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Debating *Homo Academicus*: A Maieutic Quest for Self-Reflexivity

Daniel Ericsson and Silvia Cinque

Instigating a Debate on *Homo Academicus*

The fields of management and organization have long been permeated by the ontological and normative assumption that people are—and should be—maximizers of utility, a *Homo oeconomicus*. Facing a decision between alternatives, each of which is likely to give different outcomes, people in organizations, especially those that occupy managerial positions, should calculate the pros and cons of each of their alternatives, and choose the one that maximizes the outcome in terms of utility.

This assumption was established by early economic philosophers such as Adam Smith (1776/2012) and John Stuart Mill (1863/1962), and

D. Ericsson (✉)
School of Business and Economics, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden
e-mail: daniel.ericsson@lnu.se

Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

S. Cinque
University of Liverpool Management School, Liverpool, UK
e-mail: silvia.cinque@liverpool.ac.uk

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popularized by scholars ranging from Frederic Winslow Taylor (1911/1913) to Michael Jensen and William Meckling (1976), and is still feverishly reproduced and embraced, not the least by practitioners within certain walks of organizational life such as New Public Management and Corporate Governance. As an assemblage of different ideas such as (perfect) rationality, opportunism, and managerial agency, it is however something that has been heavily debated throughout the years. For example, the laureate of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, Herbert Simon (1957) contested the notion of "maximizing man" by introducing the notion of "satisficing man"; Nils Brunsson (1982), one of the progenitors of Scandinavian institutionalism, questioned the rationality of being rational, and argued for the rationality of acting irrationally; the well-known economists Lex Donaldson and James H. Davis (1991) pleaded for replacing opportunistic agents with benevolent stewards in both theory and practice; and more recently, Peter Fleming pronounced the death of the notorious character in his *The death of Homo economicus* (2017).

Today there is an abundance of both different ontological assumptions about people and normative stories on how to act and think in accordance with these different assumptions in the fields of management and organization. Scholars have widely confronted the ontology of *Homo oeconomicus* by presenting empirical evidence or theoretical and philosophical arguments in favor of alternative assumptions, replacing *Homo oeconomicus* as the protagonist of management and organization theory and practice with among (many) others *Homo faber* (Arendt, 1958, 2018), *Homo ludens* (Haustein, 1981), *Homo narrans* (Vasquez, 1993), *Homo politicus* (Nyborg, 2000), *Homo creativus* (Kakko & Inkinen, 2009), *Homo heuristics and Homo duplex* (Kluver et al., 2014), *Homo sustainabiliticus* (Russ, 2014), *Homo dialogicus* (Kent & Taylor, 2016), *Homo entrepreneurus* (Lounsbury et al., 2019), *Homo sacer* (Redmalm & Skoglund, 2020), and *Homo projecticus* (Jacobsson & Söderholm, 2021).

In this book, we would like to advance the debate about different assumptions about people in and around organizations, as well as their consequences, but in a self-reflexive direction: What ontological assumptions about themselves do scholars in the fields of management and

organization live by? Do they think they are something "special", distinctively separated from the life-world of managers and employees but linked with other academics such as, say, philosophers and sociologists? If so, what do they have in common? And what are the consequences and implications of the assumptions made?

Initially, the working title for our project was "Who do we think we are?" Being an intertextual allusion to Deep Purple's album from 1973 with the very same title, it is intended to convey a satirical twist on the Jante law's moralist expression "Who do you think you are?" (see Chapter 2 in this volume, Ericsson and Nilsson [2024]), and as such point to what we were looking for in a clear-cut manner: an unpretentious and productive debate about the ontological assumptions scholars in the fields of management and organization make about themselves—and that might result in unintended consequences. As an informative book title, however, it was severely underdeveloped, not to say "fraught with background" (to use Auerbach's [1953/1974] famous concept), in acute need of explication. Neither did it point to the "empirical" context we envisioned in terms of the fields of management and organization, nor did it signify the relation between ontological assumption and practical implications that we wished to scrutinize. In addition (and perhaps most troublesome): our working title kept quiet about our desire to stir a debate.

