

Gowers's Weblog

Mathematics related discussions

Elsevier — my part in its downfall

The Dutch publisher Elsevier publishes many of the world's best known mathematics journals, including *Advances in Mathematics*, *Comptes Rendus*, *Discrete Mathematics*, *The European Journal of Combinatorics*, *Historia Mathematica*, *Journal of Algebra*, *Journal of Approximation Theory*, *Journal of Combinatorics Series A*, *Journal of Functional Analysis*, *Journal of Geometry and Physics*, *Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications*, *Journal of Number Theory*, *Topology*, and *Topology and its Applications*. For many years, it has also been heavily criticized for its business practices. Let me briefly summarize these criticisms.

1. It charges very high prices — so far above the average that it seems quite extraordinary that they can get away with it.
2. One method that they have for getting away with it is a practice known as “bundling”, where instead of giving libraries the choice of which journals they want to subscribe to, they offer them the choice between a large collection of journals (chosen by them) or nothing at all. So if *some* Elsevier journals in the “bundle” are indispensable to a library, that library is forced to subscribe at very high subscription rates to a large number of journals, across all the sciences, many of which they do not want. (The journal *Chaos, Solitons and Fractals* is a notorious example of a journal that is regarded as a joke by many mathematicians, but which libraries all round the world must nevertheless subscribe to.) Given that libraries have limited budgets, this often means that they cannot subscribe to journals that they would much rather subscribe to, so it is not just libraries that are harmed, but other publishers, which is of course part of the motivation for the scheme.
3. If libraries attempt to negotiate better deals, Elsevier is ruthless about cutting off access to all their journals.
4. Elsevier supports many of the measures, such as the [Research Works Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_Works_Act) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_Works_Act), that attempt to stop the move to open access. They also supported SOPA and PIPA and lobbied strongly for them.

I could carry on, but I'll leave it there.

It might seem inexplicable that this situation has been allowed to continue. After all, mathematicians (and other scientists) have been complaining about it for a long time. Why can't we just tell Elsevier that we no longer wish to publish with them?

Well, part of the answer is that we *can*. A famous (and not unique) example where we did so was the resignation of the entire editorial board of *Topology* and the founding of *The Journal of Topology* — the story is told briefly [here](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_(journal)) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_\(journal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_(journal))). But as the list above shows, such examples are very much the exception rather than the rule, so the basic question remains: why do we allow ourselves to be messed about to this extraordinary extent, when one would have thought that nothing would be easier than to do without them?

A possible explanation is that to do something about the situation requires coordinated action. Even if one library refuses to subscribe to Elsevier journals, plenty of others will feel that they can't refuse, and Elsevier won't mind too much. But if all libraries were prepared to club together and negotiate jointly, doing a kind of reverse bundling — accept this deal or none of us will subscribe to any of your journals — then Elsevier's profits (which are huge, by the way) would be genuinely threatened. However, it seems unlikely that any such massive coordination between libraries will ever take place.

What about coordination between academics? What is to stop all the other editorial boards of Elsevier journals following the example of the board of the *Journal of Topology*? I actually don't know the answer to that: I can only assume that not enough people on those editorial boards care to make it worth it to them to go through what is likely to be a somewhat unpleasant and time-consuming process.

If top-down approaches to the problem don't work, then what about bottom-up approaches? Why do any of us publish papers in Elsevier journals? Let me answer that question in my own case. I have a paper in the *European Journal of Combinatorics*, which I submitted about 20 years ago, before I knew anything about the objections to Elsevier. And what's more, I didn't know it was an Elsevier journal until a few days ago. (Part of my reason for listing the journals at the beginning of this post was to make the second excuse less valid for anyone who reads this. A more complete list can be found [here](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/P11.cws_home/mathjournals) (http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/P11.cws_home/mathjournals).

Once I did hear about Elsevier's behaviour, I made a conscious decision not to publish in Elsevier journals and I started to feel bad about cooperating with them in any way. I didn't go as far as to refuse, but if, say, I was asked to join the editorial board of an Elsevier journal and wasn't quite sure I wanted to, then the fact that it was Elsevier was enough to make my mind up. (This actually happened. I was a little cowardly and gave it as an additional reason for reluctance rather than the main reason, but I did at least mention it.) I am not knowingly on the editorial board of any Elsevier journal, and haven't been in the past either.

Now, however, I have decided that my previous quiet approach was not enough. I think another reason that we cooperate with Elsevier is simply that it is embarrassing not to. If I'm asked to referee a paper for an Elsevier journal and I am clearly an appropriate choice of referee, then refusing to do it feels like a criticism of the editor who has asked me, who

may well be somebody I know. It also feels like shirking my duty and slightly letting down the authors, who may well also be people I know.

It is because of that that the *moral* argument in favour of refusing to cooperate, as an individual, with Elsevier is not quite straightforward. Indeed, if we were just to accept Elsevier's abuses as an unfortunate fact of life that is not going to go away, then there would be a genuine argument that refusing to cooperate with them is the wrong thing to do. However, I think that the abuses *are* eventually going to go away — the internet will see to that — so I think that the doing-my-duty argument is outweighed by the argument that it is in the interests of the mathematical community to get to that happy day as soon as we can. I also don't see any argument at all against refusing to submit papers to Elsevier journals.

So I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but I am saying so publicly. I am by no means the first person to do this, but the more of us there are, the more socially acceptable it becomes, and that is my main reason for writing this post.

It occurs to me that it might help if there were a website somewhere, where mathematicians who have decided not to contribute in any way to Elsevier journals could sign their names electronically. I think that some people would be encouraged to take a stand if they could see that many others were already doing so, and that it would be a good way of making that stand public. Perhaps such a site already exists, in which case I'd like to hear about it and add my name. If it doesn't, it should be pretty easy to set up, but way beyond my competence I'm afraid. Is there anyone out there who feels like doing it?

Returning to the subject of morality, I don't think it is helpful to accuse Elsevier of immoral behaviour: they are a big business and they want to maximize their profits, as businesses do. I see the argument as a straightforward practical one. Yes, they are like that, as one would expect, but we have much greater bargaining power than we are wielding at the moment, for the very simple reason that we don't actually *need* their services. That is not to say that morality doesn't come into it, but the moral issues are between mathematicians and other mathematicians rather than between mathematicians and Elsevier. In brief, if you publish in Elsevier journals you are making it easier for Elsevier to take action that harms academic institutions, so you shouldn't. (I'm thinking of stories I've been told about mathematicians at major universities who have been cut off from Elsevier journals. Something I don't know, but would be interested to learn, is whether mathematicians in developing countries can afford to get access to Elsevier journals. If not, then that would be another powerful moral argument against submitting to them.)

Even if so many mathematicians refused to cooperate with Elsevier that the quality of their journals plummeted, that wouldn't necessarily force Elsevier to change its ways, since it could continue to bundle its by now rubbishy mathematics journals together with important journals in physics, chemistry and biology. However, it would be a powerful gesture — perhaps even powerful enough for other sciences to follow suit eventually — and at least mathematics would be free of the problem.

One final remark is that Elsevier is not the only publisher to behave in an objectionable way. However, it seems to be the worst.

PS For non-British readers, the titles of this post and the previous one are an oblique reference to [this book](#)
(<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Adolf-Hitler-Part-his-Downfall/dp/0140035206>).

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432 Responses to “Elsevier – my part in its downfall”

1. *smy* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:13 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Bundling of negotiations on the customer side does not automatically lead to better results. In France, journal costs are negotiated by representatives of many universities of all fields. The results of the negotiations with Springer are very bad for mathematics libraries who have no say in the matter.

So, be careful what you wish for.

◦ *YouKnowBestOfAll* Says:

[February 8, 2012 at 4:18 pm](#)

The main question here is: “Should the public pay twice for accessing what is essentially PUBLIC information?”

Technically, the authors of research funded by the tax payers can not assign all rights in the work to the journal, as these rights do NOT belong to the authors but to their institution and ultimately to the tax payers!

One day, when the Tax Payer wakes up, there will be massive class actions against such publishers.

See my post below “For Universal and Free Access to All Public Information”

2. *Phil Molyneux* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 6:22 pm | [Reply](#)

It is utterly absurd that we still have publishers — we write for free (because we want our work read or known), we edit or referee for free and then pay large amounts of money to buy the work back. With the advent of the Web, authors should have eliminated publishers.

◦ *Anonymous* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 1:04 pm

This is my point – I completely agree. Moreover, I think that it's absurd that editing and refereeing are not paid. They take time and are highly responsible jobs. It is also ridiculous that authors of scientific articles have to pay in order to get some examples of their printed work.

◦ *Skaperen* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 2:43 pm

If it were not for the important peer-review process, I assume that more researchers would just self-publish (or their institution would provide the means), and we (even those of us not in academia) could just come read it all. Maybe what we need is a new style of peer-review that can apply some of the technologies and methods used now by many sites to judge comments and replies. Do it in an academic context. Not only would papers be reviewed, but reviews would be reviewed by their peers as well. Then you have a means not only to publish, but you would also have a structure of peer review, and double peer review, as well. All at the cost of running a few websites.

◦ *a.d.p-h* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 10:43 pm

In reply to Skaperen above, Alan Cann at Leicester University did something close to what you're proposing:

[h](#)

<http://scienceoftheinvisible.blogspot.com/2012/01/its-academic-publishing-jim-but->

In this case, it's far from perfect but it certainly doesn't take a huge leap to imagine how it might operate on a larger scale.

As an aside, I'm always struck by the lack of researchers who blog about their own research or even just generally (it's probably worth saying I'm a postgrad student). Perhaps this might be specific to the discipline I'm involved in (linguistics). But I wouldn't think so, and it seems to me that some researchers simply aren't aware of the possibilities of social media in general or interested in questions relating to open source/open access (and, by implication, of restructuring the publishing/peer review process using these means).

◦ *jake lyles* Says:

February 1, 2012 at 5:14 am

Phil,

High quality “open access” journals are actively used in the fields of Machine Learning (<http://jmlr.csail.mit.edu/>, started in protest of a for-profit publisher) and Biology (<http://www.plos.org/>). More fields should follow suit.

I am not against people making a profit, but I am against gating scholarly knowledge so that <1% of humanity has access to it. Papers should be open access so that they can be indexed, shared, criticized, and organized on the internet.

For humanity,
Jake Lyles

3. *Felipe Pait (@pait)* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:27 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

The Brazilian government has a large deal that makes Elsevier journals available to public universities throughout the country. It is an example of reverse bundling (or collusion if you so wanted to call it).

This means that in at least one large 3rd world country access to Elsevier journals is easy. I am not familiar with the terms of the agreement, however the Brazilian government has a mixed record in wholesale negotiations. They may have an excellent deal, or a lousy one; I really don't know.

4. *gowers* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:41 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I don't think that even coordination on a national scale is enough: the hit to Elsevier's profits if the negotiations fail to reach a conclusion is certainly there, but it is small enough for them to drive a very hard bargain.

5. *juliawolf* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:52 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

There is some concerted action in this regard in France at the moment, but against Springer.

<http://www-fourier.ujf-grenoble.fr/petitions/index.php?petition=3>

However, it doesn't go as far as individual mathematicians refusing to submit to Springer journals.

6. *Eric F. Van de Velde* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:56 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Here is another thing that can be done: do not site license journals and subsidize researchers directly. Details are here:

<http://scitechsociety.blogspot.com/2011/09/publishers-dilemma.html>

7. *Kai von Fintel (@fintelkai)* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 6:58 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I commend your personal policy. I announced a similar personal policy last week:

<http://kvf.me/myoa>.

8. *Peter Murray-Rust* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Thanks for this article. I (a chemist in Cambridge) have been fighting against the tyranny of the publishers for many years. Price is a subsidiary problem; there are many worse downsides: examples are that they control our thought processes through broken publication systems and that they prevent information (such as medical) getting to those who really need it – the patients.

Mathematicians have been able to challenge the system to some extent, including self-archiving their manuscripts, Chemists are completely indifferent to the problem – the only measure for them is papers in J.A.C.S. In many disciplines it is the academics that are the primary problem.

I wish I could be more optimistic that academia will revolt, though I keep trying. Universities are now encouraged to compete against each other. The people I am fighting for are the “scholarly poor” – those who do not have university access. Patients, small businesses, policy makers are all disempowered and academia doesn’t care.

Happy to meet some time if it helps.

9. *forsyth* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:14 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Springer, Elsevier and Wiley all do a further reprehensible thing: they keep electronic access to all back issues prohibitively expensive. This makes it difficult to check references cheaply and conveniently, which almost certainly discourages people from consulting and checking references. You could wander over to a library that subscribes to the infamous bundles, but at least in the UK, you’ll typically find that the issues for reasons of space have been moved to archives, which can’t be browsed (although you can request particular issues to be fetched from the archives, with a day or two’s notice). No doubt it is character forming to give younger researchers a feel for the speed of researching of years’ past.

10. *Dylan Thurston* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:17 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

One correction: The entire board of Topology resigned. Journal of Topology was the new journal.

◦ *gowers* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:24 pm](#)

Thanks — yes, I didn’t make that clear, but the Wikipedia article I linked to does.

11. *Open Access « Sköne Oke* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:27 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Access in der Wissenschaft ganz einfach erklärt: we write for free (because we want our work read or known), we edit or referee for free and then [...]

12. *Tyler Neylon* Says:

[January 21, 2012 at 7:46 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I would be happy to create a custom page for such a list. I just got the domain

thecostofknowledge.com for that purpose (there's nothing there yet). I have a design for the page and plan to start creating it. Please email me to coordinate, or let me know if someone else will be responsible for the list. I'm happy to donate that domain name if you'd like.

- Tyler Neylon Says:

January 22, 2012 at 11:32 am

Ok, <http://thecostofknowledge.com> is up! Anyone can now add their name.

There's an email link from that page where I can be reached for suggestions.

I'm glad to hear of projects like Research Without Walls. There's still a place for an Elsevier-specific pledge, which could appeal to more researchers.

- Daniel Tobias Says:

January 22, 2012 at 2:15 pm

If it's a noncommercial project, thecostofknowledge.org would be more appropriate.

- Anonymous Says:

January 22, 2012 at 6:49 pm

I think that the site should have a clear statement indicating what the signer is pledging, (perhaps also what the objections to Elsevier practices are).

13. Michael Nielsen Says:

January 21, 2012 at 7:49 pm | [Reply](#)

To add to your list of iniquities:

(a) Elsevier have published fake medical journals which were sponsored by pharma companies: <http://classic.the-scientist.com/blog/display/55679/>

(b) The parent company Reed-Elsevier helped facilitate the international arms trade until just a few years back:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/may/30/armstrade.weaponstechnology>

This is a company that should not be supported in any way, whether by submitting articles, refereeing, or acting as an editor.

- CRL Says:

January 27, 2012 at 11:24 am

Their sponsored journals include ones that are less flagrant than the fakes. Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology is fairly notorious, but even journals like Journal of Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Analysis may not be entirely innocent. In my opinion, this is just part of a more or less subtle web of influence that protects industrial interests, particularly in the chemical and pharmaceutical sectors.

I know about this one because I got the right to reply to some articles in JPBA (doi:10.1016/j.jpba.2009.11.014). I had to contact Elsevier, who relented in the end, possibly because I had begun posting on the web and at the time the fake journal

scandal was in the news.

14. *RS* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 8:01 pm | Reply

I am a mathematician at a small liberal arts college that cannot afford Elsevier. I am fortunate that I know someone well at a large public school that does have access who will get articles for me when I need it. It is very unfortunate that I have to go to such measures to continue my research program.

15. *porton* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 8:20 pm | Reply

1. Isn't Elsevier not such bad as you describe? They (unlike Springer) allow to keep preprints on the author's site or on arXiv. They allow even to incorporate the editor's changes into the preprint. Isn't it a good alternative for cheap library access?

2. My first article has been accepted and is to be published in an open access journal soon. After this I am going to submit my next article into Annals of Math. If Annals refuse it, I was going to send it next to Advances in Mathematics.

But after your critique of Elsevier, I doubt whether I should mess with Advances in Mathematics. Maybe it would be better if I submit it into some open access journal?

By the way, I am an amateur mathematician, not an official academic. So prestige of the journals I submit to does not influence my career. It makes prestige of a journal less important for me.

Should I choose open access of prestige? I want just to maximize the number of readers of my articles.

Some people say me that to maximize it I should choose a prestigious journal. Is it right?

3. I'm a programmer and may agree to make programming of your manifest site for free (somebody needs to pay for Web hosting however).

◦ *lolporton* Says:

February 28, 2012 at 1:50 am

lol dude <http://endofgospel.org/marriage.html>

And looking at your "programming", I say good luck to you.

16. *Anonymous* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 8:48 pm | Reply

Though difficult, this decision is the humanistic, honorable thing to do. This may be your biggest contribution to the world—starting / continuing this dialog.

17. *David Molnar* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 8:58 pm | Reply

There's a site for public pledges up at <http://www.researchwithoutwalls.org>, created

by my colleague Stuart Schechter at Microsoft Research, with help and guidance from others. The “default” pledge refers to reviewing only. You can customize it to broaden to submission as well as reviewing.

Please take a look and let me know if there is any way to improve it.

- *David Savitt* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 12:10 am

Hi — I posted below but maybe I should have posted it as a direct reply to you. In any case please have a look.

18. *Giacomo Lacava* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 9:00 pm | [Reply](#)

Considering the entire system of journals and papers is about reputation rather than profit (from what I understand, nobody in academia gets money from the publishing process), it’s a prime candidate for disruption. If a small group of universities started publishing all their papers on an official website (maybe with an opportune system of ranking, to somehow reflect quality of the reviewing process and make it really equivalent to traditional journal publishing), then the incentives to publish in an Elsevier paper would disappear. The system could then grow as more universities join.

I’m surprised nobody has done it yet, there must be some stumbling block I’m not aware of.

- *Anonymous* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 9:19 pm

A major issue is that publishing does cost money. Even though many academics contribute their time for free, the management of the process, publishing, archiving, and making sure people can find the article are all of value and cost money. Nothing comes for free. Most open access publishing simply shifts the costs from the reader to the author, which has its own problems. The stumbling block is these costs, and the uphill battle of building the reputation of journals.

- *Anon* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 1:35 am

“A major issue is that publishing does cost money.”

The arXiv manages to host articles for almost nothing. And besides that, Elsevier’s profit margins are ridiculous.

“making sure people can find the article”

Does Elsevier do anything to this effect? As far as I can tell, mathematicians don’t only write, review, and edit their papers for free, they also MARKET their papers for free: publish in an Elsevier journal and then do nothing else (no pushing it at conferences, no citing it in your own future papers, etc) and it’ll be buried.

I have no Elsevier publications, but my Springer publications all have the following

property: if I search for them by name on Google, my own website comes up as the only results; in order to get the Springer copy, I have to do a Google search on the doi. Even the robot-generated CiteULike page beats the official Springer page.

◦ *stevedsbu* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 4:59 am

I think it is an important point that there is no need for a ranking system at all. The mathematics community has the unique qualities of being somewhat large, and yet almost completely self-sufficient, without external incentives. In other words, there is absolutely no need for a middle man when publishing math papers. If I publish on the arXiv a paper proving the Riemann hypothesis, that paper will be read by thousands of mathematicians (or ignored if it's rubbish), which is a whole lot better than a couple of referees. With the utmost certainty, one can say my paper is correct if no one in that time raises any serious concerns. Even if you aren't an expert in that field, the fact my paper has stood the test of thousands of those experts is enough for you to be confident in my work. This system has every advantage of publishing, and none of the disadvantages. And it works because mathematicians are internally motivated; people will read my paper because they WANT to!

