, and mastering enforced and imposed artificial change, the way a carpenter relates to and forms pieces of wood as building material. Theory aimed at understanding the thing in its natural development or transformations, including all inherent potentials and different aspects of it, the way trees grow and could grow by themselves: not merely those aspects relevant for some user’s or manipulator’s unilateral interests and current intervention and change purposes.

Noli me tangere?

Against whom, then, were the modern experimentalists arguing? Against medieval scholastics, of course. These had literally receded to a scholastic or monastic position, basically abstaining from involvement with both nature and society, overly concerned with argumentation and divine revelation. But does this medieval scholasticism really have anything to do with Aristotle, or even more pertinent; what does it have to do with current action research or modern social research? To reconnect briefly to my point of departure, I wrote that action research does not necessarily have to intervene from the outside in what it studies, i.e. intentionally changing the thing’s “natural” course of movement or development. On the other hand, it doesn’t have to position itself in an “ivory tower” either, as an external, disengaged, non-intervening observer abstaining from involvement in the practice studied and, as much as possible, uninfluenced by the same.

Although there was and is a strong tradition for ascribing a scholastic life of abstention as an ideal to Aristotle and his discussion of the wondrous *bíos theôrêtikós* in Book X of the Nicomachean Ethics, I think this is a wrong interpretation of his philosophy, just as I think traditional interpretations (of Metaph980a22-982a3 and APo99b15-100b17) trying to make Aristotle into a conventional empiricist and deductivist are wrong. I have dealt with this extensively in previous texts and cannot pursue it here (Eikeland 1997, 1998, 2008, 2016). Aristotle’s texts and several specific places indicate something quite different from ordinary empiricism, and quite different from abstaining scholasticism as well. Among other things,

Aristotle writes (GC316a5): “What causes our lack of ability to see connections in accepted facts, is our lack of experience (or inexperience [apeiría]).” And inexperience or apeiría here, does not mean merely lack of “data”. It means lack of practical experience. He continues: “This is why those having lived intimately with natural phenomena are better able to construct such principles which can connect much”⁶. Although this requirement is clearly empirical, it is much more than collecting data. What is lacking in apeiría is more like what Michael Polanyi (1962) characterised as “tacit knowledge” as a pre-requisite for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and understanding data competently. As Aristotle writes, people of experience are wiser than someone with just any haphazard perception (Metaph981b30-982a3). In fact, for Aristotle, people who merely observe at a distance, abstaining from practice – naïvely or narrowly gathering observational or perceptual “data”, if you like – is a central part of what it means to lack the experience needed for epistēmē, since, as he writes, epistēmē emerges from grasping the experience based on habit. Experience is formed through and extracted from habit, refined as skill, and then articulated into epistēmē or theoretical insight and understanding⁷. This whole articulation- or grasping process, or the way towards insight and understanding, starting from prevalent opinions and in the middle of all the idols (éndoxa), is critical – making distinctions – and both deconstructively (anaskoustikôs) and constructively (kataskoustikôs) dialogical or dialectical, with Aristotle as it is with Plato, but that is a different story not to be pursued here.

What does this mean, then? Apparently, these are arguments strongly in favour of involvement and participation in the practices studied. There are no arguments for abstention or disengagement of a modern kind in Aristotle, neither concerning the study of nature nor the study of human beings. On the other hand, there are clear arguments against intervention and against reducing ethics and politics, including organisational studies, to a tekhne or craft as depicted by Francis Bacon. Intervention, changing the course of events as they would have unfolded “naturally”, is easily reduced to manipulation and instrumentalism as with Francis Bacon, for whom knowledge was reduced to the power to predict and control. Aristotle’s arguments do not support intervening involvement and participation. It supports involvement and participation for theoretical reasons, however, i.e. as necessary for the purpose of developing insight and understanding: theory. Aristotle, in fact, summarizes his discussion at the end of the Nicomachean Ethics (Book X.viii.12, 1179a18-23) in words almost like Marx’ second Feuerbach thesis. After admitting that theories in agreement with other “wise” people – or, scholars – do have some credibility (pistin tinà), he concludes: “but it is by the practical experience of life and conduct that the truth is really tested, since it is there that the final decision lies”⁸