Soon enough, the working title for our project was to be abandoned in favor of the title that now graces the cover: "Debating *Homo academicus* in Management and Organization: Ontological Assumptions and Practical Implications". Albeit this title, in many respects, is straighter to the point, it does not present the intention and meaning of our project in "full light". It is still in need of contextualization and explication. Therefore, before we present the book's narrative structure and the different contributions, we believe it to be fruitful to pay some attention to each of the words in the title to inculcate even further the nuances that we ascribe to our project, and at the same time confront some of the troublesome issues that surfaced in the process of writing, reviewing, and editing the book.

Prior that, however, we would like to position our project in relation to what appears to be one of the major conversation topics within the

fields of management and organization: self-fulfilling prophecies, i.e., the phenomena in which unsubstantiated, unethical, or dysfunctional assumptions about humans can lead to adverse practical consequences (see, for instance, Eden, 1992; Felin & Foss, 2009; Kierein & Gold, 2000; McGregor, 1960; Merton, 1948; Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014). It is in light of such dangers, we argue, that management and organization scholars need to reflect upon the taken-for-granted assumptions they make of themselves, and to interrogate what consequences these assumptions bring to the research they conduct, the knowledge they produce, and the practical implications they advocate. As we see it, it is in relation to such a need for reflexivity that this book acquires both its meaning and its relevance.

On Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

The phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy has been problematized throughout history, in its many different shapes and contexts. Perhaps one of the oldest and most known representations of it, the *Pygmalion effect*, stems from Greek mythology and tells the story of the sculptor Pygmalion who takes such a liking to his statue, Galatea, that it eventually comes to life. Throughout history, this myth has acquired a strong positive meaning, not the least in educational settings where it has come to represent the idea that a teacher's expectations of students have a positive impact on their performances (see Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Galatea, in turn, has come to name the phenomenon where the self-fulfilling prophecy is not dependent on a relation, but generated within the individual, i.e., the *Galatea effect* refers to a situation in which one's beliefs in one's own abilities affect one's performance in a positive manner (see Eden, 1992). Where the self-fulfilling prophecy has a reversed outcome, i.e., when low expectations on individuals cause them to perform poorly, educational scholars often refer to it as the *Golem effect* (Babad et al., 1982). This effect also has deep cultural roots, as its name is taken from a legend within Jewish mythology. According to this legend, Golem was a clay creature brought to life by Rabbi Loew in Prague in the sixteenth century with the intention of protecting the Jews

from anti-Semitic persecution. However, Golem goes astray in a spiral of violence, and has to be put to sleep.

As cultural memes, the Pygmalion, Galatea, and Golem effects, each individually or taken together, permeate not only popular culture—from Frankenstein's monster and Pinocchio to My Fair Lady and Pretty Woman—but also the fields of management and organization. For instance, just to name some of the different theories and concepts that are impregnated with ideas on self-fulfilling prophecies: the Golem effect echoes in McGregor's (1960) Theory X, whereas the Pygmalion effect echoes in Theory Y; the conversation on transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) takes the Pygmalion effect for granted; and Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory of motivation assumes the workings of the Galatea effect. According to Eden (1992), even Management by Objectives might set the stage for self-fulfilling prophecies; when successfully implemented, Management by Objectives creates "a double expectation effects, i.e., a Pygmalion effect on the part of the manager and a Galatea effect on the subordinate's part" (p. 297).

On an overall level, it seems as if scholars in the fields of management and organization tend to overtly reflect upon self-fulfilling prophecies as a central empirical aspect of work organizations (see Kierein & Gold, 2000) and of the empirical relation between leaders and followers (see Whiteley et al., 2012). Occasionally, they also turn their empirical attention to management and organizational development consultants, who are seen as prophets (or Messiahs) that unwittingly fulfill their own prophecies (Eden, 1986). Self-fulfilling theories in use by the scholars themselves have also been a conversation topic even if most attention has been paid to theories within economics and their supposedly negative effect on management and organization practices (see Felin & Foss, 2009; Ferraro et al., 2005). Problematizing self-fulfilling prophecies at work within management and organization research is, however, rarer—besides an overarching methodological awareness of experimenter or observer effects and interpretative biases (see, for instance, Bell et al., 2022). There are however three different strands of research that address and problematize how management and organization researchers' assumptions, in one way or the other, influence research outcomes in a self-fulfilling manner.

