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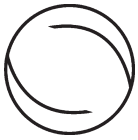

X and Organization Studies

Philosophical Minds or Brotgelehrte?

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Abstract

In this essay, we discuss basic orientations and ways of being among us, the academics, especially in the context of research. Using German poet, scholar and author Friedrich Schiller's distinction between '*der philosophische Kopf*' ('philosophical mind') and '*Brotgelehrte*' ('bread-fed scholar'), we contrast ideal-typical figures in academia. We find these forgotten 18th-century characters inspirational to help us understand some troublesome contemporary developments of academics and academia and to remind us of the perhaps perennial nature of the ongoing controversies and debates. We further develop and nuance these figures and bring them to the 21st century. Like Schiller in his time, we want to highlight the importance of each of us in shaping what academia is and what it becomes. The contrast may help us think through who we are, what is driving us in our work, and how we can (re)construct ourselves in the light of dominant normalizations and templates for being in contemporary academia.

Keywords

academia, empirical research, motives, organization studies, scholarship

Introduction

'So that I may perceive whatever holds // The world together in its inmost folds' exclaims Faust in Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust I*. Frustrated by his abortive attempts to 'know all', Faust, as a last measure, ends up selling his soul to Mephisto, the devil. Faust reflects an ideal of the thirst for knowledge of committed and passionate researchers. Is such an image of the researcher, driven by intrinsic passion to understand the world in all its richness, complexity and wonder a realistic

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reflection of the modern academic? Perhaps, more often than many of us would like to admit, not. Friedrich Schiller, a contemporary and good friend of Goethe, in his inaugural lecture as professor of history in the University of Jena, distinguished between two types of academics: 'Brotgelehrte' (literally translates as 'bread-fed scholars') and 'der philosophische Kopf' (philosophical mind or spirit) (Schiller, 1789). For Schiller, the philosophical mind was similar to the Faustian ideal which '[t]hrough always new and more beautiful forms of thought, [. . .] strides forth to higher excellence' (p. 257). The Brotgelehrte, in contrast, is eager to satisfy his 'narrow-minded thirst for fame' and is satisfied with a stock of his acquired knowledge because '[e]very extension of his bread-science upsets him, because it portends only more work, or it makes the past useless; every important innovation frightens him, because it shatters the old school form which he so laboriously adopted, it places him in danger of losing the entire effort of his preceding life' (p. 255).

Over 200 years later, Schiller's speech and poignant observations still resonate with us. Do we choose to become either 'philosophical minds' or 'Brotgelehrte' – or are we socialized into becoming either type? Or are we moving back and forth between these characters, pushed by various motives, identities, career stages, cultural norms, situations and structural factors? We, the authors of this piece, despite variation in background, age and career stage, all feel the ever-increasing pressures that nudge us into becoming Brotgelehrte. For the junior co-author the 'Brotgelehrte problem' appears in a literal way; how to put bread and butter on the table without losing one's motivation and bitterly regretting moving from a job in business to academia. For the mid-career author, it induces decision anxiety over which career path to choose. For the senior author, the problem is an existential one – curiosity competes with a will to exploit rather than broaden one's own well-rehearsed repertoires.

Schiller's characterizations, originally used as powerful rhetorical devices to persuade a live audience of students to make a deliberate choice to become a Philosophical Mind rather than a Brotgelehrte to improve humanity, are also somewhat crude and simplified. In particular, we need to moderate some idealizations of the Philosophical Mind and tone down the demonization of the Brotgelehrte. In this essay we thus refer to the Philosophical Mind as a 'Scholar', because we see this character as a defender of genuine scholarship and intellectual interest in a broad sense, but not necessarily with an interest in philosophy. The Scholar for us is neither a profession nor an organizational role but denotes an intrinsically motivated and passionate individual engaged in what s/he finds truly interesting to study. A Scholar actively thinks about the nature of the phenomenon of interest, strives to see the world from a novel angle, reconsiders frameworks, carefully scrutinizes data and challenges received ideas. The Brotgelehrte has a more instrumentalist orientation towards what to study and how to go about research. S/he knows how to play the system and is interested in maintaining it. The Brotgelehrte is merely doing a job, mainly focused on socio-politics of academic habitats and navigating these in order to accomplish specific career objectives.