Once you accept the fact that mathematical proof is relative, and not absolute, this "Cream rises to the top" mentality makes perfect sense. Why bother publishing in journals at all? One reason is that in some journals, similar papers are grouped together, and bundles are sent to those most interested in that type of paper. Of course, all of that can be done automagically by computers at almost no cost, no journal needed. Heck, we even do our own typesetting already! Another, more serious, reason to publish is for tenure, career considerations, etc. Until schools and the like follow suit and realize publishing in the Annals is no better than a couple of great mathematicians saying your paper is good, people will continue to publish, in Elsevier and elsewhere.

◦ *Laurent Henocque* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 10:03 am

@stevedsbu "there is no need for a ranking system at all"

I agree. The research community may not have taken the dimension of the possibilities offered by the net today.

This is why I am advocating the use of a shared cloud archive, like the <http://www.wuala.com/Free%20Science/> group on wuala.

I know wuala is a commercial company, but nothing comes absolutely for free, and their free account offers 2 Gigabytes – enough for a researcher's life.

Their system has good properties: files can be tagged, commented, searched within the group (one needs to 'open in wuala' to edit/view this this). Only the creator of a file or folder can edit/delete it. Files can be authenticated using gpg public key signatures. The group's web view is indexed by search engines, and supports sharing. I advocate this because it has no equivalent as far as I know.

Looking at the “STOP CENSORSHIP” flag at the top right of my screen now, I also feel a need to help protect a tool like wuala, that offers strong encryption straight from your computer, against potential SOPA/PIPA/ACTA like attacks. Also because wuala is blocked in several countries.

- *mrgunn (@mrgunn)* Says:

January 28, 2012 at 6:12 pm

This is perhaps a bit self-serving, but I work for a startup called Mendeley, where you can both archive your work on a profile page (see <http://mendeley.com/profiles/william-gunn>) and get data on how many people are viewing your page & downloading your work, so there’s a nascent filtering & discovery aspect built in.

It’s just a start, but worth taking a look at. The service is free, but you can buy extra storage space if you need it.

I do hope the <http://researchwithoutwalls.org> and <http://thecostofknowledge.com> people can join forces. I’ve signed both.

19. *Lucy Power* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 9:18 pm | [Reply](#)

Regarding access to research literature in developing countries, there is a scheme that grants free access to the literature – it’s called HINARI, is run by the WHO and has been in place since 2002 (<http://www.who.int/hinari/en/>). In 2011, Elsevier and a few other major publishers withdrew access to their journals in Bangladesh, as Elsevier thought that Bangladesh might be ready to move to a “discounted commercial agreement”. The Lancet (published by Elsevier) has a summary of the situation:

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(11\)60066-4/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(11)60066-4/fulltext)

As the article points out, when challenged, most of the publishers reinstated access, but for how long?

20. *Mayson Lancaster* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 10:41 pm | [Reply](#)

Tim,

Have you considered asking your department to in future ignore Elsevier-published articles for tenure decisions?

- *Anonymous* Says:

April 10, 2012 at 1:53 am

Mayson,

That seems like an unnecessarily hurtful thing to do (hurtful to the people applying for tenure). I see no benefit to anyone from that action.

21. *perlajulieta* Says:

January 21, 2012 at 10:44 pm | [Reply](#)

There are brilliant mathematicians that are completely unknown worldwide. Their

work and the exchange of ideas should be in a forum where everybody can learn, contribute, evolve

22. *Chey Says:*

January 21, 2012 at 11:04 pm | Reply

Remarkable. I had no idea this was happening. Not to trivialize what Elsevier is doing, but it seems that cable TV has taken a page out of their book (no pun intended). In order to get what you want, you have to pay an outrageous price and accept the fact that you will also get lots of what you *don't* want.

23. *Matt Keenan Says:*

January 21, 2012 at 11:41 pm | Reply

I am surprised no one has mentioned PLoS (plos.org). Granted it is aimed at "science and medicine" however everything they publish is open access. Maybe if a large enough number of mathematics academics talked to PLoS and asked nicely to copy their policies and infrastructure it would be a good kick start.

◦ *M. Hampton Says:*

January 24, 2012 at 3:58 am

I think most mathematicians would have sticker shock at their publication fees:

<http://www.plos.org/publish/pricing-policy/publication-fees/>

But otherwise I think it would be great if there were a more math-oriented PLoS journal.

◦ *Matt Rosin Says:*

January 28, 2012 at 10:48 am

@M. Hampton

I appreciate your comment, however the same page says:

"We offer a complete or partial fee waiver for authors who do not have funds to cover publication fees."

> I think most mathematicians would have sticker shock

> at their publication fees:

> <http://www.plos.org/publish/pricing-policy/publication-fees/>

◦ *wlm Says:*

April 13, 2012 at 8:05 pm

As I understand it, much of the cost of publishing on PLoS is the formatting; they convert submitted manuscripts to an xml-based format prior to publication. Since mathematicians (almost?) exclusively use TeX derivatives to prepare their manuscripts, this cost could presumably be reduced significantly.

Of course, publication still wouldn't be free; PLoS has a paid staff in addition to the usual academic reviewers. But online publication for math should be cheaper than perhaps any other field.

Incidentally, PLoS ONE accepts manuscripts from any field of science, including mathematics, though I'm unaware of any "pure" math published there. It is also cheaper (\$1350) than the other PLoS journals.

24. *David Savitt* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 12:00 am | [Reply](#)

@David Molnar: (hi, long time no see!) I think Stuart's default pledge is probably too broad for our purposes. For instance I don't think anyone here is planning to forego the AMS journals, nor would they insist on the AMS putting everything online for free — it's a significant boon to the running of the AMS (and so to the profession) that they are able to charge libraries for journals, and their prices are much more reasonable than Elsevier's.

I know that the pledge on Stuart's website can be customized, but if there's to be a successful mass movement, I don't think you can count on people taking the time to do that. Moreover I think Tim is absolutely right to target Elsevier specifically, at least at first: if you start too broadly, you don't leave people with enough places to submit their papers, and the movement dies out without alternatives having the chance to develop. And in any case, Springer et al couldn't fail to take notice of a successful movement against Elsevier.

If either you or Stuart could put up a separate version of that website, where the pledge is "Effective ____ I will neither submit to nor assist in the peer review process for Elsevier publications", with the rest of the page the same (including the same mechanic for signing) I think that's exactly what we'd want and would be terrific.

◦ *gowers* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 12:18 am

Tyler Neylon is working on a specific website that will I think be simple and effective, and specific to Elsevier. (I've had a sneak preview.)

◦ *Anonymous* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 2:36 pm

Note that the Research Without Walls pledge does not cover submission of papers, just participation in peer-review for forums that do not make available accepted articles for free publicly on the web. So, it sounds like the goals here are distinct from more general open access pressure in publishers to target one specific publisher.

◦ *stevedsbu* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 5:01 am

Why bother publishing in journals at all?

◦ *Michael Harris* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 7:27 am

At the risk of being pedantic, the short and tautological answer is that the modern research journal is the result of a historical process. It's something that at some point in history for various reasons seemed like a good idea to certain people, and

maybe some of those reasons are still valid. I know at least one historian is following this discussion and I hope the historians will fill in some of the relevant details.

The long and more interesting answer is that, your previous comments notwithstanding, mathematics is not self-sufficient, since it doesn't generate income to sustain itself. The hierarchy of research journals is an important part of the symbolic structure that convinces the people responsible for the distribution of the social surplus to direct part of it to pay students, post-docs, and university professors to devote a large proportion of their working time to research. Symbolism is important! Without that symbolic structure, we could all be paid adjunct salaries and invited to do research in our spare time.

So as far as mathematics is concerned, Elsevier and similar publishers are making outrageous profits in exchange for providing a symbolic service. The situation in the natural sciences is different, since the potential applications of the research generate substantial profits on their own. Change is possible, but it can't happen overnight.

25. *obryant* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 12:14 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Where do you recommend putting combinatorial-ish, number theory-y stuff? If each of the editors of *Integers* (<http://www.integers-ejcnt.org/edboard.html>) would put one article there this year, the impact factor might jump enough to make it a reasonable place for mathematicians like the editors to publish in.

26. *akrish » Blog Archive » Some Interesting Articles* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 12:31 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gowers, a famous mathematician (a Fields Medalist) and blogger, also wrote here specifically about the bad practices of Elsevier, one of the big academic publishing companies. In [...]

27. *Anonymous* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 1:26 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Another thing that you (and others) could do to help with some of these issues is to make all of your papers available on the arXiv or your website. This is expressly allowed by Elsevier:

<http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/authorsview.authors/rights>. Currently, only a subset of your papers are available on your website. I do remember it being a nuisance one time to try to get a copy of one of your unposted papers.

I certainly have had many days of frustration when traveling and not being able to access some paper (even the astronomical Elsevier subscription rates my library pays does not entitle us to full electronic archive access). I imagine this is much worse for individuals at universities with incomplete subscriptions and more limited library budgets.

In any event, this can be easily (and legally) addressed by individuals placing copies of

their papers on their websites. Of course, with the content freely available, this also helps weaken Elsevier negotiating position.

28. *Richard Karpinski* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 1:34 am | [Reply](#)

Copyright has its limitations. It applies only to the presentation, not the facts. And I think fair use is another loophole. We could check on the limitations on lists of cross references and provide ways for interested parties to request information about particular papers.

In academia, there is an unpaid labor force of people willing to discuss papers on topics of interest to them. Some recipients of journals might be willing to mail a requested paper cut out from its journal to a grad student prepared to analyse it in open source literature.

Wikipedia grew so quickly in part because it was able to harvest much smaller pieces of experts attention in a useful way. Papers of great interest could surely attract discussions about their content without using copies of the detailed presentation used. These could grow to be rather more informative and useful than the original paper was.

The World Wide Web was explicitly invented to facilitate rapid and free dissemination of papers on physics. PLoS and Wikipedia are early successful examples of extending the scope of the Web when it seemed useful to do so. Don't stop now.

29. *Stefan* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 3:08 am | [Reply](#)

I submitted papers to Elsevier, and will keep doing so for a while. Not because I like their business practices, but because the highest-ranking journal that will have my papers is run by them (it's not in your list, by the way: I'm thinking Journal of Combinatorial Theory Series B).

I try to mitigate this by making sure I've got up-to-date copies of my papers on the arXiv. It's not enough to make them change their ways, but hopefully it helps the odd researcher looking for my stuff.

Any advice on how a young researcher without tenure can better his or her ways, without harm to the career, would be more than welcome!

◦ *Morgan Leigh* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 1:10 am

Here's your advice. Right words, right thoughts, right deeds.

If a thing is wrong you have to be prepared to stand up and bear the cost of writing the wrong. For someone to make a profit from the unpaid work of others is wrong. For someone to restrict access to work they paid nothing for is wrong.

Why would you want to publish your work with someone whose goal is to restrict access to it?

I recommend the following reading on this matter.

The copyright industry: a century of Deceit. –

http://torrentfreak.com/the-copyright-industry-a-century-of-deceit-111127/?utm_s

Should Copyright be abolished in Academic work? –

<http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20090724/0445155649.shtml>

Cory Doctorow on Digital Property –

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4454381456832593071#>

30. *Sandeep Yadav* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 3:24 am](#) | [Reply](#)

I must say Brilliant work done ..

<http://sandyadav.com>

31. *John Baez* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 3:48 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Hurrah!

I too refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier (except to hound it mercilessly).

I like the idea of a webpage where mathematicians *and other scientists* who adopt this policy can add their names to a kind of pledge, or something like that. If anyone creates such a page, I'll add my name. I'd create this page myself except I'm no good with software, and it would be nice if people could easily enter their names via a form.

◦ *John Baez* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 3:50 am](#)

Oh, it sounds like such a page is already in the works. Great! I hope someone announces its existence on Google+ when it's ready.

32. *Anonymous* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 3:53 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Here's something small that any one of us can start doing right away: when you cite a paper in an Elsevier journal which also happens to be in the arXiv, add the arXiv number at the end of the citation!!

◦ *aram harrow* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 9:45 pm](#)

Journals tend to remove this at the copyediting stage. It's a difficult fight. Once they removed the arXiv links without telling me, and I argued for an erratum:

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/y676r18436467328/>

◦ *David Stranz* Says:

[April 18, 2012 at 10:30 pm](#)

@aram harrow: For access to which 2-page erratum Elsevier has just graciously offered to charge me only \$24.95

33. *Ravi Shankar (Oklahoma)* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 4:13 am | [Reply](#)

I turned down a refereeing request from an Elsevier journal and will continue to refuse until they change their public stance on SOPA/PIPA (which is not much but it's a start). It's not always up to me when publishing especially when co-authors are involved but there are open access journals now and one really does not need high cost publishers or their journals.

Along these lines, Pearson is also a supporter of SOPA. As far as I know, Springer is not. I don't know of any others.

◦ *perlajulieta* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 6:01 am

SOPA and PIPA were retired. In one year they can come back to Congress. Now is ACTA the european version of the same.

34. *Ben Golub* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 5:32 am | [Reply](#)

In economics, a large fraction of the editorial board of (formerly?) one of the leading economic theory journals (the Journal of Economic Theory, published by Elsevier) resigned en masse and founded the free, open-access Theoretical Economics, which is now at least as prestigious. Ted Bergstrom maintains a website on this here:

<http://www.econ.ucsb.edu/~tedb/Journals/jpricing.html>

An amusing bit about coordination problems is found here:

<http://www.econ.ucsb.edu/~tedb/Journals/anarchists.pdf>

More serious academic papers on journal pricing are here:

<http://www.econ.ucsb.edu/~tedb/Journals/mypapers.html>

35. *Dorothy Bishop (@deevybee)* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 9:00 am | [Reply](#)

Good stuff! I have made similar arguments in the field of psychology:

<http://deevybee.blogspot.com/2012/01/time-for-academics-to-withdraw-free.html>

But like you, I was largely unaware of who published which journals.

When I checked it out, I promptly resigned when I found I was on the editorial board of one Elsevier journal, and I've undertaken not to review for the others. Also avoiding submitting to them as far as possible: increasingly going straight to PLOS One anyhow.

Here's a list of Elsevier journals for any psychologists/neuroscientists reading this:

Acta Psychologica; Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology; Biological Psychiatry; Biological Psychology; Brain and Cognition; Brain and Language; Brain Research; Brain Research Bulletin; Clinical Neurophysiology; Cognition; Cortex; Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience; Developmental Review; Hearing Research; Human Movement Science; Infant Behavior and Development; Intelligence; International Journal of Psychophysiology; Journal of Communication Disorders; Journal of

Experimental Child Psychology; Journal of Memory and Language; Journal of Neurolinguistics; Journal of Neuroscience Methods; NeuroImage; Neuron; Neuropsychologia; Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders; Research in Developmental Disabilities; The Lancet; Trends in Cognitive Sciences; Trends in Neurosciences

36. *Sj Heckscher-Marquis* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 10:25 am | [Reply](#)

Personally as one of the poverty stricken 99% I would like to see an end to all 'sharp' business practices. However, the truth is that people are lazy and very much like sheep. You can open the gate into the new grassy field, but the sheeple will continue to mill aimlessly in the old, worn-out, bare, muddy field until the sheepdog actually drives them through. Elsevier books have long been iniquitously expensive, I remember as a student being stunned by the price of two books which were required for the course, both printed by Elsevier they accounted for almost half the cost of my book list (11 books!). The fences are now down, you can publish yourself, you can go anywhere on any platform and you need not be enslaved to a publisher.

37. *CS researcher* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 10:32 am | [Reply](#)

I actually publish in Elsevier. The reason is that I don't really get the Problems at all. In computer science, about 99% of papers are freely on-line, in some repository or better in the author's homepage. I hardly go to the library searching for the relevant journal. So there is no need for anyone to actually buy / pay for the journal, including libraries. Journals are therefore, venues for refereeing and proof-checking. Nothing more. And as such, Elsevier is as good as any other publishers.

I myself, put the latest versions of my papers in my homepage. And I expect everyone to do the same.

◦ *walkerjian* Says:

April 19, 2012 at 12:27 am

The big phluffy elephant in all of this is the cloud. It is tempting to move the corpus and mechanics of peer reviewed journals into the cloud. That is huge anonymous servers administered by say MS or Amazon... See the trap? – who gets the grok? The gestalt, the structure... Who gets to run AI over the newly 'freed' corpus of knowledge to seek out interconnections and new stuff. All patentable of course... MS, Amazon, some shell of a patent troll? In a way the paywall has protected us from these outrages, and in a way the rage for openness is leading us headlong into being quite literally enslaved by a new bunch of robber barons. Tis a time to really examine the motives and strategies and such of all the players, hidden and visible, in this game. A question – what do senior academics and administrators, in cahoots with journals really do? Is it just for the lulz? The bux? The chix? What exactly is peer review anyhoo? Are there elements of shaping and shifting and controlling so called free and open enquiry? Are peer reviewed journals just another IP sieve – where the aforementioned players make sure the right IP is siphoned into the right peoples hands?

Be careful of being herded folks – don't be sheeple!

38. *Bobito* Says:

[January 22, 2012 at 1:51 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

There are some factors which support entities like Elsevier that may be difficult to understand for good mathematicians working in healthy universities.

For many mathematicians, getting published anywhere is good enough. Almost necessarily, the bulk of mathematicians are mediocre rather than professors at Oxford (there is a joke in that sentence). In many cases, mediocre journals with low standards but decent impact factors are exactly what moderately ambitious, insecure researchers are looking for.

Such tendencies are exacerbated by legal factors. In countries with unhealthy, stupidly bureaucratic university systems, like Spain, where I work, the use of an impact factor weighted publication count in scoring CVs is mandated, often by law, in hiring and the awarding of grants. In such a context, it can become desirable, for completely non or even anti scientific reasons, to have available costly journals in which it is easy to publish. If you are going to publish crap, it is better that no one but your collaborators read it. For those in the US – imagine a world in which hiring is based entirely on the number of points awarded to a CV scored according to a fairly rigid scheme, as well as points awarded for a single 1 hour job talk – no recommendation letters – moreover, the committee doing the scoring is chosen by lottery from among all active faculty of a certain rank – and may include people from random fields and completely incompetent. In this setting, having a lot of papers with decent impact factors next to them becomes important – because for those lacking their own assessment criteria, the weighted publication count provides an almost sacred substitute for thought.

Also in such a context, the capos that lead many research groups find becoming an editor of anything highly desirable. A big man must have big positions. Thus more journals are needed. How else to explain the Peripheral Mediterranean Journal of Applied Combinatorial Group Theory? How else to explain that all of its editors have EDGE Network grants in common?

As for libraries – my university has stopped putting the heat on in the building. Our annual departmental budget (faculty of nearly 25) is less than 25,000 euros. Our only meaningful journal subscriptions are Elsevier and Springer – because journal contracting is done centrally (even at the state level) and little if any consultation is made of actual scientists and their needs.

Home pages? We don't have easily customized personal webpages unless we set them up ourselves, on non-university servers. The university wants us all to have standardized home pages that show our normalized CVs, and exhibit prominently the impact factors of our numerous publications. So we rely on the ArXiv, although if we are sufficiently lousy researchers, we prefer to submit our articles to the Western Balkam Journal of Analysis than to humiliate ourselves in front of serious mathematicians by putting our papers on the ArXiv.

And thus Chaos, Solitons, and Fractals still exists. (One of my "colleagues", senior to

me in every way, is a frequent and almost exclusive contributor).

- Matthew Emerton Says:
January 24, 2012 at 7:42 pm
Dear Bobito,

Thank you for this post.

Regards,

Matthew

39. Bobito Says:

January 22, 2012 at 1:53 pm | [Reply](#)

The problems with entities like Elsevier are why piracy projects like Library Genesis are so successful.