The first of these strands acknowledges the paradigmatic aspects of research. With reference to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) seminal *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, it is here argued that researchers' assumptions about the nature of, on the one hand, social science and, on the other hand, society are ordered in four distinct paradigms: the radical humanist paradigm, the radical structuralist paradigm, the interpretative paradigm, and the functionalist paradigm. These paradigms, it is further argued, encompass different assumptions about ontology, epistemology, human nature, and methodology, and they are mutually exclusive—or incommensurable—due to their inherent differences. All in all, these differences boil down to two major incommensurable set of assumptions: (1) the ontological assumptions on whether reality is "out there", external to the researcher, or "in there", a product of individual consciousness—which in turn is inextricably intertwined with the epistemological assumption whether it is possible to obtain either objective knowledge or subjective knowledge; and (2) the assumptions on whether research should concern societal regulation or radical change. Burrell and Morgan (1979) do not explicitly deal with self-fulfilling prophecies, but clearly the idea about incommensurable paradigms fosters research that is consistent with the underlying assumptions of the paradigms. If not, then the research would be a troublesome case of "mixed discourse" (Giorgi, 1994), that is, mixing incommensurable assumptions.

The second strand of research that problematizes management and organization researchers' assumptions in relation to the research outcome in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies is the metaphorical approach. Most vividly, this approach has been brought forward by Gareth Morgan, who in his *Images of Organization* (1986) presents eight different ways of thinking about and seeing organizations—as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination. Thinking about and seeing something *as* something is metaphorical in character, and metaphors, Morgan argues (p. 13), not only frame and limit our understanding of the world, they are also powerful devices to reproduce taken-for-granted assumptions. That is, if researchers in the fields of management and organization only talk about, say, organizations as if they were machines,

then we will most likely end up advocating managerial practices adapted to running the machine in a smooth but mechanistic manner. In this regard, Morgan speaks in favor of the use of many different metaphors to grapple with the complexities and ambiguities of organizations, but his book has also prompted a self-reflexive turn toward the (root) metaphors that researchers themselves live by (see Jermier & Forbes, 2011; Norén, 1995; Örtenblad, 2024).

The third strand, attentive to self-fulfilling prophecies among researchers, is constructionist in character, with a slight postmodern twist. Within this strand, management and organization researchers acknowledge on the one hand the constructionist bridging of the chasm between subjectivism and objectivism as conveyed by the Thomas theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991; Merton, 1948), and on the other hand the hermeneutic idea of preunderstanding (see Alvesson & Sandberg, 2022). The resulting positioning is a self-reflexive one, which highlights the researcher's subjective (dis)position to the phenomenon at hand—and to the knowledge produced.

As we see it, all three of these strands have had considerable impact within the fields of management and organization, heightening both theoretical and methodological awareness. However, in none of these strands has attention specifically been directed to the assumptions scholars make of themselves and how these assumptions might turn into troublesome self-fulfilling prophecies.

On "Debating *Homo Academicus* in Management and Organization"

Although we have carefully weighed our words in the title, each and every one of them is in need of some explication and contextualization to understand the nuances that we ascribe to our project. To start with "debating", the book is published in Palgrave's book series *Debates in Business and Management*, which has the explicit intention to present a variety of positions given a specific topic/debate. That is, we are acknowledging both the notion that there are specific topics/debates in business

and management *and* the possibility of a neighborly debate between researchers of different positions. At the same time, we are well aware of the different debating traditions in academia. On the one hand, there is the *eristic* tradition in which debate is perceived of as a struggle to defeat the opponent, not for the sake of good arguments, but for the sake of the victory in itself (as sarcastically outlined by Arthur Schopenhauer) (see Rankin, 1983). On the other hand, there is Socrates' somewhat forgotten *maieutic* tradition in which debates are seen as vehicles for advancing—or rather: *delivering*—the speaking partner's arguments (Rankin, 1983). Reflecting upon the different implications these two traditions have for life in academia in general, and in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies specifically, we have taken an ethical stand in favor of the latter: instead of approaching our book project as an eristic struggle with the final and absolute outcome of crowning the best ontological assumptions scholars in the fields of management and organization could make about themselves, we have approached it as a maieutic quest, as an ongoing conversation through which discursive positions on the subject are made visible, reflected upon, and (perhaps could be) altered. Hopefully, this ethical stance of ours enables us to challenge the assumption of *Homo academicus* as a "winner of debates"—and to refrain from partaking in the constructions of eristic scholar identities in the fields of management and organization. In our opinion, there are already too many of them out there.

