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Right to Publish: Towards Self-Regulating Scholarly Community

Note: The ideas presented here were drawn from the observation of Georgian HE reality. I realize that in different countries there are different practices established and that straightforward comparison between Georgia and these countries can be misleading. But I do hope that despite differences there are similarities too and if these thoughts overlap with already existing concerns and if this leads to international discussion, then the preliminary task can be considered as fulfilled.

One of the factors hindering the free development of humanities in Georgia, according to my opinion, is the fetishization and absolutization of peer review, citation indexes and journals with high impact factor. But if I am a researcher, say, at some Institute, or appointed professor at the university (or both of them), why should the importance of my thoughts depend of the issue of publishing/not-publishing them in some "prestigious" journals? These journals seem to have quite selective editorial policy and the researcher has to wait for acceptance for months. Even more, on the basis of remarks by anonymous editors, researcher might have to make significant changes in his/her paper. I am not denying the fact, that the opinion of other (even anonymous) colleagues might be useful and interesting for the researcher who submitted the paper and even help to really improve the work. But for this to happen, it is not necessary to send the paper in the journal with peer review. Nowadays, using the internet, researcher can have intensive communication with his/her colleagues who live in the different countries of the world (global Covid pandemic has even more intensified such kind of communication) and it is completely possible to hear useful opinions from them too. I think that *requirement* to publish in the journals with high impact-factor, a practice which has seen widespread acceptance in Georgia, significantly hinders the creativity and free development of humanities. The researcher has to allocate significant time resource in order to "fit" with journal requirements and then to wait patiently. In addition to this, he/she has to consider, in what databases is the journal of his/her choice indexed, and how "high" is its impact-factor. Frequently the access to the content of such journals is closed and they are available only for subscribers. There exists a whole industry of scientific/scholarly online databases, which are owned by private companies. Therefore, there exists a whole chain of

demand/supply which is not linked at all with the idea of free distribution of scientific/scholarly knowledge. We have to add the following unfavorable circumstances peculiar to Georgia to get the fuller picture: high hourly load of professors, low salaries, miserable pensions, neglect of the research as such (which frequently is valued only when it can be "measured" during accreditation procedures in order to satisfy the standards), insufficient knowledge of digital technologies.

The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), has more than 16 000 indexed journals (as of August, 2021). As it is well-known, the great advantage of this system is that the content of journals which are indexed in DOAJ, can be accessed freely, without any registration and complementary payments. Nevertheless, DOAJ also has its own "quality control process" where several criteria are listed. According to one of them, "[a]ll articles must pass through a quality control system (peer review) before publication."[1]

Here I want to note that I do not hint that peer review (be it blind or transparent) is outdated and ineffective. I do not have anything against open access peer review journals. I just want to say that we should not imagine peer review system as only mechanism which makes it possible to publish papers and control "scholarly quality" (a term which seems odd to me). I strongly believe, that against the background of contemporary technological developments, *scholar should be able to publish his papers on the internet and that such papers* – which might be uploaded on the official personal webpage of the researcher (on faculty webpage) or webpage of the research center where researcher is employed – *should "count" in the same manner as the papers published in "prestigious" journals* (in the "counting" I mean the practice now established in Georgian universities – state as well as private – when the university recognizes only the articles which are published in the journals which satisfy the predetermined criteria: that of peer review, indexing in Scopus or ERIH+, impact factor, etc.). I am a philosopher and therefore my example will be drawn from philosophy: If an individual gains PhD degree in philosophy and afterwards becomes employed in the research center or is appointed at an academic position at the university (or both), this means, that he/she is accepted as a member of scholarly community. I argue that this fact grants this individual the *right to publish*: he/she has the right, to publish his thoughts independently and share them through the internet to his/her colleagues. Moreover, he/she has the right that his/her works to be recognized as "scholarly" (without continually testing with formal procedures that individual's scholarly "quality"). This individual is in the same degree responsible on his/her views when they are published independently, as were it the case, that his/her paper was published in some prestigious academic journal. After all, academic journals are relatively new "invention". For centuries philosophers were conveying their views through treatises and other literary forms. I think that this excellent tradition should be revitalized in contemporary

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[1] https://www.doaj.org/apply/guide/

philosophy (and perhaps also in other disciplines too). Researchers should have the freedom of choice: to publish their papers in academic journals or to use the *personal right to publish*. I cannot guess why my thoughts should be subjected to the "quality" scrutiny from the side of anonymous experts, when I publish the article with the only purpose – to have an open and transparent debates within the scholarly community. Therefore, I think that transparent peer review within, say, the research center, should be only formal and should not exercise any "control". If something which I write, is of "low quality" and should be criticized, that will be criticized anyway by scholarly community and the "filtration" of the quality will naturally occur. To say this tautologically (and sometimes tautologies tell us a lot!), the paper which will attract attention, will attract attention and that won't, won't.

If the research and HE institutions will implement this practice and enable scholars to publish papers on their personal webpages, then scholarly community will make a big step in the process of freeing itself from forces which are founded on opaque and mercantilist principles and get closer to the ideal of *self-regulating scholarly community founded on anarchist principles.* I am writing "ideal" because I am not expecting that existing power centers (state, business corporations, research centers, universities) will readily concede with regard to this issue. Moreover, I do not think it feasible to imagine scholarly community without any power/knowledge hierarchies. But I suggest that *the ideal of self-regulating scholarly community is an alternative which should effectively counterbalance existing power hierarchies*. My anarchist program does not go beyond this "republican" position.[2]

To anticipate some possible objections: I think it is less expected, that in the case of the implementation of the above-mentioned practice, researchers will suddenly upload on their webpages completely irrelevant and absolutely "non-scholarly" texts: there is always a hidden consensus inside the scholarly community, as what to be regarded as scholarship. This means, that we should not expect that already established professors or the academics at the beginning of their career development will publish poetic volumes or fiction literature. Even in the cases, where published papers will question existing standards and mechanisms, this will not have a bad effect. On the contrary, it will stimulate debate and discussion. Here the peculiarity of philosophical discourse is salient: it is almost universally accepted, I believe, that philosophy is self-reflective enterprise: philosophers not only philosophize, but with their philosophizing they sometimes even change the understanding of philosophy, what is meant under philosophy and philosophizing (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger to name a few). It is true, that the burden of such fundamental changes rests on the shoulders of the few, but this

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[2] Brian Martin has more fully developed anarchistic position (with regards to science). See https://documents.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/94raven.html#fn5. Detailed commentaries on this paper go beyond the aim of my discussion here. I am not sure whether the implementation of anarchist science policy (inclusion of non-scientists in science etc.) will have the results that Martin anticipates, but I agree with the general idea of self-organization of science (in our case – scholarship), although I do not consider its full realization at the given stage as feasible.

does not mean that only famous philosophers were philosophizing and in our papers we should only discuss what was said by prominent thinkers. Reappropriation of the right to publish (reappropriation – because this right was once enjoyed by philosophers) for the researchers will broaden their creative potential and therefore, stimulate the development of thought.