

## **Publish or Perish**

Funds and positions in philosophy should be awarded through systems that are reliable, objective, and efficient. One question usually taken to be relevant is how many publications people have in a group of well-respected journals. However, in the context of significant competition for jobs and funding, relying on publication quantity creates a serious downside: the oft-lamented demand that we ‘publish or perish’. We offer a systematic review of the problems involved in contemporary academic philosophy, and argue that the resulting situation is bad not just for individual philosophers, but for philosophy itself: we are not working as a discipline to as high a standard as we might. We then suggest some potential solutions, including some more detailed considerations around what seems to us a particularly promising option: a professional code of conduct for philosophers.

### **1. The problem**

Funds and positions in philosophy should be awarded through systems that are reliable, objective, and efficient. One question usually taken to be relevant is how many publications people have in a certain group of well-respected journals. Articles are accepted only if other philosophers take them to be worth publishing; so it is relevant. The process is typically anonymised; various irrelevant but potentially biasing facts are set aside, making things more objective. Finally, going through dozens, or hundreds, of applications is significantly sped up by dismissing those with a poor publication record.

However, in the context of significant competition for jobs and funding, relying on publication quantity creates a serious downside: the oft-lamented demand that we

‘publish or perish’. Online philosophy forums are full of discussions of flaws in the system, and it is a common topic of informal conversation at conferences and in common rooms. But to the best of our knowledge, nobody has suggested a positive proposal in a formal academic venue. Our aim in this paper is to offer a systematic review of the problems involved in contemporary academic philosophy, and some potential solutions. Section 3 offers some more detailed considerations around what seems to us a particularly promising option: a code of conduct for all those involved in academic publication.

It is worth starting by noting a potentially dismissive response to complaints about a pressure to publish. We do not complain that doctors face a pressure to treat patients, or that teachers face a pressure to educate. Philosophers are no longer – or at least, ought not be – inhabitants of a rarefied world where we can simply pursue whatever ideas interest us personally; and this is no bad thing, particularly since many of us are funded by public money. Our suggestion, however, is not simply that the resulting situation is more onerous for individual philosophers; it is bad for philosophy. As Michael Dummett urges, the merit of a publication “must be great enough to outweigh the disservice done by its being published at all.” (in Oliver 2000: 35). And publication *is* a disservice, for several reasons.

With a greater volume of papers, individual researchers are less able to read everything on relevant topics, sometimes even for very small and specific issues. This task is aided by sophisticated repositories, such as those in *Philosophy Compass*, which hosts papers whose aim, in the words of its managing editor, is to “present accessible state-of-the-art surveys of the literature in a given area” (Cooper 2013: 328). Yet this may only go partway to solving the problem. Given the quantity of papers, even survey authors must make choices, which embody only one take on a particular debate or issue. Moreover, quite understandably, these papers are written by the usual suspects: who

should write a state-of-the-art survey on topic  $x$  if not the most obvious expert on  $x$ ? So, although papers like those in *Philosophy Compass* surely make the situation less problematic, they do not solve the issue. Moreover, survey papers are not available for every philosophical topic. If there is no survey, the natural choice is again to read papers by the usual suspects, again threatening diversity. In the end, for many topics, we either know the topic somewhat superficially, via somebody else's lens (and so we all end up wearing the very same lenses); or we lack knowledge altogether. This is bad in itself: philosophers should know about issues outside our specialisations. But apart from general considerations, these gaps in our philosophical knowledge are bad because philosophers are teachers, and good teachers should have contemporary knowledge of what they teach.

This problem of excessive material might not be such an issue if the work being produced in such great volumes were of the best possible quality; perhaps it is better to have good work being produced rather than not, even if that means a narrowing of the field in which one can be an expert. But a second problem with the reliance on quantity of publications is, simply, that philosophers have to publish as much as they can in order to be competitive, with the result that the papers produced are *not* the best possible. A focus on quantity means spending less time on each paper. Up to a point, the quality of a paper depends on devoting some time to thinking about it; ideally one would send a paper out only when one is positive that the argument advances the debate significantly; is discussed in the clearest possible way; and that problems and objections are comprehensively considered. We have all experienced how much better a paper is (if it survives at all) after it has been presented in conferences and workshops, and has changed under pressure from feedback. All this takes time and, frankly, we do not have time any more.

