The basement interviews: Peter Suber

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The Basement Interviews: Peter Suber

Free Online Scholarship

Philosopher, jurist, and one-time stand-up comic, Peter Suber is widely viewed as the de facto leader of the open access (OA) movement.

A senior researcher at the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), Open Access Project Director for the public interest advocacy group Public Knowledge, and Research Professor of Philosophy at Earlham College, Suber is also an advisor to a number of other OA-related organisations — including the Wikimedia Foundation, the Open Knowledge Foundation, and the Australian Open Access to Knowledge Law Project (OAK).

Suber was born in Evanston, Illinois, in 1951. His father was a jazz magazine publisher. His mother — Grace Mary Stern — became a prominent Illinois state senator, and in 1982 was the Democratic Party candidate for lieutenant governor of Illinois, running with Adlai Stevenson III.

Suber studied philosophy at Earlham College (in Richmond, Indiana), and then did a doctorate in philosophy and a law degree, both at Northwestern University. While at Earlham he spent a sabbatical year in Douglas Hofstadter's artificial intelligence lab as well.

To pay his way through graduate school, Suber developed a side-career as a stand-up comedian, working in clubs, universities, tech conferences, and television. As his gigs became more plentiful and lucrative, he had to choose between full-time philosophy and full-time comedy. The choice for philosophy was an easy one, in part, he says, because teaching philosophy meant that he didn't have to leave comedy entirely behind!

Choosing philosophy didn't assure him a career, however. After turning down an unsatisfactory tenure-track job offer he realised that the tight job market did not allow him to be picky. He might have returned to comedy, but acquired Graves disease (a thyroid condition now under control), which made him too hoarse to speak in public for several months. So he started law school and remained full-time in the philosophy job market. His thinking was that if he found a good job in philosophy, he'd take it; and if not, he'd be trained for something else.

After two years of law school he got an offer from his alma mater, which he considered an ideal job. So he arranged with his Dean to finish law school before starting his job, and then returned to Earlham to teach philosophy, law, and occasionally computer science.

In the mid 1990s, intrigued by the potential of the Web, Suber began to put his academic papers online. To his surprise, he immediately began to receive emails from other researchers wanting to discuss his ideas. This was just the kind of feedback that he had always expected to get by publishing in print, but which rarely materialised until his work was available online.

Excited by his experience, Suber began to make contact with other academics doing the same, and started a weekly newsletter. His plan was to report on developments, and encourage other researchers to take advantage of the new medium for disseminating their scholarship. Soon he was sufficiently gripped by the possibilities of what he now called "Free Online Scholarship" (FOS) that Suber devoted a sabbatical year to furthering his aim, and eventually deciding to put his academic career on hold to devote all his energies to FOS.

For this Suber realised he would need funding. He soon secured a grant from George Soros' Open Society Institute (OSI) and in 2003, after a final post-sabbatical year of teaching, he and his wife (who had been teaching classics at Earlham) both gave up their tenured positions, and moved to Maine — where Suber threw himself his new project with energy and determination.

That he had something to offer the world in his new role became apparent at a meeting organised by OSI in 2002. Held in Budapest, the aim of the event was to explore possible synergies between a number of apparently related developments — including several initiatives undertaken by SPARC to address the so-called "serials crisis", the nascent self-archiving movement, and the emergence of new publishers like Biomed Central, who were committed to exploiting the internet to develop new publishing models that would make research papers freely available to everyone, rather than accessible only to those able to afford the constantly rising journal subscriptions.

The meeting was hugely successful, giving birth both to the open access movement and the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI). It also attracted $3 million in funding from George Soros, for projects aimed at providing what was now no longer called Free Online Scholarship, but open access. Those attending the Budapest meeting also decided that it would be good to produce an open access manifesto — and the task of writing it fell to Suber.

In penning the manifesto Suber first demonstrated his unique ability to articulate the aims and aspirations of the movement in strikingly clear and compelling terms. Frederick Friend, one of the other attendees of the Budapest meeting, describes it thus: "His beautiful words and phrasing gave the movement a vision which people in every country have been able to relate to."

In recognition of his important contribution to OA, OSI has continued to fund Suber's activities ever since, enabling him to develop his daily-updated blog (*Open Access News*) and engage in advocacy. And with additional support from SPARC Suber has been able to continue writing his (now monthly) newsletter —*The SPARC Open Access Newsletter*. Both publications have become key platforms for promoting open access, and for publicising and recording its progress. And along with the Budapest manifesto, they are viewed as the bible of the OA movement. Suber is also widely sought out for advice by researchers, librarians, researcher funders, publishers, and governments.

Above all Suber's work is valued for its precision and its unemotional but tireless advocacy for a cause that he has both reported on and helped to shape. "All of his writing has an intellectual rigour that one might expect from a good philosopher or jurist," explains the director of SPARC Europe David Prosser. "He can construct and deconstruct arguments. It is amazing to see him methodically pick-apart an anti-OA piece."

Adds Prosser, "He is devastating on sloppy logic, inconsistencies, and disingenuous ideas, as well as being very clear on the distinction between opinion and fact."

It is his objectivity and rationality above all that has seen Suber become the unofficial leader of the movement. His calm and inclusive approach has also proved the essential glue to hold together an often rowdy and rumbustious collection of highly-opinionated and disputatious individuals. For like most of the burgeoning free and open movements, the open access movement is constantly riven with disagreements and factional in-fighting, most notably between supporters of self-archiving (the so-called green road to open access), and those who insist that open access publishing (the gold road) is the best way forward.

At the heart of Suber's ability to unite the movement is a commitment to what he calls "the big tent" — a tent from which no faction of the open access movement is excluded, and in which all shades of opinion are welcomed. His blog covers points of view he does not personally accept, but he gives them space to make their case before offering his own constructive, critical comments.

In his own analytic pieces, Suber often argues that the movement will make faster progress by harnessing differences than by quarrelling about them, but he does not hesitate to criticise ideas he believes are incorrect or untenable, even from allies. He achieves the difficult balance of being inclusive but not woolly-minded or indecisive.

Behind his approach lies a belief in the principle that the best way of achieving open access is to acknowledge when different strategies are compatible and to tap the energy of everyone who wants to play a part. The way to think about it, he says, is as a division of labour.

"It's good for us that some people want to pursue OA journals first, because they will work hard to create OA journals. It's also good that some people want to pursue OA repositories first, because they will work hard to create and fill OA repositories. The two strategies are complementary and we need them both. Individuals have to decide how to spend their time, but the movement doesn't have to decide which of these strategies is more urgent. On the contrary, it should support this division of labour."

Unlike many of his fellow OA advocates, Suber also views the movement in a larger context — recognising that the internet has implications for knowledge sharing that go some way beyond scholarly journal articles alone. And while insisting that the open access movement can achieve its objectives unilaterally, he is nevertheless conscious that there are important synergies with the other free and open movements, and reasons for sometimes working in common cause.

As Clifford Lynch, director of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI), puts it, "Peter's interests are very broad — they go not only to open access, but to the future of scholarly communication broadly, and to questions that range from new genres of scholarly communication to open data and open notebook science. Indeed, he is also interested in questions like citizen access to government data beyond the scholarly setting."

What is most striking is that Suber has acquired his leadership role not by sitting in smoke-filled rooms, and constantly travelling around pressing the flesh, but largely by sitting at his computer in the peaceful surroundings of coastal Maine — on an unpaved road off the Bagaduce River — from where he despatches a constant stream of news, commentary, advice and wise words.

For although Suber travelled frequently, and spoke often, in the years immediately following the seminal Budapest meeting (and the subsequent Bethesda meeting), more recently he has deliberately cut back on travel, in part from weariness and in part to cope with the rising demands of his newsletter, blog, and the informal advice and consulting he undertakes.

Indeed so successful a politician and diplomat does Suber appear to be that — despite his frequent absence at OA events — he has gained the respect even of those who oppose open access, or seek to divert it to their own ends. "Peter is the 'thinking person's OA advocate' — he is measured, reasonable and considers others' ideas (even if I don't always agree with his conclusions!)", says former chief executive of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) Sally Morris.

Or as Springer's Jan Velterop, puts it, "Peter's measured and well put arguments are never offensive and on the whole as fair as you could expect from anybody who clearly believes in one side of the argument. That in itself made open access far more credible, sensible, and reasonable than the heated arguments that flew before, and keep on flying."

In short, Suber appears to have gained the trust and respect of all the actors in the OA drama, not excluding the movement's hotheads and those who have sought to derail it. Vitally, suggests OSI's Melissa Hagemann, his non-confrontational approach has prevented the movement from "tearing itself asunder".

But it would be wrong to say that Suber has no critics. Stevan Harnad worries that has a tendency to be too non-confrontational and emollient. This, he believes, has sometimes held the movement back. Although deeply complimentary and respectful of Suber, and keen to acknowledge the central role he has played, Harnad worries that Suber's determination to be reasonable has on occasions enabled the open access publishing faction to sideline and devalue self-archiving.

"He is even handed to a fault," says Harnad. "If he were less compliant and obliging, he could have fought harder at the Bethesda meeting (where he was and I wasn't) where, vastly outnumbered by the gold contingent, OA essentially got defined as OAP [Open Access Publishing], omitting green completely, and setting OA back at least 3 years."

However, Harnad adds: "But this is all carping at minor things considering that Peter is the only other person in the 'OA' movement who has seen and understood it all, as of 2001. Without exception, all others have either gone pure-gold, over-gold, or simply never understood green properly. Peter did."

Criticism of Suber's ecumenism, however, overlooks the fact that beneath his emollient exterior lies a powerful and unbending determination, an extremely focused goal, and a well-articulated strategy. As fellow OA advocate Jean-Claude Guédon puts it, Suber "shuns controversy but will hold his stand if needed. In other words, he strikes me as someone quite courageous, but he does not look for fights."

And if he failed to get green OA an equal hearing at Bethesda, explains Suber, it was not for want of trying. Not only was he outnumbered by the gold advocates attending, he says, but many of them were simply unable to comprehend the green argument.

"The fact is that green OA has always had to fight for recognition," he explains. "Its novelty makes it invisible. People understand OA journals, more or less, because they understand journals. But there's no obvious counterpart to OA archiving in the traditional landscape of scholarly communication. It's as if people can only understand new things that they can assimilate to old things. All of us have had the experience of describing green OA at a meeting and then getting questions that presuppose that all OA is gold OA. All of us have seen critics object to green OA policies by pointing out supposed shortcomings of gold OA. This is the kind of obstacle green OA faced at Bethesda."

In short, it would wrong to suggest that Suber is in any way a pushover, or that he is not prepared to call a spade a spade. Moreover, he stressed to me, he is a strong believer in the need to take a tough stand when necessary. "When calling a spade a spade, or speaking accurately, requires a fight, then I fight, and many of my public writings are 'fighting words' in just this sense."

But he immediately adds: "Even then, however, I want to be constructive. I want to preserve the possibility that I might change minds and not just (as politicians put it) energise the base."

Certainly it is not difficult to find examples of his tough talking. In September, for instance, he criticised the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) for introducing a mandate with a "major loophole".

He has also been a frequent critic of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), which in 2005 retreated from a strong draft policy intended to *mandate* NIH-funded researchers to self-archiving their papers, to a weak *request* that they do so. As Suber put it, "I have to conclude that the NIH has weakened its policy and that the weakening is unjustified and harmful."

And in April Suber criticised the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) for agreeing to pay Elsevier between $1,000 and $1,500 an article to deposit HHMI-funded research into the PubMed Central (PMC) archive. After relentlessly cataloguing the failures of the agreement, he concluded: "In sum, what's wrong with this picture? HHMI is paying a fee for green OA. Despite its fee, HHMI is not getting immediate OA. Despite its fee, HHMI is not getting OA to the published version of the article. Elsevier (beyond Cell Press) is even lengthening its embargo period. Elsevier is permitting embargoed deposits in PMC, but it already permits free and unembargoed deposits in IRs. Actually making the deposits is a semi-automated clerical task that doesn't come close to justifying these fees."

Importantly, Suber is not shy to take on the formidable Harnad — the self-styled "archivangelist" who regularly and relentlessly verbally batters opponents into submission, or silent retreat. Just this month he engaged in a series of public disagreements with Harnad over copyright and "permission rights."

I too have felt the firm corrective hand of Suber. Several years ago I published a blog-based article in which I had described Suber as an OA evangelist. Shortly after I received a terse email from him in which he said that it was "inaccurate and pejorative" to describe him in that way. "It suggests that I make faith-based appeals, which I do not, or that I raise my voice, which I do not." He would prefer it, he added, if I would refer to him as an open access "researcher" instead. Suitably admonished I edited the quote!

What is undeniable is that in putting his career on hold Suber has demonstrated a personal commitment to open access that no one else can claim to have made. As Harnad points out, "I sacrificed a lot of time to OA, but Peter sacrificed even more than that. He essentially traded his career for it, and I very much hope, if there is justice in the world, that once OA prevails he will be rewarded with the secure, prestigious position he deserves, rather than dropped by all those he has helped."

He adds: "The sacrifice is all the greater once you realise that Suber views open access advocacy as a temporary duty, and dreams of returning to philosophy, and writing a book that will combine his many interests."

In fact, Suber told me, he has plans for more than one book sketched out. "I have a dozen philosophy projects in different states of completion. Some I'll never finish even if I had time, but at least half are still high priorities for me. "

As further evidence that he views open access as a "digression", rather than an exit, from his career, Suber retains a non-remunerated research post at Earlham.

In short, it is the combination of his total commitment to the cause and his ecumenical but firm guidance that has earned Suber his role as de facto leader of the open access movement. This has undeniably earned him the respect that leadership demands. When preparing to interview Suber I emailed Prosser to ask if he would comment on him. He replied almost immediately, "I'm happy to, but I'll gush — I think Peter is an International Treasure!"

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I had been hoping to interview Suber for some time, but events kept getting in the way. I was also conscious that he is an extremely busy person, and since I needed to steal at least three hours of his time to do the kind of interview I had in mind, it was not a regular journalistic request that I was making. In the event, Suber agreed immediately, and our first conversation took place the following week. This was followed up by a second call five days later.

We began our conversation on Skype, but had to switch to the regular telephone when it kept falling over. The only interruptions to our conversation were the constant chattering of Suber's parakeets — which, judging by the volume of the noise, were surely perched on his shoulder leaning into the phone mouthpiece, and for all I knew expressing strong views on the subject of open access in parakeet-speak — and a sudden whooshing noise towards the end of the conversation. The latter turned out to be a vacuum cleaner, although it wasn't clear whether the ever-busy Suber had started to multi-task, or a third party had suddenly decided that the floor under his desk was in need of urgent attention!

On later seeing the draft text of the interview Suber evidently regretted not having silenced his birds before we spoke. He commented, with some passion: "I hate those parakeets! And for the same reason dread being thought of as a parakeet person!"

In speaking to Suber I found myself constantly thinking that I was talking to an Englishman who had, by some strange accident of fate, acquired an American accent. While saying this may seem like shocking prejudice, his reserve, politeness, and extreme modesty seemed, well, distinctly un-American.

This impression was only strengthened when at the end of the second conversation he said, somewhat apologetically, that he had struggled to answer many of the questions before I threw the next one at him. From the diffident way in which he broached the subject I concluded that, while he is happy to be robust when discussing ideas, Suber is generally shy and retiring when it comes to other matters, particularly his private life — a point underlined by the almost monosyllabic replies he gave to my questions about his family.

What was surprising to me, however, was that for a man who in a former life had been a comedian, Suber appeared unexpectedly serious-minded, not to say somewhat humourless. Aside from a couple of ironic remarks, I detected no playfulness, and no hint of an absurdist view of the world. During our conversation he chuckled only once.

When I tackled him on this, Suber replied: "I used to be angry and funny. Now I am neither." He then added dryly, demonstrating that he can still get in touch with his former self, "Maybe it's just cognitive decline!"

I have always been puzzled about Suber's motivation. Why would anyone put their career on hold for a cause that, at the time he abandoned his professorship, was far from certain of success?

In the hope of finding a clue I read some of Suber's non-OA writing before speaking to him. In doing so I came across a baccalaureate address he gave at Earlham College in 1987. There he discussed how Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard had argued that in the modern age many of us are able to arrive at a position where we have no external constraints on us (a state that Immanuel Kant called negative freedom), but that most of us never move beyond that point — to find a new authority, or a new direction (positive freedom). As such, believed Kierkegaard, we never reach the state of being able to "self-legislate" about our lives, and our lives are therefore too often meaningless.

I wondered if maybe Suber's decision to abandon his career at Earlham had been inspired by a desire to "self-legislate", and to put new meaning into his life. Perhaps, I thought, it was an example of a philosopher deciding to live by the sword.

When I pressed Suber on his motives, however, he cited neither Kierkegaard nor Kant, but the founder of the Quakers, George Fox. Fox, he said, had stressed the need to live a useful life.

Suber added, "I do believe that teachers live useful lives, but I saw a chance to be more useful."

NAVIGATION TABLE

Peter Suber

THE INTERVIEW BEGINS

RP: When and where you were born?

PS: I was born in Evanston, Illinois, in 1951.

RP: Tell me about your parents?

PS: My father was the publisher of *Downbeat*, a jazz magazine. At the time my mother was a homemaker — but she later became one of the first important women politicians in the State of Illinois.

RP: She was a Democratic senator?

PS: Yes. She became a state senator, and then she ran for lieutenant governor — but that was much later, not when I was a child.

RP: Where were your parents from?

PS: They were both born in New York, my father in New York City and my mother in Upstate New York, My father's family were ultimately Russian and Polish Jews, and my mother's family Scottish and Canadian.

RP: Had both sides of your family been in America for several generations?

PS: My father was second generation American: he was born in the United States but his father was an immigrant. My mother was also born in the US but her mother was born in Canada.

RP: You have siblings?

PS: Yes, many. I have two natural brothers and a natural sister, two stepbrothers, a step sister, two half sisters, two fostered brothers, and a foster sister. There were 12 of us in total.

RP: At some point your parents split up then?

PS: They did, and my father had two daughters from his second marriage. My mother had no children from her second marriage, but her second husband had three children from a previous marriage.

RP: Are your parents still alive?

PS: My father is alive, but my mother and step-father are not.

CHILDHOOD

RP: What interested you as a child?

PS: Oh boy, that is a very hard question. The answer is just about everything: I was interested in almost everything we studied at school. I was also interested in art and architecture; I was interested in languages; and I invented a lot of games. I also enjoyed swimming and some sorts of outdoor sports like canoeing. Gosh if I started enumerating it lots of memories would come back...

RP: Would you say you were more interested in the arts than the sciences at school, or was it the other way round?

PS: I was equally interested in both. But I didn't think I was well taught at school.

RP: In what way?

PS: I tended to have either unsatisfied curiosity or uneven levels of knowledge. So in those areas where I was not being well taught at school I would have to make good myself.

RP: So you feel your education could have been better?

PS: Yes. I regret, for instance, that I never had a good mathematics teacher when I was a child. I love mathematics today, and I loved it at the time, but I found it very confusing. My teachers were just bad at explaining things, and so I had to let it slide more than I wanted to. Later on in life I had to go back and teach myself a lot of what I should have been taught as a child.

I feel the same about history and the natural sciences: I was really curious about those things when I was young, and really wanted to learn them. But in most cases my teachers were poor, and I found them confused and confusing.

RP: Would you say therefore that you went to bad schools?