Closely connected to the issue of "debating" is the issue of constructing solid and compelling arguments. In this regard, the eristic tradition is typically characterized by "rhetoric devices" whose sole purpose is to win over the opponent by ontologically distinguishing "what is" from "what is not" (see Potter, 1996). Most often, these rhetoric devices come in the form of "theoretical rigor", "empirical evidence", and "analytic statistics". By contrast, scholars engaging in the maieutic tradition are typically trying to probe what potentially "could be" together with the opponent in an emancipatory manner—which is an endeavor characterized by a completely different type of rhetoric, as we see it. Instead of hitting their opponent in the head with hard, cold, and objective facts, maieutics typically deliver arguments from a subjective (dis)position characterized by (a mutual) respect and empathy for

the opponent paired with a playful openness for the unknown. Their arguments are typically sprung from their subjective and historically mediated experiences, mobilized in unforeseen ways, and the rhetorical power of their arguments depend on their ability to resonate or fuse with the opponent's subjective and historically mediated experience (see Gadamer, 1979). Consequently, the eristic weaponry of validity, reliability, and generalizability is typically downplayed in favor of plausibility, intelligibility, and promises; deduction and induction are typically overtaken by hermeneutic abduction (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009); and traditional scientific writing, in accordance with the so-called IMRAD-model (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion), is typically replaced by essayistic forms of writing. As we see it, this typical maieutic (dis)position has much in common with the type of academic craftsmanship that Charles Wright Mills (1959) advocated for in terms of *sociological imagination*: to see beyond what is "here and now", to question the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, to focus upon the greater picture and problematize how seemingly small things in life fit into this picture, and, above all, to shift perspectives (see also Ericsson & Kostera, 2022).

In the process of writing, reviewing, and editing this volume, all of the above typical characteristics of majestic argumentation and imagination have been encouraged in different ways and to different extents. As editors we, however, have taken into consideration that scholars within the fields of management and organization not only are brought up and trained in different scientific traditions but also to varying degrees have to face the hegemony of scientific writing. In this regard, one could say that our quest for a maieutic debate at once is a quest for maieutic arguments, quality measures, forms of conclusions, as well as forms of writing.

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Regarding the subject up for debate, the "*Homo academicus*" in the book's title, is, of course, an intertextual wink to Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) seminal text and other classics problematizing different versions of "*Homo*". By using this signifier, our intent is to convey the self-reflexive and critical, not to say emancipatory, reading effects that we

are hoping for, problematizing assumptions about both scholarly positions and dispositions. However, the usage of "*Homo*" is not without controversy, and neither is our overarching generalized interest: to discuss ontological assumptions about academic "man" within the fields of management and organization, as both "*Homo*" and "man" have strong gendered connotations, not the least in Anglo-Saxon language communities. In this regard, we here face a delicate dilemma: *either* conveying the precise meaning we would like to attach to "Homo" and "man" ("a human being of either sex") and being accused of using gendering language, *or* using imprecise but non-gendered alternatives to "man" such as "humanity" or "mankind" (i.e. "human beings considered collectively" or "the human race" in the dictionary sense). "Human nature", as we occasionally used in our initial call for papers, narrows attention to general biological and/or psychological characteristics but might lead the reader in unwarranted directions. By comparison, "man" is significantly more open and inclusive of different aspects (and assumptions) of life.

We are of course not the first to face this dilemma, and sad to say there seems to be no complete escape out of the gendered intricacies of language. As we see it, however, there are strategies to mitigate the gap between *intentio auctoris* and the reading effects the use of language might trigger. On the one hand, we deem it fruitful to address the issue in an open and honest manner, revealing and discussing one's intentions and deliberations. On the other hand, we see it as necessary, as far as it is possible, to take responsibility, as both authors and editors, not only for the different texts in the book but also for the reading of it. The book you are holding in your hand is the outcome of these two strategies: we have omitted gendered expressions, such as "assumptions about man", in all but those cases where we openly scrutinize the assumption behind that assumption or are bound by explicit references that are not gender neutral (i.e., the Thomas theorem above); and we have actively rewritten text passages that could provoke gendering reading effects. However, we have kept "*Homo*" in the title, as well as in this introductory chapter and in most of the other chapters, since we reckon this to be one too well-established concept to abandon, given the positioning of the book and its contribution. Taken together, we sincerely hope that our dealings

with our dilemma neither make the book into a gendered (or even worse, sexist) enterprise nor forfeit some of the book's core ideas and spirit.