For those of us who work in mediocre underfunded universities with lousy libraries, this is where we get our books. We have no realistic alternative besides our personal libraries.

40. Jose Says:

January 22, 2012 at 2:12 pm | [Reply](#)

I emigrated to the Netherlands 11 years ago, and I recognize your criticisms to Elsevier as a pretty normal way of doing business here. At first I was shocked to see it in so many different situations and types of business, and always kept on wondering how on earth could they keep their doors open and keep on selling. Now I realize that there aren't other options available, and I've got used to such abusive clauses. Surprisingly enough, such way of doing business seems to be competitive in a global market.

41. Sam Says:

January 22, 2012 at 5:24 pm | [Reply](#)

Tim, that website seems quite easy to make. I'm not sure exactly what you want it to look like, but ping me and I could probably put it up pretty quickly. I'm a mathematician-turned-programmer so I'd love to help.

Sam

42. Nick Says:

January 22, 2012 at 5:27 pm | [Reply](#)

Rob Kirby and Colin Rourke's letter on this topic in May 1997 also mentioned Elsevier explicitly at the end:

<http://msp.warwick.ac.uk/~cpr/journals.html>

It seems that things have not improved in the last 15 years!

43. Probabilist Says:

January 22, 2012 at 5:46 pm | [Reply](#)

There is an interesting discussion of your post here:

[http://www.reddit.com/r/math/comments/oqirf/one mathematicians stance again](http://www.reddit.com/r/math/comments/oqirf/one_mathematicians_stance_again)

In particular, someone there links to Rob Kirby's boycott:

<http://math.berkeley.edu/~kirby/journals.html>

which includes some rather interesting figures (although possibly somewhat dated) on comparative costs per page and per 10,000 words.

On a different note, one community that has been rather proactive about open access is the probability community. Indeed, the IMS (Institute of Mathematical Statistics) has been playing a leadership role by creating several new cheap, high-quality journals that are already well established (apart from AoP and AoS, which split off from the older Annals of Mathematical Statistics, there are now AoAP, AoAS, EJP, ECP, and EJS, all with excellent editorial boards and good to excellent reputations) and provide alternatives to expensive commercial ones like PTRF. Jim Pitman in particular has been very vocal; there is a LOT of relevant material on his website:

<http://www.stat.berkeley.edu/~pitman/>

44. *Mike Usher* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 5:49 pm | [Reply](#)

I strongly agree that we as mathematicians need to be more active in defending our interests with respect to publishing, and that making it more socially acceptable to refuse to provide free services to the journals that are putting a massive burden on university budgets should be a part of that.

However I would be much more inclined to add my name to a petition if it addressed specific behaviors, rather than a specific company. With respect to pricing, it is not at all clear to me that

Elsevier is in any way exceptional among commercial publishers—at least among journals that I have some interest in, the publicly available data that I've seen suggest that Wiley is quite a bit worse and Springer and de Gruyter aren't any better than Elsevier.

Advances in Mathematics is actually priced rather reasonably on a per-page basis—substantially cheaper even than many journals published by university presses like OUP and CUP. I'm honestly undecided about the ethics of submitting to Adv. Math.—on the one hand I can see the case that submitting to any Elsevier journal amounts to supporting their problematic business practices, but on the other hand submitting to Elsevier's reasonably-priced journals while not submitting to their overpriced journals would seem to provide the right kind of incentive for them.

I would also note that mathematics journals make up a rather small proportion of Elsevier's overall reach—I've seen estimates that they have about 25% overall market share in scientific journals, whereas I would be surprised if their share of the mathematics market was anywhere near this. Reed Elsevier's total revenue in 2010 was over 7 billion euros, compared to 866 million euros for Springer Science+Business Media (which of course has a much larger share of the math journal market). So I would not think that Elsevier would be the company most likely to be responsive to an organized effort of mathematicians.

◦ *David Savitt* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 6:38 pm

Part of the problem is that because of Elsevier's bundling practices, a library typically can't buy the "reasonable" Elsevier journals without the "unreasonable" ones (or rather, perhaps they can, but it doesn't necessarily save any money). Given this, I'm not sure one can sensibly call some of them reasonable and others not; obviously some of them are higher-quality than others, but with respect to business practices they are essentially all equivalent at the moment.

Certainly one can debate whether Elsevier is the right specific target, but I do think that if one wants to build some sort of movement, it's best to start out in a relatively specific way. Targeting a particular bad behavior in a broad way may leave so few alternatives as to be impractical for many individuals, and if individuals can't make a pledge and stick to it then one isn't going to get anywhere. You also have to ask, pragmatically, what's going to get a large number of people to participate? A high-minded commitment to a broad principle takes much more effort than a boycott of a specific company.

Finally, once this gets going I would be surprised if it remained mathematics-only.

45. *David Colquhoun* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 6:10 pm | [Reply](#)

I found out quite a lot about Elsevier, including the astonishing fact that UCL alone pays then 1.25 million euros for a bundle of journals, some of which are never used at all.

The modal number of usages is 1-10 per year. It's all at "Open access, peer review, grants and other academic conundrums" at <http://www.dcscience.net/?p=4873>

46. *David Evans* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 6:18 pm | [Reply](#)

"It occurs to me that it might help if there were a website somewhere, where mathematicians who have decided not to contribute in any way to Elsevier journals could sign their names electronically. I think that some people would be encouraged to take a stand if they could see that many others were already doing so, and that it would be a good way of making that stand public. Perhaps such a site already exists, in which case I'd like to hear about it and add my name."

The closest thing I know of to such a site that already exists is:

<http://www.researchwithoutwalls.org/>

This is broader than just Elsevier, and started in the Computer Science community, but makes a general pledge against providing services to for-profit, closed publishers. (You can customize your pledge to limit it just to Elsevier if you want, but I think it is in the interests of the community to take a broader stand against academics providing free labor for any publication that is not serving our community's interests well.)

47. *Anna* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 7:47 pm | [Reply](#)

I used to work for Elsevier. I guess I was naive when I accepted their offer. When it came time to do my taxes, I learned that they had illegally classified me as an independent contractor, forcing me to pay *a lot* of money in taxes, despite not meeting a single criterion for that classification. The matter was not resolved to my satisfaction, but I dearly hope they discontinued that practice after I brought it to the attention of at least one higher-up. In short, hearing other examples of their scumminess does not surprise me.

48. *tcs researcher* Says:

January 22, 2012 at 8:55 pm | [Reply](#)

The natural place to make general action about this issue is organizations like AMS, ACM, IEEE. Unfortunately they seem to be unwilling to perform their part (if not themselves being part of the problem, as is the case with ACM).

49. *Anonymous* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 2:04 am | [Reply](#)

Even in India I heard that Elsevier are becoming increasingly difficult to handle during the negotiations for their subscription, but never imagined that there is so much of mess around. Probably for such reasons now more and more weightage is given to Society Journals when it comes to comparison of some sort. In an era of open access, if scientific community take a hard stance against such practices publishers will have to yield.

50. *IP* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 6:43 am | [Reply](#)

I understand the frustration with commercial publishers in general, I just don't get the reason for a pileup. It sounds from what you are saying that Elsevier is being ruthless and really ingenuous in charging money for "rubbish journals". But that's what it's supposed to do! Being upset with Elsevier is kind of like being upset with Microsoft for selling too many copies of MS Office when cheap/free alternatives are available. Again, that's what they do!

Here is another argument why Elsevier HAS to do what it does. Its parent company, Reed Elsevier is a part of FTSE 100, the index where much of our pensions is invested (likely yours as well). The executives of the company have a fiduciary duty to increase the profits within constraints of the law. Since nothing they do is illegal as I understand it, you are really mad at the system and not this particular publisher. Correcting or even completely changing the system is probably a good idea, but picking on winners does not seem the most productive way to achieve this long term goal.

◦ *gowers* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 8:02 am

I agree with most of what you say, as a careful reading of the post will make clear.

◦ *plm* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 11:06 am

I am not at all familiar with the details of UK laws. It would surprise me that it really ask publishers to be “ruthless and really ingenuous [sic] in charging money for “rubbish journals””.

IP, I think yours is the kind of attitude that leads to many of the abuses we have recently witnessed in the financial sector, or to phenomena like the growth in internet sales of unregulated harmful narcotic drugs, among many examples. It is our fault, we have not written laws that prevent malicious people from using us...

I think a consequence of Gödel’s (first) incompleteness theorem is that there cannot be a consistent legal system that rules out all abuses.

Realistic legal systems must encode arithmetic some way (like usual programming languages simulate Turing machines) and consistency of those systems must imply consistency of (an extension of) arithmetic, and then incompleteness of arithmetic must imply loopholes in laws, behaviors that are not prevented and some of those behaviors can probably be used to profit from society.

This is very speculative. I wonder whether the literature on mechanism design theory (in the economic/game theory sense) says anything about how implementation of social choice rules relate to logic. I would be very interested in references to related results. I will think about it a little more.

A probably more relevant result is whether we can write laws such that finding a possibility of abuse is very hard, and whether finding such laws is itself hard/feasible. These are interesting questions, which must belong to political theory. I would be glad to read comments from anyone who knows about research in that area.

◦ *IP Says:*

January 23, 2012 at 9:04 pm

Re: “IP, I think yours is the kind of attitude that leads to many of the abuses we have recently witnessed in the financial sector.”

You misunderstood my point. The parallel is actually good (insulting me is unhelpful though). You see, no laws were broken by the big banks. So to me saying “let us all not deal with Elsevier” is kind of like a proposal to boycott Goldman Sachs. If you want to change the system, fine, but singling out one company feels morally wrong.

Tim’s “careful reading” is probably related to the following quote at the end: “One final remark is that Elsevier is not the only publisher to behave in an objectionable way. However, it seems to be the worst.” If this is an explanation, it’s unconvincing.

Let put it this way. It’s perfectly fine to call it when you see something ugly. You even get brownie points for that. It’s also fine to boycott it. I would discourage that, but everyone is free to do what they like. But public calls for boycotts are

almost never productive, and occasionally very destructive (think recent boycotts of Danish products, Israeli academics, or old boycotts of first Moscow, and then Los Angeles Olympic Games, etc.) In my book, you don't get to have a high moral ground by calling to boycott one particular company whose action you find morally objectionable.

◦ *plm* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 12:32 pm

Thank you for the further explanations and examples. Those are things I will/have to think about more. A few comments: I mainly criticized you, your attitude, not the point you were making. More on your point, people supporting the Elsevier boycott do not seem very optimistic about their chances. Lastly, mathematicians are on the "quiet" side of personalities, I mean in particular involving them in politics and protests is difficult, so perhaps if a boycott is successful in doing that, it is good (for them and for society -bad for Elsevier in the short term).

◦ *Matthew Emerton* Says:

January 28, 2012 at 12:54 pm

Dear IP,

I think you missed Gowers's point about "a careful reading". In his post he says that there is no point in accusing Elsevier of being immoral, since they are simply behaving in a way a profit-making corporation might be expected to behave. The question is rather whether we want to put up with their behaviour. While they may not have any moral obligation to behave differently, neither do we (mathematicians) have any obligation (moral or otherwise) to continue to use their publishing services.

51. *Scott Morrison* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 7:33 am | [Reply](#)

Dear Tim,

for many more junior mathematicians, it's often hard to turn down an editor. (Indeed, I've done this, on the grounds of the journal being one of the most expensive, but wondered ever since if the editor remembers me and hates me. (Hi!))

Perhaps you could help by not only saying that you, personally, will refuse to referee for Elsevier, but to publicly declare "and everyone else who does this has my direct moral support" — perhaps an appropriate open letter, and explicitly encouraging timid refuseniks to cite that letter when corresponding with editors.

best regards,
Scott Morrison

◦ *gowers* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 8:06 am

Recently the IMU [asked for suggestions on its blog about what to do about high-priced journals](#). I made exactly the same suggestion, except that the

declaration of moral support would come from the IMU, which would I think carry a lot of weight. I'll think about your suggestion — though I hope that it's fairly clear from the post above that everyone else who does it does indeed have my moral support.

52. *fatherofkraken* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 8:18 am | [Reply](#)

In France some universities and research units took action and gathered into the Couperin network (<http://www.couperin.org/>)

Couperin negotiates purchase of electronic library resources on behalf of its members thus obtaining low prices.

◦ *Yann Bugeaud* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 9:10 am

The Couperin network was founded by a few presidents of universities for negotiations at university level, without any discussion with research institutes of their own universities. From its creation, it has negotiated leonin agreements with, among others, Elsevier. Heads of institutes, scientific heads of libraries, were never consulted. A close look at their website, and in particular at "JISC Collections a élaboré un guide de conseils et de bonnes pratiques concernant le transfert des revues de sociétés savantes à des éditeurs commerciaux" shows that we have to be very careful with Couperin.

53. *fatherofkraken* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 8:24 am | [Reply](#)

And what about the Plos initiative ?

Why don't you simply join them and encourage members of your community to do so as well ?

Tools / Open Publishers are right here and others can publishers be created easily (I would love to with the right connections to scientists)

54. *Dave* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 8:34 am | [Reply](#)

I haven't submitted to or refereed for an Elsevier journal for years. I'm a theoretical physicist and not a mathematician. I am happy to referee for non-profit journals such as those published by AIP or IOP. Elsevier is a tremendous drag on the scientific (and mathematical) enterprise. The solution is not difficult. If we all stopped submitting and refereeing for Elsevier, they would wither away.

◦ *CS researcher* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 4:32 pm

As I said before, the solution is elsewhere, and is in fact much simpler. Publish and referee for Elsevier (as I do), but never buy or pay for their journals, do not encourage the libraries to buy their journals, and if you have any administrative power refuse to pay for any journal (actually, not only Elsevier).

There is no need to pay for any article. Almost everything is available freely online. All authors should put their papers on their websites (to set up a personal website is, literally, as easy as writing a Word doc; so there is no reason for not doing so), or on ArXiv, or other relevant repositories.

55. [Links 23/1/2012: Desura Game Client Open Source, Megaupload Seizure | Techrights](#) Says:
[January 23, 2012 at 10:59 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall The Dutch publisher Elsevier publishes many of the world's best known mathematics journals, including Advances in Mathematics, Comptes Rendus, Discrete Mathematics, The European Journal of Combinatorics, Historia Mathematica, Journal of Algebra, Journal of Approximation Theory, Journal of Combinatorics Series A, Journal of Functional Analysis, Journal of Geometry and Physics, Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications, Journal of Number Theory, Topology, and Topology and its Applications. For many years, it has also been heavily criticized for its business practices. Let me briefly summarize these criticisms. [...]

56. [Stan Barnett](#) Says:
[January 23, 2012 at 1:04 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
A couple of years ago a colleague and I tried to start a literature web access portal for scientists without journal access through an institution. The idea was that we would bundle 5K to 10K scientists. With this many clients we should have been able to negotiate the price most academic libraries get and provided access to the top 500 bioscience journals for an affordable price (at least US). We talked to senior people at Wiley, Elsevier and Nature. They all acknowledged the lack of access problem, admitted that our solution was workable and refused to deal with us. My impression was that the amount of money involved was not worth their effort and that they did not want to risk the potential unintended consequences of a new model. Since this experience I have promoted open access publication. This whole problem would go away if scientists could get some spine and let their science speak for itself instead of trying to gain the additional prestige of a specific journal.

BTW, Annotum and WordPress are making starting a scientific journal almost free and without significant technical expertise. If a tight knit scientific publishing community wanted to abandon traditional publication strategies and move to their own journal this is very doable with minimum effort. If anyone is interested, let me know. I can help.

◦ [Scholastica](#) Says:
[January 23, 2012 at 1:24 pm](#)
Stan,

We agree that technology is making publishing an electronic journal easy without technical expertise.

A group of current UChicago and former grad students and alums have created Scholastica, (<http://www.scholasticahq.com>), an academic journal management platform and scholarly community. Anyone can create their own peer reviewed

journal, manage their peer review process, and ultimately publish without the need for publishing companies like Elsevier. There's also a section of the application called 'The Conversation' (<http://scholasticahq.com/conversation>) that is very similar to Mathoverflow that allows academics to build reputation points that can be used to be recruited as a referee.

We hope that this is seen as more than a shameless plug as we've been working tirelessly over the last year with no pay to provide something to address the problems with academic publishing that Tim and others describe here.

We would love your support.

- Rob Walsh
Scholastica

◦ *Stan Barnett* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 2:20 pm](#)

Thanks for the info. Looking forward to checking out Scholastica

57. *Vlad* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 3:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I admit I have not read the entire discussion, but here's a perspective from economics. In this club – they dare call it profession, which is just ridiculous – your promotion and advancement depends on your ability to publish in “top” journals. So, I simply must send my papers to the journals on the list, or I am out. What is the situation in mathematics, chemistry, and other real sciences?

58. *omega* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 3:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

As a community, we can speed up the internet's inevitable influence on the current journal system by making it clear that it is professionally unacceptable not to have your journal submissions posted on the arxiv. For example, editors of all journals can demand this as a precondition for submission for peer review. We will still have journals, perhaps physically located at fewer, wealthier, universities but available through inter-library loan. They will also be physically available at the library of congress and other national archives worldwide. If we need to read a proof, we can look at the arxiv. If we need to see the actual published version, we can request it from another library, but I predict that we won't need to do this very often. Journals will still serve their important archival role (for which they do not need to be physically located in all libraries), perform the important peer-review process, and the prestige of journals will still serve as a statement of a papers' quality and importance. What is the justification for an author not to have papers freely available on the arxiv? I realize that there are some good reasons for this, but they are outweighed by the costs of the current system. Mathematical results are intended to be public and I believe that there is no real justification not to upload them to the arxiv. There are mechanisms for us to make this the norm, for example, by not considering articles that are not on the arxiv in grant applications, job applications, and as references in new papers that we are refereeing.

59. *Michael Harris* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 4:33 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Fifteen mathematicians based in France have signed the petition at thecostofknowledge.com in the last 45 minutes. This is not as easy as it may seem: Elsevier publishes the Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences in mathematics, where French Ph.D. students are expected to have published announcements of their work before applying for jobs.

◦ *gowers* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 5:12 pm](#)

Thanks for mentioning this. The site isn't quite in its finished form, but it is functioning, so perhaps now is the time to give it a bit more publicity.

◦ *Anonymous* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 6:24 pm](#)

Any reason why the .org domain is not acquired to point to the same .com website?

◦ *gowers* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 6:28 pm](#)

i don't know — you'd have to ask Tyler Neylon that.

60. *Laurent Henocque* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 6:15 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

It seems that we don't need these people. Documents can be hosted on the cloud. I am suggesting the use of Wuala, and created a public group called "Free Science" where anybody can upload any material. Storage is counted to the contributor, so the group can absorb huge amounts of data.

<http://www.wuala.com/Free%20Science/>

I have added a link to your blog in the motivations for creating the group.

There is a second very strong incentive to using wuala. It is the only cloud operator today that encrypts data prior to sending and that has such a level of functionality. In these days of censorship, this must be supported by all possible means.

The power of wuala is that documents support tagging, and commenting. For researchers, having the possibility to comment upon a paper may become analogous to peer reviewing. Also, multiple version (up to ten) are preserved by the file system, which allows for

Note that wuala public groups are indexed by search engines. Check for instance the query 'fukushima archive'. A wuala group that I have also created comes high (The Fukushima Archive)

Also note that I have no link whatsoever with the wuala company. I am just advocating this kind of solution, which to me, and because of the above elements, challenges the ArXiv. (The sources required to regenerate a latex document may also

be stored on wuala.)