PS: No. I grew up in a fairly affluent suburb of Chicago where the schools were good. And every now and then I *would* come across a good teacher, one who would connect with me. But when I was at grade school these tended to be generalist teachers who couldn't give me depth in any of these fields, although they would inspire me to want to keep learning. Then when I got older I might encounter a teacher who would give me some depth, but only in one specific area or another.

My curiosity was pretty universal, and I really wanted to learn everything. Since my school education was uneven I had to teach myself most of what I really wanted to learn. I have no doubt that my teachers did really know their stuff; the problem was that they weren't always able to explain it, or at least not to me.

RP: What age were you when you felt this?

PS: First grade through end of high school. I'm sure I had some very good teachers, but I don't think I ever had my curiosity itch scratched very well — unless I did it myself.

RP: Did your parents encourage you educationally?

PS: Yes. They were both readers, and they both encouraged me to read too. In fact my mother made a very good deal with me as I entered adolescence: she said she would pay for any book I wanted — provided that I would actually read it.

RP: Did that work?

PS: It did. I felt it was a very good deal, and I took advantage of it.

RP: Were you considered academic at school?

PS: I think I became a very strong academic student at high school. Until then I wasn't. I certainly didn't think of myself as a strong student, and I am not sure my teachers did either. If I could have focused on the subject at hand I might have done very well, but my mind was always racing; I was always thinking of something else.

So I had a very active mind — which says that I was ready to be a good student. But I didn't quite focus until the middle of high school, and then I focused intensely.

STUDENT

RP: After school you went to Earlham College — a Quaker liberal arts college in Indiana. There you majored in philosophy. Why philosophy?

PS: Because philosophy let me study everything. Or let's say it allowed me to make good use of everything that I knew or wanted to know, both in the sciences and the humanities, and it demanded that I pursue all those interests deeply. Philosophy asked the questions that I wanted to answer and in philosophy none of my interests felt extraneous or wasted.

RP: So philosophy was a very deliberate choice on your part?

PS: I had no problems picking a major, but I was drawn to philosophy involuntarily. As soon as I took my first philosophy course, I knew that it was exactly what I wanted. And the more philosophy I took the more clear it became to me that it was the subject I had to study.

RP: You then went on to do a doctorate in philosophy, and then a juris doctor, or law degree.

PS: Yes.

RP: Where did you undertake your postgraduate studies?

PS: I did both degrees at Northwestern.

RP: Why law?

PS: Because at that time the job market for philosophy was so miserable.

RP: You were not able to get a job teaching philosophy?

PS: I did get a tenure-track offer from a second-rate school. I thought very hard about that, but I eventually turned it down. I then realised that the job market in philosophy was so bad that I couldn't afford to keep turning down tenure-track jobs. I decided, therefore, that if I was going to be picky I should retrain myself — not because I wanted to go into another field, but because I might *have* to go into another field.

I went to law school as a way of biding time. It allowed me to stay in the philosophy job market for a few more years. My plan was to keep looking for a good job in philosophy. If I didn't have any luck after three years, then at least I would be trained in something else. And it worked.

RP: Because you got eventually got a good job in philosophy?

PS: Right. While I was in the middle of law school I got an offer to come back to Earlham as a regular full-time tenure-track professor.

I had one more year of law school to go but I accepted the job, and then persuaded my dean to let me finish the law degree, so that I would have both degrees. He agreed as he felt that it would benefit Earlham.

RP: You might have become a lawyer however?

PS: Yea, I had to think about that seriously. But I didn't like the idea: although there are still some areas of legal practice that I could have tolerated, and even enjoyed, it would have been nothing like philosophy.

COMEDIAN

RP: Your Wikipedia entry reports that at one point you also worked as a stand up comic, appearing amongst other things on The Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson. Is that accurate?

PS: Yes, I put myself through graduate school as a comic, and it was very convenient. While some of my friends had to work every night in a pizza joint, or every weekend painting houses, I would go to Los Angeles or New York for a day, perform once, and come back with enough money for the month.

RP: How did you get into that?

PS: It wasn't intentional. My brother-in-law was a member of the Rotary Club in Chicago and he thought I was a funny guy around the dinner table. He began to think that maybe I could be funny in public.

RP: So you started out in a Chicago Rotary Club?

PS: I did. I had no idea how I would go about being funny to a group of strangers but I tried it, and it was pretty successful.

Some of the people in the audience later invited me to talk to their businesses, or to their conventions, and word spread. For a long time my work was all by word-of-mouth. And as you say, I later began to perform in clubs, universities, and on television.

RP: How many years did you do that for?

PS: Maybe three or four.

RP: What sort of jokes did you tell?

PS: I guess you could say it was academic comedy.

RP: What is that?

PS: I would make fun of the way people talk. I would go to a convention where I was going to speak and listen to the other speakers in front of me. I'd pick up on their jargon and recycle it in a completely different context. They found that funny.

RP: Did you ever view it as a possible career option?

PS: I did. Again, not deliberately — but as I got more gigs, and as they became higher profile, and the money got better, and as the jobs in philosophy got more and more scarce, I thought I might have to consider comedy as a possibility too.

I realised that at some point I had a decision to make — not whether to go into comedy instead of philosophy, but whether to go into it more seriously, more full time.

Around that time, however, I got Graves Disease — which is a thyroid disorder — and for about six months my voice was totally hoarse and I couldn't speak. That tended to make the decision for me since I couldn't perform during that period. At about the same time I also started law school. Once law school began, it was so intensive that I didn't have time to travel and perform any more.

RP: Fellow open access advocate Alma Swan tells me she has tried to get you to demonstrate your comic talents on a number of occasions, but you always refuse. Is there any particular reason why?

PS: I couldn't. It would be pathetic. I used to be angry and funny. Now I am neither. Or more precisely, I used to be fast with both and now I'm slow with both. Slow-burn anger keeps my motivation up, but slow-burn humour is useless, at least for making people laugh.

RP: Perhaps philosophy killed your comic talent!

PS: True, I've endured nearly 40 years of philosophy. But I don't think I can blame that. I believe humour helped me with philosophy, and I know that philosophy helped me with humour. Maybe it's just cognitive decline.

RP: You returned to Earlham College to teach in 1982. Was there any particular reason why you returned to your Alma Mater?

PS: Earlham is a gem of a small private liberal arts college, exactly the kind of job I was looking for. I was very happy to accept it.

RP: No regrets?

PS: None. Of course if there had been a range of jobs, I am not sure which job I might have taken. It would have depended on what else was in the mix. But I was very glad to take the Earlham job, and once I was there I was very happy to stay. Certainly I never tried to move to a different kind of school and I taught there happily for 21 years.

PHILOSOPHER JURIST

RP: At Earlham you taught classes on logic, ethics, and the history of philosophy, including Kant's **Critique of Pure Reason.** ***You also taught law. But you view yourself as*** a ***philosopher above all do you?***

PS: I do. That is where my interests lie. I did teach a little straight law, as opposed to philosophy of law, towards the end of my time at Earlham, but I used my law background mostly to teach and write in the philosophy of law, and to connect my interests in ethics with relevant parts of law.

RP: What kind of philosopher are you?

PS: That's a hard question. Twentieth century philosophy was divided into two large camps, and I'm not really aligned with either one.

RP: In one of your papers you say that philosophy has divided between the English-speaking "analytic" philosophers, and the European or "continental" philosophers.

PS: Yes. In general, I found that analytic philosophers asked small questions but were clear and rigorous in their writing, and that contemporary Continental philosophers asked larger and more important questions but were needlessly vague and sometimes wilfully impressionistic in their writing. I admired exceptions on both sides, but didn't feel at home in either one. I wanted to ask the large, important questions and approach them with clarity and rigor. I'd rather live without answers than lower the standard or give up the goal.

RP: You conclude that you are "a sceptic who lacks anxiety for closure." Unlike many of your philosopher colleagues, you don't look to philosophy for a full and final answer to things then?

PS: Actually I do, I just don't expect to get one. I am not optimistic about that in the way that traditional philosophers were. And this may be all I have in common with most contemporary philosophers. They're not optimistic about that either.

RP: Unlike traditional philosophers?

PS: Earlier philosophers[1] were more sophisticated than most 20th century philosophers gave them credit for. Most 20th century philosophers in both camps were too busy dismissing previous philosophy to read it carefully. But it's true that traditional philosophers were sometimes hasty and uncritical. Sometimes they were extraordinarily careful, but sometimes they were extraordinarily careless and vulnerable to a sceptical critique. Of course the same is true of modern and contemporary philosophers.

But while I was never satisfied with traditional philosophy I always thought it was asking the right questions, and moving in the right direction. It was just too easily satisfied with its answers. I wanted to combine the hard questions of the philosophical tradition with the high standards of the sceptics. The result, for the sceptical tradition and for me personally, is a dearth of answers. But it's an honest dearth. While most 20th century philosophers change the questions to make answers possible, or change the goal to make answers unnecessary, I can't bring myself to do that.

[1] e.g. Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

RP: And the two modern schools are effectively a response to the presumption of traditional philosophers are they?

PS: Yes. One response was contemporary [analytic philosophy](), which became more modest in its goals, hoping it could actually accomplish something. But my view is that it became so modest that it was uninteresting: it was asking the wrong questions.

By contrast, contemporary [continental philosophy]() — again, with exceptions — asked many of the important questions of its predecessors but didn't trust the methods of its predecessors or any method that claimed classic kinds of objectivity or universality. As a result it took its own kind of retreat and gave up the attempt to find answers that it could justify and communicate.

RP: This reflects the modern world's loss of confidence that absolute answers are possible perhaps?

PS: Yes, but there are different ways of dealing with that loss of confidence. I want to deal it with by continuing to plug away. After all, we can't prove that knowledge is impossible. That would be a contradiction. We can't give up on the questions that actually arise in life, just as we can't settle for hasty and careless answers.

RP: What for you then is the point of philosophy? What is its purpose?

PS: [Silence] That's a good question. [Sigh]. Socrates said it was preparation for death. And that comes pretty close to it.

The payoff isn't necessarily in answers, or in answers we can prove to be true and complete. If that is what we demand, then philosophy has never really had a payoff.

However, it does have a payoff in the life of the philosopher, because it keeps you ... [Silence]...

RP: Peter? I think the line has dropped...

PS: No, I'm thinking. It is a hard question to answer.

I'll put it another way: I didn't pursue philosophy because I had some idea of what it was good for. I pursued it because I had to.

RP: Maybe the importance lies in asking the questions, not in finding answers?

PS: In part, but I wouldn't stop there — because asking questions is only important if you want answers. It's not a formality or ritual. I did want answers; and the people I respected most also wanted answers; and very often I respected their answers — I just didn't personally find them completely satisfying.

I do think it's possible to make progress toward answers, even if we do it with the suspicion that new answers will have new inadequacies.

RP: What is that process?

PS: Someone takes up a good question and finds a promising direction, but doesn't quite see all its implications. Someone else recognises promise in an earlier, promising but unfinished inquiry and takes it further, or finds where it went wrong and picks a better path. We're very good at identifying the spots where previous philosophers were sloppy, vague, or indulged some preconceived notions or wishful thinking. It's more or less how we train. But we can only make progress if we avoid the mistakes of previous philosophers, after taking the trouble to identify them.

One of those mistakes is to try to answer these hard questions from scratch without the help of previous philosophers. It's a mistake to treat mistakes as grounds for wholesale dismissal, but unfortunately it was a very common mistake in the 20th century.

We can't do science without building on previous science — standing on the shoulders of giants — and even though philosophy is no science, we can't do philosophy without building on previous philosophy.

One problem is that we can be more confident about what counts as a mistake, or as a careless step in reasoning, than in the rightness of some new path. We can't be sure we're making progress on our own, or at least not without mistaking certitude for certainty. But if we can't do this alone, then we have to learn patience. This kind of constructive inquiry in philosophy is a large, culture-wide, centuries-long task. It is that task that both contemporary continental and analytic philosophy have given up on.

So it's not just about asking questions. It's about studying previous answers, framing our own answers, and testing answers against life, even though life is constantly changing.

RP: One question that has long exercised the minds of philosophers, of course, is freedom. And it is a question that you have puzzled over I think: in one of your papers you discuss Kant's distinction between positive freedom and negative freedom. As I understand it, an individual achieves negative freedom when he or she suffers no external constraints, and positive freedom comes when one becomes autonomous. In your paper you say that the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard was the first person to point out that one can attain the former without ever achieving the latter. He adds that modern man is particularly afflicted with this — we may enjoy negative freedom, but most of us never arrive at positive freedom.

PS: Yes, that is what I was trying to say in that paper: that negative freedom is freedom from influences but without reaching what Kant called self-legislation, or finding an authority somewhere else, without finding a new direction. Kierkegaard called that condition *hovering*, and he regarded it as a kind of meaninglessness.

Kant talked about negative freedom as a step on the way toward positive freedom, but Kierkegaard realised that we could get stalled there, and might even want to get stalled there.

RP: Do you think people are particularly susceptible to hovering today because in many Western countries religion has been in decline?

PS: I do think it is a common problem in the modern world, and I do think it is related to the decline of religion. On the other hand, the decline of religion is liberating; this is the flip side of what Kierkegaard called hovering.

One mistake that many religious thinkers make is to assume that the decline of religion entails a decline in ethics, or in the norms that create positive freedom. But of course we can lose supernatural authorities without losing natural authorities, such as evidence about what serves our needs and interests.

PARADOXES

RP: In 1998 you published the book, **The Case of the Speluncean Explorers: Nine New Opinions**. ***This was a "re-hearing" of a fictional legal case described in the*** **Harvard Law Review** ***by Lon Fuller in 1949. The case described how a group of cavers get trapped, and end up eating one of their team. The aim was to examine the different ways in which a court might judge their actions. Essentially, it explored the relativity of the law and the way in which legal decisions are arrived at I think.***

PS: Fuller cooked up a hard case in which five judges disagreed deeply in their principles and reasoning. He wanted to illustrate different methods of deciding cases and different philosophies of law.

It is a great exercise for law students, and also for legal philosophers. It shows dramatically that all of these approaches co-exist and are nevertheless incompatible. At the same time, they all have a rationality to them. Together they challenge the foundation of law.

RP: Why?

PS: If different judges, using different principles, come to different conclusions, then we have to ask what it means for judges to be "bound by the law". If there's a right answer despite the strong arguments for other conclusions, then we have to ask what went wrong with the careful reasoning for the incorrect conclusions.

RP: Your aim was to update Fuller's book?

PS: Yes. He wrote about the different co-existing yet incompatible philosophies of law in the mid 20th Century. I wanted to do it again at the end of the 20th Century.

RP: What was your conclusion?

PS: That in a way we are even worse off, as there are even more co-existing incompatible philosophies of law now than there were then. We are no closer to finding a way to understand law that actually binds people who disagree about fundamentals.

RP: The case was not intended to demonstrate that there are different cultural understandings of law around the world, but how even within a single jurisdiction — in this case the US legal system — different philosophies of law mean that different conclusions and different verdicts, can be arrived at when looking at the same law, and using the same facts.

PS: Yes.

RP: And you discovered that another nine alternative approaches are now possible.

PS: That's right; even when judges agree that this is the murder statute, agree on its words, and share the legal culture providing the principles for interpreting it, they can still move in different directions.

RP: This challenges our view that any given legal system is capable of dispensing justice doesn't it?

PS: It does. It makes us ask what we mean by the rule of law if it can lead careful, rational judges to come down on different sides of the same case.

RP: What you describe sounds paradoxical. Indeed, you seem to have a fascination for paradoxes. Some of your works even have the word in their title — e.g. The Paradox of Self-Amendment, The Paradox of Liberation, The Database Paradox etc. — and a paradox seems to lie at the heart of many of your other works, including The Problem of a Beginning and The Ethics of Deep Self-Modification. Similarly, in talking about the complicated process of how humans attain independence you also characterise it as a paradoxical process: In an address you gave at Earlham College in 1987, for instance, you say, "It seems paradoxical to expect the unfree to use the freedom they lack to liberate themselves." Essentially, for you the human condition is paradoxical?

PS: I confess that I have always been drawn to paradoxes and have written about them in logic, law, and ethics. Most paradoxes arise from one kind of circularity or another, and much of my work has been devoted to circularity — self-amending laws, self-modifying software, self-referring language, self-justifying and self-refuting arguments, and free acts that enhance or diminish freedom.

In fact when I was in law school I couldn't stop seeing paradoxes everywhere — that is strict logical paradoxes of self-reference. So rather than studying law I ended up writing a book on paradoxes.

RP: You are referring to your book The Paradox of Self-Amendment. So it's not just the human condition. The world itself is full of paradoxes?

PS: It's not that the world is full of paradoxes. We don't know enough to say that. All we can say is that our attempt to understand the world is full of paradoxes.

RP: How do you mean?

PS: Any attempt to come to a satisfying intellectual understanding of the world will have its little inadequacies; and when we look at them closely, they usually turn out to be large inadequacies.

When formulated as paradoxes, they strike some people as small problems easily fixed, or parlour tricks not worth fixing. But on close examination they end up implicating principles that are actually very deep; and the only way to resolve a paradox is to give up something that we don't want to give up, or to accept something that we don't want to accept.

So while they don't challenge the world itself, they challenge our way of understanding it. They just challenge our ability to come to a satisfactory theory about it.

RP: Can you give me an example of one of this?

PS: The paradox of self-amendment arises when we use the amending clause of a constitution to amend itself. Can we adopt amendments that irrevocably limit the amending power?

This turns out to be logically similar to the problem of an omnipotent deity creating a stone it cannot lift. Whether we say it's possible or impossible, we find limited power where we expected unlimited power. In the case of an amending clause, limited power is disturbing because it limits the power of people to enact the laws they want. But if the amending power is somehow limited, then it seems that the limit could be removed by amendment, throwing us back into the paradox.

RP: It is clear from your work — and from what you said earlier about your childhood — that you have a wide range of interests. Your Wikipedia entry says that you write on self-reference, ethics, formal and informal logic, the philosophy of law, and the history of philosophy. But what's the "Big idea" at the heart of your work? How would you describe your academic work in a nutshell?

PS: I never framed a big idea unifying all my work and I am not sure I could do it now.

RP: It is a work in progress?

PS: It is a work in progress. As I wrote the separate pieces, sometimes I saw connections to other pieces and sometimes I didn't. Sometimes I deliberately developed these connections but sometimes I deliberately pursued something new, or something that seemed to be new.

As I said, I didn't align myself with any particular school of philosophy, and if you don't do that you end up studying philosophy historically. One frame for almost everything I've done is simply the history of philosophy, not a particular doctrine, concept, method, or question.

RP: Which means you end up studying everybody?

PS: Yes, more or less, not from intellectual sympathy but because it's a non-reductive and non-dogmatic way of organising them. Within this wide range of thinkers and topics, however, I was much more interested in some than others. I was deeply interested in scepticism, epistemology, paradox, logic, ethics, and law.

As I got older, however, I began to see connections among these interests, and I am currently working on an unfinished book — a book that I won't be able to finish as long as I am working full-time on open access — that will bring many of them together.

In writing it I discovered some connections that I never noticed before. What's interesting is that some of these connections didn't occur to me until later in life. At the time most of these interests seemed to me to be separate. I thought of myself as someone who was pulled in many different directions.

RP: When you finish the book you will perhaps understand why you were being pulled in all these different directions — and you may make some kind of self-discovery!

PS: It doesn't bring all my interests together, just many of them. But yes, it's already a self-discovery, although that's not what I'm writing about. In my case, unification didn't come first, giving me some kind of lifelong plan. Insofar as it came at all, it came last.

