

# We Scholars

## How Libraries Could Help Us with Scholarly Publishing, if Only We'd Let Them

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Universities easily fall into ruts. Almost every epoch requires a fresh start.

—Daniel Coit Gilman  
*Inaugural Address as First President of  
Johns Hopkins University*

Research has become the dominant source of instinct, meaning, status and revenue in higher education, especially at the top of the university totem pole.

—Simon Marginson  
*“Ideas of a University” for the Global Era*

Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.

—Jean-François Lyotard  
*The Postmodern Condition:  
 A Report on Knowledge*

We scholars<sup>1</sup> value scholarly publication above all else. Since the library can help us with research—mostly by providing access to the scholarly literature we need—we also value the library. However, we scholars are not, as a group, convinced that librarians really understand the value of research. Yes, librarians understand things like cataloging and preservation, but even when librarians are technically considered members of the faculty, we scholars presume that libraries and librarians are there to serve our research needs.

Put differently, for us scholars, where scholarly publication has intrinsic value, the library and librarians have instrumental value. It goes without saying for us scholars that whatever has intrinsic value (such as research) and is valued for its own sake is inherently more valuable than anything that has merely instrumental value (such as the library) and can be seen as a means to another end. This attitude, which Nietzsche would have termed the order of rank of our scholarly values, is literally ancient—it was clearly expressed by Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics* (written ~350 BCE). We scholars have institutionalized this attitude in the form of the university.

As we shall see, this attitude has several implications for libraries as publishers. One such implication is that we scholars tend not to work in a collaborative manner with libraries and librarians; instead, we expect not to encounter any resistance from them (a book should always be on the shelf, we should have easy access to all the journal articles we need, and so forth). We may in fact resent it when libraries try to move beyond this minimal role. For instance, if libraries really understood scholarly publishing, they would not do things like impose open-access mandates.

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1. Throughout this chapter, I include myself in the set “we scholars” in contrast to librarians, a group of which I am certainly not a member. Whether I really ought to be included among “we scholars” will, I hope, remain unclear. For the sake of argument, however, I definitely mean to exclude librarians from that group and to treat librarians and scholars as separate entities with different values.

So the idea that libraries might themselves enter into the publishing arena strikes many academics as silly at best.<sup>2</sup> At worst, depending on how it is implemented, many academics will see library publishing as a threat to academic freedom. This chapter attempts to reconstruct how we scholars think about these matters in an effort to help libraries that are venturing out into the world of scholarly publishing. It also attempts to construct an argument that we scholars ought to adjust our own thinking about the library, as well as about scholarly publishing.

## On (Academic) Liberty

The university is founded on freedom. At the same time, the university instantiates many ideas of freedom. Although I agree that it is important for librarians to understand the difference between the sorts of academic freedom we scholars enjoy and the intellectual freedom accorded to librarians (see Danner and Bintliff 2007 for an excellent account of this distinction), these are not the different sorts of freedom I plan to address here. Instead, I shall begin with an examination of the philosophical issues that underlie several different understandings of freedom operative in the university where “the university” is understood to embody many different contexts. These different understandings—which are usually implicit—provide ample opportunity for miscommunication among us scholars, between us scholars and university administrators, and between us scholars and librarians. Until we begin to understand—and perhaps to reconceive—academic freedom, libraries have little chance to succeed as scholarly publishers.

Academic freedom itself varies from context to context. Different countries, and even different universities within the same country, have different views of academic freedom. This fact is fairly well known and is very well discussed in the literature on academic freedom. Less well discussed, however, at least outside of the circle of academic philosophy, is the question of whether we have different ideas of freedom itself. This

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2. I am aware that some libraries have been engaged with publishing for some time; but I believe I am in the minority and that most scholars remain ignorant of this fact. I spend more time than most scholars engaging with librarians, and I was surprised to learn while writing this chapter that there had once existed an International Group of Publishing Libraries.

chapter is not the place to go into detail about this philosophical debate. However, a brief tour of some of the issues—something no scholar of philosophy would respect as true scholarship—will prove enlightening.

Isaiah Berlin (1958) distinguished between two concepts of liberty: *negative liberty*, which can be summarized as freedom from constraint, and *positive liberty*, which can be summarized as freedom to pursue a self-determined course of action. Although Berlin's account was specifically about liberty in a political context, these two concepts of liberty are also relevant to the sort of freedom we scholars understand when we think of academic freedom. Indeed, the history of the notion of academic freedom suggests that we scholars have moved away from thinking of academic freedom as positive liberty and toward a notion of academic freedom as negative liberty. The most obvious evidence of this shift is the evolution of our attitudes toward tenure.

