The Two Freedoms: On Open Access

Introductory Paragraph
The economics of scholarly publishing are incredibly tangled. Even Harvard University cannot afford all the material that its researchers need to conduct their work. In this piece, Martin Eve picks apart the histories and economics that have led to the open access movement, arguing that we need to move away from a purely market-driven sales approach for access to research.

Article

How did we get into the mess that is scholarly communication today? Our forebears spent a long time building the principles of freedom of inquiry into the university. One of the most crucial of these measures was that academics should not have to produce research that would sell. In fact, the choice was deliberately made to separate the selection of research topic from market populism because it is clear that the investigation of esoteric areas, selected by experts, can yield better results than financial incentives posing as democracy. The freedom from having to sell.

These principles are, of course, perpetually under assault in the contemporary marketisation of higher education. However, a more long-standing problem comes in the form of subscription and sales publishing for academic research. While we gave researchers freedom to investigate wheresoever they felt that there might be merit, we concurrently outsourced publication to entities that *were* reliant on the market for their income. With an explosion of research output in all disciplines (fuelled by assessment that prioritises research for accreditation) we now can't afford to buy back the work that our colleagues produced and gave away, supposedly free from the market. Supply and demand.

But, of course, we also now have the phenomenal technological feat of the internet. Capable of disseminating material *ad infinitum* at a near-infinitesimal cost-per-copy, we could push market concerns out of research publication practices once more. This idea of paywall-free dissemination of academic material is called “open access” and the movement dedicated to its realisation has grown exponentially over the past decade. In the ideal situation of academic remuneration, where researchers are paid a salary to produce work, it is argued, what could be better than giving away one's research without paywalls hindering the ability of others to read that work on financial grounds?

The good news is that, in almost all cases, this is possible today. Many humanities academics are surprised to find that the vast majority of journals allow authors to post a copy of their articles freely online in their institution's repositories. This is called 'green OA' and you should do it. Right now. It will increase your readership and doesn't require you to change your choice of publication venue. You will help students and fellow researchers alike.

Of course, in light of my observations on the market, ideally we would reconfigure the economics of the whole system to make journals and books freely available at source ('gold OA'). In reality this is trickier (but not impossible) for several reasons. Academics operate within a field of symbolic capital (prestige) that encourages conservatism in their selection of publication venue. Because this symbolic capital leads to hiring, promotion and tenure, it has a real material knock-on for academics and might as well be financial capital. This means that existing publishers often own the most-favoured venues and, if the subscription/sales model seems secure for their shareholders, even if universities can't afford to buy the research they need, they will not be keen to try something new that could erode profit margins.

While there is certainly labour in publishing that must be remunerated, it is probable that we could do this in a better way than through sales. This is why I support open access for all disciplines: a pure 'free-market' approach has failed us in allowing even just all academics access to university research, let alone the general public. Let us instead think through the ways in which we might return to the roots of scholarly freedom to write and to be read, instead of to sell.

Bio

Dr. Martin Paul Eve is a lecturer in English at the University of Lincoln, UK, specialising in contemporary American fiction. He is the author of Pynchon and Philosophy (Palgrave, 2014) and Open Access and the Humanities: Contexts, Controversies and the Future (forthcoming Cambridge University Press, 2014), the latter of which will be available in an open access format. In addition, Martin is well-known for his work on open access, appearing before the UK House of Commons Select Committee BIS Inquiry into Open Access, writing for the British Academy Policy Series on the topic, being a steering-group member of the OAPEN-UK project, the Jisc National Monograph Strategy Group, the SCONUL Strategy Group on Academic Content and Communications, the Open Knowledge Foundation's Open Access Steering Group and the HEFCE Open Access Monographs Expert Reference Panel and founding the *Open Library of Humanities*.