Moreover, the more we all publish, the more we must collectively referee. As Henry Richardson, editor of *Ethics*, puts it: “We like to see ourselves as offering a service, helping papers get better by putting them through a good review process even if we do not end up publishing them.” (in Hansson et al. 2011: 108). But as journals receive ever more papers, we should not be surprised that, as Richardson claims, “this is a service that is becoming ever harder to offer.” (ibid.)

Pressure to publish may also encourage harmful pragmatic strategizing. In a recent blog entry Huemer suggests that,

to get published, you...need an idea that the referee thinks is likely correct, yet not *obviously* correct, interesting, and tied to the literature, yet hasn't been said before. That rules out practically everything. So it's almost impossible to get published. Here is the loophole: you can take a point that is so narrow and so tied to the specific course of the recent literature that it hasn't been made before. The standards for “interestingness” in academia allow very small, hyperspecialized points to count as sufficiently interesting. So that's how most published papers get published.

We cite Huemer not so much to endorse this picture of how ‘most papers’ *are* published as to claim that this is the best *strategy* for publication. There may be disciplines in which this is more evident and others in which luckily this happens less. For example, perhaps in the philosophy of cognitive sciences, where new data are available to be discussed all the time, filling the logical space for the sake of it may be less common. But the strategy is in general the most effective way to be published. The problems multiply. Under pressure to publish, it is not wise to risk engaging with broader implications for

topics that are superficially unrelated, or with big bold claims, or practical applications. We are not experts on these other areas, and big bold claims are the most natural source of problems, the easiest to criticise. Exploring those areas thus carries with it higher risks of rejection. The best strategy to reach the goal of working in the discipline that we care about seems to be to ghettoize ourselves into a sub-discipline, to avoid making controversial statements in that sub-discipline, and to refrain from getting out of our philosophical armchairs. Pressure to publish also discourages connecting ideas. If you have two publishable ideas that are connected, and interestingly so, there is more pragmatic mileage from publishing them separately. Any sense of how those ideas contribute to a bigger overall picture is thus removed. It is, of course, important not to exaggerate the problem. We are not claiming that the resulting work is of an overall poor quality, because most journals still have very high standards. And we recognise that even quite small developments can be interesting in themselves, or can be part of the catalyst for much broader changes. Not all academic work can make revolutionary advances. Even if some small points end up having no wider impact, we cannot know that in advance. It might well be that the implications of an apparently minor point aren't obvious until long after it is made. But, even if small developments are worthwhile, a paper that could but fails to work on the big picture is surely worse than it could be. Even if most philosophy is good, we are not working as a discipline to as high a standard as we might. There are still further problems with strategizing. Sometimes, we receive requests to revise and resubmit a paper. Being evaluated on publication quantity means that you need to publish soon. The winning strategy seems to involve changing the paper quickly, and broadly as the referees suggest. Challenging suggestions involves a higher risk of rejection, or even just of multiple rounds of revision that dangerously delay publication. This 'winning' strategy is clearly not a strategy for the best possible paper. Moreover, this strategy seems to kill diversity. Since referees

have generally published on a topic, agreeing with their suggestions makes novel papers more consonant with existing literature. Again, it is important not to exaggerate. Most philosophers are proud enough that they will not accept a suggested revision that they take to be obviously false; and many referees and editors are fair-minded enough to accept a refusal to make recommended changes if that refusal is justified. But our claim is about a direction of pressure; there is a greater risk in challenging comments. Huemer also suggests that a winning strategy is to quote all the people that worked on a particular topic, since if your referee's work is not cited, "he might feel a negative emotion, which could bias him against your paper." Since you don't know who the referee is going to be, the most effective thing to do is then to "cite as many people as you can, even if the citations are not actually helpful." We do not think this is a strategy that philosophers follow, at least in the majority; nor do we think that referees are generally guided by such considerations. But since this *might* happen, the safest strategy is as Huemer suggests. This is clearly bad in itself, but is also bad for those who read the paper: how are we supposed to understand what to read to improve our understanding of a topic if at least some of references made in the paper are strategic? Finally, pressure to publish encourages the strategy of working on 'fashionable' topics. If a particular issue or area is currently popular, with a great deal of work being written on it, contributions on this area may be more likely to be deemed valuable. If the same topics are repeatedly deemed unfashionable, this may push researchers away from publications in these areas, further narrowing the scope of philosophical enquiry.