## Tenure—From Means to End

Tenure is meant to be a means to secure the end of academic freedom. In fact, however, tenure has become the end we seek, and academics have become so beholden to the idea of tenure that we sacrifice the pursuit of positive freedom. Instead of what Fuller (1999) describes as the “right to be wrong,” we scholars assert the “right to be right—or at least to avoid being wrong—in our own little world.”

The idea that tenure is meant to be a means to secure academic freedom is explicitly and clearly expressed in the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*:

Tenure is a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society. (AAUP 1990, 3)

As competition for tenured academic jobs has increased over the years, tenure has increasingly been identified with the end of economic security. Those lucky enough to secure a tenure-track position these days are typically advised to “do what it takes” to be granted tenure. “What it takes” is typically expressed in terms of a set of criteria for tenure, including especially publishing a certain amount of scholarship (a number of articles or a book) in certain venues (top journals or academic presses). The first seven years or so of a scholar’s career are thus spent with one aim in mind: securing tenure. Moreover, scholars are trained to adhere to strict disciplinary standards of what counts in order to achieve the end of tenure. The idea that tenure is meant as a means to freedom of teaching and research has dropped out, replaced by the idea that tenure equals economic security, provided one follows the rules.

Once tenure has been granted, scholars *do* view themselves as free—*free from* the overwhelming pressure to publish or perish. Once tenure has been granted, the scholar is safe. Provided that minimal standards are met, the tenured scholar is generally permitted to go about her or his business of teaching and research without too many external constraints. Academic freedom has been effectively reduced to the idea of negative liberty.

Insofar as we scholars tend to view tenure as the end and scholarship as the chief means to that end, we also tend to undervalue the positive aspects of academic freedom. We scholars care not what we are *free to* do, but only what we are *free from* being required to do. (This insight, by the way, should be an important lesson for those in charge of assessing scholarly research.) That scholars tend to undervalue the positive aspects of academic freedom has important ramifications for the course of scholarship. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in the process of peer review.

## Our Twisted View of Peer Review

According to Biagioli (2002), peer review was originally used as a complement to state censorship—foreign products were censored, while those produced within the state under the auspices of national academies were subject to “internal,” that is, intrastate, peer review. The notion of an internal peer gradually moved away from the state, shifting the locus of power to academic disciplines. Today, particularly in terms of the scientific com-

munity, peer review is treated as a guarantee of epistemic warrant, as well as viewed as another means of securing academic freedom. However, the sort of academic freedom peer review secures is negative—peer review erects a barrier against outside, nonacademic interference. What is lacking is any sense that peer review could also be used to expand our positive freedom (Holbrook 2010). We seek assurance from our peers that what we say is right, or at least not wrong, rather than insurance from peer review to take intellectual and academic risks.

Disciplines define peers, and peer review is generally designed to uphold disciplinary standards—of rigor, of method, of subject matter, and generally of what counts as good research within a discipline. When a piece of research is subject to peer review, then, it typically means that disciplinary standards will determine whether it passes muster to be published (in the case of a manuscript submitted for publication) or to be funded (in the case of a grant proposal). Decisions regarding promotion and tenure typically involve a larger body of work, but this work is also typically subject first and foremost to disciplinary peer review (by peers within the department and external referees, who are typically scholars of high standing within the discipline). Tenure decisions usually also involve review by members of the faculty from disciplines other than that of the person up for tenure review. These tenure review committees tend to rely heavily on the reports of the disciplinary peers within the department and the external disciplinary reviews. The largest factor in their decisions, however, remains the candidate's record of *peer-reviewed publications* (National Research Council 2012; Harley 2013). Such publications ideally appear in the top journals within the researcher's field of expertise. In other words, nondisciplinary "peers" place their trust in the judgment of disciplinary peers.

This sort of respect shown by members of review panels for the disciplinary expertise of other reviewers is also sometimes evident in the peer review of grant proposals. Lamont, Mallard, and Guetzkow (2012) identify several "rules" adopted by panelists, including "deferring to expertise" and "respecting disciplinary sovereignty" (431). Peer review, then, whether of manuscripts or grant proposals, is typically dependent on disciplinary norms. As such, peer review is typically conservative, encouraging adherence to normal rather than "potentially transformative" research (Frodeman and Holbrook 2012).

Although tenure depends on peer review, the conservatism of peer review is reinforced by the need to secure tenure. Scholars seeking tenure are warned against—since they are typically not rewarded for—publishing in lower quality (according to peers) venues, much less in venues outside their native disciplines. The combined forces of peer review and tenure requirements pose the greatest threat to the emergence of libraries as publishers.