To us there is little doubt that the Brotgelehrte, rather than the scholar, is currently the increasingly dominant, seductive subject position for researchers. Even though similar developments appear to take place in many scientific disciplines, in this essay we take inspiration from our own experiences and address our field of organization studies. The contemporary Brotgelehrte draws inspiration from a normative managerialist ideal: control the circumstances of your career by playing your cards right, please the university executives with excellent KPIs (= 4* journal publications), be efficient in your research strategies and focus on performance management and rewards. The short-term consequences of supporting a Brotgelehrte strategy may benefit universities (or at least university management) anxious to show the right metrics. However, they are devastating for academia and for parts of society supposed to benefit from knowledge contributions. For researchers, the consequences are ambiguous since many seek recognition and benefit from rewards. Yet the domination of such instrumentalism and output optimization is at odds with a rich and affirming working life that could encompass valuable and meaningful knowledge contributions in

research and education, benefiting not only individuals' careers and university management, but also our academic communities and society at large.

Although our essay focuses on research, there are other possible extensions. For example, activists driven by ideological-political rather than intellectual or career-optimizing motivations. Similar dynamics are also at play in teaching. A scholar may be open to new developments and pedagogical frameworks while a Brotgelehrte focuses on received ideas, models and examples defending existing teaching repertoires. Some people may be quite Brotgelehrte-oriented in research but less so in their teaching, and some research-oriented scholars may be eager to minimize teaching work and thus repeat the same courses and lectures without demonstrating much interest in exploring novel paths in their pedagogy.

Inspired by our initial reflections and Schiller's concerns about academia already back in the Enlightenment, this essay goes on to explore *how and why we as researchers tend to become normalized as Brotgelehrte – and shrink as scholars? How can we reconsider these subject positions in our identities, practices and modern academia?* In what follows, we further specify Schiller's categories and add some nuances before exploring the mindsets, social contexts and drivers behind the expanding 'Brotgelehrte-ism'. We then reflect on how we may resurrect and strengthen the scholar in each one of us and in academia in general. In a concluding section, we further nuance the two characters and bring them to the 21st century.

The Philosophical Mind and the Brotgelehrte

Schiller, an established poet, philosopher and newly appointed professor at the university of Jena, chose to start his inaugural lecture as a professor of history by raising concerns similar to those in recent years (e.g. Alvesson, Gabriel, & Paulsen, 2017; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Ashcraft, 2017; Courpasson, 2013; Gabriel, 2010; Grey, 2010). Just like now, the world order back then was in transition: the ideas of Enlightenment had spread, the era of modernity was starting to take shape, and the French revolution was a few months away. The first part of his speech reads like a more eloquent and rhetorically superior version of what in comparison sound like present-day rants about New Public Management and managerialism in academia. This astonishing similarity makes Schiller worth citing at length:

> He (Brotgelehrte) will direct all of his diligence to the demands made upon him by the future master of his fate, and he will believe he has achieved everything once he has made himself capable of not fearing this authority. Once he has run his course and attained the goal of his desires, he dismisses the sciences which guided him, for why should he bother with them any longer? His greatest concern now is to display these accumulated treasures of his memory, and to take care that their value not depreciate. (Schiller, 1789)

For Schiller, Brotgelehrte are individuals who focus on gaining external recognition, defend acquired knowledge, and battle against all kinds of insights that would challenge his or her worldview. S/he seeks to please the 'masters' who provide recognition and acclaim. Caught in such system the Brotgelehrte then 'drags an enslaved soul around with him'.

The scholar, in contrast, seeks novelty and knowledge for the sake of a deeper understanding and engagement. S/he is not content with defending knowledge or seeking closure, but gladly welcomes any insights that challenge established ideas:

> New discoveries in the sphere of his activities, which cast the bread-fed scholar down, delight the philosophical mind. Perhaps they fill a gap which had still disfigured the growing whole of his conceptions, or they set the stone still missing in the edifice of his ideas, which then completes it. Even should these

> new discoveries leave it in ruins, a new chain of thoughts, a new natural phenomenon, a newly discovered law in the material world overthrow the entire edifice of his science, no matter: He has always loved truth more than his system, and he will gladly exchange the old, insufficient form for a new one, more beautiful. Indeed, if no blow from the outside shatters his edifice of ideas, he himself will be the first to tear it apart, discontented, to re-establish it more perfected. (Schiller, 1789, emphasis in original)

Important areas where these characters differ are (a) the meaning of knowledge, (b) individual motives and (c) how they relate to the social context. Let us take a closer look.