What, then, is theoretical knowledge, and why has it had such an important position? First, for Aristotle, it was important to understand the thing in itself, as it is without blurring idols or other disturbances, and without interventions from the outside. Although, after

6 aifton dè tou ep’ élatton dúnasthai tà homologómena sunoran hê apeiría. diò hósoi enôkêkasi mallon en tois phusikois, mallon dúnantai hupotíthesthai toiaútas arkhàs hâi epì polú dúnantai suneírein.

7 For those without practical experience are like people abstaining and observing from a distance (hoi gàr ápeiroi hôsper àn apékhtontes pórrôthen theórousin). SE164b27. Epistēmē becomes epistēmē from grasping the experience based on habit (hê epistēmē ex éthous tén empeirían labousa epistēmē gínetai). MM1190b30.

8 pistin mèn oun kai tà toiauta [hai tôn sophôn dóxai] ékhei tinà, tò d’ alêthès en tois praktois ek tôn érgôn kai tou bfou krínetai; en toútois gàr tò kúrión. ktl.

Kant, this ambition has been undermined repeatedly – since we cannot know the “Ding-an-sich”, only as it is “for us”⁹ – it still works as a regulative idea. Theory aims at understanding the thing as a whole, in its natural development or transformations, including all inherent potentials and different aspects of it. The importance of this kind of theory – i.e. a profound understanding of the thing concerned – is that it creates freedom to choose and to act for its carriers, while providing prediction and control over the thing known (cf. Eikeland 2008: 145-148, 282ff.). This, especially in a slightly modified form, where the carrier of the theory (or subject) and the thing known (or object) tend to merge, is still a good reason for the importance of theory (theôria in the table), even for action researchers.

Secondly, however, a certain form of theory, emulating the success of the natural sciences since the 17th century, gained general dominance in modernity. For Aristotle, this form of theory: theôrêsis, in the appended table, was explicitly secondary and applied. It is interesting that he mentions astronomy, part of the historical model or paradigm for modern “basic” science, as an instance of such a secondary and applied science, combining mathematics and observations. What resembled modern “basic” sciences in the Aristotelian intellectual universe, then, were what in his world were applied, secondary, derived, and subsidiary sciences (Eikeland 2008: 68ff., 160).

The Aristotelian argument for theory, then, is not to abstain and disengage, or to keep the distance, staring at things. There is no requirement for non-involvement or a totally detached point of view for theory in Aristotle; no “ivory tower”. On the contrary. The quotes above from Aristotle point in the opposite direction. The aim is to study the things under scrutiny as they are in themselves, comprehensively, as a whole, with all their potentials and aspects, but not merely for some limited purpose; not merely for forming it as material or using it as a tool or instrument.

Hence, as I see it, by trying to expand an until then applied model of science into a universal model for basic science, and by a requirement to know the thing studied as it is in itself, undisturbed by researchers or other outsiders, modern social science has been misled and institutionalized as an invalidating division of labour between researchers and researched creating a labyrinth of validity and reliability problems impossible to solve inside the same division of labour. It was formed, first; by a model of science, taken over uncritically from astronomy as observation at a distance with its observatories and “protocol sentences”, emulating natural science, and secondly; by the belief that the only way to engage with the studied object is by intervening and disturbing its naturalness, pursuing special interests biasing the view, thereby, in consequence, dismissing the experimental tradition whole-sale as more or less irrelevant for scientific purposes. There is both truth and falsehood in both premises. The ambition of knowing the nature of the thing as it is in itself, is good, the method for achieving it is false. The “change imperative”, from the experimental tradition, is good, but the change model from the crafts is false. But there is a third way, which I have not yet explored here, along which action research has stumbled for 80 years, however.