To our minds, these considerations suggest that there is a problem with the current reliance, in measuring researcher quality, on publication quantity. As Pauline Jacobson, president of the executive board of *Linguistic in Philosophy*, puts it, "[t]he best that we can do is to put pressure on deans, on university administrations, and on the culture to realize that numbers are not what it is all about." (in Hansson et al. 2011:

104). But how can we prompt a shift in the culture? As we have said, we do not think that the suggestions we have made so far are particularly novel. But we think that the problem is serious enough that we hope this publication will “outweigh the disservice done by its being published at all”, by raising the issue and ultimately leading to the sketch of a promising solution.

## **2. What is to be done?**

Having outlined the problem, we now turn to potential solutions. In what follows, we consider a number of potential changes to both the academic culture of philosophy in general, and the journal publication system in particular: how they might help; and how they might cause further problems. Section 3 then deals, as promised, with an academic code of publishing.

### *2.1 Charge for submissions*

Huemer suggests that journals should charge authors for submissions, though “not enough to make publishing unaffordable to anyone”. The aim of this measure is the same reason that many institutions charge for applications to graduate school: to discourage frivolous submission.

In some ways, this proposal seems quite attractive. If part of the problem is that we are all submitting too many articles, one component of the solution might be to introduce an incentive to submit fewer articles. The proposal has another advantage, which is that it seems to discourage the kind of decoupling of ideas that we have mentioned. At the moment, if one has two interesting, linked ideas, there is little incentive to publish them together rather than get two papers out of them. Financial cost is such an incentive.

However, there are also considerable problems with this suggestion. Primarily, we do not believe that the problem of too many articles is driven fundamentally by a desire on the part of academics to publish shoddy and rushed work. Insofar as that tendency exists, it is driven by the demands of the job market. A system that punishes junior academics for behaving rationally in response to the demands of the job market, without also addressing those prior causes, is deeply unfair. This tactic also seems likely to punish academics who are currently unaffiliated with particular institutions, since they are less likely to be able to pass these costs on to their departments. This would have the effect of making an already closed world even more exclusive. Given the strategic demands of early career publishing, it is also not clear what Huemer means by ‘unaffordable’. One might easily submit a paper to four or five journals before it is accepted. At Huemer’s suggested rate of \$25 a submission, that is upwards of \$100 to submit one article. All this might be fine if the only reason that articles were rejected was because they were not good enough; but part of the problem is that there is plenty of *good* work out there, with authors all wanting to submit to the top journals. This strategy thus punishes people not just for submitting incomplete work, but for submitting good work at the wrong time, or to the wrong place.

## *2.2 More journals*

Having more journals might make a positive contribution in the following way: at the moment a large number of academics compete to have their work published. Adding more journals to the mix – both generalised and specialist – provides more outlets for publication. Only if one believes that all papers currently rejected are not worthy of publication would one think that this in itself is a bad thing, and this will also help junior academics find outlets for publication. Moreover, setting up further specialist



journals would potentially open up more opportunities for otherwise less well supported topics.

What is unclear, however, is when this line of thought should stop. A rather unscientific survey of the list of merely English-language journals in philosophy on Wikipedia offers a list with over 180 names. There are lots of philosophy journals out there. This strategy also contributes clearly to several of the other problems we have mentioned. Yet more journals means yet more work in one's area that one does not have time to read, more work for already hard-pressed referees, and so on. While this is certainly no reason not to set up a journal if one perceives a gap in the publishing literature, it makes it doubtful as a general strategy.

This might make it seem as if there is an inherent tension in the problems that we raise. On one hand, we complain about how much pressure there is to get work published when it is so necessary for getting and keeping academic jobs. But when a solution is broached, we complain that this will lead to too much additional material for scholars and referees. In fact, there is no such tension, because as a solution to the problem of pressure to publish, this is also anathema. Even if a sufficiently great number of journals were established that all graduate students with work worth publishing were able to get two or three publications before their PhD, all this would do, we fear, is raise the bar for getting hired. So long as the number of publications one has is used as a general barrier to entry to the job market, simply introducing more journals, and hence making it easier to publish, will not help.