The meaning of knowledge

In his speech, Schiller describes the promising young men [sic] with a 'thirst for knowledge', and delineates the values underlying a scholar's efforts:

> All his efforts are directed toward the perfection of his knowledge; his noble impatience cannot rest until all of his conceptions have ordered themselves into an organic whole, until he stands at the center of his art, his science, and until from this position outward he surveys its expanse with a contented look. (Schiller, 1789)

A Brotgelehrte in contrast fears 'every extension of his bread-science and novel insights as it challenges his or her established image and self-worth'. The Brotgelehrte may be *wilfully ignorant* of new developments and alternative ways of thinking, clinging instead to established frameworks and theories. The *will to not know* is a key aspect when considering the Brotgelehrte/scholar divide. Schaefer (2019) argues that wilful ignorance emerges when individuals actively disregard relevant yet uncomfortable information that could potentially lead to transformative actions. We academics may be wilfully ignorant when the extrinsic motivation of the Brotgelehrte trumps the passion, intellectual curiosity and intrinsic joy of a scholar who strives to make an extra effort 'to know'.

For Schiller, a scholar is not caught in a specific framework but 'has always loved truth more *than his system*, and he will gladly exchange the old, insufficient form for a new one, more beautiful'. In contrast 'the bread-fed scholar, in eternal stagnation of mind, *guards over the barren monotony of his school-conceptions*'. A Brotgelehrte may simply ignore the idea that ambiguous empirical material calls for more clarification, or does not reflect on the possibility that there may be more insightful frameworks to apply and develop (Rorty, 1989). S/he may work hard to find ways to squeeze out more and more publications from his or her existing empirical material to avoid having to conduct time-consuming and unglamorous fieldwork with uncertain outcomes. One may even sense an institutionalization of a 'barren monotony' given all the predictable studies that apply frameworks from the 1970s (Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011), and adhere to conventions and lack originality (Alvesson et al., 2017; Tourish, 2019). The Brotgelehrte then is happy to simply reproduce assumptions, academic conventions and recipes for conducting and publishing such research (Mills, 1959). Complications are avoided and the knowledge output is seen more as a commodity, useful for promotions, status and ego.

A scholar aspires to ensure that s/he has a sound basis for making knowledge claims and questions and revises preferred frameworks and vocabularies, rather than mechanically confirming and imposing preconceived ideas. We regularly see the reproduction of templated truths such as organizations are gendered, power defines subjectivity, managers do strategy in practice, people are either leaders or followers, discourse constitutes reality and institutional theory explains everything. In most papers 'method authorities' are invoked. More than once we have heard and experienced that reviewers almost routinely push authors to code with the Gioia method, build case studies inspired by Eisenhardt (or Yin) and find patterns according to Glaser and Strauss. There are many missed opportunities for novel thinking and doing research when we fail to consider other

empirical clues, vocabularies and innovative methods rather than those fitting into our acquired frameworks and reductionistic data management practices! Imagine studies suggesting that an organization is non-gendered, that subjectivity defies power, managers bypass 'strategy', most people neither lead nor follow, reality moves on undisturbed by 'discourse' and institutional theory fails to say something novel and interesting about a specific phenomenon under study. A scholar would find that interesting and inspiring but a Brotgelehrte would not take such disturbing thoughts, 'unpleasant' findings or inspirations seriously as they would mean complications, reduced and delayed possibilities for publication, and a challenge to one's identity, for instance, as a Foucauldian, gender, leadership or institutionalist scholar.

For sure, a scholarly inclination alone does not guarantee insightful research outputs each and every time. There is also the risk that the researcher, especially when working in an isolated ivory tower lacking the benefits that come from interaction with peers and people outside the academic tribe, becomes caught in what s/he finds interesting but that is not necessarily so relevant or useful for others. However, an intrinsic will to seek knowledge increases the possibility for significant contributions to emerge out of consistent efforts. Many combined individual efforts in a community of scholars, almost by definition, will in the long run push the limits of knowledge further than a mass of Brotgelehrte.

Even though some of the best scholars may fail to fully live up to Schiller's romantic picture, the key here is interest and ambition combined with passion. A scholar in this sense is not necessarily a Great Mind, an academic superhero, but a person driven by a strong intellectual interest and the will to *try to find out with an open mind* and with a *more intrinsic than instrumental set of motives*. The scholar also resists the temptation of promoting new-sounding but shallow knowledge for the sake of personal fame, or instigating or joining the bandwagon of the next management fad. The scholar is not a prolific airport book author who gladly exchanges a previous 'one-size-fits-all' management practice for the next one. Of course, popular management books can be based on serious scholarly work but they often are not driven by scholarly rigour and a genuinely reflective stance.