Computer Programmer

RP: Before we move on to open access I wanted to ask you about your interest in computers. When you were at Earlham you worked as a research associate in an AI lab didn't you?

PS: Yes. I worked in Doug Hofstadter's lab at Indiana University. But he'd prefer to call it a cognitive science lab.

RP: What was it about computers that appealed to you?

PS: I should have mentioned it when you asked about my interests as a child, but when I was in high school I was very interested in electronics, and I worked in an electronics laboratory.

This was in the age before personal computers so we didn't even have a computer in the lab. But we repaired gadgets like oscilloscopes and televisions, and we made electronic prototypes for inventors. It was a very nuts-and-bolts place where I was able to take things apart, put things together, and learn about electricity and electronics from the ground up. I enjoyed that very much.

Then when personal computers became available I got one and I immediately loved its power. I love the power and clarity of programming. I taught programming for a couple of years at Earlham and had more fun than I had with most of my other courses.

Computing seemed to me to be another one of these interests that pulled me in a new direction. While it clearly had useful applications, sometimes I just saw it as geeky interest to indulge for the joy of it. I eventually saw intellectual depth in computer science, and often taught a course culminating in the link between incomputability and Gödel incompleteness.

RP: You have also written computer programs have you not; a program aimed at exploring the themes in your book about self-amendment for instance?

PS: Oh, that's not a program; it's a game called Nomic. But yes, it was meant to embody and illustrate the thesis of my book on self-amendment.

But I have written programs to test ideas that I was grappling with, and I have published some of them. I once wrote a program to test a theory I had about circular causation — the way a riverbed shapes the flow of water and the flow of water shapes the riverbed. I was trying to understand how language norms shape common usage and how common usage shapes norms.

Most of my programming, however, has been for more pedestrian purposes. Even today, for instance, I continue to use a number of utilities I wrote to help me run my computing life — for instance, my backup system is based on a program that I wrote.

My favourite personal information manager was a program I wrote for MS-DOS, but I've never had time to port it to another operating system.

RP: And you were involved in the creation of a philosophical web search engine called Hippias, and an internet-based library and search engine of philosophy called Noesis.

PS: Yes. Hippias and Noesis are peer-reviewed search engines, an idea conceived by Tony Beavers.

I was the general editor of Hippias, which meant that I decided which sites its crawler would crawl. Hippias crawled web sites on which the links to other sites were selected by a philosopher using professional judgment. If I picked sites that were comprehensive on a certain topic, period, or region, then the index would be correspondingly comprehensive, and yet it would be based entirely on human judgement or human-vetted links.

Noesis was a refinement of Hippias that replaced the crawler with a database. Hippias is now defunct, and Noesis was defunct for a while. But Tony has since revived it.

RP: The aim is to filter out irrelevant data and allow users to search only on philosophical content?

PS: Exactly. So if you search for Plato you would only get research about the Greek philosopher, not the town in Illinois.

ADVOCATE FOR FREE ONLINE SCHOLARSHIP

RP: Can we move on to Free Online Scholarship [FOS], which is the name you gave to what you were doing before people began to use the term open access. I'm assuming that your interest in FOS began in much the same that most researchers initially embraced the Web: creating your own web site and linking to journals in your discipline, subject mailing lists etc. Is that right?

PS: It's true that I had a web site very early on. However, my interest in FOS itself began when I started to put my own publications online.

RP: Why did you do start doing that?

PS: At first much of it was geeky curiosity, to play with this new thing called the world wide web. But part of my curiosity was to see what would happen when I exposed my writings to a larger audience. At the time, of course, they were only available in print. There was nothing else.

The attraction was less the network of links than the worldwide reach of the network. The attraction was making the work freely available to readers everywhere. That turned out to be a transforming experience for me.

RP: Why transforming?

PS: Because until I put them online I had little or no communication from readers, and I had no idea whether they were being read or not.

By publishing them, I thought I had crossed a kind of finish line and done all I could to place them where readers could find them. If I didn't hear from readers, I had to move on to the next project.

I could have done the kind of citation tracking that scientists do, but that's very rare in the humanities. So I really had no idea whether my publications were having much impact, and I certainly didn't have that kind of knowledge based on personal correspondence with readers.

RP: When you put them online, however, you did?

PS: Exactly. Soon after I put them up I began to get serious emails from serious readers, and these were just the kind of responses that I had always hoped to get.

Of course some of these emails were from crackpots, but most of them by far were from serious philosophers who were reading my work because they had a serious interest in the topic. Because my work was online they were now able to find it, and because email existed they were able to fire me off a note.

That was the kind of impact, and the kind of communication and collaboration, that I had always expected would flow from publications but I had rarely had it from print publications.

RP: When was it that you start putting your works online?

PS: Around 1995 or 1996. And some of the publications I put up were 10 years old.

At the time it was just a shot in the dark — an experiment to see if putting my work online would elicit any response. I discovered that it did, and I got much better feedback from serious scholars once my work was freely available online than I ever did when the same works were merely in print.

RP: So what did you conclude from all this?

PS: I concluded that if you really want to communicate your work, and make it known, you have to remove or lower the access barriers. Here I am using contemporary language — I wasn't thinking about it quite that way at the time — but it seemed to me obvious that you need to reach out to your readers, not expect them to reach out to you. You need to make it easier for people to find your work if you want them to find it and read it.

I had been raised like everyone else to think that print publications were the revered goal of scholarship, but over time I began to see publishing in a print journal as much like depositing your results in a golden file cabinet, for the record, for posterity, and that very few contemporaries would ever see it or even discover that it existed.

RP: What I find striking about that is that it is precisely this kind of role that publishers tell authors they play for them: drawing attention to their work by promoting and publicising it, and so maximising its impact. Yet you discovered that by putting your work online yourself you were able to do a more effective job?

PS: Yes. Publishers do make this claim, and we should acknowledge the sense in which they are right to do so. After all, compared to non-publication, publication is certainly the way to draw attention to a work and make it known. The problem is that print-only publication makes work invisible to links and search engines, and toll-access publication limits circulation to paying customers. So traditional publishers do expand the reach of a piece of writing, but only so far. Open access expands that reach much further. Traditional publication came close to maximising the impact a work in the age of print, but it doesn't even come close in the age of the internet.

RP: And thus was born Free Online Scholarship.

PS: Yes, and it was a no-brainer. After all, scholars publish scholarship precisely in order to reach readers, influence other researchers, and receive feedback. So I was frustrated by how slow other scholars were to see the value of the internet for scholarship. In those days there were a lot of pages devoted to links to other web pages, but few scholars were putting their own full-text articles online, and few new journals had full-text online editions, free or unfree.

Looking back, I shouldn't have been surprised or frustrated, however. Long after I was thrilled by the general power of the internet, I was still oblivious to its potential for disseminating scholarship until I tried it myself, which is several steps beyond just reading about it.

RP: Tell me, how did you come up with the term Free Online Scholarship?

PS: It describes exactly what I had in mind. It could have been more succinct, but at least it was clear and accurate.

RP: In choosing the name were you at all influenced by what you saw happening in the free and open source software movements?

PS: Certainly I had heard about free and open source software, and liked what I heard, but I didn't know a lot about it at the time. I was inspired by what I was seeing directly with scholarship, and I wasn't trying to carry over principles from the domain of software into the domain of scholarship.

RP: What was the next step in the development of Free Online Scholarship?

PS: I began to keep my eye out for signs that scholars were starting to distribute their work online, before or after peer review. Every now and then I'd notice an interesting development, and say to myself: "Yes, somebody else gets it." Some of the people doing it were my friends, because I was talking to them about it; and sometimes I would become friends with the people I saw doing it.

So I began to exchange emails with people who shared this interest, and when I saw a new development I would fire off an email to five or six people and tell them about it. Soon it was ten or twelve people, and then fifteen or twenty. After a while I created a group with my email software and started sending messages to the group. Then I thought: "As long as I am sending email to a group it might just as well be a public group rather than a private group".

So I moved the group to an online discussion forum and started sending regular messages to it. That was the birth of my newsletter.

RP: At this point it was still essentially a hobby was it?

PS: I'd call it a side-interest rather a hobby. It had clear implications for my academic work, but it was a still a minor interest bidding for my time against major interests.

Just as it my emails were evolving into a newsletter, I had a sabbatical from Earlham. My intention was to spend the year working on some philosophy writing projects that I just didn't have time to finish while I was teaching. But I had this public email list, a growing interest in the topic, and a growing number of subscribers who shared my interest. With my new expanse of sabbatical time, I started looking for new developments to post to my list and started posting comments and analysis as well as news. Soon I was writing weekly instalments.

Before long it was taking up my entire sabbatical, and I acquiesced. I pushed everything off my desk and spent almost all my time on it.

RP: What year was this?

PS: 2001.

RP: The blog came later?

PS: Yes. My newsletter was weekly during my sabbatical. But when I returned to Earlham to teach full-time, I couldn't sustain that pace. Nor could I stop following what was happening, thinking about it, or communicating with my growing list of interested colleagues. I started the blog as a newsletter substitute during the 2002-2003 academic year.

The year after, when I had left teaching to work full-time on OA, I revived the newsletter but kept the blog.

THE BUDAPEST INITIATIVE

RP: *And at some point you began to look at ways to fund your FOS activities.*

PS: Right. Earlham let faculty take a full year sabbatical at half pay or a half year at full pay. I choose a full year at half pay, with the aim of living frugally and not replacing the other half of my salary. Sometime into the year, however, I thought it would be nice to get a grant to replace that missing half of my salary. When I read about the Open Society Institute [OSI], it seemed to me that what I was doing with free online scholarship fit its mission.

RP: The OSI is a private grant making foundation created by the Hungarian/American financier George Soros. Its mission is quite broad: "to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform." However, OSI has a specific Information Program which, as you say, fitted with what you were trying to achieve. So in July 2001 you approached the Soros Foundation and asked them to fund your FOS activities. And they agreed.

PS: Yes, that's right.

RP: Melissa Hagemann, who now works on OSI's Information Program, but was at that time running the electronic information for libraries project (eIFL), tells me that at the same time you approached OSI a professor of history and political science at Central European University in Budapest called István Rév was trying to persuade OSI to support free and low-cost scholarly journals. He argued that this would complement the eIFL work that OSI was doing. It turns out that your approach was good timing, because OSI immediately saw possible synergies and so also offered you a consultancy contract to look into the journal issue, right?

PS: That's right. OSI saw that what István and I were proposing were similar, overlapping, or synergistic strategies. These two directions eventually came together, with a few others, in the Budapest Initiative.

RP: The Budapest Open Access Initiative [BOAI] took place in October 2001. Melissa Hagemann tells me that the meeting that led to this initiative was also proposed by István. What is your memory of the event and what led up to it?

PS: Melissa raised the issue with me in some emails in late 2001. She wanted to put together a meeting of leaders in what we now call the open access movement, and asked me who should be invited. She had some ideas herself, and I came up with some others.

RP: What was the aim of the meeting?

PS: The basic idea was to see whether these projects and strategies were compatible, or complementary, whether they could be combined, and above all how OSI could help.

I thought they were all compatible and would be easy to combine, and I thought that OSI could certainly help, so I was delighted to try to help make all of that happen. I had no idea at the time that I would end up writing the statement that emerged from the meeting.

In fact, at the time there was no thought that we would produce a statement. That emerged from one of the meetings convened by István: during one of the sessions someone proposed we issue a manifesto.

RP: Melissa Hagemann tells me that the idea of a manifesto was also proposed by István, although Jean-Claude Guédon suggested to me that it was he who proposed it. I guess we may never know for sure who it was, but the interesting point is that it emerged spontaneously from the Budapest meeting.

PS: My recollection is that the idea came from somewhere else around the table. But after some discussion, led by István, we all agreed that we should produce something like that. István then turned to me without any warning and said, "Would you write it?"

RP: And you agreed.

PS: I agreed, but the experience was somewhat like sitting in a department or committee meeting in which the chair suddenly asks you to write a report. I didn't look forward to having a new piece of work on my plate.

On the other hand I could see that it could be a very important document, and I wanted to be part of it. I also thought I could do a good job. So I was glad to accept it, even though it was not part of the agenda going in.

RP: Until that moment your role at the Budapest meeting was simply that of being one of a number of interested parties discussing possible ways forward?

PS: That, plus the small role I had in planning that I mentioned.

RP: And then, as you say, you were asked to write the manifesto — although Melissa Hagemann tells me that Mike Eisen had some input too. How did the drafting process work?

PS: Yes, nearly everyone had input. I wrote the drafts, sent them around, collected comments from everybody, and then tried to incorporate the ones that seemed to improve the document or have wide support.

RP: Guédon told me that it was at that point that you really came into your own within the movement, and everyone was very pleased with the result. One of the others who attended the meeting, Frederick Friend, put it this way: "His beautiful words and phrasing gave the movement a vision which people in every country have been able to relate to. Every new movement needs such a vision." Were you aware at the time that this was going to be an important historic document?

PS: I was aware that it could be a declaration of independence for the open access movement, and that the better we were in articulating the vision, the more effective it would be. I knew we had a chance to do something important.

At that time there were no public statements in support of open access, and no public definitions of it. We had a chance not just to produce a technical document from a dozen people in Budapest, but to launch a movement, or to show the unity of many separate projects and interests, and give that movement energy. We had a chance to articulate a vision that other people could follow.

RP: How confident were you that you could do that?

PS: I didn't know that we could succeed, but I knew that it had fallen to me, and I knew that we had a chance.

My only concern was that the statement might end up reading like a committee document. I knew that my draft was going to be commented upon, and modified, by the others, and that it had to be approved by them — so in effect it was being written by a committee.

RP: But you succeeded in avoiding that.

PS: Yes, I don't think the end result does read like a committee document. Nevertheless, the drafting process was very difficult — in part because I often arrived at what I thought was very good language only to find that somebody objected to it, and I had to change it to satisfy them. In most cases I found new wording that I was almost as happy with, but in some cases I didn't, and I dropped better language for worse language in order to achieve a consensus.

However, because I had control of the language, and was responding to comments rather than simply incorporating them, I think I was able to keep it in the style of a person rather than a committee.

RP: After the Budapest meeting you gave up your career as a researcher at Earlham and devoted yourself full time to open access. Can you talk me through that?

PS: It didn't happen immediately because the Budapest meeting took place while I was on sabbatical from Earlham, and a condition of that sabbatical was that I return to Earlham for at least a year.

So I was on sabbatical for the year 2001/2002, and then I returned to Earlham for the 2002/2003 year. But during that year at Earlham, my wife and I made plans to leave our jobs and move to Maine. My own plan was to continue my sabbatical work on open access.

RP: You wife also gave up her career as part of the move to Maine didn't she?

PS: She gave up her teaching position at Earlham, as I did, although neither of us thought we were giving up our careers. We were moving on to new careers or new chapters in our original careers, we weren't exactly sure.

RP: Can you expand on that for me?

PS: We were both tenured full professors at Earlham, I in philosophy and she in classics. I had been there 21 years and she had been there 25 years. We both loved Earlham, and our fields, but we were both ready for something new.

Many factors were coming together, including a desire to find a better public school for our youngest daughter. Another factor was that my step-father had recently died, full of plans for the rest of his life. We thought it's not enough to love a place like Maine and put off living there indefinitely. Life is too short.

OPEN ACCESS

RP: The Budapest meeting is important in the history of the open access movement not just because it provided $3 million funding for open access projects, but because it was at that meeting that the term open access was coined. Tell me, in settling on the term open access was there much discussion about it? Prior to the Budapest Initiative, for instance, you had been using the term Free Online Scholarship. Why use Open Access rather than FOS?

PS: Clearly we needed a name for this thing that we were advocating. As you say, I had been using the term Free Online Scholarship, but I was the first to admit that it was long and cumbersome. So I could see that even though I had achieved a kind of brand identity for it, FOS wasn't the best possible term and we wanted something better.

Actually we had quite a lengthy discussion about it, and we were a little conflicted. On the one hand, we wanted a term that was short and simple, which Free Online Scholarship was not. On the other hand, we wanted a term that was self-explanatory, which open access is not. In the end, however, we decided that there was no term that was both these things.

RP: But eventually you settled for open access?

PS: Right. We decided to go with a short term and accompany it with a clear, public definition in order to minimise misunderstanding and stretching. We anticipated that misunderstanding and stretching might be problems, but we hoped that our definition would mitigate them.

RP: There has nevertheless been some confusion as to what open access means?

PS: Yes, and this is still a problem today. However, the problem is not that our definition is unclear or inadequate. The problem is that the term has spread much further and faster than the definition.

The free software movement faces a similar problem. Its term is not self-explanatory either. But while it's precisely defined in a widely available license, the term is better known than the license. As a result people still mix up free as in speech with free as in beer.

There are two dimensions to the problem. First there is the variation within the technical definition, since the BOAI deliberately allows latitude on some points. Then there is the variation beyond the technical definition, or what I consider stretching or dilution.

Part of the solution is to accept that a term can be used strictly or loosely, like "evolution" for example, and that this can cause confusion. But another part is to remember that we can always speak strictly when we need to, and that it would be awkward and confusing to speak strictly in every context.

We shouldn't expect to overcome ambiguity with technical terms, even if we we're willing to create new ones for every variation on the theme. They don't create their own illumination and people don't always understand and use them in the same way.

Sometimes, even on the most technical subjects, you can only pin down your meaning by going beyond terms to paragraphs. Over time I think we'll find ourselves using a strategy from the free and open source software movement. When you do need to pin down a particular kind of openness, you'll point to a particular licence.

RP: Prior to Budapest there had been a meeting in Santa Fe, in 1999, from which emerged the Open Archives initiative (OAI). In opting for the term Open Archives Initiative those attending that meeting had deliberately sought to align their aims with the Open Source movement. Was there the same intent in choosing the term open access?

PS: Yes, I think so. I don't think we talked about it, but we all understood that the word "open" called up a connection with open source.

RP: Melissa Hagemann told me that most of the discussion at the Budapest meeting took place between Jan Velterop, Mike Eisen and Stevan Harnad. Is that your recollection?

PS: Those plus Manfredi La Manna, who was also very vocal.

RP: La Manna has subsequently disappeared from the open scene hasn't he?

PS: Yes he has. I don't know what he is doing now, but before Budapest he was working on a series of open access journals in the social sciences.

In Budapest he argued that there were differences among the disciplines relevant to the adoption of OA, and that we should not recommend universal or trans-disciplinary principles heedless of these differences. He argued, for example, that his discipline — economics — had many differences from the STM fields.

He wanted us to allow flexibility for different disciplines to implement open access in different ways. Several others at Budapest disagreed and were more optimistic that universal principles would work.

RP: What was your view?

PS: Disciplinary differences seemed stark to me, and I'd already begun a private list of those that might turn out to be relevant to the progress of OA. So I agreed with Manfredi on the need for flexibility and the Budapest statement reflects that.

But at the same time, I didn't see that these differences affected the definition of OA itself or the two primary strategies for implementing it —OA journals and OA repositories.

RP: Was La Manna's proposal out-voted then?

PS: In drafting the public statement, we didn't vote. I just tried to shepherd a consensus. The significant elements in the Budapest statement were the definition of OA and two complementary strategies for achieving it.

While we recommended all three for all disciplines and countries, this position was entirely compatible with acknowledging differences among disciplines and countries that affect the transition to OA. I made sure the statement said so, and I still think that was the right position to take.

HEATED DISCUSSION

RP: You mentioned the two strategies of OA journals and OA repositories (or self-archiving). There was no doubt also heated discussion about the respective merits of these two approaches — and no doubt much of the discussion between Harnad, Velterop and Eisen revolved around this issue?