61. *telescoper* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 8:22 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [In the Dark](#) and commented:

I see that the Academic Journal Racket also applies to mathematics!

62. *David Clark, Elsevier* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 8:25 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I should introduce myself as the person at Elsevier responsible for our maths programmes.

We have not worked with you directly, but I was really sorry to learn of your decision to no longer review for Elsevier journals and so wanted to respond to your post.

Elsevier is an organisation made of up of fallible humans and I have no doubt that there are areas where we have made mistakes or where we could have done a better job.

But I still believe that you are mistaken in your assumption that mathematicians would be better off without commercial publishers like Elsevier. Indeed, I think that having a mixed economy of society and commercial publishers, as well as initiatives like the arXiv, helps to create a strong and diverse system which can deliver value and access, while giving mathematicians choice as to where to publish.

Commercial journals and commercial publishers exist because they fill a need that learned societies have not been able or willing to meet.

We do, as you mention in your blog, offer a wide range of bundles and packages, which serve to make the content that we publish much more accessible and affordable. Some of these are large nation-wide packages while others are much smaller and more tailored. No doubt there will be titles in such packages that are not wanted by a particular research group, but the opposite will more often be true.

And, of course, libraries themselves form bundles of a different type and act together as consortia to achieve the best deal from publishers on behalf of their users and readers. The success of both forms of bundling has increased access to current and previous articles to levels which would have been unimaginable ten years ago, while significantly reducing cost per use.

There are occasions where relations with libraries break down or where renewals prove difficult, but cutting off access to new issues of journals, which you referred to, is very much a last resort, as it is for all publishers.

Our business is based on people using the journals that we publish and ensuring access to such titles is absolutely core to what we do. A case in point is our attempt to make our journals available in developing countries through the Hinari and Agora initiatives, amongst others, our liberal copyright policies and exchange of data with

the arXiv and other community tools.

That also means, for instance, that you should not assume that we are opposed to open access, but just keen to ensure that a new system is sustainable and does not come with barriers to submission for authors from poorly funded or developing institutions. Regardless of the rights and wrongs of SOPA, it shouldn't be so surprising that publishers, especially those who are seeking to publish books, reference works and texts, dislike on-line piracy.

I think that we have a system that, overall, delivers a great deal of value and usefulness to Science. However, I know that is not your view and I have read with interest some of your other proposals for improving and enhancing the scientific communication. I and my colleagues are certainly open to discussing new approaches and to seeing how we can make things better.

I would, however, just like to say again how much I regret your decision and hope that our actions in the future will give you cause to review it.

Sincerely,

David Clark

- *aram harrow* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 10:15 pm

Thanks for taking the time to post here.

I can't speak for others, but personally I view your support of SOPA/PIPA/RWA as evidence that if forced to choose between profits and the advancement of knowledge, you will choose profits. Likewise with the fake medical journals of Elsevier. Increasingly, this means that your values are opposed to those of the research community.

I wish there were some nice way to compromise, but fundamentally you have to pursue profits, which you have to collect using paywalls, and you have to lobby politicians to help write laws that protect your business model, at their expense of our ability to access the fruits of publicly-funded research. What action of yours can possibly change this?

- *Anon* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 2:10 am

"Regardless of the rights and wrongs of SOPA, it shouldn't be so surprising that publishers, especially those who are seeking to publish books, reference works and texts, dislike on-line piracy."

We mathematicians strive all our lives to disseminate information. I think you'll have a hard time finding a mathematician who wouldn't be thrilled to find out their papers were being so widely read that piracy became an issue. Isn't it ironic that Elsevier is called a "publisher" and yet it does the exact opposite, keeping information away FROM the public?

- *Bobito* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 8:19 am

“Commercial journals and commercial publishers exist because they fill a need that learned societies have not been able or willing to meet.”

What need is that? Some of the best journals in mathematics are published by “learned societies” or universities – Journal of the AMS and Annals of Mathematics are two easy examples that leap to mind – moreover, these journals are far, far cheaper, and better edited than the only perhaps comparable journal published by Elsevier (Advances in Mathematics).

This cheap throw away line seems to get to the essence of what is wrong with Elsevier – it is servicing the needs of professionals poorly, at a high price. That it is allowed to continue to do so is at least partly a consequence of the fact that researchers are for the most part not directly involved in managing university libraries.

Actually, I’ll cede that Elsevier does fill a need – just not a need I respect – by publishing crap journals like Chaos, Solitons and Fractals (to pick an egregious example), Elsevier serves the needs of incompetent though ambitious academics. This has detrimental effects at an institutional level because it helps these unproductive figures to dominate some institutions, particularly in countries with less well developed research and educational systems.

- *xgbi* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 10:32 am

What about Elsevier’s support of the Research Works Act then?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research_Works_Act

How is this compatible with “we are opposed to open access” ?

- *Benoît Kloeckner* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 10:09 am

Dear sir, it seems that you underestimate what in Elsevier’s practice have raised this protest. It is not merely some isolated mistakes (maybe here you refer to Chaos, Soliton and Fractals), it is the general way you bargain and publish that is the problem.

You are not only bundling, you are doing so at much higher prices than the real cost of the job we do get from you. Another point is that you do quite poorly at this job. How can you explain that the best work I ever saw done on my papers (copy-editing, English corrections, opportunity to check the changes, etc.) has been done by the cheapest, academic-run journals? There is such a tremendous gap both in quality of service and price that we cannot be surprised to hear that Elsevier runs a 36% profit margin.

Such a number is simply incompatible with a good relation between respectful

partners.

- *David Craven* Says:

January 28, 2012 at 11:35 am

@xgbi above, re: RWA. According to the Wikipedia article, it is suggested that, more than Elsevier supporting it, it is the fact that Elsevier donates its profits (i.e., public money given to libraries worldwide that is paid to Elsevier) to members of Congress to sponsor this bill. So arguably Elsevier *caused* the bill, not just support it.

I would like to add my name to the growing list of people publicly committed to bringing down the beast.

- *Michael Kovarik* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 3:53 am

Regarding Elsevier's choice in supporting SOPA/PIPA, it is most certainly unethical. It is a well known stereotype and truth that scientists, as are most academics, are firmly planted on the left (although less politically active than their academic brethren). Elsevier, which ideally ought to value its consumer relationship, should not support policies which are so blatantly antithetical to the world views of the consumers. It doesn't matter whether Elsevier lobbied for SOPA, or the abolishment of Planned Parenthood, or for the support of the Assad regime, it crossed the line of ethics by not respecting the values of its consumers.

- *jynh* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 7:07 am

Relating Elsevier and open acces:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/jan/16/academic-publishers-enemies-sc>

And here are just some "contributions" made by Elsevier to co-sponsors of the Research Works Act at the Congress

[h](http://maplight.org/us-congress/contributions?sort=asc&order=Recipient&s=1&offi)

[tp://maplight.org/us-congress/contributions?sort=asc&order=Recipient&s=1&offi](http://maplight.org/us-congress/contributions?sort=asc&order=Recipient&s=1&offi)

- *Craig* Says:

January 31, 2012 at 4:23 am

Elsevier's malpractice goes way beyond simple profiteering; the fake medical journals take it up into the realms of homicide.

Elsevier's manufacture of fraudulent publications ("The Australasian Journal of Bone and Joint Medicine" among others; see

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/may/09/bad-science-medical-jo>

for the story) was a deliberate effort to impede the research that ultimately led to the withdrawal of fatally flawed drugs. People died because of this. In a just world, Elsevier's board of directors would all be rotting in prison.

What I want to know is how you justify continuing to work for an organisation

that behaves like this. Have you no conscience?

63. Ann Perbohner Says:

January 23, 2012 at 9:17 pm | Reply

Something to note. Topology (Elsevier) has discontinued publication effective the end of 2011. Five years after the editorial board resigned, the last volume/issue published was 48/11.

<http://www.info.sciverse.com/techsupport/journals/jnldiscontinued.htm>

Change happens!

◦ David Roberts Says:

January 23, 2012 at 11:20 pm

The last real issue was in 2009 (March) and then there were three issues dedicated to a conference proceedings (June-December). The December 2011 'issue' is a four-page correction to a 1995 paper. It is only listed as a supplement to the current volume, which started in 2009.

64. Should you boycott academic publishers? Says:

January 23, 2012 at 9:24 pm | Reply

[...] boycott is currently lead by a famous mathematician, Timothy Gowers. Gowers accuses Elsevier of charging exorbitant prices for its [...]

65. Phillip Helbig Says:

January 23, 2012 at 9:48 pm | Reply

"It is utterly absurd that we still have publishers — we write for free (because we want our work read or known), we edit or referee for free and then pay large amounts of money to buy the work back. With the advent of the Web, authors should have eliminated publishers."

If it were that simple, there would be no more traditional journals. But there are. Why? Quality control. Yes, there are some rubbish journals, but everyone knows which those are, and having papers in them in you list of publications is probably worse than having fewer papers. Publication in a refereed journal is still the gold standard. This is not to say it is without problems.

Could a different system be set up? Probably. Will it be set up soon? Probably not. Why not? arXiv has become the default place for papers in many fields. Something "like arXiv but refereed" is a common wish. However, for various reasons I don't see this happening within arXiv itself, and any other system would mean having one's paper there *and* at arXiv, at least for a transitional phase. Too much work for many people. Also, there can be only one such system or otherwise none of them are useful.

The thing to do would be for learned societies to take the lead. However, many are tied to journals for historical reasons.

Fortunately, the situation in astronomy is not as bad as in some other fields.

Some sort of grass-roots initiative would have a much greater chance of success if one

could contribute without being criticized for not believing that the idea of copyright and paying people for creative work should be done away with.

- *Anon* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 1:35 am

According to this argument, a reckless venture like that new-fangled “Wikipedia” could never gain any foothold in the encyclopedia world. Quality control, y’know. (/sarcasm)

The quality control done at the big journals is done by the editors, and those editors are none other than we ourselves, and most editors work for free. Unless you’re talking about the physical typesetting quality... in which case, please! This is the 21st century!

- *Ben* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 8:11 pm

There are good quality, volunteer run journals – Electronic Journal of Combinatorics is an outstanding example (good quality, open access, and no author fees).

66. *Phillip Helbig* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 9:53 pm | [Reply](#)

Keep in mind that “open access” doesn’t mean “inexpensive”. It might mean free access to the world at large, but it usually implies rather hefty publication fees.

- *aram harrow* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 10:21 pm

arxiv.org hosts 700,000 preprints (of which maybe 100K were in 2011) and their 2011 budget was about \$700,000.

That’s \$7 per new paper.

- *Phillip Helbig* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 10:38 pm

Right. I wasn’t talking about arXiv, though, but rather about “open access” journals. Many people mention them in such discussions, but the point is that while anyone might be able to read them, the cost (sometimes quite high) is shifted from the reader to the writer.

- *aram harrow* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 10:42 pm

I agree. For example, Springer charges \$3000 per article.

Which is why it’s important to point out that open-access can be done—and is already being done—at significantly lower rates.

- *David Roberts* Says:

January 23, 2012 at 11:23 pm

Not all open access journals charge publication fees. Homotopy Homology and Applications, Journal of Homotopy and Related Structures, Theory and Application of Categories, for example, are open access and free. They are all respected and successful journals.

67. *David Colquhoun* Says:

[January 23, 2012 at 11:15 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

\$7 per paper is what it should cost. Compare that with UCL's bill from Elsevier of 2.25 million euros. And that's for web access only. No paper copies at all.

<http://www.dcsience.net/?p=4873>

Elsevier is totally unnecessary for the academic enterprise. And same for Nature Publishing Group. Nature should be reduced to a news magazine. As a publisher it does more harm than good.

68. *S. Molnar* Says:

[January 24, 2012 at 1:59 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Some of us non-British readers understood the references in your titles. Fortunately, Elsevier does not hold the copyright to the Goon Show.

69. *anonymous* Says:

[January 24, 2012 at 2:32 am](#) | [Reply](#)

I don't think that bundling is necessarily a bad idea, specifically when it comes to a university that specializes in biology and medicine which would be unlikely to buy any of the more obscure math journals if they had the choice.

70. *Scientists occupy publishers* | *Stem Cell Assays* Says:

[January 24, 2012 at 4:27 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] examples and quotes of scientists who have boycotted academic publishers: Timothy Gowers: If I'm asked to referee a paper for an Elsevier journal and I am clearly an appropriate choice [...]

71. *Anonymous* Says:

[January 24, 2012 at 7:13 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Poland successfully negotiates country-wide licenses with Elsevier or Springer for years and every Polish researcher has access to their journals served from a local site in Poland. Similarly, every Polish author can opt for open license of what they publish with Springer (for free).

72. *Michael Harris* Says:

[January 24, 2012 at 8:57 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Wikipedia has been cited several times as an alternative publishing model. I use Wikipedia frequently for general orientation but I don't find it reliable for details. For example, German Wikipedia attributes the term "transcendental number" to Leibniz (OK so far) and adds in parentheses the expression "omnem rationem transcendunt" by way of explanation. I have been unable to find this expression in Leibniz' papers on transcendence. This example is typical; I run into misleading information of this kind every week.

The point is not only that research articles are not like encyclopedia articles. The scholarly journal is a model of dissemination of knowledge that evolved over several centuries as a manifestation of the successive editors' generally elitist values and objectives,

which in most respects are not the same as the values and objectives of encyclopedia editors. In recent decades the sector was overrun by commercial interests who recognized that the service, like just about every other service, could be exploited as a source of profit.

The Wikipedia model rejects — in theory! — both commercialism and elitism. But there is no necessary relation between the two, and while I suspect few mathematicians would care to defend commercial exploitation of research publication, eliminating all traces of elitism is a step I think few would be ready to take.

Questions like these will have to be addressed soon: the Elsevier boycott is growing like no other movement I've ever seen among mathematicians, and some of us will soon have to make hard decisions if we intend to honor our pledge.

73. David Loeffler Says:

January 24, 2012 at 9:01 am | [Reply](#)

Dear Tim,

I'd like to re-raise the point that Stefan made in a comment higher up this thread, which seems to have gone unnoticed so far.

I am a post-doc. I have no choice but to struggle to get my papers into the best journals that will take them, because if I don't, I'll be on the dole queue in two years' time. So if the best journal that will take my paper happens to be an Elsevier one, I more or less have to send it there, because not doing so would cause a tiny epsilon of harm to Elsevier but a very much larger amount of harm to myself and my career prospects.

What do you (and/or the other enthusiastic advocates of an Elsevier boycott) say to that?

Regards, David Loeffler

◦ Olof Sisask Says:

January 24, 2012 at 11:31 am

Dear David,

I very much sympathise. Here are some thoughts I have had on the matter, in no particular order.

1. Something needs to be done about the situation with publishers, and one good thing about this initiative is that it is limited to a single publisher so that there are still many journals to which one can submit.

2. Given the attention that this initiative is receiving and will hopefully receive, it

doesn't strike me as unreasonable to refer to it in any job applications one submits if one has specifically avoided Elsevier journals. One might say something to the effect that one's beliefs about publishing mean that, perhaps more so than otherwise, one's papers should not be judged by their journals. I know that this is naive in certain ways, but I would like to think that those making hiring decisions are not completely bound by needing to optimise some kind of journal-linked score, whether for the REF or otherwise, and might actually consider one's research.

3. By enough young researchers joining the boycott, most will be in the same boat. Some might try to optimise their personal chances by not joining in, but who wants to be the only applicant with lots of Elsevier publications when all the other applications contain statements saying "I am boycotting Elsevier because... [it harms our profession, say]"?

4. Perhaps the mathematicians involved in the hiring process will regard favourably a pledge to join this initiative.

5. If, for a particular paper, the disparity between the best Elsevier journal and the best non-Elsevier journal to which one could get it accepted is believed to be particularly great, then perhaps one of one's referees might be willing to say something about this in their letter of recommendation. (This does seem rather a strange thing to do, but only so because it is acting on the strange assumption that the choice of journal is particularly important.)

I think I have some further ideas in favour of joining the boycott, but I can't make them quite precise right now, so will leave it at that. Hope that helps.

Best wishes,
Olof

◦ *David Savitt* Says:

January 24, 2012 at 9:43 pm

I think it's important to recognize that there are some mathematicians — particularly young mathematicians, or mathematicians in areas where Elsevier has journals that are particularly indispensable — who may not be able to sign the pledge despite supporting the principle. One reason to write a pledge that's relatively specific is to minimize the number of people who can't sign for various pragmatic reasons, but that number will never be zero and I think that has to be respected.

Effective action is surely needed on multiple fronts: those of us who agree with the pledge and can reasonably stick to it can sign the pledge, whereas in fields that are bound to Elsevier because of particular indispensable journals, the editorial boards of those journals can consider Topology-like actions.

◦ *David Roberts* Says:

January 25, 2012 at 1:22 am

People can always pledge just to not referee for Elsevier, which is free labour, but still submit articles if they choose. I wish more people would do this than say 'I can't sign because they are (essentially) the only place I can realistically publish'.

◦ Olof Sisask Says:

January 26, 2012 at 9:31 am

Let me also add that a large-scale boycott of a journal means that, from some point on, it will perhaps seem rather unimpressive to have published there. So young researchers might in fact be disadvantaging themselves in the long run by publishing in such journals.

I am not particularly a fan of the following type of reasoning, but perhaps it speaks to someone. If journal E is Elsevier and journal N is its closest non-Elsevier counterpart, and it is currently considered better to be published in E than in N, then it seems likely that those who are boycotting Elsevier will attempt to publish in N instead of E. The standard for E should thus eventually go up, and so too its reputation. Submitting to N early thus seems like a sound investment.

My overall feeling is that the waters are sufficiently muddied that we, including young researchers, do not need to analyse all the game-theoretic consequences of joining the boycott and just do what we think is right.

◦ gowers Says:

January 26, 2012 at 7:39 pm

I agree with the responses above. As I said in my subsequent post, I fully recognise that boycotting Elsevier is a lot easier for some people than it is for others. What I hope will happen is that if Elsevier becomes a tainted brand, so to speak, these difficulties will go away. I can't speak for other mathematicians, but if I were examining a CV and at the beginning of the publication list it said "I refuse to publish in Elsevier journals" then I would make due allowances. (In any case, I'm far more interested in what referees have to say than in journal quality, except that I do of course notice if someone has publications in the absolute top journals.)

74. Michael Harris Says:

January 24, 2012 at 12:05 pm | Reply

Those who signed the pledge may not all know it, but they have also committed themselves to helping post-docs in David Loeffler's position, or French students who, as I already mentioned, would normally be expected to publish announcements in the Comptes Rendus. This is the sort of thing that makes signing the pledge a political act and not just a statement of principle.

It would be useful if the Cost of Knowledge page included a link to this discussion.

75. MyDivvi Says:

January 24, 2012 at 2:02 pm | Reply

[...] boycott is currently lead by a famous mathematician, Timothy Gowers. Gowers accuses Elsevier of charging exorbitant prices for its [...]

76. [Links – Lots of Censorship and Astroturf. SOPA/MegaUpload Backlashes Bring Informed Opinion into the Political Process.](#) | [Techrights](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 1:46 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall Once I did hear about Elsevier's behaviour, I made a conscious decision not to publish in Elsevier journals and I started to feel bad about cooperating with them in any way. ... I have decided that my previous quiet approach was not enough. [...]
77. [A letter « A kind of library](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 2:15 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] some context, see this blog post by Tim Gowers and this page. 43.614000-116.202000 Advertisement GA_googleAddAttr("AdOpt", [...])
78. [Mathblogging.org Weekly Picks « Mathblogging.org – the Blog](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 3:01 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] but not least, Timothy Gowers announces not contribute to Elsevier journals in any [...]
79. [One Man and His Blog](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 3:44 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
Science publishing ripe for disruption?...