Individual motives

Scholars and Brotgelehrte may also be distinguished by their existential orientations and motives, which affect individual identities and image building. The Brotgelehrte tends to defend an established stock of knowledge and to seek status, tenure and 'competitive advantage'. This striving might be linked to the preservation of an identity associated with a specific field or career pursuit. A commonly recurring nugget of career advice, for example, is to pick a field of study, say 'innovation' or 'leadership' or a specific framework or guru (narrative theory, Lacan), which promises a community, a sense of belonging and a safe route to a career. Much of the work is then facilitated by the adapted social identity and the template for doing and publishing research. Those motivations that are taught to early career scholars have been institutionalized and affect self-understandings. The very ideal of the scholar may then be a time- and effort-consuming distraction and unpleasant provocation compared with the smooth adoption of a safe template for mechanistic journal publication and career optimization.

This focus on identity linked to status and image manifests in the 'right' journal publications. Many early-career and promotion-seeking academics feel that rigid journal templates force them to become instrumental and compliant (Tienari, 2012). The centrality of an outcome focused – as different from a knowledge-content – orientation is often revealed by authors' biographies. These tend to mention affiliation, rank and interest but also to devote much space to names of journals one has published in. 'I am where I publish' seems to be a common theme for identification and

identity, including in social media where researchers frequently choose to highlight where (or how much) they have published rather than what they have – at best – discovered.

Motives are not necessarily fixed but may reflect the situation of the academic. Most academics have their Brotgelehrte moments – we, the authors of this piece, have had ours. In some cases, these are difficult to avoid — and people with a strong scholarly ethos may suffer. However, a scholar can sometimes at least actively seek identity positions where the Brotgelehrte-character is distanced from one's self – and succeed after some painful muddling through.

Social context

Apart from knowledge interests and individuals' motives, the overall social context Schiller called the 'system' also plays a decisive role in determining our Brotgelehrte and scholar orientations. Here we consider challenges posed by peer review, academic workshops and Brotgelehrte-language as examples, showing the social practices and discourses that at least partially form us.

Peer review. The journal peer review is one of the structural features of contemporary academia. It might be considered both the lifeblood and the curse of those who are chained to the process. We see the peer review system as a double-edged sword in the struggle between scholar and Brotgelehrte-orientations. At its best, the review process helps an author to think outside the box, to expand her or his horizon, and to confront problems of ignorance and ignoring, such as limitations of data, faulty theoretical reasoning or being stuck in a particular framework.

However, authors anticipating the formulaic requirements for contemporary journal publishing often avoid risks, challenges to established frameworks, or innovative theorizing. As Siler, Lee and Buro (2015) demonstrate, most creative and challenging ideas have been rejected by the field at first. Hence established ideas persist because being critical of the status quo and rocking the boat becomes too risky for everyone in the system. Rather than to challenge a framework, the 'sympathetic' reviewer is more inclined to encourage the author to get the details right, often under the pretext of demanding a 'deeper' engagement with the literature or increased 'rigor'. Sometimes such advice is motivated, sometimes it reinforces a narrow mindset (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013; Ashcraft, 2017). While a Brotgelehrte sees strong advantages with templates for doing research – offering guidelines for how to adapt and increase the chance of predictable outputs, a scholar is more inclined to see the formulaic journal article as a straightjacket and look for alternatives such as writing books or essays (like this one). While journals differ somewhat, isomorphism tends to rule among those setting the norms, which then reinforces Brotgelehrte-ism.

Academic workshops. Workshops on journal publishing and careers are another central element in contemporary academia that often seem to revolve around a 'no-choice' fatalism, the naturalization of a research ethos focused on measurable signs of success and the marginalization of other drivers. Institutions demand and reward publications and effective completion of PhD projects that kickstart a junior scholar's career. Less common are seminars on how to write a good book, considering different styles and aesthetics of writing, reaching a broader audience or developing new ideas and having something significant and novel to say. A career workshop is most likely *not* about how to increase the chances of producing innovative and influential work that stands out over a longer time period, but about climbing the formal career ladder through enough publications in the 'right' journals, having the right 'profile' – and learning to cope with rejections. We have yet to see invitations to a workshop in which the pleasure of writing and the passion for doing research are the central topics. In one instance the advice given by a senior scholar in a career workshop organized by a prestigious journal was to seek a 'hot topic' and use the data in a way that maximizes contributions to this topic. Much

like Schiller talks about preventing the depreciation of one's knowledge, such advice emphasizes keeping topics 'hot' at least as much as it generates the right amount of publications.