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Besides being fraught with background, the working title "Who do we think we are?" also entailed a troublesome reference to a "we". Although we (the editors) eventually came to abandon the working title, and although the "we" (in the working title) neither was intended to function as some sort of rhetorical device to create homogeneity or similarity between the contributors nor to create an intrusive or unwanted bond between the writers and the readers, this "we" triggered us (the editors) to reflect upon the position from which we (the editors and the contributors) speak—and what is spoken about. Some "empirical" specification was clearly needed in regard to both the contributors' collective and the content of the book.

After some deliberation, "management and organization" seemed to be the common denominator for both contributors and content. Despite our open call for contributions (in which the book title only was "Debating *Homo academicus*"), it turned out that almost all of the responders to the call, in one way or the other, explicitly positioned their texts in relation to "management and organization". It also seemed to be a matter of professional identity for them as they presented their professional areas of expertise and/or subject affiliations in terms of management and organization.

However, "management" and "organization" are two fuzzy and rather fluent concepts that could point in many different directions, and consequently could be used to draw up many different demarcation lines between people and subject areas—which in turn have different consequences for scholars in what they do and how they identify themselves. To acknowledge the plenitude of different research areas that are subsumed under the moniker "management and organization", we therefore find it important to specify that whenever we refer to "management and organization" we mean "scholars working in the fields of management and organization". Hopefully, this specification accommodates the

contributors and their texts, as well as invites the reader, in an inclusive manner.

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Last but not least, a short note on the book's subtitle, "Ontological assumptions and practical implications", in which "ontological assumptions" is intended to signify different basic assumptions about reality, i.e., "what is" vs. "what is not". In the context of "*Homo academicus* in management and organization", scholars in these fields could, for instance, assume that they are diligent and not lazy. However, this does not mean that they *are* diligent or that diligence is part of their identity or the role that they shoulder. It could very well be, not the least in light of self-fulfilling prophecies, that they become what they assume they are, but that is, in the end, an empirical question whose answer lies outside the scope of our book. Throughout the book we have therefore tried to steer away from essentialist thinking and identity or role categorizations, and to let "ontological assumptions" be nothing but just "ontological assumptions". In the pale cast of thought, this proved to be easier said than done, as ontological assumptions most often are tightly woven together with identity and role constructions. In this regard, one could say that issues of identity and roles are crucial parts of the "practical implications" indicated by the subtitle, but certainly not restricted to these issues.

On the Book's Narrative Structure and Content

By taking the above stands, we believe that we have positioned the book so that it is in line with the intention behind the publisher's book series, highlighting both the diversity of arguments and not a priori suppressing the arguments thematically or in any other way. As we see it, the book is not predicated upon any shared themes, and it was not construed in such a manner: we had an open call for contributions on the subject of the assumptions we make about ourselves as researchers, and the researchers

that responded to the call got to develop their ideas freely in the abstracts. In different ways, each of the chapters discloses, problematizes, and criticizes different ontological assumptions about *Homo academicus* that underpins research in the fields of management and organization.

However, a posteriori (or rather: in the process of working with the book, editing and reviewing[1] the chapters) we came to develop an understanding of the ontological assumptions that seemed to be the basis for the assumptions discussed in the different chapters, sort of meta-assumptions. It seemed to us that our instigated debate revolved around two interrelated issues (or ideological tensions): (1) The extent to which scholars in the fields of management and organization are assumed to be—and should be—independent of social pressures, normative expectations, conventions, and institutional logics, and (2) The extent to which scholars in the fields of management and organization are assumed to speak—and should speak—from a position endowed with both obligations and privileges. And, through the different ways in which the book's contributors tackle these interrelated issues, we came to discern three more or less distinct argumentative ontological themes and positions:

Homo moralis: the assumption that scholars in the fields of management and organization on moral grounds should strive to be independent of social pressures, normative expectations, conventions, and institutional logics, and should be speaking from distinct privileged positions imbued with moral obligations.

Homo reflectivus: the assumption that scholars in the fields of management and organization are highly dependent on social pressures, normative expectations, conventions, and institutional logics, but should counteract such dependencies by speaking from positions based on self-reflexivity.

Homo mutatus: the assumption that scholars in the fields of management and organization are highly dependent on social pressures, normative expectations, conventions, and institutional logics, and therefore should strive to rethink the position from which to speak.