### *2.3 Increase topical calls for papers*

One of the central issues we have raised is the under-representation of certain topics, driven in part by what is deemed fashionable. A potential solution to this issue would be to have far more journals engage in calls for papers on particular topics, with a

commitment to significant focus on currently under-represented topics, combined with a corresponding reduction in unsolicited papers. Of course, many journals do commit to calling for papers on important, but under-represented issues; what we are suggesting is an increase in this practice. The infrequency of calls for publications on particular issues might also help with the problems of multiple papers, and rushed work being submitted. If one is forced to wait for a call for papers in order to submit, one will have less reason to submit a rushed, half-ready piece of work. Moreover, if one has two interesting points to make on a particular issue, but only one call for papers to submit it to, then one is surely less likely to try to wring two papers out of two points, and more likely to make interesting and valuable connections.

It may seem somewhat over-optimistic to suggest this as a solution to a focus on fashionable topics, however. For what is there to stop calls for papers from focusing on an overly narrow selection of topics? Philosophical journals do not actively coordinate their calls for papers, and so there is nothing to stop several calls for papers on a particularly fashionable issue from being called at once, to the detriment of other topics. If this is also matched by an almost-complete shutdown of unsolicited papers, this seems to invite a narrowing of scope; it also risks narrowing the opportunity to publish, since if one is unsuccessful in a particular call for papers, it could be a significant amount of time until a call relevant to one's paper comes again. This may be less of a problem than it first appears, however. We are not advocating a total shutdown on unsolicited work; what we are suggesting is that there should be far more calls for papers on particular issues. Ideally, that would include issues that tend to be less successful in unsolicited publications.

#### 2.4 *Encourage collaborative work*

Philosophy has a reputation as something of a solitary activity. Papers in philosophy still tend to be published by individual authors.<sup>1</sup> One of the issues we have highlighted is the problem of over-specialisation, resulting in a focus on overly narrow topics; encouraging philosophers to collaborate formally might be one way to resist that tendency.

There are two main potential issues with this suggestion. First, one might wonder what it would mean to ‘encourage’ collaboration in a practical sense. Here are some suggestions. Firstly, those running graduate programmes in philosophy should encourage graduate students to work together. When two students are working on complementary issues, particularly in large departments, they should be encouraged not just to talk to one another, but to actively write together. In the same way as a good graduate supervisor will encourage their supervisees to publish solo work, good graduate departments should encourage students to write and publish collaborative work. Departments could even make some collaborative work a formal requirement of their doctoral programme. A second possibility is that journals might encourage collaborative work by actively seeking out, and perhaps to some degree enforcing, a certain number of collaborative articles per year. One might worry that this kind of system is fairly easy to game: author A writes a paper and, knowing that he will have a better chance of getting it published if it is a co-authored paper, asks author B to simply sign her name to it. But such a worry seems to us to significantly overestimate the willingness of philosophers to put their name to work that they do not agree with. We suggest that author B will at the very least want to read the paper, and may offer constructive criticism on it if she does not agree with the content.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Sword (2012: 26) suggests that papers in philosophy have an average of 1.1 authors. Some explanations are offered by e.g. Fallis (2006) and Thalgard (2006).

The second complaint about this suggestion is that it over-estimates the extent to which philosophy is a solitary practice. Academics take their papers to workshops, conferences, and seminars, and discuss ideas with supervisors, colleagues and students. There is thus no need for a formal requirement to co-publish, because collaboration occurs at the less formal levels before publication. It is certainly true that a great deal of work in philosophy goes through a number of collaborative discussions before publication. But there are a couple of reasons for doubting that this undermines the point we are making. First, taking a paper to a workshop or conference is not the same as writing it collaboratively with someone. At their best, conferences certainly do offer a wealth of new ideas and takes on issues; but it is also true that the focus in philosophy conferences are often on objections to particular points; and even the most constructive question or point raised in a conference venue is a far cry from working with someone on a joint effort. Second, so long as there remains an emphasis in academia on publications, we believe that there is also a need to encourage collaborative work at that level, alongside the already existing collaboration at less formal levels. That assumes, of course, that we should maintain the current level of emphasis on publication; the next section questions that.

### *2.5 Publish less, do other things more*

We have argued that the use of sheer quantity of publications as a central criterion for doling out academic rewards is damaging to the profession. So, perhaps we should all, collectively, defend the discipline that we care about, and simply commit to publishing fewer papers. If all professional, and would-be professional, philosophers individually commit to trying to publish less – and, of course, to spending more time thinking about each publication, to connecting up ideas rather than dividing them, and so on – things could improve.