PhD students and early career scholars in particular seem to have 'no choice' if they want to have a career – and the normalization of the latter is in itself a sign of the cultivation of Brotgelehrteism (a scholar is less inclined to think in terms of a 'career'). A question uttered by senior scholars that we heard in more than one writing seminar geared towards PhD students is: 'do you want to have a job in academia *or* change the world? Now, think about your dissertation strategically. You can change the world later.' This type of indoctrination makes a fresh recruit automatically question a naïve inclination towards exploratory inquiry and shift towards instrumentalism and herd mentality. In the worst cases, this type of discourse leaves the early career scholar depressed and demotivated as his or her perhaps idealized expectations of academia are met with a brutal and intellectually uninspiring reality.

Brotgelehrte-language. Contemporary academia seems to be filled with Brotgelehrte-language. Expressions like employability, careers, being safe, rewards, 4* publications, submissions, citations, playing the game (a key marker of a true Brotgelehrte), how to get published, the pressure, promotion, criteria, rankings, citation scores etc. are frequently used. The researcher and his/her tribe together create a web of meanings and rationalizations that the researcher has himself sprung through (to partly use Geertz's, 1973, famous expression), infusing discussions with extensive Brotgelehrte-parlance.

Our present system features metrics, rewards and other formal elements that have marginalized lifeworld aspects of research such as meaning, interest and intrinsic values (Habermas, 1987). Generating new, meaningful and socially significant knowledge and experiencing joy and pride in the process are seldom discussed anywhere. There is often a deterministic, low-agency framing that includes expressions like 'pressure', 'expectations' and 'in order to survive'. This type of talk not only mirrors but also constitutes our mind-sets, and may instigate corresponding practices if we accept the argument that language in organizations is performative (e.g. Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015). This is not to argue that all language is (equally) performative and that we merely can and want to *talk* things into existence. We all are certainly affected by contemporary structures, incentives, and cultural norms as we reproduce social practices. However, using alternative ways to talk about academia with less of a Brotgelehrte bias may sow seeds for thinking about alternatives. One first measure would be to encourage different forms of writing that breaks free from the norms but yet proposes new ideas and stimulates discussion, such as the *X and Organization Studies* essay section.

Moving Between the Two Characters

In our view, most academics are *both* scholars and Brotgelehrte, or rather have their moments of each, although the degree and frequency may vary heavily from person to person and situation to situation. Hence we propose a dynamic, temporal view and argue that many academics are shifting in and out of being a Brotgelehrte and scholar, pushed and pulled by various individual and social drivers.

To account for multiple, changing motives and drivers at play, we suggest that we academics start working with the idea that we need to engage in *tradeoffs*. This implies that we actively negotiate our own positioning between Brotgelehrte and scholar in our work lives. This tradeoff can be considered in specific life stages, research projects, institutional contexts or even micro situations to indicate the relative salience of each character and set of orientations. Even though many may be inclined to a particular tradeoff rather permanently, the choice between the two orientations is not to be taken as a fixed, quantitative measure or state, but as a support for self-awareness and

reflection. At different times, it may make sense to ask oneself: Am I now driven (mainly) by a Brotgelehrte or scholar orientation? To what degree is my present research really showing signs of the former or the latter? When looking back over the years, are there signs of me really being guided by curiosity and seeking new knowledge or am I reusing the same, safe framework and method again and again, perhaps more or less confirming what I found out many years ago?

Another concept we propose considers differing *situational strengths*, ranging from strong to weak (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). *Strong situations* imply that external pressures or contingencies of the context take over in such a way that individual agency is perceived as severely constrained. One seems to have little choice but to follow the imperatives. These situations may arise for example when we seek for or want to retain a job, try to comply with tenure criteria or when our partner's job and small children make a move to another location difficult. The researcher's norms, alternative identities and aspirations fade into the background. A perception of overwhelming external forces controls most of our action. In *weak situations*, external constraints are modest and negotiable. There is more space for agency because those situations are more ambiguous and contain less external pressure. It is much more up to the individual to decide how to act, even though there may be a strong internalized constraint associated with socialization and limited worldview and skills. A well-established and tenured senior scholar is in a much 'safer' position to make choices than a post-doc living in precarious conditions, dreaming of a regular employment and slavishly trying to fulfil tenure criteria.

Situations are typically not objectively strong or weak. Without denying structural pressures and acknowledging constraints to and limitations of agency, an emphasis on the ideas of 'musts', 'pressures', 'mechanisms', 'survival', '4 by 4 publications' and so on automatically leads to constructing situations as 'strong' and individual actors as 'weak'. Two people in a similar situation may choose to frame and enact that situation as one filled with possibilities or as one severely constrained by the demands of present-day academia.