[1] All of the chapters have been subjected to double blind review, and we—the editors—would like to express our deepest gratitude to our colleagues who devoted their competence, time, and energy to act as reviewers: David Calås, Jeannie Holstein, Kai Inga Liehr Storm, Simon Parker, Suvi Satama, Ken Starkey, and Ruth Weatherall. We would also like to express our appreciation to the anonymous reviewers that commented upon our initial book proposal. It made us sharpen both our ideas and our arguments.

In the end, we decided to let these meta-assumptions form the narrative structure of the book and group the chapters in three different parts. On the one hand, the grouping made sense, for the sake of clarity of arguments, to highlight both similarities and dissimilarities between the chapters; and on the other hand, we deemed it fruitful to contribute with an overarching argumentative position, also in the introductory chapter, by means of the grouping per se. Arranging the chapters into three different parts was, however, not an unambiguous task. Some, not to say many or even all of the chapters, more or less fall in-between our imposed narrative structure. That is, *Homo moralis*, *Homo reflectivus*, and *Homo mutatus* are not mutually exclusive constructs. They are nothing but heuristic devices to even further stimulate a self-reflexive debate on *Homo academicus* within the fields of management and organization.

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In Part One—*Homo moralis*—Daniel Ericsson and Pernilla Nilsson in "When management and organization came to the village of Jante" (Chapter 2) open up the debate by engaging with the question "who do we think we are?" through the moral lens of the Law of Jante—i.e. the moral imperative "you are not to think that you are anything special". Through their writing, the authors trace how the Law of Jante has been enacted within academia, business schools, and the fields of organization and management, and end up problematizing the (de)moralizing consequences for scholars in these fields in terms of, as they put it, "disbelief in oneself and one's ability and right to contribute to society".

Questioning oneself as an academic researcher is also the topic of Chapter 3, "Aren't we all human?: On the illusion of the extraordinary academic", in which Anders Örtenblad engages in the triggering reflection about the lack of self-reflection in conducting organization and management research. Örtenblad's starting point is the consideration that the *Homo academicus* tends to treat the people studied as human beings, as if they are biased, while considering their selves as being "extraordinary". In this chapter, the author delves into his own academic experiences in the area of management fashion, to discuss the extent to

which scholars could be less gullible, irrational, and biased than those individuals they study.

First out in Part Two—*Homo reflectivus*—is Pär Vasko who in "Existential explorations of others and oneself as a researcher" (Chapter 4) engages in an exploration of others and oneself as a researcher through the illustration of three interwoven existential layers: (i) the existential paradoxes experienced by the author as a doctoral student in business administration; (ii) the theoretical key points of stewardship and agency theory; and (iii) the author's subjective exploration of taken-for-granted assumptions about human beings. Through these three existential layers, Vasko discusses how they contribute to the meaning of an "existential understanding" when theorizing about others while reflecting upon assumptions the researcher makes about oneself.

Martin Holgersson follows suit with "*Homo scribens*—Notes on writing management" (Chapter 5) in which he reflects on *Homo academicus* as a writing species. Whilst acknowledging the traditional assumption that sees management scholars as development consultants, who create knowledge in order to make organizations more efficient and well-functioning, Holgersson shifts the spotlight onto writing as the central and indispensable activity in developing management research. Far from being merely instrumental, writing is imbued with political aspects: something that places great responsibility on management scholars in the way they produce and disseminate scientific knowledge.

In "Living as an *academic-cum-something else*: How I learned to stop worrying and love academia" (Chapter 6), Carmelo Mazza earnestly reflects upon his personal struggle to be a *Homo academicus*, when another job (i.e. management consultancy) does not allow him to fully meet the requirements of being a *Homo academicus.* Interestingly, what the author refers to as "academic-cum-something else" allows him to keep loving academia without sharing the stress of the increasing managerialization of higher educational institutions, while relieving the burn-out of consultancy and management. In sharing his personal academic journey at the end of his Ph.D. in Organization Theory, Mazza seeks to answer the thought-provoking question of whether today's *Homo academicus* should, or should not, vanish into something else in order to make a new academia emerge.

Maira Babri titles Chapter 7 "*Homo academicus* as becoming nomadic: Reflections through a journey of pregnancy and motherhood". In it she outlines the shift she experienced in her academic identity from a static scholarly position toward a condition of "nomadism". Drawing from Braidotti's *Nomadic subject and nomadic ethics*, Babri initially delivers a somehow bitter and melancholic reflection on her positionality at the margins of the dominant and rational ideal academic, eventually acquiring strength through the conscious self-determination as "academic nomad"—one who is rooted and in becoming at the same time.