I wonder how long scientific publishers can cling to their existing models when they're eliciting this level of active hostility from their customers: Once I did hear about Elsevier's behaviour, I made a conscious decision not to publish in Else...
80. [Open Access versus public closed gardens of Academic Publishers](#) | [Pearltrees](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 4:56 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall « Gowers's Weblog [...]
81. [On Elsevier](#) | [Michael Nielsen](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 6:23 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] However, Tim Gowers recently started a large-scale discussion of Elsevier by scientists, by blogging to explain that he will no longer be submitting papers to Elsevier journals, refereeing for [...]
82. [Bjoern Brembs](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 10:59 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
You may also want to see this: <http://bjoern.brembs.net/comment-n820.html>
83. [Jonas](#) Says:
[January 25, 2012 at 11:52 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
Alex Holcombe also has a similar initiative but targeted at any non-open-access publishers: <http://www.openaccesspledge.com>.
84. [Timothy Gowers: A leader for our times](#) | [Piece of Mind](#) Says:
[January 26, 2012 at 4:31 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] in the face of scientific publishers' greed and business practices. Tim has just

announced his decision to boycott anything “Elsevier”. This post is to announce our solidarity with his courageous public stand, but also to inform and [...]

85. [Ban Elsevier « Azimuth Says:](#)

[January 26, 2012 at 5:17 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Tim Gowers, Elsevier: my part in its downfall and [...]

86. [Goodbye Elsevier, Goodbye Tet Lett etc « Intermolecular Says:](#)

[January 26, 2012 at 1:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] closed access journals, which totally dominate organic chemistry, were becoming overwhelming when Tim Gowers’ post came along about the need to declare publicly that we would no longer support the [...]

87. [trashbird1240 Says:](#)

[January 26, 2012 at 5:48 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [Sex, math and programming](#) and commented:

Mathematician Tim Gowers calls our attention to the moral arguments for refusing to cooperate with corporations using objectionable business practices. I’m glad he’s pointing out the ethical side of things: he gives some good arguments for when people say “I’m all for making the world a better place, *but...*” (they rarely finish the sentence).

88. [Elsevier’s economic case is lacking | Digitopoly Says:](#)

[January 26, 2012 at 6:31 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] I have termed the ‘exit’ approach). Fields medalist, Tim Gowers, started the push with this blog post. Interestingly, Gowers argument is a pure economic one. Elsevier charge too much for journals and [...]

89. [Researchers taking a stand against publishers | IU Bloomington Chemistry Library Blog](#)
Says:

[January 26, 2012 at 9:29 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] against one of the big publishers of scientific journals: Elsevier (you may read his blog post here). His main objections are: 1) they charge excessively high prices for their journals; 2) they [...]

90. [Links 26/1/2012: Btrfs in Oracle Linux, Linux Mint 13 Chatter, ODF Toolkit | Techrights](#)
Says:

[January 27, 2012 at 12:50 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall The Dutch publisher Elsevier publishes many of the world’s best known mathematics journals, including Advances in Mathematics, Comptes Rendus, Discrete Mathematics, The European Journal of Combinatorics, Historia Mathematica, Journal of Algebra, Journal of Approximation Theory, Journal of Combinatorics Series A, Journal of Functional Analysis, Journal of Geometry and Physics, Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications, Journal of Number Theory, Topology, and Topology and its Applications. For many years, it has also been heavily criticized for its business practices. Let me briefly summarize these criticisms. [...]

91. [*Shtetl-Optimized* » *Blog Archive* » *Boycott Elsevier!*](#) Says:
[January 27, 2012 at 4:05 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] more information, see this wonderful recent post by Fields medalist and Shtetl-Optimized commenter Timothy Gowers, entitled “Elsevier — [...]”
92. [*The cost of knowledge* « *What’s new*](#) Says:
[January 27, 2012 at 6:08 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] few days ago, inspired by this recent post of Tim Gowers, a web page entitled “the cost of knowledge” has been set up as a location for [...]
93. [*The cost of knowledge* | *t1u*](#) Says:
[January 27, 2012 at 6:30 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] few days ago, inspired by this recent post of Tim Gowers, a web page entitled “the cost of knowledge” has been set up as a location for mathematicians [...]
94. *Stuart Poss* Says:
[January 27, 2012 at 7:19 am](#) | [Reply](#)

This debate continues to brew across a variety of scientific disciplines. The scope and implications are far broader than merely where to publish, how, at for how much cost, and with how much immediate benefit should go to whom.

We live in an ever rapidly changing and, in many ways, an ever more imperiled environment. The need for creative cross fertilization among scientific disciplines becomes more and more important, yet harder and harder to achieve given the need for continued specialization. As the Queen of the Sciences, this seems even more true for mathematics than virtually all other disciplines, although perhaps many in the mathematical community may see primarily only the asymmetry of such relations.

Ignoring the simple inertia of tradition, there seem to be two primary barriers for failing to move to more open, on-line publishing: 1) prestige and the need for recognition for advancement in one’s own discipline and specialization and 2) the practical, managerial side of the publication and distribution process that few academics care to commit time to. The second becomes increasingly of less importance as the technological revolution has made on-line electronic publication and dissemination far less costly, although the inherent costs of review and attracting a highly regarded editorial board and the details of the editorial process can not be dismissed, even though they are, as noted by others, often tied into the first consideration.

In contrast, an increasingly important issue is the question of availability that can make the necessary cross-fertilization possible at a rate sufficient to make the results of our labors more visible and valuable to both other scientists and to the general public from whom we ultimately depend for sustenance for our work. I would argue that this latter need, is a far more important consideration than the barriers discussed above. However, it must be acknowledged that both barriers, but particularly the first, are real and a very important considerations that must be addressed in any online or independent efforts.

As one who has come to appreciate the beauty of higher mathematics late in my career, it is nonetheless extremely disconcerting as a scientist to find so many papers in mathematics, as well as numerous other disciplines related to my own, literally walled off and inaccessible without paying what amounts to a considerable, seemingly unnecessary toll, in either time or money to locate and benefit from the work of others. It is especially upsetting since, as a taxpayer, I have often already paid for the original work.

It seems that as more and more of the internet moves away from its academic moorings to a walled and gated garden model, science, one of the most critically important of human endeavors is in a fight for recognition and for its proper role in society with one hand tied behind its back. It seems absurd that society should be able to Tweet its most frivolous of thoughts to hundreds of millions, while obscuring its greatest ideas, especially so many of such importance to understanding and preserving our increasingly fragile planet.

In my discipline, Zoological Taxonomy, we have faced the cost issue for quite some time and are under a particular constraint that for published names to be valid, they must be published in a journal that is not electronic in nature. Nonetheless, several new journals have emerged to address these issues Zootaxa being one, that provides a hybrid form of publishing to address this issue.

I find fatherofkraken's, Matt Keenan's and Rob Walsh's suggestions certainly worthy of serious consideration. However, I might add that perhaps we, as scientists and mathematicians have been looking at the issue of the barrier pertaining to prestige and the need for advancement from the perspective of our historical shackles. This seems even more true now that software, written in languages such as Mathematica, and HTML 5, Java, and Javascript, are creating the computational equivalents of a pdf or Latex files, that promise to completely reinvigorate the entire on-line and communications/ educational process by making the inherent content both dynamic and interactive.

Why not consider say 5 prestige levels within any such a journal and then have the community of experts "nominate" these up the prestige scale after they are published as opposed to merely judging them on the basis of the title of the journal (I suggest 5 only because its square root plays such a remarkable role in Binet's Formula for the Fibonacci Function and in the Golden Section). Perhaps only after a suitable period of time those nominated "up" get published in printed form. Editorial boards could likewise be selected to reflect their relative merit to decide if they merit publication in the first place. However its done, electronic publishing does provide ways to address the issue of making judgments about the relative competence of authors that are unavailable to traditional publication. It certainly makes more sense than handing this role to a for-profit corporation to enrich itself at the expense of the scientific enterprise.

Statistics regarding their download and subsequent review can be kept, as well as the number of times they are referenced, or influence society's broader dialogues, that would better reflect the importance and influence of a contribution, rather than

merely number of titles and journal names a contributor might list on his CV. Many possibilities emerge when the bonds of tradition are broken. Perhaps quantitative analysis of such issues merit an online journal of their own.

Certainly, there are many potential complications that require consideration, but after all, is it not the creative content of the articles rather than the binding or presentation that really matters? Is it not the intrinsic value, usefulness, and availability of such work of greater importance to society as a whole than who stands to profit from and control the publication process?

This is ultimately for the community of scholars to decide, just as ultimately so are reputations and kudos to be bestowed. I am hard pressed to find a counterexample that suggests that increasingly expensive negotiations with for profit corporations is either necessary or sufficient for either.

95. *The cost of knowledge* « *Mathematical Biology* Says:
January 27, 2012 at 11:19 am | Reply
[...] Tim Gowers blog post [...]

96. *Why I will no longer review for your journal* « *Jabberwocky Ecology* | *Weecology's Blog* Says:
January 27, 2012 at 1:14 pm | Reply
[...] than many of my peers in explaining why (see great posts by Michael Taylor, Gavin Simpson, and Timothy Gowers). But I'm here now and I'm letting you know so that you can consider whether or not you [...]

97. *Computación Cuántica* Says:
January 27, 2012 at 1:25 pm | Reply
Banear Elsevier...

En el post de Tim Gowers menciona otros 3 puntos en contra de Elsevier, que resumidamente son: 1. Precios extremadamente elevados 2. La justificación de esos precios con que te tenés que suscribir a todas sus revistas en algún tema, o a ninguna (no pod...

98. *Crusty the Clown* Says:
January 27, 2012 at 3:11 pm | Reply
Not to mention the fact that Elsevier put out no less than six fake journals between 2000 and now. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasian_Journal_of_Bone_%26_Joint_Medicine

for more info. Appalling.

99. *Alexander Soifer* Says:
January 27, 2012 at 3:58 pm | Reply
These fine academic journals remind me cemeteries of ideas. They require complete, finished, dead research, they are not in a hurry. By the time (one, two, three years) an article is published, it is no longer of interest to its active author, and is somewhat obsolete to active readers.

This is why in 1991 I started “Geombinatorics,” a quarterly dedicated to problem posing essays in combinatorial mathematics of geometric flavor (very much in style of Paul Erdos problem articles). We quickly publish research in progress, which is of interest to the author, and thus to the readers, who can join in. Young mathematicians can find open problems, motivation and references allowing them to start their research. Here is our web page, with editors, submission suggestions, and index:

<http://www.uccs.edu/~geombina/>

So yes, we can do something about Elsevier!

100. *Tomasz Kaczynski* Says:

[January 27, 2012 at 6:17 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I am sympathetic with voices of deception with current publishing practices but I don't know why this attack is explicitly on Elsevier, while

1. The problem is general and it concerns all leading scientific publishers, with Elsevier ex aequo Springer. Please see this paper which appeared in The Guardian half an year ago:

[h](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/academic-publishers-murdo>

2. The article cited above presents objections which are more fundamental in nature than charging high prices: it is about monopolizing the knowledge acquired from public funds. But it occurred to me that actually Elsevier is the Publisher who's attitude to Author's Rights e.g. concerning the free on-line distribution of author's own preprints seems to be the most flexible, see this new reformed policy:

<http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/authorsview.authors/rights>

In the view of this policy, an author may not only keep a preprint on his web page but even update it by incorporating suggestions from referees (who also are paid from public funds, not by the Publisher) provided there is no involvement of the Publisher's team in producing the preprint version. So, regardless of how much Elsevier charges for their final version, whether or not the public research is publically released, depends on US, THE AUTHORS, not only on the Publisher.

I do not find such transparent statements from other publishers, and I think that many authors feel intimidated by journals' copyright policies. How many authors can afford purchasing the Open Access option? Those who do, are they the best authors or best-financed authors? I see that many publications of scientific Societies and Consortiums are also a kind of “Sesame: show open”

To recapitulate this, I believe that a fundamental discussion on public research and authors rights versus publisher's rights is due rather than blasting one selected publisher. Crashing Elsevier would give a monopoly to Springer. I am in Springer's market zone and I like its professional services but I am against monopoly.

101. *Links only* « *Notes on Disordered Matter* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 6:41 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] of it in the previous link = Wikipedia entry): the mathematician Gowers speaks out in his blog post Elsevier — my part in its downfall (and a follow up post here), and PZ Myers rants Elsevier = Evil in his blog. There is even a [...]

102. *Tsu Dho Nimh* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 7:14 pm | [Reply](#)

So if some Elsevier journals in the “bundle” are indispensable to a library, that library is forced to subscribe at very high subscription rates to a large number of journals, across all the sciences, many of which they do not want.

That artificially raises the “subscriber base” numbers for the unpopular journals in the bundle, enabling them to charge more for ads.

Elsevier is helping them pad the subscriber numbers, which looks a lot like fraud to me.

Who would pay for an ad in “Timmy’s Tech Journal” if Elsevier didn’t stuff it into a bundle with the IEEE ?

103. *Bela Patkai (@BelaPatkai)* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 8:56 pm | [Reply](#)

It is ironic that the highly intelligent academic community can be bullied at this level. If we can’t build ourselves an alternative system of publication (including the full workflow with reviews) then who can?

104. *Science : Le libre accès et l’appel au boycott contre Elsevier* | *Didier Villers, UMONS* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 10:19 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] mathématicien Timothy Gowers, professeur à l’université de Cambridge, vient de lancer un appel officiel au boycott à l’encontre de l’éditeur [...]

105. *Manas Patra* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 10:22 pm | [Reply](#)

Being an academic (sort of) for quite a while I have heard these whingeings before. Especially when I worked in India. Most libraries could barely afford even the most basic journals. But I and my colleagues consoled ourselves with the fact that this world is run by “dalal”s and there is not much one can do about it. Now the word “dalal” (pronounced dalaal) is a fascinating one with a range of meanings. The most charitable one is a broker or middle-man. But it can also mean a tout or something even worse. Check it out with some hindi-speaking friend or check some online dictionary (not google). But I think in the broadest sense it means any intermediary between the producer and the consumer of goods or services. So by this definition the world is indeed run by dalals and they are and have always been an essential feature of our civilization and we should not beat ourselves too much over it. Continuing in this vein, in most such transactions there is specially trained group or organization which produces the services or goods for a wider market whether it is your neighbourhood plumber or a neurosurgeon in some fancy medical school. But in academia one has to specially trained to consume the product of other similarly

trained specialists! Of course, the hallowed aim is to serve, enlighten and (what the heck) shape the wider wider society. Ah, come on!

But I do support this awakening/revolution!

106. *The Cost of Knowledge* « *Kresge Physical Sciences Library* Says:

January 27, 2012 at 11:24 pm | Reply

[...] a new and successful journal, *Journal of Topology* in 2008. Tim Gowers has recently started a lively discussion on his blog post titled *Elsevier — my part in its downfall*. In this post Gowers mentions his [...]

107. *Mathematicians organising "Occupy Elsevier"* « *The Cedar Lounge Revolution* Says:

January 28, 2012 at 12:05 am | Reply

[...] Gowers, professor of mathematics at Cambridge, has suggested that mathematicians should boycott leading journals published by Elsevier. He lists four reasons: [...]

108. *linfinit* Says:

January 28, 2012 at 4:42 am | Reply

Hi Tim,

I just submitted a paper to an Elsevier Journal last night, before I became aware of your blog.

Markus Hegland and Paul Leopardi, "Sparse grid quadrature on products of spheres", Submitted to *Journal of Complexity*, January 2012. (

<http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-complexity/>)

Preprint: January 2012. (

<http://maths.anu.edu.au/~leopardi/HL-Sparse-Grid-Spheres.pdf>)

I am still a struggling postdoc, and I need to keep up my publication rate, so that my CV looks acceptable both for grant applications and for job applications. The main reasons that I chose this journal have nothing to do with this, though. The main references in the joint paper are to other papers in the same journal, and our target audience contains many members of the editorial board of this journal.

Rather than boycotting Elsevier, which would at least seem inconsistent with what I have just done, it may be a better strategy if I spoke to members of the editorial board at the upcoming MCQMC 2012 conference at UNSW (<http://www.mcqmc2012.unsw.edu.au/index.php>) to ask why this Journal is published by Elsevier, and to see if there is any way the editorial board could move away from this publisher.

By the way, I also just last night submitted a paper to a new, free, journal,.

Paul Leopardi, "Can compatible discretization, finite element methods, and discrete Clifford analysis be fruitfully combined?", Submitted to *Clifford Analysis, Clifford Algebras and their applications (CACAA)*, January 2012.

<http://www.cliffordanalysis.com/>

P

reprint: January 2012.

<http://maths.anu.edu.au/~leopardi/Leopardi-CACAA-FE-GC.pdf>

The same criteria held in this case. Many of the people on the editorial board are in my target audience. Free access is a bonus in this case.

Also, I have just recently accepted to referee a paper for the Australasian Journal of Combinatorics (<http://ajc.maths.uq.edu.au/>) mainly because the paper is for a special issue celebrating Kathy Horadam's 60th birthday workshop (<http://www.rmit.edu.au/mathsgео/iwhma>) and I have also just submitted a paper for the same issue. At the recent ACCMCC at Monash, we (CMSA <http://www.maths.uq.edu.au/CMSA/>) discussed making the AJC a free-access journal, and as far as I know, we are still studying the matter. So right now, I'm not even in a position to sign a petition that says that I will only referee for free-access journals, without being hypocritical.

All the best, Paul

—

Paul Leopardi

<http://maths.anu.edu.au/~leopardi>

109. *Jean-Louis Colliot-Thélène* Says:
[January 28, 2012 at 8:19 am](#) | [Reply](#)
Orsay, the 28th of January, 2012

Here is a list of precise complains about Elsevier, some of which could appear in the heading of the appeal,
<http://thecostofknowledge.com/index.php> along with those which are now posted.

(1) In their contracts they want to impose an increase of 4 per cent per year, which is more than inflation in Europe. That increase is inherited from a time where inflation was higher in Europe.

(2) They want to impose a uniform format for the Journals they buy. Look at *Advances in mathematics*, *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des sciences de Paris*, *Journal of Number Theory*. That format is not very appealing. The first page of papers is hideous. The Elsevier/Sciencedirect logo appears too many times. Elsevier insists that the copyright appear also once after the abstract (for CRAS the logo appears once after the French summary and once after the English abstract). Compare with the first page of papers in these Journals when they were published by Academic Press or Gauthier-Villars. The printed letters are too small [I know the answer : paper will disappear and one can increase the size on the computer screen.]

(3) The Elsevier editing machine, which is devised for all domains of science, is a nightmare, as editors, authors and referees know. As an editor and as a referee I do not like the idea that the publishers collect list of possible referees in their machines.

(4) Elsevier wants — like many other publishers these days — to spend as little money as possible on the final editing process. After waiting for sometimes a year for their paper to be accepted then some further long delay, one fine day the authors receive a

comminatory letter according to which they have one week to send back the proofs, otherwise the paper might appear without further ado. They do not allow the authors to see second proofs.

On the positive side : I do not think that Elsevier has made any attempt so far at eradicating all languages but English from their mathematical Journals. The Journal of the EMS once made such an attempt. So did, in a hidden way, Springer. A recent attempt, partly stopped, was made by the Journal of Algebraic Geometry, a Journal distributed by the AMS. I personally systematically boycott any Journal which allows only English.

We certainly should exert pressure on Elsevier so that they change such things as bundle selling. At the same time it is hard to eliminate at once a whole series of Journals from the possible list of publishing places. There are sometimes other reasons than commercial to be discontent with some Journals. Even academically published Journals may have editorial boards who do not behave properly (poor evaluation, bias in favour of some topics, rejection after too long a period, poor handling of the proofs). If we also eliminate such Journals from our possible list, what will be left ?