PS: Yes.

RP: Disagreement over these two main principles has been a constant theme in the open access movement. Advocates of self-archiving (the so-called green road) argue that it is sufficient for researchers to continue publishing in traditional subscription-based journals, but to then self-archive their papers on the Web in order to make them freely available to all. Advocates of the gold road, by contrast, maintain that researchers should publish in OA journals, which charge authors (or their institutions) to publish their papers (rather than charging readers to read them). In this way, the papers are made freely available for researchers by the publishers.

PS: That's roughly right. I'd refine a few of the details. Even proponents of the green road admit that we might well need gold open access at a later stage, and hence that green open access might not *suffice*. And proponents of gold open access don't deny the value of self-archiving. Nor, by the way, do they presuppose that all open access journals must be supported by publication fees.

RP: I found Melissa Hagemann's recollections of Budapest interesting in one regard: She told me that when proposing the meeting István Rév characterised the issue as a publishing matter. Since she came from eIFL, Melissa also viewed it as a publishing issue. When Harnad turned up, however, he insisted that that it wasn't about publishing at all, and that all that was needed was to persuade researchers to self-archive their papers. Is that your recollection?

PS: You're right about Stevan's position, but I wouldn't say that the meeting started with a focus on publishing. In fact, I came to the meeting already familiar with Stevan's position and already committed to the need for archiving.

It didn't seem to me that Stevan was asking the meeting to change direction. It was more that he was reminding us of this other approach that ought to be part of any comprehensive vision. I agreed with that, and I am not sure that anybody disagreed. That is, I don't think anybody wanted to say: "No this is only about journals and publishing, and archiving is irrelevant."

The disagreements were mostly around whether journals were more central, more urgent, or deserved some kind of priority.

RP: What was your role in that debate?

PS: I was convinced that OA archiving and OA journals are compatible and said so whenever it came up. I remember stepping into the middle of one of the heated hallway discussions to try and make the case that we didn't have to rank the two approaches in importance or urgency. We could recommend them simultaneously and we could pursue them simultaneously. And that is still my view today. In fact, we are pursuing them simultaneously right now, and those who are pursuing them most devotedly continue to disagree on which is more urgent or important. In the big picture those disagreements don't matter. What matters is that we're making progress on both fronts at once.

RP: Guédon was also at that meeting. What is striking to me is that although he often publicly disagrees with Harnad, Guédon told me that Harnad's defence of self-archiving has over the years proved "a very powerful tool for the open access movement". He added that you were among the very first fully to recognise the importance of the self-archiving thesis. You are saying that you had been convinced of this prior to Budapest?

PS: Yes, I first came across Stevan and self-archiving when I was still discovering the range of developments relevant to free online scholarship. I didn't grasp all the nuances of self-archiving right away, so I corresponded with him about it. The more I read about it, and the more I wrote about it myself, the more obvious it seemed.

Stevan had already worked out responses to the common questions and objections, and I regarded self-archiving as a mature idea by the time of the Budapest meeting.

RP: But you saw it as a complementary strategy, not as an alternative to open access publishing?

PS: Right. I thought of it as a strategy that complements journal strategies, or indeed any other open access strategy. We didn't have to choose. My preference was to fight on every front at once, and to regard the different approaches in the way that we regard the division of labour: an efficiency that helps us move forward.

It's good for us that some people want to pursue OA journals first, because they will work hard to create OA journals. It's also good that some people want to pursue OA repositories first, because they will work hard to create and fill OA repositories. The two strategies are complementary and we need them both.

Individuals have to decide how to spend their time, but the movement doesn't have to decide which of these strategies is more urgent. On the contrary, it should support this division of labour.

RP: So your role at Budapest was to say: "Hang on a minute guys, it doesn't have to be either/or. We can do both"?

PS: Yes. But not just that we *can* do both, but that we *should*.

RP: And while both the green and gold strategies existed prior to Budapest, it was at that meeting that they were first deemed to be two separate means to the same end?

PS: They certainly existed as strategies before, and many people had recognised their differences before. But the Budapest statement was the first to endorse them together and point out that they were compatible and complementary. I still stand by that vision.

The two strategies ought to be pursued simultaneously, even if by different people. They are equally urgent, and we don't have to favour one or choose between them. As I say, individuals can choose if they wish. But that doesn't create a problem. On the contrary, it benefits us all if some are advancing journals instead of archives, and it benefits us all if some people are pursuing archives instead of journals.

RP: There were five notable invitees who were unable to attend the Budapest meeting. These were Harold Varmus, Paul Ginsparg, Clifford Lynch, Herbert Van de Sompel and Andrew Odlyzko. Do you think the outcome of the meeting — particularly the way in which the BOAI was formulated — might have been different had some or all of these people attended?

PS: Oh boy, what a question. I have enormous respect for all five and I wish they had been there. But when I think about the positions they have taken on open access, I think those positions were already represented in the room.

RP: Although there would have been five different personalities in the room wouldn't there? Might that have changed the balance in some way, and possibly led to a different conclusion?

PS: True, but it would also have meant that there were more strong-minded people on each side of each disagreement!

RP: You are saying that it would have made no difference to the outcome had these five people also attended?

PS: No. It might have increased the difficulty of negotiating the final statement. We already had very strong-minded people on each side of each disagreement, and all five of the others are also strong-minded. What I am saying is that since some of them were largely on the journal side, and some largely on the repository side, we would probably have ended up pretty much in the same position, at least on that large, central issue.

But I'm sure their presence would have changed our thinking and our language on other issues. When you asked the question, my first reaction was to be stumped by the unknowability of the answer. We'll never know what large or small differences they would have made. In setting out a long-term vision or working out precise language, personality is always a difference that makes a difference.

RP: Let me try this from another angle: If Harnad hadn't been there do you think the open access movement would have come to view self-archiving as an equal, or even realistic, strategy for achieving open access? Do you think his presence was vital in order to ensure green got an equal place in the statement?

PS: The only way I can answer that is to try to think about what I would have done to push self-archiving myself if Stevan hadn't been there pushing it — because I did know about it, and I did support it.

RP: And the answer is?

PS: It is hard for me to say. I'm very glad Stevan was there, and I am glad he was pushing. Nobody pushes self-archiving more energetically than he does. And in some of the vocal disagreements that take place he is more aggressive than I would be. I don't back down easily but neither do I raise my voice.

RP: At times perhaps it is necessary to raise your voice?

PS: Yes, sometimes it is. But I really don't know whether it was necessary in a setting like the Budapest meeting, with a small group of people in a small room. What I can say is that Steven injected the idea very effectively, and in his absence I would have injected it. I would have argued for it, and tried to prevent it from being overlooked or subordinated. But I wouldn't have participated in the same kinds of conversations that he did, because that's not my style. I honestly don't know how far I would have succeeded on my own, but I do know that, in fact, Stevan was a key part of the mix that led to the balanced result in the end.

RP: When you say that if Harnad hadn't been there you would have mentioned archiving I infer that nobody else apart from you and Stevan would have done so. Is that right?

PS: I do think that is true. But if the five other invitees had been able to come, we would also have heard it from Paul Ginsparg, and probably from Herbert Van de Sompel, Cliff Lynch, and Andrew Odlyzko.

RP: Looking back today, how important do you think the Budapest Initiative was?

PS: I think it was terribly important for a large number of reasons. It was the first public definition of open access, it was the first call for OA journals and OA archives at the same time, it was the first general call for OA in all countries and disciplines, it was the first to be accompanied by significant funding, and it was the first to use the term "Open Access". We hoped to present a clear and exciting vision that would affect both opinion and action, and I think we succeeded.

All the subsequent definitions of open access drew upon the Budapest definition. While there were several of these, none has replaced the Budapest definition; instead they all drew upon it.

I would add that there was open access activity before the Budapest meeting — which I have documented in my open access timeline — and some of it was very important. So I am reluctant to say that the open access movement started with the Budapest statement. However, there is a difference between related or convergent projects that lack a commonly-accepted name, a commonly-accepted vision and direction, and a commonly-defined goal, on the one hand, and a movement that does have all of those things. In that respect the Budapest statement launched or catalysed the open access movement.

RP: As I said earlier, it appears to have been István Rév who suggested holding the meeting from which the Budapest Initiative emerged, and it was Rév who approached OSI in the first place. Melissa Hagemann also suggested that it was also he who suggested producing a manifesto. We don't hear too much of Rév nowadays — although he is director of the Open Society Archives. I wonder if perhaps he is an unsung hero of the open access movement?

PS: He certainly has not lost interest, and I believe he has played the role he wanted to play. Like any movement, there are a lot of unsung heroes in the open access movement. Indeed, until she was recently sung, Melissa was herself one of those.

RP: You are referring to Melissa being honoured as a SPARC innovator in December 2006?

PS: Exactly. Like István, Melissa is one of those people who are extremely effective at doing what they do, but who do those things in a way that is invisible to most of the world. István and Melissa have been very influential within OSI, and OSI has been very influential in the open access movement.

FREE OR OPEN?

RP: I want to explore in more detail what we mean when we talk about open access. I note, for instance, that during the Budapest meeting you gave up the term Free Online Scholarship, and so exchanged the concept of "free" for "open". But this was not just a question of terminology was it? There is a technical difference between FOS and OA?

PS: I don't think so. FOS never had a technical definition, but if I had to give it a technical definition I would give it the same technical definition that I give to open access.

RP: There have nevertheless been discussions — and sometimes heated disagreements — within the open access movement over the difference between free and open haven't there?

PS: There are many distinctions to be drawn among kinds of wider and easier access, and sometimes there are heated disagreements about which types are adequate and which are superior. But I don't think the distinction between "free" and "open" is an illuminating way to frame any of these disagreements. It could be, if both terms were well-defined. But while "open access" has a clear meaning from public definitions, "free access" does not.

RP: Amongst the various distinctions of wider and easier access in the OA movement is the difference between the so-called price barrier (a journal subscription) and what you call "permission barriers". In other words, even if there is no price barrier between a reader and a research paper, there may be copyright restrictions limiting what people can do with that paper apart from reading it. You have said, for instance: "While removing price barriers without removing permission barriers is not enough for full open access there's no doubt that price barriers constitute the bulk of the problem for which open access is the solution." Others, however, disagree, and say that all that is needed is to remove the price barriers. It seems to me that this is what distinguishes your vision of Free Online Scholarship from the vision of open access held by someone like Harnad — who argues that permission barriers (or copyright) are irrelevant to discussions about open access?

PS: Yes, Stevan and I disagree about this. I never tire of saying that OA removes both price and permission barriers. But this isn't just my view. It's the view articulated in the Budapest, Bethesda, and Berlin statements.

Even if price barriers are the bulk of the problem, there are still strong reasons to remove permission barriers as well. We need to remove them in order to spare users the delay and expense of seeking permission whenever they want to exceed fair use.

And there are good reasons to exceed fair use, for example, to quote long excerpts, print full-text copies, email copies to students or colleagues, burn copies on CDs for bandwidth-poor parts of the world, distribute semantically-tagged or otherwise enhanced versions of a text, migrate copies to new formats or media to keep a text readable as technologies change, archive copies for preservation, include the work in a database or mashup, copy the text for indexing, text-mining, or other kinds of processing, make an audio recording of the text, or translate it into another language.

Some of these uses may actually fall under "fair use" or "fair dealing" but most do not. Moreover, even when fair use is not too restrictive, it's vague and contestable, and users can't count on it. The vagueness makes users fear liability and act cautiously. It makes them decide that they can't use something they'd like to use, or that they must delay their research in order to ask permission.

RP: Harnad's main concern seems to be that if the OA movement spends too much time fretting over permission barriers it risks being deflected from its goal. He also thinks that it leads people to put too much stress on the gold strategy, and so muddies the water. As he put it to me, "Peter's own notion of there being not one but two kinds of barriers (access barriers and 'permission' barriers) ... blurred things somewhat, again in the direction of

putting a gold gloss (permissions) on what should have been a neutral open access matter (any barrier is an access barrier!)." How do you respond to that?

PS: First, the two kinds are not access barriers and permission barriers, but *price* barriers and permission barriers. Both are access barriers. Second, we don't blur things by recognising this distinction. On the contrary, we blur things by *not* recognising this distinction.

Of course any access barrier is an access barrier. That's a tautology, and I agree that we should try to remove access barriers in order to accelerate research and promote the free circulation of ideas. But it doesn't follow that there's only one kind of access barrier. I actually recognise several other kinds beside the two under discussion here — notably, censorship barriers, language barriers, handicap access barriers, connectivity barriers or the digital divide. I'd like to remove them all. I don't believe, however, that the mission of OA covers all of these and we'll have to address the last four through separate, parallel action. But OA does cover price and permission barriers.

When Stevan encounters an online resource that removes price barriers but leaves irritating permission barriers in place, such as a prohibition on printing, I think he's as irritated as I am. So it's not that he denies these barriers exist, or that they differ from price barriers, or that they can obstruct research.

RP: So how would <u>you</u> define your disagreement with Harnad over access barriers?

PS: Sometimes Stevan argues that removing price barriers is a higher priority than removing permission barriers. I agree with that, as you've noted, but it's not a reason to stop pursuing both goals.

Sometimes he argues that pursuing it would slow down progress toward the higher priority. That could happen, but I don't support it in that form. For example, if a journal removes price barriers but not permission barriers, then I never recommend that it delay its conversion until it can do both. Stepwise progress is still progress and I praise it whenever it occurs. But when policies stop short of removing both kinds of access barrier, they leave room for improvement and we shouldn't be shy about saying so.

Sometimes he argues that the Budapest-Bethesda-Berlin definitions don't call for the removal of permission barriers, but that is untrue.

And sometimes he argues that removing price barriers will suffice because users will act as if permission barriers had been removed and do whatever they need to do with the file. Sometimes that's true and sometimes it isn't, but there's a problem either way.

RP: How do you mean?

PS: I don't want to obstruct research for conscientious scholars who respect licensing terms, whether they form the majority or a vanishing minority. Nor do I want to ask our many allies to work for a world in which more users feel more pressure to be less conscientious.

Winking at copyright infringement is a bad strategy for a movement claiming legality and the moral high ground, and it's not even necessary.

RP: You mentioned the Budapest-Bethesda-Berlin definitions. I believe Harnad's position is that these definitions should never have concerned themselves with permission barriers. Since open access is urgent, he says, the more barriers we try to remove the longer it will take to achieve it. This issue also feeds into the debate about the respective virtues of gold vs. Green, around which there has been a good deal of sparring between Harnad and open access publishers. Public Library of Science (PLoS) co-founder Michael Eisen and BioMed Central (BMC) publisher Matthew Cockerill, for instance, both believe that open access papers should come with re-use rights. Since OA publishers make their papers available under a Creative Commons licence, they automatically provide re-use. Self-archived articles, by contrast, can only remove the price barrier since subscription-based publishers insist on keeping the permission rights. Harnad argues that this is irrelevant because no one would ever want to re-use scholarly papers. To worry about permission barriers, he says, is to confuse text with data: while people might want to re-use data, they don't want to re-use papers.

PS: This is not about the difference between text and data. Data is a separate issue that we have to address, but reuse issues arise for texts as well as data, and to facilitate the reuse of texts we have to remove permission barriers.

RP: Can you give me some examples of where reuse rights are important?

PS: If you don't remove permission barriers, then you have to seek permission before you can translate a paper, text-mine it, or move it into a new medium or a new format to make it readable under some new technology. I gave some other examples a second ago.

Scholars want to reuse papers all the time and for reasons that are central for legitimate scholarship. We're already well into the era in which all serious research is mediated by sophisticated software, if only search engines for example. Over time, we'll rely more and more on tools for crunching or reusing digital texts — for searching, mining, summarising, translating, querying, linking, recommending, alerting, and other kinds of processing. An important purpose of open access is to facilitate this future and give these tools the widest possible scope of operation.

RP: One of the benefits of a Creative Commons licence, of course, is that it allows the copyright owner to signal to the world (both textually and via metadata) what he or she permits others to do with their work. By attaching a Creative Commons licence to a paper specifying this, the author obviates the need for third parties to have to track them down to find out.

PS: Yes. There's no point in removing permission barriers without informing users that you've removed them, and CC licenses do this job beautifully. They describe what's permitted and what isn't in lay terms for non-lawyers, and in technical terms for lawyers, but also in machine-readable terms for search engines and other visiting software.

Failing to inform our users that we have removed certain permission barriers is almost equivalent to not removing them. In both cases we force users to choose between the delay of asking permission and the risk of proceeding without it.

I don't want to say that CC licenses or the equivalent are necessary for open access. They aren't. But they are extremely useful. If we don't remove permission barriers, then we restrict usage, and if we lift these restrictions without informing users, then we cause them to slow down, ask for permission, or err on the side of non-use. These are not just obstacles to research, but obstacles that OA was designed to remove.

LOW-HANGING FRUIT

RP: To pursue the difference between open access and Free Online Scholarship a little further: I would anticipate that you would like to see more information made freely available than some OA advocates. Where do you draw the line (if any) between what scholarship does and does not need to be free online, and why?

PS: For me it depends on the consent of the author or copyright holder, not the genre of the writing. The open access movement has a good reason to focus on the genre of journal articles more than the genre of books. But the common formulation of this reason is incomplete.

It's true that journals don't pay authors for their articles. This economic fact matters, but mostly because it allows scholarly authors to consent to open access without losing revenue — unlike musicians and movie-makers for example.

This may be clearer if we imagine an author of a journal article who for some reason refuses to consent to open access. The economic door is open but the author is not walking through it. So relinquishing revenue is only relevant when it leads to consent, and consent suffices whether or not it's based on relinquishing revenue.

It follows that if authors of royalty-producing genres like books consent to open access, then we'll have the same basis for OA to books as we have for OA to journal articles.

I've often argued that authors of royalty-producing monographs should consent to OA either because the benefits, in a larger audience and increased impact, outweigh the meagre royalties, or because a free online edition will boost the net sales of the priced, printed edition. Some authors will be persuaded and some won't. The percentage of hold-outs among book authors will be higher than the percentage of hold-outs among article authors. But that doesn't mean that OA is limited to journal articles, only that journal articles are the low-hanging fruit.

RP: The point of difference here is that researchers generally hope to earn money from their books. By contrast, they do not write their papers for monetary gain, but to advance their careers, so they are more willing to give them away?

PS: Yes, and this has been the case since the birth of science journals in 1665. Researchers are not only willing to publish journal articles without direct monetary compensation. They are eager to do so. They do it for a host of intangible rewards, such as having an impact on their field, building the case for promotion or tenure, and establishing priority over others working on the same problem. They also do it simply to make a contribution to knowledge — to carry an honest pebble to the pile of knowledge, as John Lange put it.

This is a very human mix of interested and disinterested motives. The author's act is not entirely charitable and there's no reason to think it is. On the contrary, we would get open access a lot faster if researchers understood what was in it for them.

But in the larger picture, we need to realise how rare it is for authors to give away their hard work without direct payment. We also need to realise how fortunate we are to have grown up in an academic culture in which it was the custom for authors of research articles to be paid salaries by universities rather than royalties by publishers. It didn't have to be this way, and it makes open access possible.

By the way, it does more than make open access possible. It frees scholars from the market so that they needn't write what they think will be popular. It frees them to defend hated ideas, like evolution, and highly specialised ideas that only interest six other people in the world. It doesn't guarantee that truth-seeking will be uncorrupted by profit-seeking, but it removes one corrupting influence, and it doesn't guarantee that we'll gradually fill in the smallest gaps in our collaborative understanding of the world, but it removes one deterrent. It's a payment structure we need for good research itself, not just for good access to research.