Kate Black, Gosia Ciesielska, and Dawn Whitton are the authors of Chapter 8, titled "'Dragged in the opposite direction': Identity tension facing women academics in business and management studies". The arguments develop between the three contributors, three female academics in the field of business and management, who take a reflexive-reflective approach to their academic experiences. Theoretically, the authors ground their conversation in the socio-cultural perspectives of identity, to question who they think they are, and to what extent they are who they want to be. Gender emerges as a central aspect of the chapter, with the authors examining an array of tensions they navigate as female academics in crafting their genuine sense of identity vis-à-vis the one expected by others—both inside and outside their institutions.

Gender is also at the core of the first chapter in Part Three—*Homo mutatus*. In "*Homo academicus* and gender: The cracking assumptions of rationality" (Chapter 9), Anna M. Górska delves into the ontological assumptions underlying academic identities in the fields of management and organization in the context of New Public Management (NPM). The author's study uncovers how NPM has reshaped the management scholars' ontological beliefs about their roles and capabilities, highlighting the gendered dimensions of these shifts. In particular, the focus is on how the tendency to prioritize research over teaching under NPM not only exacerbates gender inequalities but also leads to a reframing of academic identity. Hence, the quest for Higher Education institutions to reassess performance criteria to foster more equitable and supportive conditions.

In Chapter 10, "Beyond conventional leadership: On *Homo academicus (dux)* and ontological assumptions in academia", Mattias Jacobsson and Anders Söderholm explore what it means to be a *Homo academicus* in the fields of organization and management, and they do so in relation to the academic leader (*Homo academicus dux*). The authors reflect on three common yet (what they see as) incorrect assumptions held in the literature pertaining to *the distribution of power, the role of dependencies among units and practices*, and *how a sense of belonging is formed*. The authors envisage three alternative conditions that contour a new academic rationality and help move beyond conventional leadership. These are *reversed hierarchy*, *lateral independence*, and *community-based belonging*.

Mikael Lundgren and Martin Blom follow suit with "From *Homo academicus activistarum* to *Homo academicus imaginatus*" (Chapter 11). In focus is the assumption that forms the role and practice of the *Homo academic activistarum*: the scholar who ideologically turns to activism to balance the tension between a sense of urgency to solve pressing social problems, and a diminishing faith in traditional institutions such as universities. Problematizing this assumption, the authors turn to the fields of organization and management and envision the scholar as *Homo academicus imaginatus*. In both teaching and research, the imaginative scholar is one who engages in "imaginative performativity", promoting reflexivity and alternative thinking while avoiding the pitfalls and perils of academic activism.

Last but not least, Alf Westelius closes the *Homo mutatus* part of the book with "*Homo academicus* as guild, employment and attitude: The academy in transition" (Chapter 12). The chapter hosts Alf Westelius' consideration of three very different assumptions about who counts as *Homo academicus*: being part of a guild, holding employment at a university, or having internalized a specific attitude toward knowledge and learning in terms of passion, curiosity and the search for intellectual challenges. The author examines current transitions in the academy and provides an interesting read of how the three different conceptions interact, challenge and are challenged by each other and by trends in the societies of which they form parts.

A Maieutic Quest for Reflexivity

Having outlined the rationale behind our book project, positioned it in relation to three of the most prominent strands of research in the fields of management and organization that deal with ontological assumptions and practical consequences, and presented eleven (twelve with this introductory chapter) very different debate positions, we hope to have inspired a continued self-reflexive debate on *Homo academicus* within the fields of management and organization. In this regard, our project is a quest for reflexivity—as opposed to a search for it. Whereas "the search" is oriented toward a final end state—a pre-defined goal, "the quest" is oriented toward its very own intrinsic values. Whereas "the search" is about storytelling, "the quest" is epic in character: it is an adventure into the unknown, based on the recognition that the unknown never will (and cannot) be fully known. "The quest" is, as Kostera (2005) eloquently expresses it, "a textual travel in ideas".

And, as ours is an ongoing travel, we do not put a full stop to our quest. Instead, we end this introductory chapter with a colon. It is time for you, our reader, to read, reflect, and continue the debate:

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