

Publishing Philosophy Open Access Without a Particle Collider

*Open Access often appears to be a monolithic concept, covering all fields of research and publication. However, in practice its application is to a large extent determined by the needs and resources available to different academic communities. In this post, **Bryan W. Roberts** and **David Teira** discuss open access publishing in philosophy and how an emerging generation of open publications has developed to meet the needs of an academic discipline where funding for publication is scarce.*

An old joke tells the story of a physicist, mathematician, and philosopher competing for funding. The physicist asked for a Particle Collider. The mathematician said, "Fund us instead, we only need pencils, paper and wastebaskets." To which the philosopher replied, "Even better, fund us: we only need the pencils and paper."

In those days, few scholars thought they would need special funding to get published. Now most commercial publishers are offering an Open Access option allowing authors to make their papers free to download for a fee (the APC: [Article Publication Charge](#)). There are many reasons for authors to want this option: sharing the knowledge they generate, making it available to the taxpayers who fund their research, or simply increasing their [impact and citations](#).

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Whatever the reason, publishing Open Access usually requires money to pay the APC. In fields with big enough funds to build a Particle Collider, APCs are a drop in the bucket. In philosophy, as in most fields with small budgets barely covering our pencils and paper, it's not clear where the money for Open Access will come from. If Open Access is a good thing, shouldn't philosophers find a way to do it? Are APCs necessary? If so, how should we fund them?

At a recent [virtual conference](#), hosted by the LSE Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Sciences ([CPNSS](#)), we posed just these questions to an emerging community of Open Access publishers in philosophy. Full disclosure: we are part of it, as editors of BSPS Open, more of which later. Fifteen speakers and a large, very qualified audience of Open Access stakeholders told us their secrets to navigate a world of small budgets. Here is a quick summary of our findings.

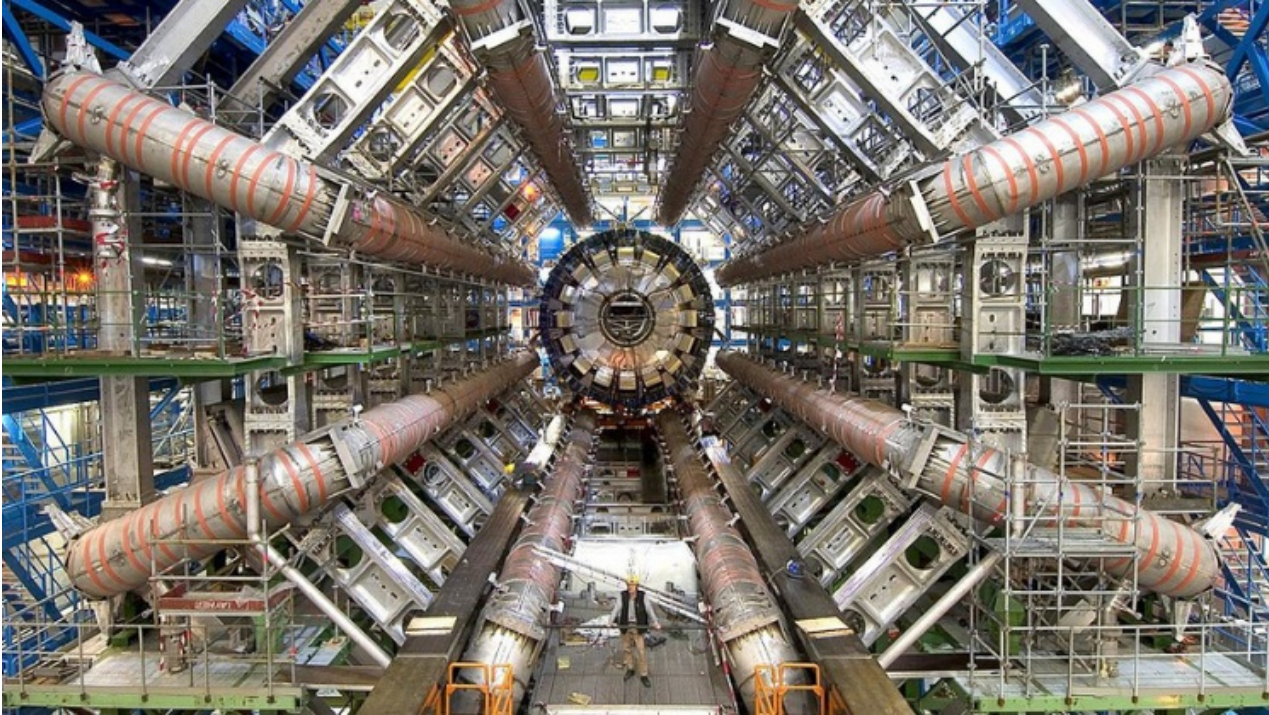
Academic culture matters

Open Access can be achieved at no cost for authors thanks to [preprint servers](#), where they can make early versions of articles freely available. In the English-speaking world, the oldest is [PhilSci-Archive](#) (2001), the USA-based Philosophy of Science Association's preprint server, with [PhilPapers](#) (2009) more recently serving philosophy at large.