RP: Ok, so OA can also work for books, but it may not be the first choice for researchers looking to make their work more accessible. You also advocate open access for other things, including data, learning objects, images, multimedia presentations, software etc.

PS: I do. If you can get the relevant consent, then all of those can be open access, and open access to them would advance research. Some of them are easier to achieve, because the authors already have an interest in providing that consent. Some of them are more difficult to achieve because authors will either give up revenue or *fear* that they will give up revenue.

RP: As you express it in your overview of open access: "Royalty-free literature is the low-hanging fruit of open access, but open access needn't be limited to royalty-free literature."

PS: Exactly. Well-put!

RP: It is here again that you part company with Harnad I think; or where he parts company with you. Does he not believe that open access is only about scholarly articles?

PS: He focuses on journal articles — as I do too, by the way. But I don't know whether he'd say that OA is properly limited to journal articles or merely that we should start with journal articles and not worry about any other category until we succeed with journal articles.

It's true that the task of achieving OA for journal articles is already large and we certainly have our work cut out for us. But I'd be surprised if he thought that OA to books was undesirable.

The real difference between us may be that he wants to give all his energy to his top priority and I want to organise a campaign that works on all fronts at once, giving primary attention to primary objectives but not failing to give secondary attention to secondary objectives. I also want to achieve OA for journal articles in a way that lays the foundation for OA to other and more difficult categories.

I also want to be prepared for pleasant surprises. For example, while all of us were focused on journal articles, having good reason to think they were easier than books, Google and the Open Content Alliance started digitising books by the millions. The Google editions of the public-domain books are nearly OA and the OCA editions are fully OA.

Royalty-producing books under copyright are still higher hanging fruit than journal articles, but I don't think any of us expected that public-domain print books would be even lower-hanging fruit than journal articles.

Books are a very valuable piece of the larger mosaic we're trying to build. The surprise is not that an unrelated development turned out to be related, but that a plot line I didn't expect until Chapter Ten started taking place in Chapter Two.

RP: The problem with books, of course, is that publishers are far less willing to allow self-archiving than they are with journal articles. I believe you have been unable to make you book **The Speluncean Explorers** ***available online because your publisher (Routledge) has refused to give permission?***

PS: That's right. As other presses started to experiment with dual editions, and discovered that OA editions tended to boost the visibility and sales of the non-OA editions, I asked Routledge whether we could make an experimental OA edition of my book. If it wanted to test the waters, then it might be looking for a Routledge author willing to put his royalties at risk. So I volunteered and made the argument. But Routledge wasn't interested. If it ever changes its mind, however, I'm still interested.

By the way, when my earlier book, *The Paradox of Self-Amendment*, went out of print and the rights reverted to me, I made it OA immediately, and to judge from my correspondence it's had many more online readers than it ever had in print. No surprise there. It was a $70 hardback.

RP: Where do you draw the line between what is scholarship and what is not in the context of open access?

PS: I haven't got an answer to that, although I know that we need one. It is an issue for a very practical project that I have been working on — the Universal Repository for the Internet Archive.

RP: The aim of the Universal Repository is to provide somewhere where scholars can self-archive their papers, even if they don't have a repository in their institution and there is no disciplinary repository they can use?

PS: Yes. And to implement it we will have to draw a line between scholarship and non scholarship. Right, now, however, I don't have a principled way to do that, and it has never been defined by any of the open access public definitions.

Paul Ginsparg's arXiv, by the way, has to make a similar distinction and has a nice way of doing it. The arXiv says, roughly speaking, "We will accept things that are fit for peer review, or that are ready for submission to a scholarly journal." A deposit needn't have passed peer review anywhere, but it must be fit for submission to peer-reviewed journal.

THE BETHESDA STATEMENT

RP: You mentioned that there have been other open access declarations and manifestos. And as you said, the two main ones were the Bethesda Statement and the Berlin Declaration?

PS: Yes.

RP: When we discussed the Budapest meeting you said that you didn't know how it might have gone had Harnad had not been there, particularly with regard to ensuring that the green strategy was not overlooked. That, says Harnad, is exactly what did happen at Bethesda. I think he wishes that you had shouted harder. As he put it to me: "If Peter were less compliant and obliging, he could have fought harder at Bethesda (where he was and I wasn't) where, vastly outnumbered by the gold contingent, open access essentially got defined as OAP [OA Publishing], omitting green completely, and setting open access back at least 3 years." How do you respond to that?

PS: I have talked to Stevan about this privately. First, the Bethesda statement does *not* define open access as journal-oriented or gold open access. It does use the word "publishing" in the definition, but we'd have to narrow its meaning artificially in order to interpret it as favouring journals and disfavouring archives and repositories.

Second, the situation in Bethesda was quite different from Budapest. In Budapest there were only a dozen people in the room, but at Bethesda there were five or six times as many. We broke up into working groups, which meant that individual participants only had a voice in the particular group to which they had been assigned, and could only influence the topics that were discussed in their group.

Bethesda, by the way, was a meeting primarily for funding agencies. In my working group, most people around the table were thinking only about what funders could or should to do promote gold OA. For example, they were clearly reluctant to require open access, or even to encourage it very strongly, on the ground that there were simply not enough open access journals to take up the demand. I argued with some passion that the solution was to require open access archiving instead, for either we have the capacity already or we could quickly grow it, and we wouldn't limit the freedom of authors to publish in the journals of their choice. The argument didn't sink in, and I still don't know what would have helped make it sink in.

Perhaps I should make clear that while I regard gold and green OA as complementary, and equal in urgency for the movement as a whole, I strongly believe that funder and university policies must focus on OA archiving rather than OA journals, and I made that case repeatedly within my working group. I even wrote a hand-out for the Bethesda meeting, which the sponsors circulated to all the participants in advance, outlining a model funder policy focused on OA archiving.

Stevan underestimates what I did at Bethesda, and seems to base his picture on inferences from the outcome. But no one can say that he's underestimating what he could have done at Bethesda.

RP: Essentially, you were outnumbered?

PS: I was outnumbered, and it was a brand new idea to most people in the room. It didn't sink in. And I doubt it was even discussed in the other groups.

Then, after all the working groups had made their contributions, some central group — I am still not sure exactly who it was, but I think PLoS and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute were heavily involved — combined the insights of the separate working groups and produced a draft text.

RP: Which was then published as the Bethesda statement?

PS: We all had a chance to comment on the draft, and I made some comments that were eventually incorporated into the final text. But there was no way to change the overall shape of the policy that emerged. If you look at it again, you'll see that it's organised by working group.

RP: What were your views on the final text?

PS: There were several provisions of the policy that I thought were weak. The failure to distinguish green and gold OA is a weakness; the limitation on the number of copies that can be made of an OA article is a weakness. I also I think that defining open access to include archiving is a weakness.

RP: Can you explain what you mean by that last point?

PS: Yes. While I believe that OA archives provide a *bona fide* form of OA, I also believe that OA journals provide a *bona fide* form of OA. If OA archiving is part of the *definition* of OA, then it follows that OA journals don't provide OA until they deposit their articles in an archive. That's absurd. I do want OA journals to deposit their articles in archives, as PLoS and BMC do for example, but I also want to recognise that the articles are already OA.

On the other side, the Bethesda statement had several strengths, including the emphasis on individual works, as opposed to journals or publishers, and the emphasis on community standards to enforce attribution and proper use, as opposed to copyright law. It was also right to recognise the need for explicit labels to help users understand that OA works are actually OA.

And I appreciate that Bethesda defined OA to permit derivative works, even though I think this is a complex topic that needs more detailed attention. For example, translations are derivative works, and I'd open the door wide to them, but so are copies that add or subtract the word "not".

But above all, Bethesda was decisive in helping funding agencies see that they had their own interests in OA, and that a good OA policy would advance their own goals and not merely those of the researchers they were funding.

RP: In other words, OA allows funders to maximise the use of the research that they fund. What you say fits with what Melissa Hagemann told me — the significance of Bethesda, she said, is that it drew attention to the role that funders ought to be playing in encouraging open access, most notably in mandating the researchers they funded to self-archive their papers in order to make them more widely available. Mandates had not been much discussed before Bethesda I assume.

PS: That's right. But while it persuaded funders that they had their own interests in OA, it didn't persuade them to adopt mandates. One of the most commonly heard statements at Bethesda was that "We should use carrots and not sticks."

RP: Why do you think they took that view?

PS: Mainly because neither carrots nor sticks had yet been tried, and it didn't make sense to skip over carrots until we had given them a good try. In addition, as I mentioned, the only kind of open access people were thinking about at that time — outside my working group — was gold OA, and mandates don't make nearly as much sense for gold OA as they do for green OA.

RP: What you are saying is that people attending Bethesda simply didn't understand that you could require researchers to make their papers open access themselves?

PS: No, most of them did not. A couple of people in my working group got it, but the idea didn't survive the note-taking process to make it to the drafters, or to make it from the drafters into the final text.

RP: You said that PLoS was involved in the drafting process. As an open access publisher, PLoS surely had its own agenda. A paranoid interpretation of the outcome could be that

the meeting was an attempt by OA publishers to hijack the debate, and divert attention from green to gold. Would there be any justification for reaching such a conclusion?

PS: No. PLoS took part in Budapest and supported complementary green and gold strategies. And the funding agencies had a stronger interest in supporting green OA than gold OA, if only they understood the options fully. But many of the Bethesda participants knew very little about green OA or had an innocent bias in favour of journals simply because they were familiar with journals.

The fact is that green OA has always had to fight for recognition. Its novelty makes it invisible. People understand OA journals, more or less, because they understand journals. But there's no obvious counterpart to OA archiving in the traditional landscape of scholarly communication. It's as if people can only understand new things that they can assimilate to old things. All of us have had the experience of describing green OA at a meeting and then getting questions that presuppose that all OA is gold OA. All of us have seen critics object to green OA policies by pointing out supposed shortcomings of gold OA. This is the kind of obstacle green OA faced at Bethesda, not hijacking.

By the way, Stevan is very familiar with this problem and it frustrates him as much as anyone. He knows that we haven't found the magic appeal, loud or soft, long or short, nuanced or simple, peaceable or aggressive, to make headway against it, and he shouldn't be surprised that it was part of the atmosphere in Bethesda, especially in 2003.

RP: And it is for this reason that there has always been a bias against green perhaps?

PS: If you mean within the OA movement, then, as I said, I prefer to think of this as a division of labour. Some people who are well informed about archiving still think it is more urgent to establish and spread OA journals, just as other people who are well informed about OA journals think it is more urgent to establish and spread OA repositories.

RP: And this is a good thing.

PS: Definitely. It is very healthy for us that we have both kinds of people within the movement, working hard to put their visions into practice.

RP: Even if one accepts that there was no hidden agenda at Bethesda, one inevitably wonders why, after Budapest, it was felt that there was a need for any more statements, declarations or manifestos?

PS: We didn't need a new definition of OA, although some of the Bethesda additions were improvements. But we did need funding agencies to recognise that they had their own interest in open access, and to commit themselves to it. Writing a public statement and adding your name can be more effective than nodding around a table.

I would add that after the three main statements — Budapest, Bethesda, and Berlin [BBB] — there has been almost no attempt to redefine open access. While there have been many other declarations of principle, most of them simply build on the BBB definitions and aim primarily at rallying support among people at a certain conference, or people in a particular sector of scholarly communication or in a particular region of the world. That has been very helpful.

RP: What contribution did the Berlin Declaration make then? Was it mainly a tool for persuading European research funders to buy into open access?

PS: It helped recruit European research institutions as well as funders. There was nothing distinctive about its definition of OA. That was essentially the same as the Bethesda definition.

But Berlin was the only one of the three main statements to incorporate a follow-up process, notably through annual meetings designed to monitor and stimulate further progress. At the next several meetings there were valuable refinements to the original declaration. For example, Berlin 3 added some excellent implementation suggestions.

RP: So the Berlin format managed to keep the momentum going by assuming that there would be an annual review of progress?

PS: Right. While there has also been continuing life to the Budapest Initiative, it hasn't taken the form of revising the statement or issuing new implementation suggestions. The Budapest Initiative continues in the form of OSI funding for various OA projects, in the discussion forum, and in what could be called its citation life. It continues to exert an influence on researchers, librarians, university administrators, and policy-makers.

RP: One of the downsides of having a series of different declarations and manifestos, perhaps, is that different factions have been able to cherry pick parts of them in order to shape the debate in a way that suits their own agenda. I think that both Jan Velterop and Mike Eisen have tried to do that over time, focusing in on particular parts of a declaration and declaring that that particular aspect is the one true definition of open access. One could argue that Harnad has done the same. Have you noticed this at all?

PS: Yes, I have noticed some selective reading of the public statements. Some of it, however, supports the kind of division of labour that I believe is beneficial. If the BOAI supports two strategies, and you draw primarily on one of them, you're still helping the larger cause.

I don't mind this kind of selective reading as much as others might. Part of the reason is that OA needs to harness the energies of different people with different interests and priorities. Part of the reason is that OA is not a narrow concept that can be applied or implemented in just one way. Neither is it so loose that every kind of stretching is justified. But it deliberately allows some kinds of flexibility, and embraces projects and policies that make different decisions.

For example, I personally believe that OA articles should permit commercial re-use. But as I once put it in my newsletter, I want to make this preference genial, or compatible with the opposite preference, so that we can recruit authors and publishers who want to block commercial re-use. At this stage we benefit more from this flexibility than we would from premature uniformity in setting rigid boundaries.

RP: You mean at this stage of the development of open access?

PS: Yes. Long-term it might help to have a more precise idea of what the boundaries of open access are, and some way of recognising when a given resource does or doesn't live up to the definition, roughly the way that the free and open source software movement does.

But we're still early in our history and still learning which variations on the theme are possible and what advantages and disadvantages each of them carries. I don't think we are ready to go beyond the Budapest statement, for example, to sharpen those boundaries — especially if it means compromising our ability to recruit new supporters and build a coalition.

I worry that drawing the boundaries too soon would reflect the partial views of one or another of the different blocs within our diversified movement, and exclude friends and allies whose projects are among our undeniable success stories.

The Open Access Definition

RP: So how do <u>you</u> define open access? What is a one-sentence definition of open access?

PS: When I need a short definition, I say that open access literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.

RP: You say <u>most</u> copyright and licensing restrictions. Presumably then you see some permission barriers remaining?

PS: Yes. It's harmless and sometimes beneficial to allow *some* copyright and licensing restrictions to remain. We don't need to put all open access works into the public domain, although the public domain is a very clear and adequate legal basis for open access.

We can stop short of the public domain, for example, in order to ensure the integrity of the author's work and ensure that the author is properly credited. But we shouldn't allow many more restrictions than that or we will start to interfere with the legitimate needs of scholarly users, for example in making and distributing copies, migrating a paper from one format or medium to another, harvesting or mining it, or translating it into another language. We don't have movement-wide agreement on which permission barriers must go and which may remain.

Eventually there will be an OA-friendly license corresponding to each variation on the theme, and we can talk about which licenses to endorse. That will be the most precise and satisfactory to solve this problem. But even then, I hope we will recognise a plurality of licenses.

RP: One issue your definition does not address is immediacy. As you know, while the majority of publishers have accepted that authors can self-archive their papers, many of them insist that this can only be done after an embargo period.

PS: Right.

RP: In theory, therefore, open access could be delayed indefinitely by publishers?

PS: Many publishers want very long embargoes, which is one reason why funding agencies and governments should not defer to publishers on this question. OA policies should set a firm and fairly short deadline on embargoes.

I believe that any embargo is a compromise with the public interest. Immediate OA is best for researchers. But there are two points to make here. First, it makes more sense to think about immediacy as a policy goal than as a defining condition of OA. Second, compromise may be politically necessary.

RP: So while immediate access is optimal, delayed access is an acceptable compromise?

PS: Yes. Open access to literature is more useful when it happens immediately, and less useful when it occurs after some delay. But there are political reasons why embargoes might be a necessary comprise to get an otherwise strong OA policy adopted. If we insist on immediate OA, we may lose the policy and let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

But not every embargo is an acceptable compromise. Some are too long and we can never forget that the public interest would be best served by immediate access.

Apart from the political problem, I am reluctant to *define* open access as immediate open access. If we did, then delayed open access would be a contradiction in terms. But delayed open access is perfectly coherent — it's just inferior to immediate open access. We have to do the hard work of minimising embargoes in the political arena, and not let ourselves think we can define them away.

I would like publishers to recognise that embargoes are a satisfactory way to meet their legitimate interests. I would like them to accept that the cost of a research project is almost always greater than the cost of publication, sometimes thousands of times greater, and therefore that the agencies funding research — and in the case of public funders, taxpayers — add at least as much value to peer-reviewed research articles as publishers do. If so, then publishers can't trump all the other stakeholders just because they "add value" and want to dig in their heels. But neither can we expect publishers to continue to add value without compensation.

So we have to compromise. I believe the best compromise is a period of exclusivity for the publisher followed by unqualified open access for the public. I would like publishers to accept OA mandates for publicly funded research and focus their concern on the length of the embargo.

But for that to happen, OA proponents must accept the legitimacy of compromise. If they don't, ironically, they'll create a new kind of embargo — an indefinite delay of strong OA policies in the name of purity.

GREEN ROAD VS. GOLD ROAD

RP: You are renowned for the ecumenical approach you take to open access — and practically every measured answer you give to my questions confirms this. Your objectivity, however, is far from typical, and the movement is very factional. What is perhaps striking is that although — when pushed — most if not all OA advocates agree that both the gold and green approaches make sense, they tend, as we have discussed, to support just one approach, and often with extraordinary virulence. Why is there such a strong inclination to promote one over the other?

PS: I don't know. There is no need whatsoever to put one ahead of another, and I have never quite understood the importance of putting one method ahead of the other.

I've seen arguments that, strategically, green should come first because it helps create the environment in which both green and gold can survive. But that presupposes that the transition to gold must come about through pressure and friction –the pressure on subscriptions from rising levels of OA archiving. While I believe that's one avenue of change, I also believe that the transition to gold can come about through publisher self-interest and multi-party negotiation, as CERN is now proving.

I've also seen arguments that, strategically, gold should come first because it helps create the environment in which both green and gold can survive. The theory here is that we need a healthy, critical mass of peer-reviewed journals before governments will adopt strong green policies in the face of publisher objections that green OA will kill peer review. I don't believe this either, although I do know, from talking to policy-makers, that OA journals do help the case for OA archiving. Everyone wants to be reassured that OA peer-review providers exist before they put toll-access peer-review providers at risk.

The fact is that OA archiving and OA journals are complementary and need to proceed simultaneously, much as an organism develops its nervous system and digestive system simultaneously and cannot do one first and the other second.

RP: As we also discussed, Harnad's argument is that we need to prioritise self-archiving because it is a much quicker way of achieving open access. Is he right?

PS: He's right that it's quicker, and that's a good reason to pursue it. But it doesn't stand alone, and that's a good reason not to pursue it alone.

RP: Critics of green, by contrast, respond that it is not a robust strategy. As I mentioned, Guédon characterises it as a "tool", implying that it should be viewed as merely transitional, a kind of lever to force the world down the gold road, not a solution in its own right. Harnad, however, insists that green is sufficient unto itself.