To conclude, let me indicate that there are sometimes smooth ways out, but they require us to spend some of our precious time doing other things than mathematics. After being the managing editor of the Annales scientifiques de l'École Normale Supérieure, then published by Elsevier [but the title belongs to the École Normale Supérieure, Paris], and after several complains we had had with Elsevier (see above), I was asked by the Annales to investigate the possibilities of finding a new publisher. I put up a list of requests we had and sent it (in French) to various publishers. A respectable academic British publishing company did not bother to answer. Among others, we got fair offers from Springer, from the European Mathematical Society and from the Société mathématique de France. The Annales are now published by the Société mathématique de France.

J.-L. Colliot-Thélène

CNRS, Université Paris-Sud, Orsay, France

10. [Cornelsen Education Publisher: Take a look at what India is doing with media! « *childrenspeech* Says: January 28, 2012 at 9:03 am | Reply](#)
[...] the academic front, publishers are also having to face up to reality. Check out the blogs on Elsevier. Finally, scientists are wondering, why they do all the work, then pay to get published and pay to [...]
11. [Blog blast births boffin boycott of publisher Elsevier | Technology News Says: January 28, 2012 at 10:06 am | Reply](#)
[...] mathematician Tim Gowers kicked-started the campaign with a scorching blog post outlining numerous complaints against the publisher, which sells over 2,000 academic journals such [...]

112. *Dois artigos interessantes sobre o atual sistema de periódicos científicos « Teoria de Lie e Aplicações* Says:
January 28, 2012 at 10:13 am | Reply
[...] few days ago, inspired by this recent post of Tim Gowers, a web page entitled “the cost of knowledge” has been set up as a location for mathematicians [...]

113. *Matt Rosin* Says:
January 28, 2012 at 10:46 am | Reply
@M. Hampton

And yet the same page says:

“We offer a complete or partial fee waiver for authors who do not have funds to cover publication fees.”

> I think most mathematicians would have sticker shock
> at their publication fees:
> <http://www.plos.org/publish/pricing-policy/publication-fees/>

114. *Arieh Iserles* Says:
January 28, 2012 at 11:55 am | Reply

Coming late to this discussion (but not to the issue at hand), allow me a stab at explaining why from Elsevier’s point of view this attitude pays – this has a clear operative consequence, namely that attempting to change their mode of operation by persuasion is bound to fail in the short term and all that remains is an effective and principled boycott.

Elsevier makes the really fat, cholesterol-laden portion of its profits from medical and biology journals. Both medicine and biology are awash with funding and the cost of journals is incidental to the very large research expenses they have, hence is not really an issue. They then force universities to accept very expensive bundles, inclusive of mathematical journals. The facts on the ground (speaking from bruised experience) are that medicine and biology department wield infinitely greater political clout than maths at a typical university (and even at my, atypical university), hence the bundle is forced on mathematicians and, realistically, there isn’t much we can do in the short term.

As a mathematical community, we must play the long-term game. This means that those who can afford it (it would be morally wrong to expect this from colleagues early in their career) must be steadfast in refusing to do anything with Elsevier. Moreover, we must do this loudly and openly: I have been boycotting them informally for a while but this counts for little. Only if we, as a community, boycott them, only if they are stigmatised sufficiently in public to impact on the flow of papers and quality of editorial boards in their journals (those two are of course related), only then they might be forced to take note – and even if they don’t take note, their impact will be diminished and they will matter less from our point of view. So, not just boycott them but publicise it among your colleagues, on Facebook (that’s how I’ve learnt of this discussion), Tweeter, whatsoever!

Incidentally, Elsevier _are_ in my humble experience, considerably worse than other commercial publishers, certainly worse than Springer. Most commercial publishers retain some vestige of pride in their output (this isn't bad even for commercial purposes). I don't believe that Springer will publish something which, while being complete crap, will generate significant sales: Elsevier will have no such compunction (see the Chaos etc. journal). I know the main maths editors of Springer in both Heidelberg and New York and their heart is at the right place: they are coming from the same stable as LMS, AMS, SIAM, CUP, OUP, PUP, ... maths editors. And no, I don't know Elsevier maths editors. One major reason (and yet another reason for a boycott) is that Elsevier is cutting corners and employs, for very low salaries, unqualified personnel, treats them badly and the outcome is huge turnover. (I am speaking from some knowledge a decade ago: in the unlikely case they have changed, apologies.)

The hierarchy of publishers (here I am speaking wearing multiple editorial hats) can be best demonstrated by their attitude to copy editing:

- a. Academic and learned society publishers copy edit papers as a matter of course (although standards vary),
- b. Springer copy-edits once Managing Editors insist.
- c. Elsevier doesn't spend money on copy editing, seeing this as authors' responsibility.

115. [Kêu gọi tẩy chay nhà xuất bản Elsevier](#) « *TS. Lê Văn Út* Says:

[January 28, 2012 at 12:24 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] ngày 21.1.2012, GS. Timothy Gowers đăng bài "Elsevier – phần của tôi trong sự sụp đổ của nó" trên blog của ông. Trong bài viết của mình, GS. Gowers đã lên án ít nhất [...]

116. [Just Say No – The Ashburner Response](#) « *I wish you'd made me angry earlier* Says:

[January 28, 2012 at 5:18 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gower's Weblog - Elsevier — my part in its downfall [...]

117. [Elsevier's Publishing Model Might be About to Go Up in Smoke](#) | *Books & Publishing News* Says:

[January 28, 2012 at 7:09 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] start was made by British mathematician Tim Gowers, in a blog post here. That wasn't the very start, but it looks like one of those pebbles that starts the avalanche [...]

118. [Occupy Elsevier!](#) « *conorjh* Says:

[January 28, 2012 at 7:43 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] <http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/elsevier-my-part-in-its-downfall/> [...]

119. [Knowledge slavery](#) « *ConservationBytes.com* Says:

[January 28, 2012 at 8:39 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Elsevier (agreed by many to be the leader in the greed-pack – see how some scientists are staging their protest; also here) made US\$1.1 billion in [...]

120. [Elsevier Boycot started among Scientists](#) » *Barnhard Blog* Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 1:20 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Act. Fields medal-winning mathematician Tim Gowers decided to go public with a blog post describing how he'll no longer have anything to do with Elsevier journals, and suggesting that a public website where mathematicians and scientists could register their [...]

121. [Boycotting Pricey Journals](#) « [Random Walks](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 4:21 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] movement among academics to boycott their part of this process. The action was sparked by a blog post by Timothy Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, and Fields Medal recipient. A [...]

122. [Caroline Kloppert](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 6:59 am](#) | [Reply](#)

I find that one thing is taken for granted in all these very necessary protests against exploitation. In "we want to publish for free so our work can be read" is a hidden assumption, that one publishes only to be read, an assumption of enormous privilege. What if one is not part of Academia, how will one pay for one's writing if one has to share it for free? Is it only the research of Academics employed in institutions which is worthwhile? What about published research such as that by historians or Linguists that can be done in private... do you really realize how draconian, biased and limiting the necessity to be an employed teacher in a University is as a prerequisite for the creation of knowledge?

◦ [gowers](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 8:15 am](#)

I don't think there is any realistic prospect of any academic researchers, independent or affiliated, making a living from their publications. So I think the answer to your question, whatever the publication model, is surely going to have to be to get a day job, rather as professional academics do with their teaching.

In any case I'd slightly question your initial analysis. In this day and age, if we want to be read we put our results on the arXiv or on our web pages and we tell people about them. Publication doesn't help dissemination, and sometimes hinders it. The reason we do it is that our systems of evaluation require it, and it is that that companies like Elsevier have been able to exploit so effectively.

◦ [David Stranz](#) Says:

[April 19, 2012 at 12:06 am](#)

As scientists, we do not publish only to be read, although it is nice to see your name in print. Publication is not, "an assumption of enormous privilege"; it is the end result of a rigorous vetting of one's work by one's peers, and quite often your work is not accepted without changes required by the reviewers.

Anyone whose work is deemed publishable by this process may publish. It is not at all limited to academicians. In my field, a large percentage of the articles are published by people from industry and government, large and small.

You also seem to have missed a major point of this protest: that no one who publishes in for-profit journals is paid for anything, including your “historians and linguists” working in private. In fact, we are required to pay to read even our own articles after publication. This is even more egregious in the case of publicly-funded research (i.e. paid for by your taxes). Not only do the journals get the content, reviewing, and editing for free, you the taxpayer are not allowed to see what you’ve paid for without paying the publisher again.

◦ *walkerjian* Says:

[April 19, 2012 at 1:58 am](#)

trouble is how much baby goes out with the bathwater? how much diamond in the rough is shaped away by the vetting of the peer review? and quo quo scelesti ruitis? hmmm?

[h](#)

<http://theaeneidgroup.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/epode-7-quo-quo-scelesti-ruitis.ht>

123. [TS. Lê Văn Út – Kêu gọi tẩy chay nhà xuất bản Elsevier | phamdinhlan](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 10:14 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] ngày 21.1.2012, GS. Timothy Gowers đăng bài “Elsevier – phần của tôi trong sự sụp đổ của nó” trên blog của ông. Trong bài viết của mình, GS. Gowers đã lên án ít nhất bốn [...]

124. [maccad » Blog blast births boffin boycott of publisher Elsevier](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 11:01 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] mathematician Tim Gowers kicked-started the campaign with a scorching blog post outlining numerous complaints against the publisher, which sells over 2,000 academic journals such [...]

125. [Unilever Centre for Molecular Informatics, Cambridge - What have the Publishers ever done for us? And do we need them? « petermr's blog](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 11:18 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gowers has used Spike Milligan as an inspiration for challenging Elsevier:

<http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/elsevier-my-part-in-its-downfall/> .

British satire is one of the things that keeps us going. I’ll use the equally irreverent [...]

126. [PUBlishers' wars « Peter Cameron's Blog](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 3:28 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] have been spurred into action against big publishers. I am not certain of the history, but Tim Gowers seems to have taken the lead in a campaign targeted specifically against Elsevier, supported by [...]

127. [What's wrong with electronic journals? « Gowers's Weblog](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 3:41 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] then read this (written, as you can see, in response to another comment). [...]

128. [Could LexisNexis and Thomson Reuter legal publishing model go up in smoke? : Real Lawyers Have Blogs](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 4:15 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] mathematician Tim Gowers, cited by Worstall and who has written for Elsevier, shares a few reasons why he's no longer going to do so. It charges very high prices — so far above the average that it [...]

129. [More on Elsevier « Secret Blogging Seminar](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 7:05 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gower's blog, we've had the response from within Elsevier; I don't find it particularly convincing, but what do you expect. I [...]

130. [reuben hersh](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 8:21 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Excellent!

First class!

Way to go!!!

Reuben Hersh

131. [Elsevier's Publishing Model Might be About to Go Up in Smoke | AnalystWatch.com | Market Analysis | Stock picking tips](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 9:06 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] start was made by British mathematician Tim Gowers, in a blog post here. That wasn't the very start, but it looks like one of those pebbles that starts the avalanche [...]

132. [Anonymous](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 9:25 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Surely there must be a wiki way to self-publish with peer review?

133. [Academic publication boycott | Quantum Forest](#) Says:

[January 29, 2012 at 11:24 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] supporting, a boycott against Elsevier; for example, Scientific Community to Elsevier: Drop Dead, Elsevier—my part in its downfall or, more general, Should you boycott academic [...]

134. [Jeff Burdges](#) Says:

[January 30, 2012 at 12:36 am](#) | [Reply](#)

We should discuss establishing a decorum for not even citing recent publications in Elsevier journals. We could for example cite recent articles to their author, title, and arxiv.org url, but rot13 the journal name, issue, and page, or possibly drop the journal citation entirely, citing only arxiv.org. We could implement this rot13 for journal names in a LaTeX package or BibTeX style (.bst file).

<http://www.metafilter.com/112178/Scientists-boycott-Elsevier>

◦ [David Stranz](#) Says:

[April 19, 2012 at 12:13 am](#)

Good luck getting anything published anywhere with that kind of scheme. The first thing any publisher (and probably referees as well) would do is make you

remove the gibberish and replace it with clear text. See aram harow's comments above about what happened when all he tried to do was to include arxiv.org links in addition to the normal citations.

135. *Axel Boldt* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 1:02 am | Reply

I completely agree with the Elsevier boycott, but it can only be a first step. Eventually we must come to a web-based system of publishing that allows all researchers free access to peer-reviewed articles.

The Arxiv is already pretty close; only a component of peer review is missing. I have outlined a method to add this component here: <http://arxiv.org/abs/1011.6590>

136. *Hello world! « gilsonrfilho* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 4:16 am | Reply

[...] Também estou acompanhando a repercussão de uma pequena série de posts do Timothy Gowers a respeito dos abusos da indústria de publicação de periódicos, em particular contra os serviços da Elsevier. Acompanhe tudo pelo blog do mesmo aqui. [...]

137. *maccad » Boffin's blog blast births boycott of publisher Elsevier* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 11:27 am | Reply

[...] mathematician Tim Gowers kicked-started the campaign with a scorching blog post outlining numerous complaints against the publisher, which sells over 2,000 academic journals such [...]

138. *Tom* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 12:23 pm | Reply

I'd much rather see a spate of new journals than the birth of a monstrous library union.

139. *A business model in flames? « The Bibliobrary* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 3:04 pm | Reply

[...] Gowers certainly helped get the latest ball rolling with his public declaration that he would no longer publish in or work with any Elsevier journals in any capacity such as [...]

140. *Boycott Elsevier | Cosmic Variance | Discover Magazine* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 4:56 pm | Reply

[...] is a publishing company that controls many important journals, and uses their position to charge amazingly exorbitant prices to university libraries — and then makes the published papers very hard to access for anyone [...]

141. *KÊU GOI TẤY CHAY NHÀ XUẤT BẢN ELSEVIER (TS Lê Văn Út) « Ngoclinhvugia's Blog* Says:

January 30, 2012 at 5:00 pm | Reply

[...] ngày 21.1.2012, GS. Timothy Gowers đăng bài "Elsevier – phần của tôi trong sự sụp đổ của nó" trên blog của ông. Trong bài viết của mình, GS. Gowers đã lên án ít

nhất bốn [...]

142. *Charlie Says:*

[January 30, 2012 at 5:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I think all authors can make a more intelligent decision on where to publish by consulting <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/> to find out which publishers encourage or discourage author's own copies on institutional and personal websites. Elsevier has been "Green" for a long time, which does not excuse aggressive pricing to libraries that can afford aggressive pricing. If you are a author on a campus without an institutional repository, it is hard to negotiate or demand that right. But a personal website is fairly cheap these days, if you have the time to manage it. Elsevier manages much very efficiently, which is the argument for taking advantage of their green privilege.... Google scholar will index your green copy, along with the publishers...

143. *Janet Forde Says:*

[January 30, 2012 at 5:53 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

NB: Columbia University called for a Boycott of Elsevier in 2004 viz.

The Lancet, Volume 363, Issue 9402, Pages 44 – 45, 3 January 2004

doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(03)15248-8Cite or Link Using DOI

Publishers face backlash over rising subscription costs

Faith McLellan

High prices have led some US institutions to cancel subscriptions to, or even boycott, scientific journals

144. *There's A Smell Of Revolution In The Air « The Room of Infinite Diligence Says:*

[January 30, 2012 at 6:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] start was made by British mathematician Tim Gowers, in a blog post here. That wasn't the very start, but it looks like one of those pebbles that starts the avalanche [...]

145. *Should you boycott Elsevier? « viXra log Says:*

[January 30, 2012 at 9:34 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] people include a few notable bloggers are saying that we should all boycott Elsevier who publish science journals and sell them [...]

146. *Elsevier Publishing Boycott Gathers Steam Among Academics - Wired Campus - The Chronicle of Higher Education Says:*

[January 30, 2012 at 11:51 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] restrict access to work that should be much more easily available. He asked for a boycott in a blog post on January 21, and as of Monday evening, on the boycott's Web site The Cost of Knowledge, [...]

147. *Elsevier en el punto de mira at El site de Rafael Repiso Says:*

[January 31, 2012 at 6:36 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] La última iniciativa tiene su origen en un grupo de matemáticos, encabezados por el británico Tim Gowers, que hartos de los abusos de Elsevier en su área, han creado

una lista pública donde los [...]

148. *First academic boycott of the year.* | *Dark Brightness* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 6:45 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] there are now a fair number of scientific bloggers saying that we should neither submit articles or peer review papers submitted to these journals. There is now a petition to [...]

149. *Elsevier Publishing Boycott Gathers Steam Among Academics* | *My Blog* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 7:57 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] shorten entrance to work that should be many some-more simply available. He asked for a protest in a blog post on Jan 21, and as of Monday evening, on a boycott's Web site The Cost of Knowledge, scarcely [...]

150. *Rupert Gatti* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 4:07 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Great post, and great response by the academic community. This is the only way to change things. Often academics (who are provided access to the articles for free through their library subscriptions) are unaware of the costs involved – and the loss to the academic community both directly through these charges and indirectly by restricted access to research results by those not employed at rich institutions.

Incidentally UCL, Imperial and a coalition of other similar Uni libraries in the UK recently had a face off with Elsevier and negotiated a “significant” reduction in subscription charges – but this still came out at WELL OVER £1m per year for EACH library. And part of the deal was a confidentiality clause not to reveal the price paid!

151. *Items of Interest* | *LibTech Soup* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 4:10 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] on the crimes of Elsevier as an academic publisher (particularly against academic libraries): Elsevier — my part in its downfall. He advocates pressuring them to change by not participating in Elsevier-published journals. [...]

152. *Koszt wiedzy « Rozmaitości* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 5:42 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] czara goryczy się przelała. Laureat Medalu Fieldsa Timothy Gowers wezwał na swoim blogu do bojkotu Elseviera. Kilka dni później poparł go Terence Tao. Na stronie [...]

153. *crlab* Says:

[January 31, 2012 at 6:53 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

These are excellent points. I do hope Elsevier is able to publicly respond to these criticisms, as historically it has provided a great venue for many scientific works. However, Michael Eisen (<http://www.michaeleisen.org/blog/?p=807>) raises an additional point with Elsevier's campaign contributions to one of the authors of the Research Works Act. Eisen's statement "It is inexcusable that a simple idea – that no American should be denied access to biomedical research their tax dollars paid to produce – could be scuttled by a greedy publisher who bought access to a member of

Congress.” The fact that Elsevier is actively supporting such legislation is inexcusable. As a US citizen, I have written my congressman to protect and extend the wildly successful U.S. National Institutes of Health’s “Policy on Enhancing Public Access to Archived Publications Resulting from NIH-Funded Research” (including PubMed Central)

154. *Will Academics’ Boycott Of Elsevier Be The Tipping Point For Open Access — Or Another Embarrassing Flop?* « *waweru.net* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 7:12 pm | Reply
[...] mathematician and Fields Medallist (think Nobel Prize of mathematics) Tim Gowers that provided the spark for the explosion of anger that followed: I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but I am [...]
155. *Petition Targeting Elsevier’s Business Practices Begins to Snowball* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 7:41 pm | Reply
[...] Gowers, of the University of Cambridge and a winner of the Fields Medal, criticized Elsevier on his blog on January 21 for charging exorbitantly high prices, obliging libraries to purchase either a large [...]
156. *Boycott Elsevier* « *Skeptical Science* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 8:18 pm | Reply
[...] Tim Gowers, in a blog post here [...]
157. *The Research Works Act, open access and publisher boycotts* « *sharmanedit* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 9:44 pm | Reply
[...] and Fields Medal winner Timothy Gowers to publish a blog post on 21 January entitled ‘Elsevier — my part in its downfall’ (after the late Spike Milligan’s book ‘Adolf Hitler: My Part in his [...]
158. *Call to boycott Elsevier gaining steam* | *Wisdom’s Quintessence* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 10:14 pm | Reply
[...] Gowers of the University of Cambridge, who won the Fields Medal for his research, has organized a boycott of Elsevier because, he says, its pricing and policies restrict access to work that should be much more easily [...]
159. *Libres pensées d’un mathématicien ordinaire » Publications: science, money, and human comedy* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 11:03 pm | Reply
[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall by Tim Gowers [...]
160. *Elsevier Publishing Boycott Gathers Steam Among Academics* « « *DediCommDediComm* Says:
January 31, 2012 at 11:31 pm | Reply
[...] restrict access to work that should be much more easily available. He asked for a boycott in a blog post on January 21, and as of Monday evening, on the boycott’s Web site The Cost of Knowledge, nearly [...]