9 Aristotle would agree. Cf. Eikeland 2008: 176.

Changes in ways of knowing. Social change?

To summarise, then: I am not arguing against the fact that we will gain a better understanding of something from trying to change it. I think this is true, although much could be said about applying modern experimental designs to social research. It's more a question of what kind of knowledge is gained, and conventional experimentation inevitably produces craft competence; technical *poiêsis*-knowledge. Historically, however, and especially during the 20th century, it is in the transfer of the "change imperative" from external nature after the model of craft, to history, human beings, society, and culture, including organisations, that challenges have popped up, in Heidegger's (1927) and Gadamer's (1960) connection to Aristotle's *phronêsis*-concept, in Horkheimer's and Adorno's aporetic critique of the dominance of technical, manipulative rationality (1947), in Arendt's distinctions between labour, work, and action (1958), inspired by Aristotle's distinctions, in Habermas' distinctions between technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge interests (1973), inspired by Arendt's Aristotle-inspired distinctions, in Western Marxism's general critique of the lack of distinction between technique and praxis in Soviet Marxism, and in many other ways. The question is: Can Bacon's craft metaphor and slogan "knowledge is power" through prediction and control be generalised and transferred to history, human beings, society, and culture without inconsistencies resulting in what Adorno and Horkheimer called the "dialectic of enlightenment". How should we (or could we), using Francis Bacon's vocabulary, squeeze, mould, vex, constrain, and force human beings out of their natural state, and into something somebody, as an outsider, considers a desired state? Who are the "we" who may legitimately squeeze, mould, force, etc. or maybe more relevantly; stimulate, tease, allure, manipulate, or persuade? What is the "natural state" of individuals, society, and culture, anyhow? The whole analogy from art as craft is false when transferred to society, history, culture, and individuals in social science, as Aristotle himself pointed out (Pol1269a9).

Questions like these connect to a basic inconsistency in what the third Feuerbach-thesis calls "the materialist doctrine", "concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing". Marx claims that this (non-dialectical) "materialist doctrine" "forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society." So, the question remains: who educates the educators, who controls the controllers, who observes the observers, who predicts the predictors, etc.? The attempt to divide society into two parts, one superior to society is totally arbitrary, and in deed, impossible. The observers, controllers, predictors, and educators are inevitably part of society in quite different and more complex ways than how natural scientists are both separate and superior to but still part of nature. The problem is what the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim (1959; 1973) called "self-referential" inconsistency still haunting social science and its "application" in politics and professional work: The external means for regulating and controlling "common people": cause-effect mechanisms postulated in theories and used as technical measures in politics, are quite different from the internal self-regulation and control, oriented towards understanding and validity criteria in different fields, of the controllers, educators, etc.

The dream of an un-disturbed social science, free from idols, and a non-intervening social science as well, not influencing the things studied, has been undermined by the internal,

methodological reflections of social research itself (cf. Eikeland 2006). The so-called interactivity or reactivity of research methods, discussed for a long time in mainstream methodology (from Mayo 1933; Gillespie 2008; Rosenthal 1966, and more), indicates that all forms of research influence whatever is studied, bringing it out of its “natural state”. It is unavoidable. Hawthorne effects, experimenter effects, the very division of labour institutionalised between researchers (knowers) and researched (known), etc. all influence the researched social objects like individuals, history, social structure, organisations, culture, etc. and decide what kind of knowledge is demanded and what tends to be produced. It is elementary though, that what is valid for individuals, societies, or cultures “under influence”: squeezed, moulded, vexed, forced, manipulated, persuaded, is not necessarily true when they are not. The mainstream methodological strategy has for an equally long time been; trying to minimize the interactivity or reactivity (Cf. Eikeland 1985), for example by trying to influence all data-sources or “informants” in exactly the same way, or using different forms of so-called “unobtrusive measures”, like spies essentially, and “big data” produced by extant social and technological practices themselves as today when Facebook, Google, and other surveillance agencies use data-traces left by our electronic gadgets.