## On (Academic) Libraries

I see an ongoing effort aimed at re-envisioning the academic library. The source of this effort is, as far as I can tell, internal to libraries themselves. Libraries face a slew of problems. Most pressing, perhaps, are issues regarding space and increasing strains on library budgets. Technology promises some help for issues of space. Digitized collections, after all, take up less physical space than books. But technology may also help ease the strain on library budgets—or so the thinking goes.

As far as I can tell, forward-thinking librarians, many of whom have training in information science as well as in library science, see an opportunity in the advance of information technology. This opportunity is linked to the increase in subscription prices for scholarly journals, including the practice of many scholarly publishers of bundling journals together. Why, these forward-thinking librarians wonder, should subscription prices for journals go up while the price for publishing them, because of advances in information technology, continues to go down? Armed with knowledge of both the economics and technology of publishing, librarians have begun to think in terms of *business models*.

The open-access (OA) movement also seems to be linked with this new way of thinking. Opening access to scholarship is good, philosophically speaking, especially from a librarian's (or a research funder's) point of view. Technologically, OA is viable. As a business model for scholarly publishing—or rather, for scholarly publishers—however, OA presents many difficulties. Scholarly publishers have generally balked at OA, though the combination of funder mandates, new OA journals, and increasing pressure from librarians has led to some publishers at least appearing to move in the direction of OA (though one suspects a movement akin to “greenwashing” businesses).

Sensing an opportunity, libraries have begun to promote OA policies at an increasing number of universities. Faculty senates across the land have been convinced that such policies are good for scholarship—we scholars certainly want our research to be more readily available, perhaps even more read and more cited! We also love it if we can simply and easily access others' research without having to navigate pay walls or sign in to our library website, only to find that our library has dropped a subscription (it was too costly, after all, given that it was bundled with little used journals) to a journal that contains an article we need to write the next sentence! OA seems a win-win-win for libraries, for research funders, and for us scholars. If OA undermines the current business model of today's scholarly publishers, well, so much the better! Libraries can act as publishers to fill the void left when today's giants of scholarly publishing collapse.

This sort of enthusiasm is infectious, of course. In fact, one can make a case that something like infectious enthusiasm is a necessary requirement for any revolution to succeed. But for all its promise, OA should also be seen as an opportunity for libraries to learn some lessons. The simplest and biggest lesson of OA is that librarians do not yet understand us scholars and our scholarly culture. This misunderstanding is demonstrated by the fact that many OA policies *mandate* that scholarly work (starting with peer-reviewed journal articles) be submitted to an institutional repository.

## Lessons to be Learned from Open-Access Mandates

The first lesson to be learned from OA mandates is the extent to which we scholars value our academic freedom—specifically in the sense of negative liberty or *freedom from* constraints. To mandate that we upload some version of our scholarly work to an institutional repository—no matter how easy libraries make that task—automatically places an additional constraint on us scholars. Insofar as mandates place additional constraints on us, they by definition limit our negative liberty.

The second lesson to be learned from OA mandates is that we scholars tend to see our academic freedom in disciplinary terms. Even if



we scholars (in the form of a faculty senate, say) voted in favor of an OA mandate, which seems to respect our academic freedom, OA mandates can be seen as a threat to our academic freedom insofar as they fail to respect disciplinary sovereignty. Historians, to take one example, tend to resist OA mandates that apply to dissertations. A historian's dissertation typically becomes that historian's first book. Making the dissertation openly available automatically makes the historian's research openly available. This openness poses two threats to the historian's disciplinary sovereignty. First, many historians are concerned that an openly available dissertation will be viewed by book publishers as prior publication, thus making the prospects of securing a book contract more difficult. Second, once the research is made openly available, other historians who are working on similar areas may come in and "scoop" the research, including it in their own book already under contract. A footnote in someone else's book does not equate to one's own book, and if the research is already published in someone else's book, that, too, would undermine one's efforts to secure a book contract.

The third lesson to be learned from OA mandates is that it is sometimes possible—and sometimes even efficacious—to appeal to a notion of academic freedom in the sense of positive liberty. That faculty at many universities have voted in favor of OA mandates clearly demonstrates the appeal of *freedom* to open up our scholarship. Like the disciplinary standards we impose on ourselves, certain limitations on academic freedom (in the negative sense) are justifiable on the grounds that the limits are *self-imposed*. The notion of giving oneself limits, in other words, is compatible with a notion of positive academic freedom (which might better be termed *autonomy*).