PS: Green OA is more than a tool to force the transition to gold. We know that because we'll want green even in a world in which all journals are OA. For example, we'll want green OA for preprints, for the earliest possible timestamp to establish the author's priority, and for the security of having multiple OA copies in multiple independent locations. We'll even want OA repositories as the distribution mechanism for peer-reviewed OA journals. And at least until the very last subscription journal converts to OA, we'll need green OA so that funder and university policies can mandate OA without mandating submission to OA journals and limiting the freedom of authors to submit to the journals of their choice.

But on the other side, green is not sufficient. It hasn't caused journal cancellations in physics but it might cause journal cancellations in other fields, eventually, as OA archiving rates approach 100%.

If so, then we'll need OA peer-review providers to replace the TA [toll access, or subscription] peer-review providers overthrown by OA archiving. By the way, Stevan acknowledges this too, and it's perfectly consistent for him to do so.

RP: The argument here is that if all researchers make their papers freely available on the Web libraries will stop buying journal subscriptions, and so the system on which self-archiving depends will fail. In short, argue critics, self-archiving will cause the financial failure of the journals that organise the peer review process, causing quality control to disappear, and the entire scholarly publishing process will collapse as a result.

PS: Yes, they say that. If the growth of green does undermine subscription journals then it will prove to be the parasite that kills the host, and eventually we won't have the subscription-based peer review providers.

Even then, however, we'll have the OA peer review providers and we'll also have all the money we formerly spent on the TA peer review providers. The first priority for that money should be to support and expand the peer-reviewed OA journals. If we do, we'll have peer review in all the niches where we formerly had it and it won't cost us a cent more. Moreover, I've argued elsewhere that it would cost us less and there are reasons to think the quality of review would improve as well.

On the other hand, if the growth of green does not undermine subscription journals, then the parasite will not kill the host. And by the way, this is what we're seeing in physics after 16 years of green OA through arXiv at rates approaching 100%.

Physics journal publishers have not seen any cancellations that they can attribute to arXiv. On the contrary, they host their own mirrors of arXiv, accept submissions directly from arXiv, and are now symbiotic with it. If other fields develop as physics has, then subscription-based peer review will coexist with gold OA.

RP: How do you expect this to play out?

PS: So far nobody knows whether the growth of open access archiving will undermine journal subscriptions outside physics. Some publishers are confident that it will, but they never argue their case. They might be right, but there's no evidence yet that they're right, and counter-evidence from physics that they are wrong. But there are natural experiments under way that will produce some evidence one way or another.

Last year we saw a wave of OA mandates across many disciplines. As a result, the OA archiving rates in many fields outside physics will start to increase, and we should be able to observe whether they trigger journal cancellations above and beyond the background rate of attrition. Meantime, the claim that OA archiving mandates will kill journal subscriptions is an unargued fear or a self-serving prediction to support a lobbying campaign.

But there are two important points to make here. First, even if the growth of OA archiving does undermine journal subscriptions, it will not undermine peer review. Don't forget the peer-reviewed OA journals and the money formerly spent on the TA journals that we could redirect toward OA journals.

Second, OA archiving is justified whether or not it undermines subscription journals, especially for publicly-funded research. We just have to be prepared for both possibilities.

OPEN ACCESS MILESTONES

RP: As you said earlier, you publish a detailed timeline of the open access movement. What do you believe to have been the most significant milestones?

PS: Gosh. It depends on whether you want the top 10 or the top 100. But I'd certainly mention arXiv, the physics preprint repository launched by Paul Ginsparg in 1991. I'd mention Stevan Harnad's self-archiving proposal in 1994. I'd mention the 2001 PLoS open letter, which called on publishers to make their papers freely available within six months of publication. The letter attracted 34,000 signatures from scientists in 180 countries, and led to PLoS becoming a publisher itself in 2002. I would also want to mention the launch of BioMed Central in 2000.

I'd also mention the Budapest Initiative in 2002, the first university OA mandate at Queensland University of Technology in 2003, and the Congressional directive for an OA mandate at the NIH in 2004.

RP: The NIH policy has not proved very successful to date though has it?

PS: No, it hasn't. Congress asked for an OA mandate and the NIH adopted an OA request. Despite its best efforts, the agency hasn't been able to get the compliance rate above 5%. As it stands, the policy is not important because it is strong, but because it was unprecedented at the time and because the NIH is so large and influential. Moreover, the inadequacy or failure of the policy has focused minds around the world on the need for true OA mandates.

In that light, I'd also mention some of the policies that emerged in the wake of the failure of the NIH policy, especially the OA mandate from the Wellcome Trust in 2005 and the OA mandates announced by the RCUK [The Research Councils UK] also in 2005 — which were themselves an outcome of the groundbreaking investigation of scientific publishing by the British Science & Technology Committee in 2003.

RP: Open access is primarily viewed as an issue that need only concern scientists. Clifford Lynch told me he would be interested to hear your take on the reason for this. He added that it was striking that, although you are one of the leading lights of the open access, you are yourself not a scientist.

PS: I believe that open access is just as desirable and just as attainable in the humanities as it is in the sciences. But most of the action has been in the sciences — far and away. So even though I'm not a scientist — unless logicians are scientists — I began to track and then advocate OA in the sciences.

But I've also been arguing for open access in the humanities all along, however, and wrote one of the first articles making the general case for open access in the humanities. In that article I suggested nine reasons why OA is moving more slowing in the humanities than in the sciences, and I still stand by that diagnosis. And I'm happy to say that the level of interest in the humanities and the pace of progress are both picking up.

In addition, I'd advise other humanists to work for OA in the sciences. Not only will the sciences create policy precedents that will benefit the humanities, in funding agencies and universities, but it will free up money to pay for OA in the humanities.

A large part of the monograph crisis in the humanities, for example, can be traced directly to high-priced science journals, which soak up library budgets, lead librarians to cut back on book acquisitions, and lead book publishers to cut back on new works.

THE SLOW ROAD

RP: It is now six years since the Budapest Initiative, and 16 years since Paul Ginsparg founded arXiv. In 2002 you were talking of an imminent tipping point for open access. Yet today still only around 15% of the scholarly literature is being self-archived, and another 10% published in gold journals. Why is open access taking so long to achieve?

PS: Personally I am no longer surprised at how long it is taking, although I was surprised at first. I guess, like most people, I thought that if you have a really good idea, and all the means for implementing it at your fingertips, then it shouldn't take too long for it to spread, especially if the people who are in a position to implement it are easily persuaded once you get their attention. All these conditions are met with open access.

On the other side, we're talking about deep institutional change, the kind that's deep enough to affect individual actions and attitudes.

RP: Open access assumes a fundamental change to scholarly communication doesn't it?

PS: Yes. Individual actions can change institutions, and we've been counting on that. But at the same time institutions shape individual actions, and we've tended to underestimate that. So we have a kind of halting progress in which unilateral researcher action moves us forward, but we must wait for other actions before other researchers are willing to act unilaterally.

Moreover, scholars are overworked and preoccupied. For many of them until recently open access was the last thing on their mind. They didn't want to hear about some new development in scholarly communication. They wanted to focus on their research.

So we have to persuade them that this isn't just about publishing economics or publishing technology — for most of them, deeply boring topics which they deliberately tune out. We have to persuade them that this is about enlarging their audience and impact as authors and facilitating their research as readers. Researchers are good at what they do because they can tune out what isn't relevant to their work. The trick is to get them to see that open access belongs on the inside, not the outside, of that focus.

We're not fighting stupidity or even opposition to OA. We're fighting a semi-deliberate attempt by researchers to concentrate on their work and avert their eyes from distractions.

RP: The irony is that researchers are in the most powerful position to effect this change in scholarly communication. They could decide to self-archive all their papers from today, or to publish only in OA journals?

PS: Right. But just as they don't like it when their university wants them to pay attention to parking lots, or lawn mowing, or fundraising, researchers don't like it when someone wants them to pay attention to scholarly communication. They view it as another distraction from what is really important in their lives and their careers.

RP: The challenge then is to get scholars to see that OA is in their own interests.

PS: Exactly. I said earlier that scholars are easily persuaded once we get their attention. That has been my experience, and I believe it has been the experience of anybody who speaks about open access on university campuses.

If you can get them in a room and tell them about the benefits of OA, and the methods of delivering it, you can excite them in just a few minutes. The trick is to get their attention.

RP: Given that open access is in their own interests, researcher's tardiness in embracing it is downright irrational. Research suggests that making research papers freely available on the Web makes it much more visible, and so increases its impact. By adopting OA, therefore, they are more likely to help their career enhancement than by sticking with toll-access journals and not self-archiving.

PS: That's right. Their focus is not just to get their research right, but to try and get the greatest impact they can from that result. And since open access increases impact, it is directly relevant to them.

I sometimes compare the situation to a job I had in high school. I told you that I worked in an electronics laboratory. One job we did in the lab was to tape record stage productions for theatres. I remember going to a theatre once, hanging a microphone over centre stage, and then sitting down by our equipment. Everything was working fine, but I noticed that one of the stage hands had moved the microphone to stage right. I pointed this out to my boss a few minutes before curtain, and asked if I should get it moved back. He said: "Nah, don't bother. When the actors see where it is, they'll move over."

That is my attitude towards open access: when scholars see where the microphone is, they'll move over. But many of them haven't yet realised that open access is the microphone of their research.

RP: Ok, so one of the things that has been holding back open access is researcher resistance...

PS: I wouldn't put it that way. Researchers are not opposed or resisting. They are preoccupied and busy, unfamiliar with their options. There are good studies on this question, and they turn up very low levels of opposition and very high levels of ignorance and misunderstanding. We still have a lot of educating to do.

IMPEDIMENTS

RP: You say it is just a case of researchers finding where the microphone is. It's also true, of course, that while they might — to use your metaphor — see the benefits of moving over to the microphone, they fear that in doing so they might, say, trip over something, or slip out of the limelight. Some, for instance, assume that putting their papers on the Web involves bypassing peer review. That's not true, but because open access journals also conduct peer review, and green OA does not imply that researchers just stick their papers on the Web, but that they publish them in a traditional peer-reviewed journal first, and then self-archive them. Traditional publishers have fanned the flames of misunderstanding by repeatedly claiming that open access implies abandoning peer review. How can this misunderstanding be cleared up?

PS: Actually I recently published a very long 15-point rebuttal to publisher claims that open access will undermine peer review. One problem is that those who say that they are worried about peer review never connect the dots, and never explain how or why open access might undermine peer review. So it is almost impossible to know what to respond to. Nevertheless I reconstruct the objection and respond to it at length.

RP: I wonder if part of the problem is that many people — I think correctly — assume that in an open access environment peer review can and will change, and develop in new ways. Might that be introducing some noise into the debate?

PS: It's true that peer review might change, and also true that some people fear this prospect and others relish it. That conflict has certainly created some misunderstandings about open access in the past — for example, that the purpose of OA was to bypass peer review, that OA presupposed a certain model of peer review, or that we had to agree on the best form of peer review before proceeding with OA. Those were all harmful and unnecessary misunderstandings.

What's important for the current debate is that while open access can change everything about scholarly communication — including peer review — there is no reason at all to think that it will corrupt peer review. In fact, insofar as OA changes the dynamics and incentives within a journal, there are reasons to think it will actually improve peer review, for example by removing the incentive to accept enough papers to fill a short issue. OA journals don't have to worry about short-changing subscribers with a short issue. I say more about these possibilities in a newsletter article from last year.

Putting aside the disinformation campaign asserting that government OA mandates will undermine peer review, we see a lot less confusion of OA issues with peer review issues today than we did in the past. In the past many people really believed that open access is about bypassing peer review — which was never true, and they could never find anybody saying it was true. Many people were honestly confused, even if other people who knew better repeated the claims in bad faith.

RP: You are saying that it is less of an issue today?

PS: Yes. Fortunately most stakeholders and journalists now understand that achieving OA and reforming peer review are independent projects. Open access is not about bypassing peer review. Open access is compatible with every kind of peer review, from the most conservative to the most innovative.

That said, it's true that there are certain synergies between open access and some models of peer review. That is, some models of peer review lend themselves better to open access than to subscription or toll access, and I'm not at all surprised — I am even gratified — that some people are experimenting with those synergies.

I have my own thoughts about better and worse forms of peer review, but I rarely discuss them in order to avoid giving support to the false impression that OA favours some kinds of peer review over others. What's true is the converse, that some kinds of peer review favour or presuppose open access.

The many strands of the OA movement would never agree on the best form of peer review, and there's no reason for them to do so. But we all agree on wanting to see OA for the results of peer review, regardless of what kinds are actually in use.

WHY DOES THE WORLD NEED OPEN ACCESS?

RP: Let me ask you a very basic question then: What is the argument for open access? Why does the world need it?

PS: We need it for many reasons. Primary among them is to accelerate research and share knowledge. The benefits accrue first to researchers themselves, both as authors and readers, but they do not stop there. OA also benefits universities, libraries, and funding agencies. I believe it benefits publishers as well, even if these benefits are offset by some losses. And therefore I believe it benefits scholarly societies, both as publishers and even more as supporters of research in certain fields or topics. Finally, it benefits non-researchers, since we all depend on research for our health, our safety, our convenience, and of course for our understanding.

In short, it benefits just about everybody. The exception is that it may not be a net benefit for those publishers who currently profit from the toll-access system, since they could see their profits diminish in an open access environment.

RP: As a philosopher I suspect you also have views on the ethics of open access. Is there a moral argument for open access?

PS: Yes, and again there is more than one. Essentially, knowledge is a public good, not a commodity. But today we are treating it as a commodity, not a public good.

RP: Can you expand on that?

PS: Over the past half century or so we have increasingly outsourced journal publishing from universities to commercial companies and non-profits which tend to behave, for this purpose, like commercial companies.

In addition we have seen changes to the copyright system that have tilted the balance of the copyright laws in favour of publishers and away from consumers. The combined effect of these changes has been to create an enclosure around what one might call the "scholarly commons".

So today there is a moral argument for de-enclosing that commons and sharing the knowledge it contains. There's a moral argument for giving effect to the original intentions of the researchers, who willingly published without direct compensation, and the funding agencies, who paid for the underlying research in order to realise its promise of general utility.

There is, by the way, also a clear utilitarian argument, since de-enclosing the knowledge commons would accelerate research and, as I said, everyone benefits in very concrete ways from the progress of research. This is true even though not all research has concretely useful consequences.

There is an ethical argument to provide access to those who cannot afford to pay, and to distribute the public good of knowledge equitably among all who can make use of it. We can't easily do this with material goods, like food and shelter, which are costly to reproduce and distribute, but we can do it for digital goods.

Nor need we do it for all digital goods. The principle isn't that everything useful ought to be free, or even that all information ought to be free. It's that when we have author consent and the digital medium, then knowledge ought to be free. Under these conditions, the alternative is to retreat from revolutionary abundance to artificial scarcity, when we have a chance to abolish scarcity altogether and fulfil the needs of both the creators and the users of knowledge.

RP: Since most research is funded by the public purse some people argue that there is also an argument that says that taxpayers should have a right of access to this information?

PS: Yes, I make this argument myself. You can frame it as another moral argument, since governments should treat taxpayers fairly and should spend public money responsibly. But there are also pragmatic arguments woven into this moral argument, for example, that governments should maximise the return on the public investment in research.

But whether we call it an argument about fairness or efficiency, it is simply perverse to spend a lot of public money on research, and then hand over the results to companies who believe that they can only survive by surrounding that knowledge with access barriers.

It doesn't matter whether publishers are correct or incorrect in their belief that they can only survive by erecting access barriers. If they are correct, then we shouldn't give them the fruits of this public investment. If they are incorrect, then we shouldn't give them the fruits of this public investment. It's perverse either way.

WHAT PRICE PUBLISHING?

RP: You said that just about everybody benefits from open access except for those publishers who profit from the toll-access system. How would you characterise the way in which scholarly publishers have responded to the open access movement as it has developed?

PS: Publishers are not monolithic, so it's not easy to talk about them as a class. Some publishers provide open access, and some of them are willing to experiment with it. And of those experimenting, some are doing it in good faith, while others appear to be doing it cynically.

RP: You mean some publishers are carrying out experiments in order to suggest that open access can never work, not in a spirit of genuine experimentation?

PS: Yes. I'd put about half of the hybrid OA journal programs in this category. The publication fees are very high and the reuse rights are very low. The author uptake is low, the publishers don't mind, and there's no attempt to adjust the terms to increase author uptake. For some, it's a way to be paid twice for the same article, since they charge a publication fee for the OA option and refuse to reduce their subscription price in proportion to author uptake.

Then some publishers strongly oppose open access and don't hide the fact. Among those who oppose it, some oppose open access journals but not open access repositories, while others take the opposite position. Some publishers provide some form of OA themselves but lobby hard against government OA policies.

It is also clear that some publishers who have not yet adopted open access are nevertheless watching in good faith as other publishers experiment, and might be ready to launch an experiment of their own, or to change their policy, if they see those experiments producing positive results.

So there is a huge range of attitudes among publishers.

RP: What are your views on what one might characterise as the more egregious actions of publishers: the aggressive lobbying against mandates, the hiring of the so-called pit bull of PR Eric Dezenhall to help them make their case, the recent launch of PRISM, and that organisation's dissemination of what one might call disinformation?

PS: Yes, I call it disinformation.

RP: What do you make of this kind of activity?

PS: I have no problem with publishers defending their own interests, and no problem acknowledging that one of their interests is revenue and profit, but I wish they would be more candid in acknowledging that it *is* their own interests they are defending.

RP: Whereas they claim that they are defending peer-review, or trying to avoid the collapse of the scholarly communication process?

PS: Yes. What bothers me is the dishonesty of some of the arguments. Instead of arguing that their revenues are at stake, publisher lobbyists argue that peer review as such is at stake, that OA is a form of censorship, and that authors and publishers will be forced to "surrender" their articles to the government.

There's a gray area in which we can't distinguish very weak arguments from deliberate disinformation, or innocent misunderstandings from culpable misrepresentations. But these are well outside that zone. They're cynical attempts to mislead anyone who doesn't know the facts, especially policy-makers and journalists. They're arguments that only work with an ignorant audience, and they know that.

What's ironic and frankly astonishing is that academic publishers should be making these arguments, or allowing their lobbyists to make them. They should be trying to prove that they are especially careful with reasoning and evidence, and deserve to be entrusted with the management of peer review. But the ones behind the PRISM campaign are proving that they are careless with truth and do not deserve that trust.

RP: One of the common threads in the prolonged discussion about the NIH policy is that — by insisting that NIH-funded researchers should be forced to archive their papers in the US government-owned database PubMed Central — the open access movement wants to see the scholarly communication process nationalised. In 2004, for instance, Rudy Baum, Editor-in-Chief of the American Chemical Society's Chemical & Engineering News argued that open access advocates wanted to place responsibility for "the entire scientific enterprise in the federal government's hand." He added, "Their unspoken crusade is to socialize all aspects of science, putting the federal government in charge of funding science, communicating science, and maintaining the archive of scientific knowledge."

More recently we discovered from a leaked document that Dezenhall advised publishers to campaign around claims not just that the US government is seeking to "nationalise science", but, as you just pointed out, that "public access equals government censorship."

Baum was clearly wrong, and Dezenhall's advice plain wicked, but it is true that public money is being invested in the creation of PubMed Central is it not?

PS: There's no sense at all in which the NIH policy, or FRPAA, would "nationalise" or "socialise" science. The government would archive copies of articles, but only articles that were already published by independent, private-sector, peer-reviewed journals. The originals would continue to exist in every library and web site where the publishers had managed to place them. There isn't a single OA policy in any country under which the government would take over peer review, perform peer review itself, tell journals how to perform peer review, tell journals what to publish, or tell journals what business models to use.