161. Joe E Says:
February 1, 2012 at 12:26 am | Reply
Elsevier is doing something just as bad to the artistic community. The Vandals, a punk band in California created a parody of one of their magazines logos. This was perfectly protected speech according to the 1st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. Copyright Act's Fair Use Doctrine. However, Elsevier has been suing the four musicians since 2004, attempting to ruin their lives after already ruining their careers. Read about it here: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>... or on Huffington Post , or at <http://www.vandals.com/Vandals...> The Vandals will help spread the boycott!
Flag
162. Gert-Jan Pepping Says:
February 1, 2012 at 7:51 am | Reply
Reblogged this on G-J Pepping.
163. Comfort is the death knell of academia: why I'm standing down as a journal referee | Impact of Social Sciences Says:
February 1, 2012 at 11:02 am | Reply
[...] journals, which totally dominate organic chemistry, were becoming overwhelming when Tim Gowers' post came along about the need to declare publicly that we would no longer support the [...]
164. DM Says:
February 1, 2012 at 11:23 am | Reply
Dear colleagues,

Last Fall I published an opinion piece about this issue in the French national daily Libération:
<http://david.monniaux.free.fr/dotclear/index.php/post/2011/10/15/Le-racket-de-l-%>

The newspaper slightly bowdlerized it and in particular suppressed the explicit mention of Elsevier, but the main points remained. In particular, I suggested that government-funded research articles could not be licensed exclusively to a publisher.
165. matt19593 Says:
February 1, 2012 at 1:34 pm | Reply
I am not a scientist, but management advisor and author in the states. However, publishers play dumb when talking about the business model of their industry. They have less and less to offer each year as the sophistication of the web and its applications grows. I am sure we are close to that point and maybe at it.
166. Elsevier publishing boycott- Gaining momentum | Research Impact: Scholarly Communication @ Carleton University Says:
February 1, 2012 at 2:32 pm | Reply
[...] publishers. Started by Timothy Gowers of the University of Cambridge who asked for a boycott on his blog on January 21st, the online petition now has more than 2500 [...]

167. *Elsevier Boycott, My Thoughts - Things of interest to a medical librarian. - Krafty Librarian*
Says:
February 1, 2012 at 2:36 pm | Reply
[...] recent publishing brouhaha has been about Elsevier. Mathematician, Tim Gowers, published a blog post where he complained about Elsevier's very high prices, bundling practices, negotiation [...]
168. *Boycotting Academic Publishers | preserve/destroy* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 3:17 pm | Reply
[...] Timothy Gowers [...]
169. *Speculative Diction | Higher ed news tidbits – from around the world and the web | University Affairs* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 4:30 pm | Reply
[...] flows on the creation and use of new scientific knowledge. Mathematician Timothy Gowers has called for an international ban on publisher Elsevier for its support of both SOPA and the Research Works Act, and researchers are [...]
170. *Elsevier Boycott Attracts U-M Faculty* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 4:56 pm | Reply
[...] with the University of Michigan. Gowers explains his reasoning for the project in a detailed blog post. The boycott has also received coverage in Forbes, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and notable [...]
171. *Kradak* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 6:34 pm | Reply
Bravo and good luck. The reasons are valid and well stated. The best time is now, if any. I would ask, though, if the desire to go whole-hog and boycott Elsevier could extend beyond purchasing, editing, reviewing, and publishing—how about boycotting reading Elsevier journals or citing any of their articles? Certainly there could be some way to refer to articles in such a way as to not boost citation statistics of the offending journals, i.e. (citation in non-elsevier journal that cites an elsevier journal) “and references therein” or some such. Unfortunatley, you editors would probably pounce on that as well.
172. *Boycotts are all around us | Irrational Tonics* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 7:56 pm | Reply
[...] view as stifling to creative and innovative thought, and access. The original call to boycott is here, the Chronicle article is here, and if you Google the thing, you'll find dozens of blogs and [...]
173. *Research Works Act, la “SOPA” contra l'accés obert a la ciència | Q* Says:
February 1, 2012 at 8:00 pm | Reply
[...] I finalment, un creixent grup de científics; per citar alguns exemples de blogs que segueixo, Tim Gowers, Steve Flammia, Scott Aaronson, Aram Harrow, Cosma Rohilla Shalizi... I segur que n'hi ha [...]
174. *Elsevier boycott « The stupidest thing...* Says:

[February 1, 2012 at 10:08 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] expect you've already heard about the Elsevier boycott, started based on comments from Timothy Gowers. While he focused on his own discipline (mathematics), the boycott site now has people broken down [...]

175. [Scientists Fight For Open Access For Research | Care2 Causes](#) Says:

[February 1, 2012 at 11:08 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] [...]

176. [Falvey Library Blogs: Library News » Elsevier Journal Boycott Takes Center Stage with Scholars](#) Says:

[February 1, 2012 at 11:41 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] the boycott was inspired by Field's medalist Tim Gowers' recent comments describing his personal boycott of Elsevier journals." What are your opinions about the journal boycott? How about the recent efforts to impose [...]

177. [Academics announce boycott of journal publisher Elsevier | Ebooks on Crack](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 5:52 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] prominent British mathematician Tim Gowers spoke out in favor of a boycott, a website sprang up to organize it, and so far almost 2,000 academics have [...]

178. [Josh](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 5:54 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Reblogged this on [Synonyms for Fun](#) and commented:

First reblog, and a very important one indeed. Don't let science suffer for profit.

179. [Peter Apps](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 9:49 am](#) | [Reply](#)

I referee frequently for an Elsevier chemistry journal; Journal of Chromatography A. In return I am granted free access to Scopus and Science Direct, with full text access to the Elsevier journals in addition to those that are free to access anyway. If I was an academic with library privileges I would not even notice this freebie, but since I work for a small independent research organisation it is my main channel of access to full text scientific literature. None of the other publishers for which I have refereed have offered anything similar.

Peter Apps

180. [A Discussion and a Debate | Combinatorics and more](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 1:36 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] published by Elsevier as part of the boycott. I liked, generally speaking, Gowers's critical post on Elsevier, but the winds of war and associated rhetoric are not to my liking. The universities are quite [...]

181. [Anonymous](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 1:45 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Dear Professor Gower,

Your institution charges £9000 year in tuition fees, per student.

A journal subscription for the entire institution (which you get free access to via them) costs maybe £3000 a year. Therefore, for every student you absolutely bleed try in tuition fees, your library can buy 3 of your “overpriced” journals.

Pot & Kettle

- [gowers](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 3:01 pm](#)

You make an interesting point. Here’s how I’d reply to it. We were basically forced to charge the tuition fees by the government’s decision to give us much less money. It’s hard to see how we could significantly reduce them without doing a lot of damage to the university and what it can offer. By contrast, with journals, it is easy to envisage a different system that would cost scientists far less, so it seems silly not to try to change to such a system.

One way of getting your analogy to work would be to argue that there was an obvious way for people to get what Cambridge has to offer far more cheaply. It’s conceivable that that will one day be the case — more and more educational materials are appearing online, for instance — but I don’t think we’ve got there yet, and my guess is that it would be hard to provide the full student experience for substantially less.

182. » [Scholars call for boycott of Elsevier over high prices and copyright maximalism at Snell](#)

[Snippets - Library blog](#). Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 2:22 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gowers, a prominent mathematician, wrote a blog post on January 21, 2012, in which he discussed the issues outlined above and asked, “Why can’t we just tell [...]

183. [thinking» Blog Archive » 97% of US schools cannot afford Elsevier journals](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 3:23 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] authors). This is the motivation behind thecostofknowledge.com, a grass-roots campaign inspired by Tim Gowers’s stand against Elsevier. This effort has already gathered, in under two weeks, over 3,000 individual pledges to withhold [...]

184. [Lawrence Grossberg and the politics of collaboration « Creating Publics](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 3:55 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] there was a post on the LSE’s Impact blog by the chemist Matthew Todd who – following a slightly earlier intervention by a Cambridge mathematician – publicly announces that he is joining a growing list of academics boycotting Elsevier [...]

185. [La rebelión de los matemáticos](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 5:55 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gowers publicó el pasado 21 de enero en su blog un llamamiento a este boicot, por los precios abusivos de las revistas de Elsevier así como las prácticas de acceso [...]

186. [Blackpool_Alcoholic_Chap](#) Says:

[February 2, 2012 at 6:31 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Beyond the fact that Elsevier’s pricing on single article (34€ what a joke) or Big Deals

(several millions € – a complete ripp off) it should not be forgotten that Elsevier plays very well with the ego of the scientists, in fact publishing in some journals is an ego booster to get recognition from the community, and recognition means career progression, so it's a trap. So if scientists forget for a moment their own ego and explain to government authorities that the once valid law "publish or perish" it's actually only a drain for public taxpayers money to fund shareholders fat dividends then they can start publish in Open Access journals more often and therefore break the vicious circle that Elsevier (and others) have created.

187. *Raymond A Saumure, PhD* Says:

February 2, 2012 at 7:01 pm | Reply

I am on the governing board of an online, peer-reviewed, herpetology journal

<http://www.herpconbio.org/>

that the Chronicle of Higher Education basically suggested was the future of academic publication in the humanities and sciences. Everyone should check out how we do it:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Hot-Type-Scholars-Creat/126090/>

Strangely, the Chronicle charges a fee to read the article that praises open access!!!!??? ...so you can check it out on my website here:

http://raymondsaumure.com/ChronicleHigherEducation_2011.pdf

Viva la révolution!

188. *Elsevier, la AAA e la rivolta in favore dell'Open Access* | *Professione Antropologo* Says:

February 2, 2012 at 7:13 pm | Reply

[...] è partito dal matematico Tim Gowers, che nel suo blog personale ha espresso il suo disappunto circa la politica editoriale di Elsevier. Gowers ha fatto notare [...]

189. *Hey Publishers! Jump On In... The Water's Fine!* | *TechieLibrarian* Says:

February 2, 2012 at 9:06 pm | Reply

[...] awareness about this issue from faulty and researchers, and to see their reaction to a recent blog post and online petition to refuse to publish or peer review in Elsevier journals until they change [...]

190. *alanc* Says:

February 2, 2012 at 9:07 pm | Reply

don't worry it will be so much better when all the upfront costs are loaded on the researcher (as much as \$6000 per article) and this of course will be easily found from the overflowing budgets even though the UK produces %8 of published papers the Chinese, Russians, Indians, South Americans, East Asians will of course all OPEN ACCESS their research and bear all the costs and the trans-national supervision of this will of course be easily achieved , through as yet unknown routes, and coconut shy politics a la Monbiot will of course yield a new dawn in the creation, authentication , and dissemination of research across the world as just like you can see things *for free* on the internet, everything should be *free* because we have mistaken the

medium for the message and just as films are free to watch on the tv so it must be that the internet will enable a new world of free information to flow freely unless you want to advertise via google whereupon the auction price for your advert = the sky's the limit, so that will be a great advantage especially if you are a google shareholder; everything should be free. Amen.

◦ *David Craven* Says:

February 3, 2012 at 12:08 am

Just a moment's thought will demonstrate why the £6000 figure is ridiculous, and this completely underscores the entire point of the blog, that "academic" publishers are gratuitously profiteering. In what possible way could it cost £6000 to publish a 300kB pdf file on a website when the submission, refereeing, editorial work, copyediting (by the author) and typesetting (by the author) is all done for free?

◦ *alanc* Says:

February 3, 2012 at 9:36 am

h

http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/nar/announce_openaccess.html#PublicCharges

OUPs subvention 10s millions to Oxford (new chem lab) OA charges v. small part obviously.

Academic editorial fees ? – great variation and difficult to find out who gets what. \$100k for some, none for others..

Libraries (I used to work in one..) & Google – not sure if the UL did a 'deal' like Oxford; ie. scan millions of pages [out of print books] to create new electronic books which will generate traffic & ,ad. revenue , marketing etc and pay....nothing(!) Try asking for just one page to be scanned for your own website,...

191. *harnad* Says:

February 3, 2012 at 12:19 am | Reply

POGO: WHY ARE RESEARCHERS YET AGAIN BOYCOTTING INSTEAD OF KEYSTROKING?

<http://openaccess.eprints.org/index.php?/archives/869-.html>

While the worldwide researcher community is again busy working itself up into an indignant lather with yet another publisher boycott threat, I am still haunted by a "keystroke koan":

"Why did 34,000 researchers sign a threat in 2000 to boycott their journals unless those journals agreed to provide open access to their articles – when the researchers themselves could provide open access (OA) to their own articles by self-archiving them on their own institutional websites?"

Not only has 100% OA been reachable through author self-archiving as of at least 1994, but over 90% of all refereed journals (published by 65% of all refereed journal

publishers) have already given their explicit green light to some form of author self-archiving — with over 60% of all journals, including Elsevier's — giving their authors the green light to self-archive their refereed final drafts ("postprint") immediately upon acceptance for publication...

So why are researchers yet again boycotting instead of keystroking, with yet another dozen years of needlessly lost research access and impact already behind us?

We have met the enemy, Pogo, and it's not Elsevier.

(And this is why keystroke mandates are necessary; just keying out boycott threats to publishers is not enough.)

192. [UniMelb Copyright blog » Copyright & academic publishing – a rising tension](#) Says:
[February 3, 2012 at 5:33 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] a mathematician also fed up with the way academic publishing works, posted an outcry in his blog Elsevier — my part in its downfall (Gowers's Weblog 21/01/12) explaining his reasons for boycotting Elsevier and calling others [...]
193. [As Journal Boycott Grows, Elsevier Defends Its Practices | QUT Business Librarians' Blog](#)
Says:
[February 3, 2012 at 6:19 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] <http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/elsevier-my-part-in-its-downfall/> [...]
194. [Boykott gegen Elsevier | KnackBockBlog](#) Says:
[February 3, 2012 at 6:41 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] ist Timothy Gowers, Mathematiker an der Universität Cambridge (UK). Auf seinem Blog erläutert er dezidiert die Gründe und den Ansporn für den Boykott [...]
195. [pablocecil](#) Says:
[February 3, 2012 at 9:59 am](#) | [Reply](#)
The bundling practice sends me back to my youth growing up behind the Iron Curtain. There was so much junk they could not sell they had to bundle it with something else. For example, if you could get a copy of Clavell's "Shogun" (which was the rage in the 80s) only bundled with a volume of deep thoughts of the Dear Leader (Ceausescu in that case).

The bundling technique practiced by Elsevier (and Springer Verlag for that matter) is a bit more devious. At the University I currently work at, the Elsevier and Springer bundles are rather large since they encompass not just Math journals, but all sciences. It is hard to de-bundle because is hard to find a consensus between sciences on which junk they can live without.

As for Elsevier's customer service experience, a few years ago I published paper in Adv. in Math that was a personal record of mine: I waited 24 months for a decision from the referees.

In any case Mr. Gowers, I fully support your manifesto.

196. [Open access, Elsevier boycott « Frank Waaldijk's math & science & philosophy blog](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 11:45 am | [Reply](#)
[...] On his blog Tim Gowers recently petitioned for a general boycott by scientists of Elsevier's scientific journals. [...]
197. [La Comunidad Científica se Indigna y se Moviliza: boicot a Elsevier « Alkhimia](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 11:58 am | [Reply](#)
[...] matemático de la Universidad de Cambridge, y medallista Fields, escribió una entrada en su blog, Elsevier -my part in its downfall, donde llama al boicot contra Elsevier y su política editorial y [...]
198. [Boicot científico a la editorial Elsevier « La biblioteca informa](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 12:29 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] campaña ha sido iniciada por el matemático Timothy Gowers quien publicó en su blog un llamamiento al boicot. Las prácticas abusivas que denuncia serían: 1.- Cobra precios abusivos por las revistas, muy [...]
199. [Serve il vostro aiuto \(mini-ciclot\) » Ocasapiens - Blog - Repubblica.it](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 1:24 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] Gran Bretagna, medaglia Field per la matematica che l'ha descritta con altri particolari sul proprio blog. E che mentre la descriveva si sentiva sempre di più come i francesi nella canzone di Enzo [...]
200. [La comunità scientifica si ribella contro lo strapotere delle case editrici | Enrica Garzilli | Il Fatto Quotidiano](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 3:51 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] dell'Università di Cambridge che nel post "Elsevier – la mia parte nella sua caduta", pubblicato sul suo blog, ha dichiarato di boicottare la Elsevier da molti anni. La petizione non è solo un attacco alla [...]
201. [ATG Hot Topics of the Week: Open Access and Boycotting Journals | Against-the-Grain.com](#)
Says:
February 3, 2012 at 4:03 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] academics (mainly non-librarians in this case) have called for a boycott of Elsevier, spurred by a Jan. 21 blog post from a Cambridge mathematician. Elsevier has responded via the Chronicle of Higher Education [...]
202. [Trolling for stats & other science journal shenanigans | eats shoots 'n leaves](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 10:02 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] Read the rest. [...]
203. [E a política de acesso aberto no Brasil? | Rainha Vermelha](#) Says:
February 3, 2012 at 10:44 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] dos artigos pelos pesquisadores – fomentaram ainda mais a rejeição à editora. Ao ponto que o matemático Timothy Gowers resolveu deixar de submeter e revisar artigos para a Elsevier, e convidou outros pesquisadores a fazer isso [...]
204. *JD* Says:
February 4, 2012 at 2:24 pm | [Reply](#)

bundling is there whether you talk about Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell or other big deal providers... It is always possible to buy on a per article basis or get personal subscriptions to specific journal. The catch is although the bundling seems a bad practice, try to evaluate how the big deal costs VS smaller deals. obviously the bigger is the university and the broader are the themes of that University, the more economical a big deal becomes... As low as a few cents per article downloaded even if some journals are never actually used by this university. The hard reality is those big deal providers represents about 60% of the market of the total scientific journal literature nowadays. they are big, and Not many others provide digital access to the almost every thing they have published since they exist. While not many open source initiative exist, for many scientists cutting these access because they are costly would prevent fast progress as you wouldn't know what as already been done nor how.

205. [The Elsevier Boycott — Does It Make Sense? « The Scholarly Kitchen](#) Says:

[February 4, 2012 at 2:27 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] call for a boycott of Elsevier is by now well-known. The boycott started January 21 with a blog post by Timothy Gowers in the UK, who objects to Elsevier's pricing (it's too high), bundling of lesser [...]

206. [#occupyelsevier? « Cultural Organology](#) Says:

[February 4, 2012 at 9:23 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] among academics in protesting the high costs of journal publishers through boycotting Elsevier. An early call came from Timothy Gowers. This was mentioned by Michael Nielsen, who gives some more context: Elsevier is the world's [...]