The fourth lesson to be learned from OA mandates is that this notion of positive academic freedom is best addressed on the level of *disciplinary autonomy*. Academics within a discipline defer to the standards of their own discipline, or they violate them at their own risk. Academics from different disciplines tend to defer to the standards of the other's discipline, provided that the territories staked out by those disciplines do not overlap. That the faculty (in the form of the senate) voted to adopt an OA mandate may de jure mean that all disciplines must comply, but few of us scholars would dispute the rights of individual disciplines (such as history) to resist such mandates.

## Risk, Reputation, and Revaluation

That a positive notion of academic freedom (autonomy) is compatible with a negative notion of academic freedom (from external constraint) is not sufficient to secure the success of libraries as scholarly publishers. Most of us scholars have uncritically (and largely unconsciously) embraced the negative notion of academic freedom. As I have argued above, this negative notion of academic freedom presents a significant barrier to libraries venturing into the field of scholarly publishing. If a library wishes to venture into the field of scholarly publishing, then what should it do?

If I am right in my preceding analysis, until we scholars adopt and pursue a notion of positive academic autonomy, there is a limit to what libraries *can* do. Pointing to freedom *from* the existing publishers may have some appeal to some of us scholars. But setting things up so that we have the freedom *to* publish through the library cannot succeed until we scholars recognize this (positive) freedom as worthy of pursuit.

As things stand now, any of us scholars who pursue publication outside the venues recognized by our disciplinary peers as exemplary are taking a risk. It is tempting to think that those of us who publish in “alternative” venues do so only at the expense of extra time. In other words, one might think that, as long as we publish the requisite amount (according to tenure and promotion requirements) in the recognized venues, we are also free to publish in alternative venues. The reality, however, is that in pursuing publication outside the accepted disciplinary norms, we run the risk of being misidentified, of being labeled a maverick at best or an outsider at worst. The safe advice for anyone seeking to pass through peer review is not to confuse the reviewers. Publications outside the norm, however, even accompanied by publications that fall well inside normal parameters, risk producing confusion. In publishing outside the recognized venues, we risk our scholarly reputations.

What we need is a revaluation of academic freedom that emphasizes positive liberty—the *freedom to* publish what we want where we want. Libraries as publishers could serve as a means to achieve that end. However, until we scholars realize, and recognize as a problem, that tenure—intended as the *means* to achieve academic freedom—has become the de facto *end* of scholarship, there is a large disincentive to pursue our freedom in a positive sense.

The barrier of tenure requirements is not one that libraries seeking to branch out into publishing can simply avoid. It will not be enough to build the capacity to publish and hope that we scholars will simply come and use it. Libraries, too, must take risks. Libraries must recognize that building tools and making them available is at most only part of what they must do. Resources are of no use unless they are actually used.

It is essential, then, that libraries engage their potential users as co-designers of their attempt to enter into scholarly publishing. This engagement must take place on multiple levels, including working with individual scholars to learn what design elements are essential and what would make their scholarship even better. But engagement must also take place on larger institutional levels, including those of the department, the university, and, ultimately, the disciplines. Although academic departments often hold sway within universities, disciplines are the seat of academic power. Only if *disciplines* see libraries-as-publishers as a means to the end of empowerment will libraries-as-publishers become viable in the eyes of us scholars.

Libraries-as-publishers are facing a crisis of legitimation. For this reason, it would make the most sense for libraries to partner with scholars from particular disciplines, as well as with disciplinary professional organizations, to develop publications designed specifically for those disciplines. It is essential to this design process that these publications be recognized by the disciplines as respectable venues. Peer review (one of the main trump cards held now by traditional scholarly publishers) should also be included as part of the design, whether the publications planned are journals or books.

The idea that libraries-as-publishers ought to engage disciplines suggests a course of action that runs counter to the discourse of replacing traditional scholarly publishers. The group of traditional scholarly publishers ought to be divided into two groups: for-profit publishers on the one hand and not-for-profit publishers on the other. The currently dominant narrative suggests that universities should be run more like businesses, which results in university presses, disciplinary professional organizations that rely on publication subscriptions, and libraries thinking in terms of “business models” for scholarly publication. A better way to approach the issue of scholarly publication, I have suggested, would be in terms of empowering scholars to pursue their scholarship with maximal

freedom and creativity. Speaking in such terms ought to appeal to not-for-profit publishers, as well as to individual scholars, while falling on deaf ears of anyone seeking only profit from scholarship. Libraries that engage us scholars in such terms, rather than thinking only in terms of *business models*, stand a real chance of succeeding as scholarly publishers

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