A couple of obvious worries arise. The first of these is that philosophers like to write and talk about philosophy. Are we seriously suggesting that we should all artificially limit that impulse? If so, then we will have a hard time convincing anyone to join our cause; and the benefits to the profession seem limited. But we are not making any such suggestion. For one thing, we have already argued that reducing the pressure to publish would give us all more time to write, think and talk about philosophy: if the reason is that we are spending more time on each individual piece of work, the result of lowering production need not be a reduced amount of time spent doing the bits of philosophy that we enjoy. But we have also not suggested a reduction in output; rather, we suggest a reduction in *formal output in journal publications*. A reduction in this form of output could be met by an increase in production of less formal forms of philosophy, such as blog posts, public talks and workshops. In fact, our suggestion is not even that people should write fewer papers: people can and do post work online before it has been published, and this can very often lead to interesting and productive discussion at the informal level. In other words, we suggest an increase in a number of things that we already do; but whereas these are currently typically aimed at preparing a paper for publication, perhaps that need not always be the focus.

Of course, even with this clarification this suggestion is not without its issues. Currently, one can receive the contents of a few central journals every month, or every quarter, and this is a good way to keep up with some of what is being put out in one's field. If everyone is posting papers and shorter posts on their personal blogs, it will be even harder to keep track of the field, exacerbating two of the problems we mentioned in section one: an inability to keep track of updates in one's field, and a tendency to focus on *the usual suspects*, since it is likely that the most well-known philosophers will spring to mind when one is looking for new material to read. This problem is partially addressed by already existing formats, in the form of online databases, such as

philpapers.org and academia.edu. Each of these models might need some tweaking to meet the requirements of our suggestion. Philpapers, for instance, lists only published journal articles, which is somewhat anathema to our suggestion. But it would clearly be possible to adapt it, or to develop a new site, that allowed users to upload their own work, with less strict rules as to what content could be included, as is the model used by academia.edu. One might worry that this opens us up to a significant reduction in quality; but one thing that we hope this new model might encourage would be far more user interaction with papers than either of the exemplar sites currently offers,<sup>2</sup> allowing users both to offer comments on all posted papers.

The final issue is that this is a fairly typical collective action problem. We are all colleagues who want one another to succeed, and philosophers who want our discipline to thrive. But we are also competitors for grant money, jobs, and other rewards. It is all very well for us to plead with you all to publish less; but from a selfish perspective it makes strategic sense to publicly call for a reduction in publication while continuing to operate as before. We might appeal to the suggestion that even if we all have our self-interest, most of us are not so anti-social as to deceive our colleagues about our intentions. But a less extreme version of this problem still occurs if most people are honest about their scepticism; people will only be willing to commit to this strategy if it is likely to be successful, and it is only likely to be successful if many people commit to it. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of specificity inherent in this discussion. We have suggested that there is ‘too much’ publication, and that we should all commit to less of it. But this might have significantly divergent interpretations between individuals; in committing to a reduction in one’s formal output, one is thus left unclear whether one is committing to more or less than one’s colleagues. Indeed, our own action

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<sup>2</sup> Philpapers offers no option for user discussion, while academia.edu allows ‘invited sessions’ for discussion of papers.

of submitting this paper for publication might be taken as evidence that we are less than sincere in our suggestion, since we cannot even abide by it ourselves. What this last issue reinforces is that this strategy is unlikely to work in isolation, and in particular that it is not wise or fair to expect it to be led by individual, particularly junior, academics. The problem is an institutional one, and must be led at an institutional level. The next suggestion addresses an aspect of that, which is a suggested change to the use of publication figures in job applications.

## *2.6 Use different criteria for jobs*

We are of the view that one of the fundamental drivers of the pressure to publish is the reliance on publications in formal assessments of an academic's standing, in job applications, grant applications, and so on. One of the ways that institutional support could help resolve this issue is by changing the criteria for job applications, so that a focus on the number of publications one has is less central to one's suitability for a job.

We have considered some reasons why one might want to maintain the current system, but do not believe that any of them stand up to scrutiny.

