

*Editorial*

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF  
UNIVERSITY-FUNDED OPEN-ACCESS PUBLISHING

THE *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* (JESP) was founded in 2005 with the conviction that universities must be in the business of disseminating knowledge, not of handing it for free to private stakeholders who profit by locking it away. In the years since, this mission has proven to be even more important, as for-profit publishers have co-opted the concept of “open access” as a name for charging authors exorbitant fees to make their articles accessible on top of the existing profit stream from university libraries that are still paying for subscription access. Our model has proven again and again that it does not cost \$2,500 in “open-access fees” to copyedit, publish, and preserve a thirty-page philosophy article, and that great financial and epistemic benefits to universities arise from ditching the middleman and directly funding publication and dissemination of academic research—not only in making the fruits of research accessible to everyone, but also in giving everyone access to publish their research on its own merits.

Still, as we have also learned over the years, there are many obstacles to running a university-funded open-access journal. While the barriers to entry are low—anyone who can spare the time and has access to a web server can in principle run such a journal—the costs of growth and institutionalization are high. University budgets are divided into research budgets and library budgets; the research budgets are designed to be spent on paying someone else to publish and the library budgets are built around paying someone else for access. This feature of institutional design leaves no one below the level of university provost or president with the power and scope of decision-making to enact substantive change, and it turns out that university provosts and presidents have many other priorities.

Every journal editor, of course, has a challenging job. It includes recruiting willing and reliable associate editors and referees, obtaining quality submissions, and dealing with the inevitable fact that it is flatly impossible to make everyone happy. Even the most optimal submission-evaluation process will, like any medical test, be subject to both false positives and false negatives. Their

journal's process will, of course, depend on the cooperation of too many people to be anything close to optimal. And the challenges of occupying this role are incessant—authors can submit to your journal at any time of day or night, potential referees can decline requests, committed referees can go AWOL, and, as the journal's editor, you live and breathe the fact that every gap between one person doing their step in moving a submission forward and the next taking it up is another day (or week) that the submitting author has to wait for a verdict—a pain that you have felt on the other side many times.

But the structures of twenty-first-century academic publishing also present many additional challenges to would-be open-access editors with the energy and enthusiasm to overcome the lack of institutional initiative. They must navigate a wide range of issues, including how to implement a robustly triple-blind process, often using tools that are not well-designed for it, designing and implementing typesetting and journal style, learning how to assign and register DOIs, archiving publications against the risk of possible future collapse of the journal's funding, hiring and managing copy editors, handling tech issues with the journal's content management system, and resetting authors' forgotten passwords—all of which fall directly onto their plate.

And for the would-be open-access journal editor, these substantial difficulties also come with the further challenge of securing ongoing funding to support their journal's operations. The initial funding commitment from a favorable dean may evaporate when the dean's successor goes looking for soft spots in their budget, or the journal's success may fuel growth that outpaces the resources originally envisioned. They may spend substantial time and effort writing for grant support for their journal, petitioning university librarians, navigating the technical and legal issues to create web-based donation portals, or resorting to fees or "suggested donations" to authors when all of the institutions whose ostensible function is to support and disseminate research cannot find room for it in their budgets because they need to spend those dollars paying for access to paywalled research or "open-access fees." And they do all of these things as a volunteer.

Finally, even the successful open-access editor must, at the end of all of this work, confront their most important obstacle. Because the institution of their journal is not larger than themselves, they cannot simply resign and trust the owners or operators of the journal to secure an able successor. Instead, their most important and also most difficult job is to find and secure their own successor—someone they trust to carry forward their open-access mission, protect the reputation of the journal even while adding their own editorial vision, and secure the funding support required to sustain the journal, which, if they are successful and submissions continue to grow, will only become more

difficult over time. And they must somehow recruit this successor with clear eyes about the kinds of frustrations and challenges inherent to operating a fully open-access journal.

Through all of these challenges, *JESP* has by all accounts thrived. The number of submissions that we receive has grown, the quality of submissions that we receive is up, and the amount that we publish is higher as well. The pool of authors who submit to and publish in *JESP* has grown more diverse. *JESP* continues to be the best venue in the field to publish discussion notes in ethics or related areas. And I am proud to report that *JESP* is now living up to its title as a journal of not just *ethics*, but also of *social philosophy*, publishing exciting new work on race, gender, disability, relationships, parenting, the family, and more, in addition to continuing to publish great work in normative ethics, metaethics, practical reason, moral responsibility, legal philosophy, political philosophy, and value theory. Though we have faced challenges over these years and not every decision that I have made has been the correct one, each of these is, I hope, an improvement for the experience of readers, authors, referees, and editors working with the journal. And my reward for the time commitment and challenges of running the journal has been the kind words that you all have shared with me about how much you appreciate the journal and recognize the quality of what is published in its pages.

I assumed the editorship of *JESP* on December 1, 2014, from my colleague and *JESP*'s founding editor, Andrei Marmor, who was at that time moving from USC to take up a position at Cornell. I took it with the goal of keeping *JESP* at USC, which had funded the journal through its first ten years and promised to continue to do so, and with the expectation that it could be up to a ten-year commitment. It has now been just over nine years, during which I have updated the look and feel of the journal, moved to a new and more robust online content-management system, integrated the journal's publication system more thoroughly into the modern publication system including registration of DOIs and improved archiving, grown the team of associate editors, transitioned to a new workflow better suited to the growth in submission volume, and overseen a growth from publishing about three issues of three articles each per year to now publishing as many as ten issues per year with seven full articles plus discussion notes in each issue.

But it is now time for me to fulfill the hardest part of this job. It is time for new leadership to take the journal to yet higher levels.

I am therefore delighted to announce that, as of January 1, 2024, editorial leadership of and institutional support for *JESP* will pass to Sarah Paul and Matthew Silverstein of New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD). NYUAD's logo features a torch as a symbol of light cast into darkness, and there is no better manifestation

of a university's commitment to cast light into the darkness than institutional support for access to a publication that is free at point of access to both authors and readers. But it is also a symbol, for me, of the torch that I am passing to Paul and Silverstein, and that USC is passing to NYUAD. The financial support that NYUAD is providing to *JESP* and its mission represents a major commitment and shows true leadership among world universities in protecting *JESP*'s vision for open knowledge. I hope for a world in which more universities follow their lead.

I am grateful as well for the trusted hands into which I am able to pass the journal. In addition to being distinguished scholars, capable administrators, and deeply familiar with editing and journal processes, both Paul and Silverstein are longtime, enthusiastic supporters of *JESP* as readers, authors, and referees. Paul's article "Deviant Formal Causation" appeared in volume 5, issue 3 in 2011. Silverstein's "Inescapability and Normativity" appeared in volume 6, issue 3 the following year, and his "Reducing Reasons" appeared in volume 10, issue 1 in 2016. Since 2017, Silverstein has painstakingly typeset every article that has appeared in *JESP*, starting with volume 12—by my count, 255 articles in total by the time this note is published, fully 60 percent of all articles published in the history of the journal.

There is no one—or ones!—whose judgment or commitment I could trust more, and they have a shared vision and purpose to continue to take *JESP* to new and better places in the kinds and quality of work that it publishes and in the experiences that it offers readers, authors, and everyone else whose hard work makes the journal tick. They will face trials, it is true, but no one is better suited to triumph. I can't wait to see where they take it.

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