Over the last decades, however, another methodological strategy has been pursued, at least by some. Since reactivity or interactivity cannot be eliminated, some, like Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), have suggested to use the reactivity itself as a source of “data” or information. This is fine. Kirsten Hastrup (1995) has even taken it a step further in anthropology transcending the model of participant observer, to explicitly become an observant and reflecting participant: both eating the cake and keeping it too, in other words. There isn’t time to go into details. As I have argued elsewhere (cf. Eikeland 2006), these developments are part of how mainstream social research converges towards action research, but in at least two different forms: 1) Intentionally introducing change and intervention resulting in poîêsis-knowledge in the table. 2) Reflecting on the inevitability of reactivity and how our actions affect others, resulting in the table’s praxis-knowledge.

What is not clear in the “change imperative” and its proponents as presented above, then, is that there are several different forms of change or practice. Pathos, khêrêsis, poîêsis, and praxis in the table could all pass as “practice” in the undistinguished modern parlance. In the philosophy of Aristotle, however, the forms mentioned are different in principle, and there are even two concepts of praxis at work. Also, in Aristotle’s terminology there are a) changes in place, i.e. movements in space, and there are b) changes in inessential properties and attributes like changes in colour, shape, clothing, haircuts, etc. (cf. Eikeland 2008: 122-131). These are kinds of change that can be made by art – i.e. tékhnê in poîêsis and khêrêsis. Then there is c) change of essence, which is when something is born or comes into being and dissolves or dies. Both nature and “art” can make this. The fourth form is d) what Aristotle, somewhat confusingly for modern ears, calls a quantitative change (kînêsis katà tò posòn) which implies a growth (aúxêsis) into and fulfilment of something’s own proper and mature form (eidòs). This can be a natural process, but hardly an artificial change made by outsiders. It can include natural transformations, as when a seed grows and matures into a tree with fruits, or an insect metamorphoses from egg to larva, through a cocooned pupa, and becomes a butterfly or beetle. These natural processes from inchoate beginnings and immaturity to mature stages, are where Aristotle, besides nature or phúsis, uses concepts like praxis and énérgεια with

standards and ends immanent, where things, while staying the same essentially, realise their potentials and become what they are through maturing transformations, finding their forms. The internal transformations of social research itself, just outlined above, could be seen as this kind of process since its driving force is not primarily external but internal to the activity, in trying to solve internal tensions and contradictions when attempting to achieve theoretical knowledge of its studied “object”; i.e. its own practice, through understanding and developing it. Distinctions like these are important reasons why Aristotle is interesting and attractive for so many modern philosophers and professionals.

As I wrote, the change imperative is not peculiar to Kurt Lewin and action research. It was even central to Hegel. His change imperative is not borrowed from art as craft as with Bacon, however. It is in fact, more like what Aristotle called quantitative change; a process of growth and maturation. Two hundred years before Mezirow et al. (1990), Hegel’s central concept of change was a form of transformative learning, and his work “The phenomenology of spirit” (1807) is his demonstration of such processes of transformation. When he reflects on the process in his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* (1970: 8: 78f.), he writes (in my translation): Through reflection (*das Nachdenken*), some of the content of what first appears as perception, observation, or imagination is changed. It is therefore only through a change that we come to consciousness of the true nature of the object. In order to experience what is true in things, mere attention is not enough. Our subjective activity is necessary, which transforms what is immediately present. This seems at first sight totally wrong and contrary to the aim of getting to know something.¹⁰ This transformative process is emphasized in his *History of Philosophy* (1971: 18: 303) as well, in writing about what he calls “*die immanente Betrachtung des Gegenstandes*” or freely translated; seeing the thing studied from the inside. Hegel requires that “*Man setzt sich ganz in die Sache hinein*” or roughly translated that “you get thoroughly acquainted with the thing”. When this is done, he says, the thing itself reveals that it contains contradictions, and “*sublates itself*” (*sich aufhebt*)¹¹ or transforms.