The Brotgelehrte is inclined to construct situations as strong so that compliance appears motivated and rational even though there may be considerable leeway in making different choices. It is tempting to over-emphasize external factors, structures, performance management, review procedures, rewards and social contingencies. There is a shrinking of researchers as agents and an overemphasis on the power of the 'system'. Surely, most individual academics have some autonomy and are inhabited by an inquisitive, sceptical attitude embodied by the scholar? We think there is an interesting interplay here that readily leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The system encourages the Brotgelehrte in us who is inclined to see the world as a strong situation. This way, the various system characteristics appear as having a strong grip, leading us to multiple logics: publish, perform, prestige among like-minded peers, pressure-complying, promotion-seeking, and so on. Somewhere in between we may protest a bit, but not too loudly and never too much. The naturalization of the strong system and the Brotgelehrte as an inevitable and comfortable adaptation – rather than a moral embarrassment and source of self-contempt – then offers a good way out. Fromm's (1941) concept *escape from freedom* (see also Deslandes, 2018) is relevant here: following imperatives and seeing these as unavoidable may be anxiety-reducing.

We acknowledge that fixed individual performance criteria are in one sense something objective with some financial and possible status consequences that may be hard to 'construct oneself' out of. Also, there are institutions with strict and rigid criteria that are also settings for strong situations, but they are (still) not dominating, at least not in all countries. Within the still expanding sector of business schools, there are many jobs and many schools can hardly require faculty to publish in A journals – the space for A journal articles is low compared to all business school jobs to be filled. Opportunities to find a more humane or a less performance pressuring university (or

another job altogether), go to another country, reduce the importance of promotion, or work half time for a period, are often downplayed when one constructs the situation as 'strong'.

Our argument is that, on the whole, academics, at least compared to most other occupations, are generally in a field of weak situations. We are in the habit of constructing situations as 'strong' even though there are alternatives. Most readers of *Organization Studies* are not defenceless victims of natural disasters, famine, life in a war zone, or facing other strictly constraining situations. Tendencies to naturalize or essentialize strong situations should be met with suspicion, partly because they are regularly used to legitimize compliance. Much of our critique of academia blames the system and victimizes the academic. There is frequent talk about 'the pressure' or 'The Rule' (Ashcraft, 2017; Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017; Clarke & Knights, 2015). The individual academic is powerless, while New Public Management, neoliberalism, top management, 'the system', journal editors and reviewers are calling the shots. This is deeply ironic as well: transformational leadership, organic organizations, communities of practice, meaningful work, self-motivated professionals, resistance and ethics are among the organization and management scholars' preferred topics. One could expect us to have some capacity to practise what we preach.

Strengthening the Scholar in Us – And in Our Communities

Our critique and diagnosis of the academic system so far naturally begs the question of how we can individually and collectively strengthen the scholar in us. To this end, we need to work both with ourselves and our communities.

Asking inquisitive questions

We believe that a scholarly attitude starts with a reflection and assessment of what choices are possible in each situation. Schiller's ideas are a good starting point to ask *inquisitive questions* about ourselves as academics as we forge our paths somewhere between a scholar and Brotgelehrte. Who are we? What is really important? How can we justify our academic work to taxpayers, funding agencies, to ourselves and to the society at large? Another crucial question concerns the locus of responsibility to protect the search for knowledge and the fight against ignorance. Is the system or the academic in charge? How does the dynamic between the individual academic, the community, the employing organizations and their management unfold? Ultimately, what is the vocation and the role of the academic in our society? To follow and comply – or to take initiative, be responsible for doing our job the best we can, to resist or even to lead? Are we there to produce citations, articles and diplomas for the system's and our careers' sake, or to engage in original thinking to generate new ideas as our first priority?

Why have we accepted the running of so many how-to-publish and not how-to-write or how-to-conduct-interesting-research workshops or even how-to-do-research-that-makes-a-socially-significant-contribution workshops? Why all the fuss to 'meet-the-editor' rather than 'meet-a-good-author' having crafted a really good, inspirational text (without necessarily being a distinguished celebrity, at least not for the time being)? Why do so few people go to the field to observe the phenomenon from close range to learn something new? Or try to seriously challenge and revise our lines of thinking? Why are so many of our journals so limited and narrow in their approach and eager to replicate the template of a 'good *paper*', rather than an insightful text? Why do they receive so few submissions containing original ideas and rich empirical material? Why do so many of us show signs of cynicism and opportunism (Tourish, 2019), and openly use the expression 'play the game' (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012) and other Brotgelehrte

vocabulary? Because we have allowed the Brotgelehrte to take the upper hand and become the dominant Character!