First, we have already suggested that a focus on publication numbers can act as a pragmatic filter in a job market where many posts receive scores, if not hundreds, of applications. This is not, in our view, a good reason to focus on publications, any more than any other pragmatic shortcut is. Simply cutting down the number of applications one has to view is an unethical reason to implement a filtering rule when that rule has no further reasons backing it; it is also against the interests of the hiring institution, since it may result in the unthinking rejection of good candidates. So there must, for this to be a good reason, be other reasons as well.

A second suggestion is that the number of publications is a measure of the quality of a person's scholarship. This is not outright false, but it is a deeply incomplete picture.

While we agree that quality of scholarship is a central consideration in a decision to publish – so that multiple publications in good journals is an indication of the quality of someone’s work – it is not the only consideration; this means that the reverse is *not* true, i.e. a failure to have multiple publications is not in itself an indication of the *poor* quality of someone’s work. Indeed, as we have said, some of the pressures to which we must respond as job applicants may go *against* good quality work. Similar considerations are due to the claim that publication is a good indication of productivity, or work ethic. Having a lot of publications is a good indication that one is writing a lot of papers; but failing to have a lot of publications does not indicate the opposite.

The final argument is that hiring committees are right to consider one’s publication record because it is relevant to one’s ability to do the job; not because it is an indication of quality or of work ethic, but because *publishing papers is part of the job*. One’s current record is thus a measure of whether one will perform a central task well. In a sense, this is entirely true. But it is also a somewhat question-begging argument; after all, our argument has applied not just to the obsession with publications on the part of hiring committees, but in the profession as a whole. One might think that if publication isn’t the task of the academic, it’s not clear what is: but we have already suggested what that might be. The academic’s job is to write, read, think, argue, teach, engage with the public and, as Mary Beard recently put it, “make everything less simple”.<sup>3</sup> We do not think that publication is inimical to those tasks; but when publication gets in the way of those tasks, it is not what should be prioritised.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/23/mary-beard-the-role-of-the-academic-is-to-make-everything-less-simple>



### **3. A professional code of conduct for philosophy**

We have already argued that it is not fundamentally the task of individual academics to change the situation we are in at the moment, but of institutions. But how can this change really happen? We finish this paper by exploring one practical suggestion in more depth. This suggestion aims to embody some of the points raised above, but also to do so in a somewhat more practical way. We suggest that philosophy, just like many other professions, should draw up a professional code of conduct. There are obvious things that will have to be in the code: we must not steal ideas; the refereeing process should be anonymous unless there are good reasons for exception. But what else should be in it?

The Hippocratic Oath is a professional code for physicians with its roots in the work of the Ancient Greek doctor Hippocrates of Kos. We do not know whether Diogenes Laertius was right that philosophers are physicians (of the soul) (Life of Plato, XXX: 129). Still, surprisingly, much of the Oath seems relevant, following suitable modification, to our profession as well. In particular, various appropriate ideas are contained in the following three declarations from the modern version of the oath written by Dr. Lasagna in 1964 and still widely used in many medical schools today:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

We think that a code of conduct for philosophers should surely incorporate the idea that we should respect the work of others; that we ought to share knowledge; that we should not be ashamed to say “I know not”, and so should be prepared to look for collaboration; and that we ought to think of ourselves as members of a community.

In being a member of a community, philosophers should aim at cooperation, and when thinking about cooperation, the *locus classicus* is Grice’s principle and maxims (1975: 45-7). We think that our code will then have to include something along these lines.

#### The Cooperative Principle

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged

Philosophers have an obligation to make contributions to academic exchange that are required, given the shape and direction of current debate. This does not necessarily require accepting the direction of current debate, but does require responding to it.

The principle is then divided into several maxims that deal with various ways that one’s contribution can be shaped to the requirements of a particular context. These are:

### Maxim of Quantity

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Contributions to academic discussion should be as informative as is required to move the debate forward. On one hand, this involves refusing to artificially divide up ideas that naturally complement one another; this would involve being under-informative. On the other hand, some contributions to philosophical discussion commit the opposite vice of being over-informative. In particular, the filling of logical space for its own sake may qualify for this category.

### Maxim of Quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Here, we would argue that contributions to academic discussion should be accepted as true by those who make them, and believed to be backed by good evidence or argument.

### Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

This goes back to what we said concerning the principle: academics should consider themselves as part of a debate and should contribute to it when publishing in a way that

is relevant, be it providing arguments for a thesis, opposing a tendency or showing that the debate is misplaced.

Maxim of Manner

Be perspicuous.

