

Whither now, Open Access?

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The recently discussed [scenario](#) of universal gold open access brought about by simply [switching](#) the subscriptions funds at libraries to have the libraries pay for author processing charges instead, seemed like a ghoulish [nightmare](#). One of the few scenarios [worse](#) than the desolate state we call the *status quo* today. The [latest news](#), however, seem to indicate that the corporate publishers are planning to shift the situation towards a reality that is even worse than that nightmare. Not only are publishers, as predicted, increasing their profits by [plundering](#) the public coffers to an even larger extent (which would be bad enough by itself), they are now also attempting to take over the institutional repositories that have grown over the last decade. If successful, this would undo much of the emancipation we have wrought from the publisher [oligopoly](#). This move can only be intended to assure that our crown jewels stay with the publishers, rather than where they belong, in our institutions. Apparently, some libraries are all too eager to get rid of their primary reason d'être: to archive and make accessible the works of their faculty.

Publisher behavior over the last decade has been nothing short of a huge disappointment at best and an outright insult at worst. I cannot fathom a single reason why we should let corporate publishers continue to [parasitize](#) our labor. If even the supposedly [good guys](#) can be seen as [not acting](#) in our best interest, what are we left with? How can we ever entrust our most valuable assets to organizations that have proven time and again that they will abuse our trust for profit? Why is there still a single scientist left, with the opinion that “the current publishing model works well”, let alone a [plurality](#)?

These recent developments re-emphasize that none of our current approaches to solve the access problem (gold, green or hybrid) are [sustainable by themselves](#). It is in our own best interest (and hence the tax-payers' who fund us) to put publishers out of business for good. If we strive for our institutions and hence us to regain and stay in control of our own works, be that the code we develop, the data we collect or the text summaries we write, then we need a new [approach](#) and that is to [cut subscriptions](#) on a [massive scale](#) in order to free the [funds](#) to implement a [modern scholarly infrastructure](#). This infrastructure will not only solve the access problem that most people care so much about, but simultaneously ameliorate the counter-productive incentives currently in place and help improve the [replication crisis](#).

I do not think it is reasonable to try to solve the access problem at the expense of all the other, numerous and potentially more pernicious shortcomings of our current infrastructure, even though there is a lot of momentum on the open access front these days. Why not take this momentum and use it to rationally transform the way we do science, taking all modern technology at our disposal, with the added benefit of also solving the access problem along the way? The result of blindly, frantically doctoring on one single symptom, ignoring the disease that is still festering, is all too likely the death of the patient.

tl;dr: Cut all subscriptions now!