But if they are saying that OA policies are a bad idea because they cost too much...

RP: That is one of the claims.

PS: I consider that one of the honest arguments used by publishers, and it is one that should be debated carefully and on the merits. It's true that the NIH policy — for example — costs money, but it's far from clear that it costs "too much" for the benefits it buys. The NIH has said that if it managed to achieve 100% compliance with its public access policy, then the programme would cost between $2 million and $4 million per year.

That is about 0.01% of the NIH budget, a vanishing fraction. Publishers who say that it's not the percentage that matters but the absolute number of dollars forget that the NIH spends about $30 million every year in support of subscription journals, for example through page and colour charges. Publishers don't object to this subsidy, even though it's ten times greater than the cost of the proposed subsidy for OA.

RP: You are saying that if 100% of the scholarly papers produced from NIH-funded research were self-archived then PubMed Central would cost the American taxpayer one tenth of what it currently pays to support the journal subscription system?

PS: Exactly. The argument that the cost of an OA program diverts money from research applies ten times more strongly to the subsidy for subscription journals. Now the cost of the OA program actually benefits research and would be justified if it were much larger, for it amplifies the utility and impact of NIH research. But the money spent on subscription journals, which limit access to paying customers, has the opposite effect. Even if much more than 0.01% of the NIH's budget were used to support open access for NIH-funded research, I would call it a bargain.

RP: How much do you anticipate that it would it cost in publication fees if 100% of NIH-funded research was published in gold journals?

PS: We could estimate the amount if we assumed that all open access journals charged publication fees and if we picked a number to represent the fee. Just multiply the fee by 65,000, the approximate number of peer-reviewed articles published every year based on NIH-funded research.

But that kind of estimate would be misleading. The majority of open access journals don't charge publication fees, and so far nobody has done the work to figure out the average fee.

RP: You have always stressed that scholarly publishing is not a costless activity. As you point it in your overview of open access (citing the BOAI FAQ), "Free is ambiguous. We mean free for readers, not free for producers." It is your assumption, however, that an open access model is cheaper than a subscription model?

PS: That's right.

RP: Where will these savings come from?

PS: I assume we're talking about open access journals, not open access archives.

RP: Yes.

PS: First, then, OA journals can dispense with the print edition — a savings they share with toll-access ejournals. Second, OA journals dispense with subscription management — all the apparatus and personnel for soliciting, negotiating, tracking, and renewing subscribers. They dispense with the technology for authenticating users, distinguishing authorised from unauthorised users, and blocking access to the unauthorised.

RP: Technologies like digital rights management [DRM]?

PS: Yes. They cut out all the apparatus of exclusion, even if they retain DRM in some harmless form for counting traffic.

They dispense with legal fees for licensing. If they use Creative Commons licences or the equivalent, the licences are already written and free of charge. So the journals don't have to pay lawyers to draft licences and they don't have to pay anyone to negotiate their terms with subscribers or libraries. Because open licences permit more than they prohibit, the journals also save money previously spent on monitoring and enforcing compliance.

And they can dispense with marketing.

RP: You are saying that it is enough just to publish papers and put them on the Web. Readers will then find them?

PS: Open access publishers might still do some marketing if they want to. But they can reduce or eliminate their marketing budget, and rely on no-cost, *post facto* indexing by third parties like Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, and OAIster, plus all kinds of non-profit and for-profit indices that will pick up the papers and make them visible to potential readers.

In addition, an OA publisher can be lean and mean, optimised for OA publication. That by itself will give it lower costs than a traditional print publisher retooling for electronic publication. It will have no legacy equipment, no legacy employees, and no legacy overhead.

RP: But there will be some new costs.

PS: Sure, but they're limited to the costs of collecting publication fees from authors, collecting subsidies from institutions, or running institutional membership program like that offered by BMC.

RP: In short, in addition to removing the access barriers (and with luck the permission barriers too), open access will cost society less?

PS: Significantly less. It would cost publishers less and it would cost universities and libraries less.

THE BIG PICTURE

RP: Today we are witnessing the development of a wide range of free and open movements. We've mentioned the free and open source software movements, and we have mentioned Creative Commons. There are also movements like Open Data, Open Biology, Open Spectrum, Open Source Journalism, Open Source Politics, and so on. You have described the open access movement as being "a cousin to the 'information wants to be free' movement." So how does the open access movement fit into this larger context?

PS: I don't remember the full context of that quote but I think I was trying to *distinguish* it from the information wants to be free movement. They are related but they are not the same thing.

RP: Can you expand on that?

PS: The "information wants to be free" movement isn't well-formulated and I don't want to strike out at a moving fogbank. But if it wants to abolish copyright, or bypass copyright, or infringe copyright, then clearly open access is not the same thing. Open access is compatible with copyright as it is, despite the grotesque imbalance in contemporary copyright law. Open access would certainly benefit from the right kinds of copyright reforms, but it doesn't require them. The important point is that open access is within reach today, and entirely lawful, even if we fail to reform or rebalance copyright law.

RP: Because open access is focused on royalty-free literature, or literature in which the copyright owner makes it freely available voluntarily.

PS: Yes. The consent of the copyright holder has legal consequences and authorises what would otherwise be unauthorised. The tradition of royalty-free journal literature makes it easy for authors to consent to OA, and consent to OA makes OA lawful. That's the large story-line, but of course things get more complicated when we seek the consent of publishers rather than authors.

Still, we're fortunate that we don't have to reform, abolish, or violate copyright. That sets open access apart from some of the kindred movements.

On the other hand, some of those kindred movements are also compatible with copyright, and nowadays they all tend to use a consent or license-based approach to give their work a legal footing. That is, they leave bad statutes unmodified and work around them with good contracts or waivers. This is how we have to work until we can transform copyright law. Just a bit more than 30 years ago in this country, new work was in the public domain by default and authors had to take affirmative steps to copyright it. Now new work is under full all-rights-reserved copyright by default and authors must take affirmative steps to open it up.

I don't expect that we'll ever shift the default back to its original position, and at least the current law lets us change the default through consents, waivers, and licenses. The disadvantage is that we must act, and cannot rest on the default rules. But the advantage is that we are acting, and reclaiming control of scholarly communication.

RP: But why are all these free and open movements arising today. What's the big picture?

PS: One thing they demonstrate is that there has always been a gift culture hidden by the larger commodity culture. When we get tools that let us share more effectively, this hidden gift culture begins to become more visible. That's part of what is happening.

For scholars, at least as authors, academic journal publishing has always been a gift culture. Researchers have shared their work without direct compensation. Obviously it is not a gift culture from the publishers' point of view. But as soon as the internet allowed scholars to share their work more widely and effectively, some authors saw the gain and started to do it.

They started, even if the acceleration was slow. If it had been faster, I might have stayed a philosophy professor.

But there's another effect here as well. Sharing is simply easier today, that is, sharing information over a digital network. Historically, researchers could only share their work with the help of middlemen. Now they can do it on their own. They can do it the moment they think of doing it, and they can do it for a worldwide audience they could never have reached in the past, even with a lot of money, time, and the help of middlemen.

Some of the motivation to share was already there, in scholarship and other domains. But some of it is new, elicited by the extraordinary ease of sharing over a digital network. It makes you wonder whether we shouldn't write off human beings as basically selfish until we find new ways to test the hypothesis. Until digital technologies came along, most forms of generosity were costly, which naturally held down the incidence. We shouldn't be surprised to see it spike when we found a way to enlarge — hugely enlarge — the forms of sharing that were easy and essentially costless.

It doesn't matter that this sharing is usually mixed with interested motives. Whether the generosity is pure or impure, its volume goes up when the difficulty goes down.

So the internet is giving effect to older forms of gift culture, and thereby making them visible. But it's also stimulating new forms or at least new participation in the old forms. Either way, we can truthfully say that participation is up, not just visibility.

RP: Yochai Benkler makes this point in his book, The Wealth of Networks. In addition, he suggests that the motivations that underlie sharing — social motivations, cooperation, friendship, decency etc. — are beginning to move from the periphery of society to the core. This has important economy implications but, as you imply, also social consequences it seems.

PS: Yes. When we recognise the breadth of the gift economy, and start to depend on it ourselves, it's hard to go back to seeing it as the weird or marginal exception. We do internalise norms from the practices around us, or what we take to be the practices around us. So the spreading gift culture is both a cause and effect of spreading respect for a norm of sharing.

RP: This question may drift a little far away from the topic of open access, but I'm going to ask it anyway, since it seems to flow from your answer. You say that that as the internet enables more and more sharing so our attitudes towards sharing are changing too. I am also conscious that in an interview you gave to Library Journal in 2003 you said of open access, "It's about sharing knowledge, and sharing knowledge is one of the conditions of civilisation." Civilisations change over time of course. What are the possible social implications of the free and open movements, including open access?

PS: Hang on... *[Whooshing noise]* ...is that better?

RP: Yes. That's much better.

PS: Good, there's a vacuum cleaner being used behind me. I've turned off the speakerphone; it will help me to concentrate with the phone to my ear.

Let me respond to at least part of your question. I do think that sharing knowledge is a condition of civilisation, and that's one of the reasons why I'm excited by open access. It's even one of the reasons why I'm optimistic about its future.

However, I don't want to say that discovering knowledge, articulating knowledge, and sharing knowledge, are things that humans do best — because we are actually very good at ignorance and superstition. But I do want to say that they are among the most precious things we do, and that open access fosters them.

In my view anything that fosters knowledge sharing is not just good, but precious. That is why, at bedrock, I feel so strongly about open access.

PLAYING FOR TIME?

RP: What is surely very striking — and this is something Benkler also discusses — is the huge resistance that the free and open movements are facing from incumbents. At bottom, this seems to be a struggle between those who believe that in a knowledge society the rules, and established ways of doing things, need to change, and those who believe that we can hang on to the old models of the industrial society. The struggle being played out between the open access movement and those publishers who support PRISM seems to fit this model. But do you think these publishers really believe they can maintain the old way of doing things, or are they playing for time?

PS: I really wish I knew. I'd like to think that even those lobbying hardest against OA are privately preparing to lose the battle and coexist with OA. Their first choice is to defeat or derail it, but they can't afford to assume they will succeed. I'd like to think that they all see long odds in betting against the internet. I'd like to think that the same perception would make them rethink and look for business opportunities in betting on the other side.

But I really don’t know. It's possible that they're just delaying adaptation as long as possible. But it's also possible that some really believe their longevity is assured by their past value.

Do any of them believe that no adaptation is necessary? I doubt it. That would be truly remarkable. But I really don't know.

RP: They might be encouraged in thinking that will not have to change by the simple fact that much of their lobbying to date has proved successful might they not?

PS: To some extent they have been successful in lobbying. While giving the impression that they are under siege, in reality they have succeeded more than they have let on. Back in 2004, for instance, Congress told the NIH to require open access to NIH funded research. But the publishing lobby made sure that the NIH did *not* require it, but merely request it.

Congress also asked for a six month embargo, but the publishing lobby got it changed to twelve months.

The publishing lobby has been present at the deliberations of the largest funding agencies since then, and has nearly always succeeded in persuading them to weaken strong drafts, often at the last minute. So in this they have been very effective.

However, every time they succeed in watering down one policy, three more policies are adopted in other institutions or other countries.

RP: Do you think the recent news that Elsevier plans to use advertising on its new web portals OncologySTAT and DoctorPortal offers any clue? On the one hand, it could be seen as a way of looking for a potential way of funding open access. On the other hand, however, people have been quick to point out that this is simply an attempt to extract even higher revenues from scholarly publishing, and implies no fear of a loss of subscription revenue, or an awareness that the world is changing?

PS: I don't begrudge them their revenues as long as the output stream is open to readers and the input stream is open to authors. I commend Elsevier for OncologySTAT. It's a way to provide free online access and preserve revenue at the same time. Even though there are other ways to provide open access, we have to recognise that without some methods that protect revenue, we'll have less of it over time than we might have had.

Elsevier has the capacity to compete against open access as long as any other publisher. It could be the last toll-access publisher standing, if it wanted to. But it's exploring forms of adaptation. It's preparing for a world in which it has to compete with free. Other publishers should ask themselves what they are doing to prepare for that world.

RP: In your view then this is a war of attrition that publishers must eventually lose?

PS: Let me put it this way. The spread of open access is unstoppable, even if some kinds of toll-access coexist with it indefinitely. I published an article recently in which I tried to identify trends in scholarly communication with some implications for open access, positive or negative. I could hardly find any that favoured the toll-access publishers, but I found dozens that favoured open access. The rise of open access is inevitable, although the death of toll access is not inevitable.

However, while some toll-access publishing can co-exist with open access, perhaps indefinitely, the toll-access survivors will be those who have adapted to a world of OA.

RP: It seems to me that advocates of some of the other free and open movements are less optimistic. In June, for instance, the founder of Creative Commons Lawrence Lessig announced on his blog that he will be redirecting his research to what he calls "the 'corruption' of the political process." As I understand it, his view is that unless we first fix the political system first, the various free and open movements may not succeed. As he put it, "Compare: Imagine someone devoted to free culture coming to believe that until free software supports free culture, free culture can't succeed. So he devotes himself to

building software. I am someone who believes that a free society — free of the 'corruption' that defines our current society — is necessary for free culture, and much more. For that reason, I turn my energy elsewhere for now."

Certainly the various changes that have been made to copyright have tilted the balance significantly against the consumer and towards publishers and media companies, as you mentioned earlier. New legislation like the Digital Millennium Copyright Act [DMCA] and the Sono Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, for instance, have been very controversial. In addition, we are witnessing a struggle around so-called Net Neutrality, and there is some concern about the significant power that the current patent system gives to proprietary software companies — which many fear could hold back or even cripple the free and open source software movements. In fact, wherever you look you can see struggles between open and proprietary models. And the current struggle with traditional publishers over open access seems to fit right in there. Might Lessig have a point? Maybe we will need to fix the political system before these movements can flourish?

PS: I strongly agree with what he is saying, and I have corresponded with him about it. The copyright industry has been very successful in changing copyright law to suit itself, and in ways that harm consumers.

RP: Essentially we are talking about the so-called "special interest" problem. Incumbents are very successful at lobbying governments in order to protect their own interests.

PS: Right. And they have been so successful because they are so wealthy, and to me this is a symptom of a much larger problem, and Lessig is on to it. However, what he calls corruption I would put slightly differently.

RP: How do you mean?

PS: On the whole private interests prevail over the public interest because they are better funded. Large private interests can take their messages to Congress and make sure they are heard. Every large company has an interest in legislation and the means to do something about it. And every member of Congress has an unrelenting interest in fund-raising.

Private interests can't guarantee a win, but they can guarantee that they are heard. Who does that for the public interest? There are some organisations to do some of it, but they are public-spirited foundations, few in number compared to private-spirited corporations. Or they are non-profits, low in cash compared to for-profit corporations.

Everyone can take their message to Congress. That's the openness of our system. But in practice the well-funded private interests do so much more often and much more effectively than the abstract and ill-funded public interest. In practice it's become just another market.

In the case of open access the conventional publishers are the well-funded private interests, and they are doing everything they can to preserve their revenue streams and block legislation that would put the public interest first.

RP: So how do open access advocates counter the financial muscle of publishers?

PS: We can't match their money, and insofar as that's a surrogate for power, we can't match their power. However, our arguments are better than theirs. Here's where Lessig's project matters. Insofar as Congress is corrupt in Lessig's sense, good arguments lose to money, and insofar as it's uncorrupted, good arguments can prevail.

But like other human institutions, Congress is a place of mixed motives and intermediate virtue. To counter the financial muscle of publishers, we don't need Congressional purity. If we did, we'd be doomed. We need to make Congress into the kind of place where good arguments beat money more often than not.

The more you try to win with good arguments alone and little money, the more you see the systemic problem and the urgency of addressing it. I've seen this systemic problem up close, and I'm delighted that Lessig is drawing new attention to it.

THE FUTURE OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

RP: You say you are confident that open access will prevail. So when do you expect we will see a 100% open access environment?

PS: I'm confident that open access will become the default for research articles. However, it is likely that we will approach 100% asymptotically, and it's possible, as I suggested earlier, that toll-access will not entirely disappear.

RP: Can you expand on that?

PS: Even after open access has become the default it will still be compatible with toll access, and it may be that some toll-access journals will never convert to open access.

For instance, the most prestigious toll-access journals — journals like *Nature* — may be able to charge subscription fees forever, or for as long as they maintain the level of prestige they have today. They will still be must-haves in a university library, and they will be even easier for a university to afford once most other journals are open access.

It's also possible that we will see 100% open access operating in parallel with toll access, because some journals will exist in dual editions. One of the first open access publishers to turn a profit, MedKnow, publishes dual editions of each of its journals.

RP: In other words, in addition to providing a free version online, a journal might sell a paid-for print issue for those who want it — a model in fact that has also been adopted by some PLoS journals.

PS: Right. Open access isn't about excluding toll access and I don't think the two models are incompatible: they can co-exist, although we don’t know for how long or in which niches.

And as I say, the market share of open access is likely to approach 100% asymptotically, with the last 5% much harder to achieve than the next 5%.

RP: Can you give me some sense how you envisage scholarly communication once we achieve, or have nearly achieved, 100% open access?

PS: Rigorous peer review will still be in the interests of all the stakeholders, so we can expect that to continue. That said, there might not be rigorous peer review on every form of scholarly communication — scholarly blogs, for instance, may never be rigorously peer reviewed.

RP: So we can expect to see peer-reviewed literature coexisting with non-peer-reviewed literature?

PS: Yes, just as we do today. Critically, however, there will be no access barriers to the peer-reviewed literature — and since peer review is a way of saying that this literature is the most worth reading, it will provide scholars with a filter to enable them to focus on the most important subset of the literature, while being confident that they can have full access to all of it.

RP: Of course even this filtered subset of the literature will be too much for any one researcher to read.

PS: That's right, even on the specialised topics of their research. Consequently, we will also need to rely on software filters to complement the human peer review filters.

RP: And presumably this software will only be able to do a good job of filtering once all the literature is open access?

PS: Exactly. We already use software to find texts and within limits to evaluate their relevance to our research purpose. We'll start to use software to select the relevant texts most worth reading, and we'll start to use software to mine more texts than we could ever read. And we'll use software to enhance our reading after we find a text and decide that it deserves our attention.

We'll use text summarising software to zero in on what to read but also to become familiar with texts of secondary relevance that we'd otherwise skip entirely.

RP: How might that work in practice?

PS: Instead of doing a traditional search, for instance, and ending up with 100,000 hits on your topic, you could sort them by relevance and ask for summaries of the top 10 or top 100. Software able to write concise summaries of longer articles is already pretty accurate, and there is no reason why it will not become more accurate. But as you say, it requires access to full-texts.

In addition, we can expect machine translation to become more and more accurate — so you will be able to get pretty good translations, as well as pretty good summaries, of works not published in your own language.

In an open access environment you will have a chance of using actual relevance, and nothing but actual relevance, as your filter to cope with information overload, as opposed to the filter of what is available in your institution's library, the filter of what you can afford to buy, or the filter of what your search engine's crawler was able to reach.

PETER SUBER

RP: Let's turn back to Peter Suber. As we discussed, one of the key roles you have played in the open access movement, from the very early days, has been to monitor and comment on developments as they occur; and in doing so you have helped to shape the movement. As we also discussed, you have done this via your newsletter (The SPARC Open Access Newsletter), and via your blog (Open Access News), which you update on a daily basis. With interest in open access growing apace, I guess it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep on top of developments. How do you track everything that's going on?