Working with meaning and motives

We also propose *working with questions of meaning and motives* that are related to our identity and morality. This is ultimately about clarifying the rationale for doing research, and taking issues like motives and responsibility seriously. Here we refer to self-reflexivity and identity work: Who am I? What am I doing? What am I contributing with – if anything (apart from CV boosting and improved institutional metrics)? *Speak truth to yourself!* may be the motto akin to Foucault's interpretation of parrhesia (Foucault, 1985). It is always tempting to repress any awareness of a lack of a deeper purpose. To become self-aware of positive and negative drivers and try to reduce excessive instrumentalism and opportunism is a *possibility* for us to be better at what we do, as individuals and as research communities.

Researchers can, if sufficiently motivated, change behaviours and attitudes to investigate alternative ways of being an academic. Being a scholar implies neither a naïve, 'religious' attitude towards positivism, interpretivism or philosophy nor a vain dream of finding and telling the 'truth'. Instead it builds on a sincere ambition to conduct serious research, where the researcher aims to get a rich understanding of the phenomenon studied and is willing to revise her/his own preconceptions or question the conventions and routines of the field. Publication in the 'right' journal is then secondary to having something important or interesting to say. This means going beyond 'adding to the literature' mentality, finding and filling a gap that perhaps does not need filling (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). This ambition is partly an individual issue, but also something for the research community to address. Encouraging the scholar calls for selective recruitment, socialization and ongoing cultivation of values aimed at reducing incentives for us to become Brotgelehrte, rather than the contrary.

Instead of asking each other 'where and how much have you published', we should perhaps be asking 'what is your key insight, idea or contribution' more often. 'So what?' could and should be a key question, not only during PhD seminars. We could also adopt a scholarly attitude when reviewing other people's work, nudging authors to be more creative and think about novel aspects of their contributions and refrain from demanding compliance with the formulae for a journal article. We may also ask for the demonstration of wider readership, also potentially having something to say to parts of the educated public or professional groups, not only academics within our own micro-tribe, discourage authors from using the same framework or guru over a long time and reject papers without a significant idea or contribution apart from 'filling a gap in the literature'. This is very much a collective project, focusing on social norms and practices of doing and assessing research, but the individual researcher/research group need to show initiative and exemplify what is called for.

Breaking the loop

The academic community needs to protect and support the scholar and stop cultivating and rewarding the Brotgelehrte, who threatens to become the pervasive character in contemporary academia, supported by strong structural and cultural forces. This is partly a collective project, but also the responsibility of the academic, whose individual choices and subjectivity do matter at the end of the day. Is our priority promotion and rewards or doing something that is meaningful and important? There are many instances in which we can use our well-honed argumentative skills to contest at least some well-targeted obstructive routines, processes, excess bureaucratic

burdens, and ask ourselves and each other whether the institutional forces really are as strong as we construct them to be. And how can we, in particular senior academics, contribute to scholar-friendly cultures and policies? By constructing 'the system' as an insurmountable *force majeure* and 'the self' as a weak individual with low agency, we ourselves become both the outcomes and drivers of Brotgelehrte-ism. The idea that a strong (high-pressure, deterministic) system turns weak academics into Brotgelehrte may be challenged by the counter-idea that Brotgelehrte uses the argument of a strong situation, in which anything but compliance is naïve or impossible (without terrible consequences), as an excuse for conformism and opportunism. For a scholar, the system is less of an issue – s/he is not that inclined to yield to 'pressures', and control through instrumental rewards is less effective.

Our institutions and senior academics in particular play a crucial role in selecting, socializing, supporting and promoting junior researchers. University managers, leaders of research programmes, scientific associations, journal editors and reviewers all have tremendous power in promoting either scholars or Brotgelehrte. One may be willing to incur some costs for recruiting and supporting scholars at the expense of efficient journal publishing by Brotgelehrte-minded people. The recent trend to prioritize the latter group calls for serious reflection – and the mobilization of strong counterforces. Downplaying the incessant, nauseating talk on metrics and starting to share our ideas and research interests instead would be an important step forward. Careful monitoring of Brotgelehrte-ism – on all levels from system to institutional culture to research group to self-identity – may help academics to distance themselves from marinating academic life in this orientation.

Strengthening our communities

Many academics are discontented and unhappy (Fleming, 2020). Some are silently compliant, while others find subtle ways to resist or to cope. Many, in particular senior academics but also Brotgelehrte-minded people in general, benefit from the system and have no interest in initiating change. Collectively we often seem to work with – and socially construct – mechanistic hierarchies, engage in transactional relations with management and comply with strict performance management systems. Where is the brave, creative disruption of our field and grass-roots initiatives for more progressive management and academic citizenship? Different forms of collective action to make our organizations more scholar-compliant and socially responsive are a possibility, but concrete initiatives are still rare.