Avoid obscurity of expression.

Avoid ambiguity.

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Be orderly.

Again, these ideas seem to us to apply quite readily to the issue of academic writing. Papers ought to be aimed at clarity, precision, brevity and orderliness in order to contribute fully to academic debate. One might think that all this is even too obvious to be stated, but we think it need to be stressed. For although it is obviously philosophically good, clarity seems to be strategically bad in the current publish or perish situation. As Huemer remarks, in fact:

if the referee has trouble following the argument, he'll find it difficult to say you're wrong. (He also won't know that you're *right*, but again, referees are looking for reasons to reject, not reasons to accept.) That's another advantage of obfuscatory prose.

Again, we do not think that philosophers tend to use this strategy. Still, we think in the code it should be clear that this strategy is opposite to our ethics.

These are very general remarks. A full professional code might have more specific suggestions that are tailored for the three different figures that take part in the

publishing process: authors; referees; and editors. We do not have a detailed proposal for such a code. As we have said, the aim of this paper is to set up a space for a pressing philosophical enterprise, i.e. the enterprise of defining its own rules of conduct. Without offering a fully developed code, however, we end by suggesting a few indicative examples of possible rules for prospective authors:

*I will not plagiarise the work of others, or my own work.*

A proscription against plagiarism of others' work risks falling into the category of 'too obvious to mention'. But it is also of such central importance to the practice of academic philosophy that we believe it should head any discussion of a philosophers' code of practice. Self-plagiarism is a slightly more complex issue. There is nothing wrong in principle with the re-use of one's earlier ideas. But it is still important to reference those ideas correctly: this facilitates the judgment of whether a piece of work is legitimately using an authors' previous ideas to further a particular discussion, and hence whether a submission really adds anything to the field.

*I will not artificially divide ideas and discussion across papers that would better serve the discipline in one paper.*

We have already explored the problem of artificial division above. While we have maintained that the problem is a cultural one, and hence cannot be solved by authors alone, our view is that individuals should commit to abstaining from this practice. Of course, there may be situations where this will prove difficult. If a referee report insists that you should concentrate on just one idea in a paper that, in your view, provides an interesting discussion of two related issues, you will face a difficult decision whether to follow that advice, possibly securing a publication, or stick to one's guns. We do not suggest that authors must, at the risk of unprofessionalism, always choose the

interrelated route. But perhaps a default position should be that authors will attempt to make interesting and valuable connections in initial submissions.

*I will remember that reviewing is a service that is crucial to the good of the profession, and be committed to finding time to performing that service myself.*

We have mentioned a number of ways that reviewing can go wrong. But it is of particular importance to remember that, at least as things stand, many reviewers give up a significant amount of their time, for no remuneration, simply in order to benefit philosophy, and to give useful feedback for prospective authors. In our view, benefitting from this unpaid labour creates an obligation to return, or perhaps pay forward, that benefit. One might object to this claim on the following grounds: currently, publishers of academic journals make profits on the basis of unpaid, and hence exploited, labour on the part of both authors and referees. Since one is not obligated to support exploitative practices, nobody is obligated to referee for exploitative journals. This is not a persuasive argument, at least so long as one also *benefits* from the unpaid labour of others. Either we ought to commit to boycotting exploitative academic publishers entirely, or we ought to share in the burden from which we benefit, while also working in other ways to improve practices.

## **Conclusion**

In submitting this paper for publication (!), we are aiming to start a discussion on what seems to us to be a crucial issue in academic philosophy. We have made some practical suggestion, and hope that others will engage in a constructive discussion about merits and problems that we might not have seen, or alternative ideas. We suggested that

philosophy should draw up a professional code of conduct.<sup>4</sup> We see no negative effects of such a code: it cannot do any harm to have one. Moreover, we think there are some obvious positive effects: first of all, it will recognize that philosophy is a profession like many others; secondly, the very process of writing it will help the community discuss together what we should think we should do as the professionals we are. Ethical codes are obviously not fully enforceable, since they often regard attitudes and intentions, and might not be enough to solve the issues. Still, we think, it may point us in the right direction for broader cultural change, and it will moreover make publishing really one of the correct criteria for measuring research, given that these published papers will conform to such a code.

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<sup>4</sup> For a survey on whether editors and authors in Accountancy felt an ethical code for publishing is needed, see Borkowski & Welsh 2000.

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