To almost merge with the thing studied to get a view from the inside, seems utopian and highly unrealistic concerning external nature and the study of external objects. When it comes to the study of history, culture, society, and not the least, professional practices, however, it is not quite as preposterous. It is simply what is required to become a full member, or native to those things. As competently, practising natives, we are inside those things, and they are inside us. Although discussions over the last decades may have concluded that conventional anthropologists, working within the institutionalized divisions of labour, can never become quite like the natives and the cultures they visit to observe as “others”, there is no reason why these “others”; the natives themselves, cannot become their own anthropologists. This is, in fact, what

10 Hegel (1970:8:78f.) Durch das Nachdenken wird an der Art, wie der Inhalt zunächst in der Empfindung, Anschauung, Vorstellung ist, etwas verändert; es ist somit nur vermittels einer Veränderung, dass die wahre Natur des Gegenstandes zum Bewusstsein kommt. (...) Um zu erfahren, was das Wahre in den Dingen sei, ist es mit der blossen Aufmerksamkeit nicht abgetan, sondern es gehört dazu unsere subjektive Tätigkeit, welche das unmittelbare Vorhandene umgestaltet. Dies scheint nun auf den ersten Anblick ganz verkehrt und dem Zwecke, um den es sich beim Erkennen handelt, zuwiderlaufend zu sein.

11 (1971: 18: 303) (Der Gegenstand) wird für sich genommen, ohne Voraussetzung, Idee, Sollen, nicht nach äusserlichen Verhältnissen, Gesetzen, Gründen. Man setzt sich ganz in die Sache hinein, betrachtet den Gegenstand an ihm selbst und nimmt ihn nach den Bestimmungen, die er hat. In dieser Betrachtung zeigt er sich dann selbst auf, dass er entgegengesetzte Bestimmungen enthält, sich also aufhebt.

is happening around us. Natives are becoming researchers, and we are all natives (to some culture or practices). We always were. There are growing movements of native and indigenous research, practitioner research from within different professions, reflective practices proliferating into all kinds of work life, organisational learning, etc. This is already an important strand in what is recognised as action research internationally. Simultaneously, this “consciousness-raising” bottom-up from within practices, bringing subconscious general patterns in common conduct into language as objects of common consciousness, is praxis-research according to Aristotle’s definitions. Articulating such patterns is a theoretical task if anything is, and it requires full and profound involvement and participation as competent and “professional” members of the practices concerned and studied: “going thoroughly native”, if you like, becoming an observant and reflecting participant, and it does not necessarily change what it studies, certainly not according to a craft model. As in Hegel’s phenomenology, however, it can perfectly well imply transformations, *Aufhebungen*, preserving and altering the point of departure simultaneously, in line with inner tensions and contradictions belonging to the nature of that practice, as stages in maturing or finding forms optimally adequate to the aim or end sought.

There are other interesting examples, as well, of what could be seen as “non-intervening”, participatory, experience-based action research; praxis research. As I have tried to argue for many years (cf. Eikeland 1990), the methods of research methodology in mainstream social research is a good example of a self-reflective and transformative discourse: wonderfully illustrated as a personal story of learning in Reinharz (1979), progressing through a Hegelian immanent critique, articulating and developing the professional or vocational knowledge and competence of researchers, almost like a Trojan horse inside the fortified walls of conventional research. Although the methods of methodology, the professional knowledge and competence of researchers, are experience based, they are not themselves “research based” in a conventional sense. Hence, they could function as an analogical paradigm for an autonomous articulation of corresponding professional competence in other vocations and professions. I have also used grammar as an example of praxis knowledge, since grammar is basically an articulation of structures in a linguistic practice we are and carry with us as competent native speakers. I see clear tendencies toward praxis research in action research as promoted by Peter Reason and associates (e.g. Reason and Rowan 1981; Reason and Bradbury 2001), as well as in the CARN network (e.g. Rowell et al. 2016), and in directions inspired by P. Freire (Fals-Borda & Rahman 1991). The development of broad participation methods over decades in the WRI-tradition also moved it in praxis-directions, as I have discussed elsewhere (Eikeland 2012). Many different varieties of action research have appropriate times, places, and purposes (a *kairós*) for their applications. I think, however, that the road forward for refining it needs to go through a serious engagement with Aristotle’s ways of knowing and Hegel’s concept of a transformative, immanently critical change.