Genuine, deep-level involvement with the industry to create better educational programmes and to cooperate for research, and using new technologies to collaborate in new ways and to communicate our research to the world outside the mainstream outlets are examples of what we could be better at. Why are we not, then? We are hopefully not waiting for the political elites, the neoliberal university and its management to help us organize? While it is naïve to ask for pure voluntarism, it is equally naïve to deny the high degrees of freedom and choice as well as options for collective action for most academics in most parts of their work life. Sometimes even academics who are advocates of social construction of reality in their research seem to consider their own organizational contexts as if set in stone. Hypocrisy, we might say, is a close companion of the Brotgelehrte mindset. There may also be considerable support for an original, high-quality study – even if it is more risky, takes longer time to conduct and calls for more effort than the standard published article. Actually, most journals like *OS* are very supportive of such work, so much of the problem is that researchers *themselves* choose to play it safe and go for the template.

Rethinking our role in the society

What is our relevance to our societies and to organizations we are supposed to be experts on? How much and what sort of expert value do we add for our peers, organizational practitioners and society? Are we doing our best? Are we just too passive? Can there be beauty and passion in our research that resonates (with) and transforms rather than alienates us and our audiences? These are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves. We seem to live much in our own static academic 'system' that is becoming increasingly self-referential. While researchers may move between the two contrasting Schillerian subject positions, we need to become aware of and reconcile the contingencies at play for each orientation, and consider a third dimension, reminding ourselves of our social responsibility. A scholar may be too egocentric and happy to live in an academic ivory tower. We need to better reflect who we, students of organizations, need to be and want to become as members of society. This may involve self-transformations and an orientation outwards. Tackling today's wicked problems calls for having an interested audience also outside academia. We need to lift our gaze and look further out, as far as we can see, and join researchers from other disciplines to allow for a holistic leap of the imagination (Brown, Deane, Harris, & Russell, 2010, p. 4).

We need more scholarship, and in particular 'sociocentric' – not egocentric – forms of it, guided by the ambition to create socially significant knowledge and having something of value to say to a broader audience. In this sense support of the scholar is a necessary but insufficient step for the development of organizational students worth their salt. Else, our theories may be running the danger of becoming a 'compound of dead ideas' as an article in *The Economist* (2016), embarrassingly outside our own inner circle, warned.

Conclusion

We, the authors of this essay, are astonished at how eloquent and captivating Schiller's speech still is and how well it captures concerns with today's academia. Reading through Schiller's lecture, a passionate appeal to scholars of his time, immediately sparked uncomfortable personal reflections. Are we ourselves open-minded and curious scholars, motivated to set ourselves on an ambitious and arduous quest for knowledge, not only for our own self-interest but also to benefit others? Or rather, are we Brotgelehrte merely seeking acceptance in our herds, eager to secure our bread and butter, defending and exploiting what we already are familiar with? How and why do we shift between the two positions – and which one dominates us right now, and why? This is a difficult, existential, yet essential question.

Admittedly, there is much convergence between Brotgelehrte-ism and powerful social practices at play that reinforce this tendency. Systemic, situational and individual forces drive what seems to us an increasingly unequal struggle between the scholar and the Brotgelehrte, making the latter the dominating prototype in our habitat. This is a tendency we should be alarmed about and which we, in this essay, have tried to problematize. Many researchers have an intellectual interest, a curious mind, some feeling of social responsibility, as well as a will to get out of their comfort zones to contribute with knowledge to the best of their abilities. Our careers are not only about 'playing the game' of being published or getting ahead in one's career (Knights & Clarke, 2014). Most of us swing between scholarly and Brotgelehrte orientations, as well as between our egocentricities and a wish to have something relevant and meaningful to say to broader audiences.

We sincerely hope that PhD students, early career and senior scholars will read our essay as part of their orientation or re-orientation. We need to be aware of our choices and underlying dynamics, and not be so trustful and uncritical of our, in many cases, not so scholarly environment. We hope that senior academics in particular, gate-keepers at journals, conferences, research councils, hiring

committees, PhD education, university management, and so on, will make more visible the traps of present-day academia, and help avoid at least some of the situations that produce Brotgelehrteism, and instead work towards creating and sustaining more scholarly attitudes and more hospitable habitats for the philosophical minds.

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