However, it seems philosophers do not yet have a strong preprint culture. This may change in the near future, as funders increasingly require the deposit of research in repositories. But, to foster accessibility and facilitate dissemination, philosophers need to make sure that their preprints are properly curated (indexed, catalogued, etc). Although the PhilSci-Archive and PhilPapers are providing good enough solutions, many other philosophical communities will surely want to develop their own repositories. This is a world still in the making.

Unpaid volunteers do backbreaking work

The income a journal makes from APC payments covers many editorial costs. One way around this is to rely on voluntary, unpaid work. Academics are often contributing such work as editors or referees for commercial journals. A few passionate volunteers have gone further, setting up non-profit Open Access journals and managing the entire editorial operation.



[Philosopher's Imprint](#) and [Ergo](#), two of the largest Open Access journals in philosophy, are working on editorial platforms whose software was developed by philosophers (like Franz Huber, David Velleman, Jonathan Weisberg, and Alastair Wilson). They often work with open source platforms like the Open Journal System, which is easy to customise. But, as many editors in our workshop attested, someone has to do the customisation and run the platform, often with little support from their home institutions.

Copyediting and typesetting are further necessary tasks where philosophers are being innovative. Julien Dutant is developing a software for [Dialectica](#), to help reduce the cost of its recent transition to Open Access. This includes use of the Markdown markup language, together with the GNU universal document converter [pandoc](#) (developed for free by philosopher John MacFarlane), allowing for the low-cost production of the XML needed to produce typeset PDF and web versions of their articles.

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Cutting marketing costs means that, before a journal achieves its reputation, editors must invest significant efforts in attracting authors and community building. The double-edged sword is that if they succeed, significant efforts are then required to screen submissions and decide which deserve to be sent for review. They then face the same problems that all for-profit commercial journals have: managing the peer review process.

These unpaid volunteers are not doing all this for the money (remember: pencils and paper). But if the profession wants to support non-profit, affordable Open Access, some non-material compensations may help: award special points for service in tenure and promotion committees, relieve editors from other administrative tasks, and so on. Otherwise, when backs of these editors finally break, there will be no replacement available to keep these journals alive.

University partnerships are what keep the lights on

The main support for Open Access journals in philosophy, as well as preprint servers and other Open Access outlets, is usually from a home university: either a Philosophy Department, a university Press or Library. Small grants are sometimes available to cover minimal copyediting or technical support to set up editorial platforms, which help to keep many non-profit journals alive. The most successful Open Access philosophy journals (like *Philosopher's Imprint* or *Ergo*) can afford to cover these expenses with minimal APCs. But philosophy is a diverse field. If we want to have as much non-profit Open Access as possible, we need more micro-funding partnerships.

Canada is leading the way here: [Coalition Publica](#) is a funding body providing infrastructure and budgets for Open Access publication. University of Calgary Press has partnered with the British Society for Philosophy of Science (BSPS) to launch an Open Access book collection, [BSPS Open](#), with no APCs: no charges to either authors or readers. With some luck, [Plan S](#) may bring more resources for initiatives of this kind in Europe. The European Society for Analytic Philosophy is now taking the lead, by providing funding through grants and fees for the transition of its flagship journal *Dialectica* to Open Access. This is a big step in a world in which most scholarly societies depend on for-profit journal royalties.

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Commercial publishers are already setting their own Open Access solutions for smaller fees, often via Read and Publish agreements in which public consortia (usually involving universities and libraries) cover the APCs of their affiliated authors at discount rates. However, it's not yet clear how to make this strategy [fair and sustainable](#): should agreements should be calculated per number of authors, with rich countries subsidising the rest? Or should they be calculated per number of readers, leaving the sciences to effectively subsidise the humanities? In case things go bad for the Humanities, Departments and scholarly societies should perhaps start considering the non-profit alternatives.

Pencils, papers, and impact

As our participants Sabina Leonelli (University of Exeter) and Ties Nijssen (Springer) put it, Open Access is crucial for philosophy, since it is a field that thrives on the interaction between people from different disciplines, experts from inside and outside academia, and the general public. A significant number of readers and authors of philosophy are not professional philosophers. By facilitating outreach and feedback from multiple audiences, Open Access helps to support the intellectual diversity and impact of our discipline.

Our intellectual diversity and impact are one of the great assets of academic philosophy, which extends far beyond the reach of our pencils and papers in the old days. Although keeping it alive through non-profit Open Access initiatives is a huge challenge, it is a worthy one. If you would like to contribute to this effort, please get in touch and we will help you connect.

Readers interested in BSPS Open can watch the authors discussing the book series here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx3q0_tRMIA

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