Conclusion

The moral of this story is not that “thou shalt never ever do theôrêsis or tékhnê” (in the table). Neither is it to drop collaborative projects between “researchers” and “practitioners” although

practitioners and natives are increasingly becoming researchers themselves. Labelling such collaboration “democratic” does not solve the challenges outlined here, however. Transitional forms like these can hardly be avoided in our kind of societies, and for most purposes, they are all to the good. Making space for other more *praxis*-based forms, requires social, organizational, and institutional changes, especially concerning collective, organizational learning and lifelong learning in the sense of providing preconditions for experiential learning by doing, through practice and reflection, in all contexts of life. My challenge is simple and in line with how I started: Mainstreaming action research needs more and more adequate distinctions. What I have presented, are some suggestions to think through.

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Appendix

Aristotelian relational ways of knowing partly introduced by H.Arendt (1958) (labor, work, action) and Habermas (1970) knowledge interest (natural science: explanatory, technical / humanities: practical-interpretive, social research: emancipatory)

Basis	Way of knowing – <i>gnōsis</i> form	Associated rationality	English equivalent
Aisthēsis (perception)	1.Theōrēsis = <i>epistēmē</i> ₂	Deduction, demonstration, didactics	Spectator speculation (<i>observation</i>), dispassionate explanatory, predictive modelling
	2.Páthos	??	Suffering, being affected / influenced passively / "passionately" from the outside
Empeiria (practically acquired and accumulated experience) and <i>enérgeia</i> / <i>entelékheia</i> (activity / actuality)	3.Khrēsis	Tékhne (calculation)	Using external objects as instruments without changing them
	4.Poíēsis		Making / creating; manipulating external objects as materials, forming materials according to our preconceived plan
	5.Praxis ₂	Phronēsis (special form of deliberation)	Doing; virtuous performance, practical reasoning, ethical deliberation
	6.Praxis ₁	Critical dialectics / dialogue as reflection. The way from novice to expert, from tacit to articulate knowing	Practice, rehearsing, training for competence development, mastery, and insight (<i>theōria</i>)
	7.Theōria = <i>epistēmē</i> ₁	Dialogue, deduction, deliberation	Insight, understanding forms / patterns

About the author

Olav Eikeland (born 1955) has his PhD in ancient philosophy from 1993, University of Oslo with a dissertation on "Aristotle, the dialogical-dialectical tradition, and its relevance for action research and modern empirical social research." He is currently professor of educational and work life research at the Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet). From 1985 to 2008 he worked at the Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo as researcher, research director, and CEO. His research has focused on action research, its legitimacy and institutionalisation in Norway and modern societies. He has also done research in ancient philosophy, general theories of knowledge, philosophical and methodological aspects of mainstream social science and research, and learning in modern organisations.

Author's address

Olav Eikeland, Dr.Philos.
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University / Storbyuniversitetet
Faculty of Education & International Studies
P.O. Box 4 St. Olavs plass
NO-0130 Oslo, Norway
Mobile phone: +4790822463, Office +4764849135
Office: P42-Q8005
E-mail: olave@oslomet.no / oleik@online.no / olaveik@icloud.com