PS: For the blog, I use software called WebSite Watcher, which allows me to run a kind of private crawl of the internet.

RP: How does that work?

PS: It downloads a page and compares its current contents with what it found on its last visit. Because I run the software every day, it compares what is there today with what was there yesterday.

RP: How many sites do you check each day?

PS: About 2,000. I also add several new sites every week. For example, if I hear that a funding agency is considering an open access policy, I'll start to crawl its front page, its "what's new" page, its page of press releases, and so on.

I crawl all the relevant discussion lists, all the open access project initiatives, all the funding agencies with open access policies, all the blogs that regularly discuss open access, all the journals likely to publish articles about open access. You get the idea.

I can also use it to run keyword searches on vertical search engines. For example, I can go to a site like PubMed Central and search for new articles that mention open access, and I can have it highlight the hits that didn't appear in yesterday's hit list. So in addition to the 2,000 web sites, I run about 100 specialised searches on vertical search engines every day.

Of course, I also rely heavily on email leads from other open access activists.

RP: How many hours a day do you spend updating your blog?

PS: On an average day it takes a few hours to look at all the pages that have changed since yesterday, a few more hours to pick out the subset of changes that matter for open access, and a few more hours to compose my blog posts. On a light news day, I can finish the blog work by noon and get on to the newsletter or my correspondence. But on a heavy news day, I may give it all day and still not finish.

RP: And some postings will take longer than others I guess. Sometimes you just blog the news; sometimes you add comments as well?

PS: Right. I don't feel obliged to comment on every development. That would double the time required. But I do want to comment on the important developments or the ones on which I have something to say.

The volume of the news is only part of the problem. I'm a lot slower to think through an issue now than I was when I was younger — and when I comment on a new development, I want to give it the time that I feel it needs.

RP: Personally, I find the most valuable part of the blog to be your comments. In fact, I tend only to read those items that you have commented on.

PS: I know others who do the same. I wish I could comment on more. If the news would only slow down, or if only someone else would blog it. I can't swing at every pitch, however. Time is one reason. But on many new developments, my thoughts are swirling and I want to let them keep swirling.

RP: You say you can spend all your working day on the blog. How long is an average working day for you?

PS: Ten or twelve hours. But that's for everything — the blog, newsletter, research, correspondence, the works, not just the blog.

RP: Can you give me some feel for how large the blog is today? How many posts have you have made since you launched it, and when was it launched?

PS: I launched it in May 2002, and just a few days ago wrote my 12,000th post.

RP: Some in the OA movement might wish that you did more public speaking and direct advocacy. When you became open access project director for Public Knowledge you did do some lobbying in Washington, but later stopped. Do you prefer not to engage in that kind of advocacy?

PS: I used to do a lot of shoe-leather work in Washington for Public Knowledge, both in Congress and the agencies. But we phased out my street-level work in Washington when we could afford lobbyists who had more Washington experience than I did and who actually lived there.

I also used to speak a lot — a couple of times a month. I would have kept up my travel and speaking schedule if the growing volume of OA-related news hadn't cut so deeply into my time. I've had to cut back on travel in order to do the rest of my work. But I admit that I'm also weary of travel and have had some health problems that make travel difficult.

If I could speak without travelling, I'd do a lot more of it — and in fact, I've done a few teleconferences, speaking to live audiences in Canada or India from my study in Maine. When I actually do travel, or rather when I finish travelling and arrive somewhere, I enjoy myself, enjoy speaking, and appreciate the networking. I always see old friends, meet people I already knew virtually, and make new friends. One of my regrets is that I am so busy with the rest of my work that I don't have time to travel as much as I used to.

RP: Might it be time to offload the blog on to someone else, or introduce a more automated system so that you can do more of that? Do you think you time is being best used for the open access movement in continuing to run the blog?

PS: I think about this every day. First, I do a lot besides the blog. For example, see the 100-plus issues of my newsletter. My email correspondence is also extensive, and may be more helpful to individual projects or people than my blog or newsletter.

But I'm very conscious that I could do more if I blogged less. The snag is that I need to do the blog to do most of my other work. I need to know what's going on. The blog forces me to inform myself. It forces me to digest new developments and not merely nod at them. That daily research is the time-consuming part, and as long as I'm doing it, I should share what I'm learning.

Nevertheless, I'm always looking for ways to cut back. If you've been following the blog for long, you've noticed that I've narrowed its scope considerably. I used to cover copyright, academic freedom, peer review, electronic publishing, digital preservation, search engines, and many other topics. Now I only cover them when they have a strong OA connection.

But that's not enough and I often think about my priorities and what it would be like to have an assistant or staff.

RP: Why not?

PS: There are some practical problems, like finding the money to pay an assistant or staff. Another is to spend less time training and supervising an assistant than I now spend blogging. I haven't yet found a good solution, but I'm not giving up.

RP: The more time you spend on the blog, the less time you have to help others perhaps?

PS: Yes, but I should clarify: I do three things, not just two. I write the blog, I write the newsletter, and I do a large amount of what you could call direct assistance. I talk a lot, by phone and email, with researchers who want to provide open access to their own work, funding agencies considering an open access policy, faculty strategising for a university policy, librarians considering a repository, journals considering a move to open access, journalists writing stories about open access, lobbyists thinking about effective arguments and strategic responses to obstacles. You could call this consulting, advocacy, or direct assistance. Nearly all of it is *pro bono*.

I'd love to give each of these three tasks the time it deserves. The problem is that each of them is nearly a full-time job, and any two of them add up to more than a full-time job.

Clearly, if I didn't do the blog I could spend a lot more of my time on direct assistance. But to be helpful or effective, I still have to know the things that I learn by doing the blog.

RP: Presumably the more successful the open access movement becomes the harder it will become for you to keep up with the blog?

PS: I think of this every day too. While the number of topics I cover keeps shrinking, the volume of news keeps growing — which is a direct result of the success of the open access movement. I do believe it contributes to the success of the open access movement, but it doesn't scale with that success.

I know that my current job description is unsustainable and I often wonder how to deal with that. I still don't have an answer. The good news is that by the time this problem solves itself, one way or another, the movement will be so large and self-nurturing that it won't need my blog.

RP: You mentioned that you had some health problems that make it difficult to travel. You were referring to Graves Disease were you?

PS: No. Graves disease is one of those well-behaved diseases, easy to control with a daily pill. The problem that sometimes interferes with travel is an unexplained seizure disorder that strikes without warning, sometimes while I'm on the road.

RP: I recall you saying earlier that the time might come for certifying open access in the way that the Open Source Initiative certifies Open Source licences, and acts as the guardian of the Open Source Definition. You also pointed to the need to counter the constant lobbying being done by publishers. I understand that the OSI has been encouraging you to create a 501(c)(3) in order to have an organisation that can be funded. This is a bit of hobby horse of mine, but might not one solution be to create an Open Access Foundation? I would imagine that some form of official organisation would be better placed to attract the funds you need to grow the movement, and to take some of the pressure away from you and allow you to use your talents to better effect?

PS: It might, and by the way I don't oppose the idea: I just oppose certain top-down models for such an organisation. Certainly I can see that in the long term, open access might benefit from an organisation. But it might not — depending on what kind of organisation we are talking about.

Remember that we're lobbying for OA today, and I'm getting funded today, without such an organisation. If there are good ways to take some of the load off me, I suspect that they too could be implemented without an organisation.

In any case, I'd want to separate the question of an open access organisation from the question of what I might need personally in the long-term. I also think many of the other successful movements — like open source — got where they are without having anybody doing exactly what I am doing.

But I agree that as open access continues to progress, the job description I've carved out for myself will drift from one and a half or two jobs — roughly where it is now — to three or four jobs. At some point I'll have scale back significantly or find some assistants.

CAREER DIGRESSION

RP: You say you are getting funded today. As I understand it, your funding still comes from OSI, although I think The Wellcome Trust recently agreed to pay one fourth of the annual grant you formerly received from OSI. Is that correct?

PS: Yes it is.

RP: That is your sole income is it?

PS: I also get money from SPARC [The Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition], which pays me for each issue of my newsletter. OSI and Wellcome Trust pay me for the blog, and SPARC pays me for the newsletter.

RP: This is reflected in name change the newsletter underwent — it was formerly called the FOS Newsletter, but is now the SPARC Newsletter?

PS: Yes. After I left teaching, I needed a new source of funding and SPARC agreed to publish my newsletter. I was glad to rename it in order to reflect SPARC's involvement.

RP: So far as I know, you are the only open access advocate to have given up their career for the cause. Was that an easy decision to make?

PS: No. It was a hard decision, and also a very complicated one. As I said earlier, a number of different factors were involved — not just my desire to work on open access, but the fact that my wife and I both wanted to try something new and both wanted to move to Maine.

RP: You are clearly very committed to open access. You said earlier that the bedrock of your commitment to open access is its ability to foster the sharing of knowledge. But even if they were looking for life change, I'm wondering why anyone would want to give up a full-tenured professorship to dedicate themselves to a cause like open access? Why did you?

PS: Oh boy! First of all, I see what I am doing as a digression from my career. I still think of myself as a philosopher, and I am an open access advocate temporarily. So even though I have now been doing this full-time for many years — and plan to continue— I still think of it as a digression.

RP: But why did Peter Suber give up his job for open access?

PS: Why me? Well, it is easier to answer that question today than when I made the decisions.

RP: How do you mean?

PS: Because I have acquired some leadership in this movement, because I now know that I can help bring about the change that I want to see, and because the movement is succeeding. For all these reasons it would be very hard to back away now, particularly when I still believe in the cause.

But despite the gratifications, and the possibilities for real progress, it's still a digression. When a blizzard blows in and you put down a good book in order to shovel snow, you can be very proud of your work but still want to get back to that book. That's the sense in which I want to get back to philosophy.

RP: That tells me something about why you don't want to stop now, but not why you started. Harnad suggested to me that you are primarily driven by idealism. As he put it, "All of Peter's motivations and aspirations seem to be pure, egalitarian, and humanistic." I wonder whether there is any political aspect to your motivation. Your mother was a Democrat politician; I would think you are probably a Democrat too. Are you a political creature?

PS: Not in that partisan sense, but I do feel a certain desire to... [pause] ...I'm thinking of a way to put this... [pause] ...I do have a desire to participate more directly in social change.

RP: Can you expand on that?

PS: When I was a philosophy teacher I had the same strong views about public policy that I have today, and I felt that I had a very weak and indirect impact on those policies through my students or through my writing. I was not, by the way, a political activist in the classroom and, if anything, I erred on the side of keeping my views to myself. This indirect impact on public policy was simply by educating students to reason well, question deeply, and think carefully about ethics.

RP: But that was not enough for you?

PS: It wasn't. I began to feel that I wanted to have a more direct impact. As a teacher I influenced a few hundred students a year to be better philosophers. I still value that. But as a policy advocate, I can influence thousands of people a month directly on an issue of public importance.

I don't want to say that one of my motivations at the time was to leave the academic world. I loved teaching; I never wanted to leave it, and I still want to get back to it. But I think a balanced life has to include some social action, and mine had too little. Right now maybe it has too much. I only say that because I have much less time now for reflection.

My move reminds me... [pause] ... of The Magic Mountain, when Hans Castorp leaves the sanatorium and enters the war. He didn't have a happy end, and he fought on the wrong side. But he made the move. I do wish that everyone could find a way to act for the causes they care about the way I have found a way to act for this cause.

RP: Given our earlier discussion about freedom I was wondering if you felt that your decision to become a full-time actor for social action was an attempt to achieve positive freedom — to, in Kantian terms, self-legislate?

PS: I can't say that, because I never thought about it from that angle.

RP: I wonder if there is any significance in your having spent much of your life in a Quaker college. You said earlier that you have no religion, but I know that some Quakers no longer claim to be Christians, and say that the Society of Friends is post-Christian. Has your connection with the Quakers influenced you?

PS: There is no direct connection. I went to that school in the first place not because it was Quaker, and certainly not because it was religious or Christian, but because it felt comfortable. Having taught there for 21 years, I am still very comfortable with many Quaker traditions.

Actually there is a Quaker phrase that captures what I was trying say a moment ago. George Fox urged his followers to live a useful life. I do believe that teachers live useful lives, but I saw a chance to be more useful.

To go back to your other question about politics: I said it is not partisan politics that motivates me, but in fact what I mean by social action *is* political action, and it is political in the sense that it is work for a public good.

RP: But you are not entirely comfortable with the term political here?

PS: Not entirely. The term may be misleading because it suggests partisan politics. That is why I prefer the language of social action, which can include research and analysis, but still aims at improving the world in which you find yourself. I feel that I can do this kind of action more directly and more effectively now than when I was a teacher. I find that very gratifying.

RP: What sort of person are you? How would you describe yourself?

PS: Oh boy. [chuckle]. It is very hard to answer that in general. If you had a more specific question it would help.

RP: Ok, let me try some quotes on you. When I asked Guédon what sort of person you are he said, "Peter is reserved, defends his privacy a good deal and likes nothing so much more than peace and quiet to write and do the things he likes to do. His move to Maine is indicative of his taste for peaceful thinking, as is his basic dislike for public speaking (although he speaks admirably)."

Friend said this of you: "When you talk to Peter he listens more than he speaks."

Velterop said, "Peter is a quiet and almost self-effacing and with a very sharp intellect, a wonderful way with words, and an energy that can only make one envious."

And Lynch said, "I get from Peter a sense of empathy that I don't find in some of the other OA advocates — a realisation that the move towards OA will not be without substantial disruptions, and displacements, and in some cases perils. This is important and lends strength to his authority and credibility as a commentator and advocate."

Do these comments ring true? Do you recognise yourself?

PS: Yes, if I can be that immodest. I think they say something about me.

FAMILY

RP: I want to turn back to your family for a minute. You mentioned that your mother was a state senator. Her name was Grace Mary Stern?

PS: Yes.

RP: And she was the first Democrat in Lake County to be elected countywide since the Civil War.

PS: Yes. She was.

RP: And in 1982 she was slated by the Democratic Party for state-wide office?

PS: Right. She ran for Lieutenant Governor as the running mate of Adlai Stevenson III.

RP: I note that your mother and Stevenson were defeated by the Republican James Thompson, the long-serving governor of Illinois.

PS: Yes, sadly, but they lost by only one-fourteenth of one percent of the vote.

RP: There is also a Grace Mary Stern scholarship in women's and gender studies at Roosevelt University?

PS: Yes.

RP: You had a mother to be proud then?

PS: Very much so. She was an important Illinois politician, and an important woman in Illinois.

RP: You said she was a homemaker when you were a child. Her political life began after you had left home did it?

PS: She ran for countywide office before I got to college, but she moved beyond countywide office to state-wide office later when I was older — after I left college.

RP: And your stepfather was a lawyer called Herbert "Hub" Stern?

PS: Yes.

RP: What age were you when your parents broke up?

PS: I was in third grade, so I was about seven or eight.

RP: Was it a traumatic experience for you?

PS: Somewhat. It was certainly more difficult than my mother's remarriage.

RP: That happened quite soon afterwards did it?

PS: There was a two year gap before my mother remarried.

RP: You stayed with your mother did you?

PS: Yes. I did.

RP: Did you see your natural father much as child?

PS: Yes, and I still do.

RP: Was it an easy relationship?

PS: It was quite comfortable, yes.

RP: Stepfamilies can be unhappy places to live, particularly for children. Yours sounds as though it was a fairly friendly arrangement. Would that be accurate?

PS: Yes, definitely.

RP: And you all continued to holiday together in adult life. In 1996, for instance, ten members of the family all took a trip to Antarctica.

PS: Right. My stepfather liked to go off on long trips with as many family members as he could recruit. Some of us would be free to go, and some of us wouldn't, so there would be different subsets of us on different trips. But I got to go on the Antarctic trip and I was very glad about that.

RP: Do you all still get together regularly?

PS: When my mother was alive we would get together at least once a year, and she would sponsor a kind of reunion on the North Carolina beach, and we all had a great time.

When she died we all promised we would keep it up, but without her personality and her organisation, it has fallen apart a bit. We all are on good terms, and wish we could see each other more often, but it's getting harder to do.

RP: You mentioned that your wife — Liffey Thorpe — is a classicist, and that you have two daughters. The family includes two Abyssinian cats doesn't it?

PS: Yes, that's right.

THE HISTORY BOOKS

RP: When the historians of scholarly communication look back from the future how important do you think they will deem the open access movement to have been, and how do you think they will characterise it?

PS: I hope they will say that the internet was as deeply transformative as the printing press, and that open access was the key to taking full advantage of the internet, at least for research literature and data.

It won't be long before open access is old hat, taken for granted by a new generation of tools and services that depend on unrestricted access to research literature and data. As those tools and services come along, they will be the hot story.

But historians will note that they all depend on open access and that open access was not easily won.

RP: How would you like to see those historians portray your contribution to the movement?

PS: You ask so many questions that want me to be immodest.

RP: Why not be immodest occasionally?

PS: That's hard.

RP: Ok, let's try this from a different angle. Melissa Hagemann said to me that she thought the key role you have played — and presumably will continue to play — is that you stopped the movement from tearing itself asunder. Would you agree?

PS: Yes, or at least I'm conscious of trying. There are factions or interest groups in the movement that have different passions and priorities. I'm convinced that all the major ones are compatible, complementary, and beneficial, and I know that most of us agree with this proposition in theory.

But I'm sometimes struck by how few seem to agree in practice. I try to preserve — to use a political term — the big tent that can hold them all together in a movement. I want to see the disagreements in perspective.

I don't believe in false unity, and pretending that we all agree on more than we all agree on. In fact, I always hated that from school principals and American presidents. But I do believe that our different priorities are more productive than schismatic, and that we have a much better chance of accomplishing OA through a broad-based coalition than through bright ideas alone.

RP: As you say, there are a number of factions in the movement. I've noticed that you very rarely contribute to the mailings lists that discuss open access — lists like the American Scientist Open Access Forum and Liblicense. It is on these lists that the factional disputes tend to be played out, often in a virulent and hostile manner. Is it deliberate policy on your part not to take part in these disputes, or is it just that you do not have the time?

PS: Both. It's deliberate because I don't have time. Some of the listserv discussions are very valuable and constructive, and one of my regrets is that my workload forces me to spend my time elsewhere. But some of the discussions generate more heat than light. So even if I had more time, I'd only have time for some of those threads.

RP: How do you mean?

PS: When I participate in a discussion thread, and someone asks a question about something I said, I feel obliged to answer. I avoid listservs in part to avoid that kind of open-ended time commitment. It's as if answering a telephone call committed you to answer a dozen more over the next few days. The dialogue may be valuable, but it's too expensive.

On the other side, when I participate in a discussion thread and someone becomes abusive, or builds a response on a lazy or ideological reading of someone else's words, then I'd rather drop out than continue.

But as I said, many of the threads are constructive, and I regret that I don't have time to play a larger part in them. A lot of persuasion takes place there.

RP: It certainly does. But let's leave it there today. Thank you for your time.

If you would like to republish the interview on a commercial basis, or have any comments on it, please email me at richard.poynder@btinternet.com.

Please note that while I make this interview freely available to all, I am a freelance journalist by profession, and so make my living from writing. To assist me to continue making my work available in this way I invite anyone who reads this article to make a voluntary contribution. I have in mind a figure of $8, but whatever anyone felt inspired to contribute would be fine. This can be done quite simply by sending a payment to my PayPal account quoting the email address *richard.poynder@btinternet.com*. It is not necessary to have a PayPal account to make a payment.

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