207. [The Cost of Knowledge | gforsythe.ca](#) Says:

[February 4, 2012 at 10:06 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] by the thousands per day, I'm getting a few hundred visits to my recent visualization of Timothy Gower's blog post and The Chronicle of Higher Ed article, Elsevier Publishing Boycott Gathers Steam Among [...]

208. [George A. Lozano](#) Says:

[February 4, 2012 at 11:17 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

As much as I agree with the movement, asking people not to publish, review or edit for Elsevier is asking people to look beyond their own immediate needs and focus in the greater good. As long as papers in Elsevier are highly cited, it is going to be a difficult proposition. Maybe we could add NOT CITING Elsevier papers. THAT would really discourage people and be a more powerful boycott.

◦ [matt19593](#) Says:

[February 4, 2012 at 11:27 pm](#)

I agree that the future is ours if we can organize it (our future).

209. [CJAB](#) Says:

[February 5, 2012 at 5:39 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Think Elsevier might give up 10% of its profits? If enough of us demanded what we're worth, they might have to

<http://conservationbytes.com/2012/01/29/knowledge-slavery/>

210. *harnad* Says:

February 5, 2012 at 6:28 am | Reply

THE GREEN ROAD TO OPEN ACCESS: A LEVERAGED TRANSITION

What the research community needs, urgently, is free online access (Open Access, OA) to its own peer-reviewed research output.

Researchers can provide that in two ways: by publishing their articles in OA journals (Gold OA) or by continuing to publish in non-OA journals and self-archiving their final peer-reviewed drafts in their own OA Institutional Repositories (Green OA).

Green OA self-archiving, once it is mandated by research institutions and funders, can reliably generate 100% Green OA.

Gold OA publishing, in contrast, (1) requires journals to convert to OA publishing (which is not in the hands of the research community) and it also (2) requires the funds to cover the Gold OA publication costs.

The institutional funds to pay for Gold OA publishing today are still tied up in paying for institutional non-OA journal subscriptions; those subscriptions are also still paying the cost of publication today.

Most journals today (and especially the top journals in each discipline) are non-OA — but most non-OA journals (> 60% of them) today (including the top journals in almost all disciplines) — are “Green,” in that they have already endorsed immediate (un-embargoed) Green OA self-archiving of their authors’ refereed final drafts in their institutional repositories.

(Elsevier may have extortionately high subscription prices and it certainly lobbies and conspires against Green OA self-archiving mandates —

<http://openaccess.eprints.org/index.php?/archives/867-.html> — but, despite a good deal of double-talk, which should be completely ignored as incoherent and having no legal force whatsoever —

<http://openaccess.eprints.org/index.php?/archives/822-.html> — Elsevier also happens to be Green on immediate Green OA self-archiving by its authors!)

With 100% Green OA, the research community’s access and impact problems are already solved. If and when 100% Green OA should cause significant cancellation pressure (no one knows whether or when that will happen, because OA Green grows anarchically, article by article, not journal by journal) then the cancellation pressure will cause cost-cutting, downsizing and eventually a leveraged transition to OA (Gold) publishing on the part of journals.

As subscription revenues shrink, institutional windfall savings from cancellations grow.

If and when journal subscriptions become unsustainable, per-article publishing costs will be low enough, and institutional savings will be high enough to cover them, because publishing will have downsized to just peer-review service provision alone,

offloading text-generation onto authors and access-provision and archiving onto the global network of OA Institutional Repositories.

Green OA will have leveraged a transition to Gold OA.

So why are we just boycotting rather than keystroking?

This is why Green OA mandates from all universities and research funders are what's urgently needed.

If researchers had been expressing their indignation by keystroking instead of just boycotting, we'd have had 100% OA long ago, without the need of mandates.

So if you want to follow Tim Gowers's example, don't just boycott: self-archive — <http://arxiv.org/find/all/1/au:+Gowers/0/1/0/all/0/1>

—

Harnad, S. (2007) The Green Road to Open Access: A Leveraged Transition. In: The Culture of Periodicals from the Perspective of the Electronic Age, pp. 99-105, L'Harmattan. <http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/15753/>

211. [As Journal Boycott Grows, Elsevier Defends Its Practices | Hot Searches Today](#) Says: [February 5, 2012 at 12:24 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] complaints surfaced on January 21 in a blog post by Timothy Gowers, a prominent mathematician at the University of Cambridge who has won the Fields [...]
212. [Doug Arnold](#) Says: [February 5, 2012 at 8:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
I have posted an [article at the IMU journals blog](#) supplementing the reasons Tim gave for an Elsevier boycott. It focuses on their many violations of ethical and quality publishing practices, some not yet well-known.
213. [Els matemàtics diuen prou! | Bloc de la Biblioteca de Matemàtiques](#) Says: [February 5, 2012 at 11:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] de Cambridge i medalla Fields el 1998, va escriure el dia 21 de gener un apunt al seu bloc —Elsevier — my part in its downfall—, en què criticava durament les pràctiques d'Elsevier, un dels editors més importants en [...]
214. [Elsevier Boycott Gains Steam | AgroEcoPeople](#) Says: [February 6, 2012 at 1:12 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] am thus extremely happy to learn from Michael Nielsen that Tim Gowers is organizing a general boycott of Elsevier, asking people to pledge not to contribute to its journals, referee for them, or do editorial work [...]
215. [Elsevier : la première bataille | L'alambic numérique](#) Says: [February 6, 2012 at 6:34 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] dans un billet qui méritera de rester dans les annales de l'épopée scientifique moderne : Elsevier, mon rôle dans sa chute. Simple comme une confession, implacable

comme une démonstration, ce billet a enclenché le [...]

216. *La primavera dei matematici « Oggi Scienza Says:*

February 6, 2012 at 8:49 am | Reply

[...] Gowers dell'università di Cambridge. che l'ha descritta con altri particolari sul proprio blog: Mi vien in mente che potrebbe essere d'aiuto se ci fosse un sito da qualche parte, dove i [...]

217. *A primavera acadêmica: O livre acesso ao conhecimento científico | | SocialMenteSocialMente*
Says:

February 6, 2012 at 10:12 am | Reply

[...] no texto do Atila, aqui no scienceblogs. Matérias sobre este assunto podem ser lidas aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui e [...]

218. *A sleeping giant: Vision scientists wake up, drink some coffee and start boycotting Elsevier « Site unseen* Says:

February 6, 2012 at 12:08 pm | Reply

[...] comment in the Guardian, and Fields-medal-winning Mathematician, Timothy Gower wrote a widely-read call for a boycott of peer-review against Elsevier, which in turn gave rise to an online [...]

219. *A primavera acadêmica: O livre acesso ao conhecimento científico | Blog de Astronomia do astroPT* Says:

February 6, 2012 at 12:13 pm | Reply

[...] no texto do Atila, aqui no scienceblogs*. Matérias sobre este assunto podem ser lidas aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui, aqui e aqui.*Originalmente publicado no blog SocialMente. [...]

220. *Richard Elwes – Let it be known that...* Says:

February 6, 2012 at 2:18 pm | Reply

[...] don't think I need say any more, since the issues have been thoroughly discussed [...]

221. *Nick Gill* Says:

February 6, 2012 at 9:58 pm | Reply

Great stuff Tim. Elsevier's behaviour is shocking. I also refuse to have anything to do with them (although my decision probably won't make as many waves as yours .

I wrote an article on this subject a while ago which might interest some of your readers:

<http://infochangeindia.org/technology/features/knowledge-for-all.html>

It's also worth noting that Elsevier have been hurt before by the collective actions of mathematicians (and others). They suffered a boycott for their connection to the arms trade (one of their branches organised a bunch of arms fairs). The boycott was successful – they cut off the offending branch. More details can be found here:

<http://www.ams.org/notices/200708/tx070800958p.pdf>

I hope that provides some more encouragement for other mathematicians to take your lead.

22. [Library News » Blog Archive » Copyright in the media](#): Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 3:00 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Elsevier — my part in its downfall (Gowers's Weblog 21/01/12) A Mathematician's blog explains his reasons for boycotting Elsevier and calling others to join him. Others have joined in the boycott which is resulting in a rising tension – check out the Copyright Office blog to read more about the discussion and sequence of events. Posted by abovell Filed in Copyright No Comments » [...]

23. [La primavera dei matematici](#) | [Svoogle News](#) Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 3:36 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Gowers dell'università di Cambridge. che l'ha descritta con altri particolari sul proprio blog: Mi vien in mente che potrebbe essere d'aiuto se ci fosse un sito da qualche parte, dove i [...]

24. [Bernie](#) Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 9:50 am](#) | [Reply](#)

I find that access to a wide range of journals is very useful, nay essential, to the development of new ideas. New concepts can be gathered from different fields and be reinterpreted. An eclectic approach may be an anathema to mathematicians and physicists but don't assume that everyone works in this way.

Better still direct your energies at the disgusting practice of pumping up the impact factor of journals that some publishers do. Yes, we're very pleased to publish in some journals with high impact factor but they are mostly uninformative tabloids with high visibility. I give me Elsevier's (amongst others) low impact factors, I can work with those, even though it does my career no good.

25. [On Elsevier and the academic project](#) | [Richard Hall's Space](#) Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 11:49 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Cambridge Mathematician, Tim Gower, has highlighted a campaign against the publisher Reed Elsevier for the tripartite crimes of: high [...]

26. [You Get What You Pay For — JuriScientia](#) Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 3:00 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] research journals published by the commercial publisher Elsevier. A copy of his post can be read here. The post has prompted more than 2700 researchers to sign an online pledge to boycott Elsevier [...]

27. [ben-hqet](#) Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 3:21 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

From journalprices.com you will find out that Springer, Emerald, Wiley, Sage, American Chemical Society, Taylor & Francis, Oxford University Press, and your university's (TIMOTHY GOWER'S) Cambridge University Press do bundling contracts, in addition to Elsevier. I did not check the pricing for all of them, but I did for Oxford and Cambridge physics and they come out looking no better than Elsevier.

So do you propose boycotting them all?

- *gowers* Says:

February 7, 2012 at 3:44 pm

Doron Zeilberger does. (See his latest opinion.) However, it is not realistic to expect significant numbers of people to do that, and there is also the point (contested by Zeilberger but upheld by many others) that the profits from journals published by university presses and learned societies are used to the benefit of academia rather than to line the pockets of shareholders.

I see the boycott as a way of provoking mathematicians (and ideally all scientists, but my personal focus is mathematicians) to make the effort necessary to adapt our systems for evaluating each other until we are no longer at the mercy of the big commercial publishers. If this happens, its effects will be felt not just by Elsevier.

- *wch* Says:

February 7, 2012 at 7:02 pm

I do not read this reply as at all responsive to the point being made by ben-hqet. Cambridge University Press is a major international publisher controlling hundreds of journals, many of dubious quality. Far from being a friend of academics, it has a history of aggressive attacks on academics who it views tread on its "ownership rights." One example, described in a publisher's weekly article some time ago

(<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news> is the Cambridge University Press/Oxford University Press lawsuit against Georgia Tech librarians who put classroom materials on line under standard fair use policies. The suit is exceedingly aggressive in targeting both the university and the individual academics involved. Obviously the ONLY purpose of the suit is to protect the CUP revenue stream from materials they did not create (but were funded largely by the public through research grants).

So the question is: Why did you call for a boycott of Elsevier when by any reasonable measure, your own university press is leading efforts to suppress reasonable on-line use of academic materials? Why look for a target overseas, when you have a far more aggressive ownership-rights publisher on your doorstep?

Disclosure: As an academic I help four publishers, including Elsevier, who I regard highly because of their use of academics as editors, not clerks. All fees from my editorial work are donated to university scholarship funds.

- *FelixKlein* Says:

February 7, 2012 at 7:55 pm

Dear wch,

There are several questions that need to be addressed.

- 1) Is Elsevier's behavior reasonable?
- 2) Is Elsevier unique in its behavior?
- 3) Should we as a community target all companies behaving unreasonably?

Most people posting here seem to agree that the answers to questions 1) and 2) are No and No. The most controversial is question 3).

Your critique of Tim Gowers' post answers 2) in the negative, from which you conclude that the only possible answer to 3) is yes, or else we look like hypocrites.

First, your critique has not addressed question 1). You have not convinced me that Elsevier's behavior is reasonable. From my point of view as a mathematician I see Elsevier making profits by relying on a substantial amount of highly qualified unpaid labor (writers, referees, and editors). While I do not expect to be financially rewarded for any of these jobs, I think that Elsevier could share some of this 36% profit with the scientific community in the form of more affordable subscriptions. (I work at a financially secure university, yet we have to struggle every year with the library budget.)

As for question 3) in an ideal world one should treat equally all the culprits. However in the real world, in this particular case, this is not feasible.

To my mind the main goal of this initiative is changing the publishers behavior, and in the process subjecting the scientific community to the least amount of harm possible.

That is why targeting all companies does not make practical sense. That is why researchers at the beginning of their careers need to feel guilty for not being able to participate in this boycott.

It takes a bit of patience. After two-three years of cold-shoulder treatment the impact factor of Elsevier journals will drop and then even young researchers will find other publishers more attractive. (Publishers and university administrators are very sensitive to the impact factor.)

On the other hand, I am sure that the officials at Springer, Cambridge University Press etc are following this development closely, and are keeping a low profile. This is not the kind of publicity they seek. And they are worried.

- *ex-librarian* Says:

February 8, 2012 at 4:58 pm

The shareholders of Reed Elsevier UK plc include the USS National Univ. pension scheme (USS also invests in BAE systems) , most UK insurers, institutions, and irrelevant individuals, like me.

Although JISC estimates cost savings through open-access, running JISC itself costs...?

I remember agonizing over photocopying textbooks, now pirate digital copies are flagged up for consumption and re-distribution almost as trophies of honour..

(How mathematicians organize their research output is their concern, I wish them every success)

228. *walkerjian* Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 3:39 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Careful – Suppose the boycott works and publicly funded research is no longer exploited by leeches such as Elsevier etc (yay!). Suppose the papers are moved onto ‘open access’ servers. What then? Open access to whom? The ‘right kind’ of people from the country of origin of the research; the tax payers of which funded the research. Will the paywall be moved to national borders, perhaps the border routers of the US? See the trap, SOPA and PIPA being the herrings currently being stuffed up our nostrils while the foxy content mafias are moving to the unassailable heights of (closed) open-ness. Open publications perhaps hosted on public sites in the originator countries should perhaps be compelled to concentrate such open journals into UN sanctioned servers... Lest the curtains fall to the detriment of us all...

on another tack, I would dearly love to see an object model and api for all fields of endeavour – new works inheriting and reusing rather than merely citing – look at SiCM for an example... just saying...

229. *Occupy Elsevier? « Profncampbell's Blog* Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 6:44 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] don't see any argument at all against refusing to submit papers to Elsevier journals," Gowers wrote. "So I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but [...]"

230. *UCLA Faculty Sign Elsevier Pledge « UCLA Science and Engineering Library Blog* Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 6:55 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] pledge grew out of a blog post by Timothy Gowers, a Fields Medal-winning mathematician at the University of Cambridge. In that post, he stated that [...]"

231. *FelixKlein* Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 7:59 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Correction to my previous post:

The phrase

That is why researchers at the beginning of their careers need to feel guilty for not being able to participate in this boycott.

should read

That is why researchers at the beginning of their careers need NOT feel guilty for not being able to participate in this boycott.

232. *Occupy Elsevier? | Books & Publishing News* Says:

[February 7, 2012 at 8:00 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] don't see any argument at all against refusing to submit papers to Elsevier journals," Gowers wrote. "So I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but [...]"

233. *The future of academic publishing « theoretical ecology* Says:
[February 7, 2012 at 11:03 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] Economist used a series of blog posts (see here and the following posts) by Cambridge mathematician Timothy Gowers as a reason to ask once more [...]

234. *E internet se defiende...* Says:
[February 7, 2012 at 11:33 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] sabotaje contra la editorial Elsevier publicando esta iniciativa en su blog, con el artículo Elsevier — my part in its downfall esta iniciativa está teniendo un buen acogimiento de hecho se está gestionando todo [...]

235. *YouKnowBestOfAll* Says:
[February 8, 2012 at 12:47 am](#) | [Reply](#)
Good one, Timothy! IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE!

For Universal and Free Access to All Public Information
Opinion

I believe that everyone has experienced different levels of frustration when one is asked to pay USD 30.00 up to 60.00 (or even more) just to see an article (or even a letter to the editor) which, during the reading, the reader may realise is of little or even no use at all for him/her.

Some people may say that this is solely a problem of the reader as s/he has decided, after reading the Abstract, that the material would worth paying for it. Indeed, such practice is so wide-spread that it is considered to be the norm.

However, apart from the ethical issues, there are legal problems related to this.

First, in many cases the reader has little or even no information in regard to what actually one is going to purchase. At best one can get only a vague idea from the Abstract, if such exists. Often a small Extract (the first 100 or so words) is offered, and there are numerous cases when there is nothing – neither abstract nor extract, so the reader should make decision based only on the title and authors' names. This is like "buying a cat in a sack" – one never knows what s/he will get, and in many cases it is not even clear if the "thing" in the sack is a "cat" or may be something else. In some civilized countries trade authorities would consider such practice as "misleading and deceptive conduct", which incurs hefty fines.

Second, in most cases the journal asks the authors to assign all rights in the work to the journal. However, in many cases the authors actually don't have such right – to assign copyrights – since the copyrights do not belong to them. This is so, because in most cases the work (research, study, etc.) has been funded predominantly (or even entirely) with public money. In most jurisdictions around the world it is explicitly stated that all rights in such works belong not to the creator, but to the funding body, unless specified otherwise. By assigning copyrights of the work to the journal authors "assign" something which is not theirs, but in fact belongs to the public. Therefore, the validity of such assigning is highly questionable, if legal at all.

In conclusion, with the exception of the open access journals, current practice of paid access to articles de facto restricts the dissemination of public information, which per se is not in the public interest. Therefore, the access to any work funded entirely or even in part by the public, no matter in what form, should be universal and free of charge for personal use from the public.

YouKnowBestOfAll that action is needed for a change which is long overdue!

236. *An open revolution* « *QuantumBlah* Says:

February 8, 2012 at 11:46 am | Reply

[...] the open, using online tools to share unfinished ideas and allow massive collaboration, but also an open revolt against the traditional model of publishing those finished ideas, in particular against the [...]

237. *El costo del conocimiento: boicot a Elsevier* | *SeDiCI* | *Blog* Says:

February 8, 2012 at 12:18 pm | Reply

[...] 21 de enero, el matemático de la Universidad de Cambridge, Timothy Gowers, publicó en su blog una encendida protesta contra las prácticas monopólicas y abusivas de la mayor editorial académica del mundo, Elsevier. [...]

238. *Luis Herrera* Says:

February 8, 2012 at 2:48 pm | Reply

Some years ago (1997, I think) I listened to a speech by Michael Keller (Stanford University Libraries) in which he outlined what I thought was a strategic view of scientific publishing for Stanford. He basically said that he'd found that monopolies in scientific publishing ended up damaging science improvement since institutions paid for research and infrastructure to produce papers and later had to pay again to have the journals which contained the papers (research) that had already been paid for. It did not look smart to pay twice for the same thing. Stanford University Libraries had started with HighwirePress around 1995. Open Access journals are an answer to the monopolic business practices.

◦ *FelixKlein* Says:

February 8, 2012 at 3:00 pm

I have my hesitations about Open Access Journals for the following reasons.

1. The cost of publishing can be prohibitive (in the thousands).
2. The inherent conflict of interest built in these journals: they thrive only by accepting many papers, whence the danger of lowering quality standards. (I've seen this happening in parts of Asia.)

For me a good example of alternative to traditional publishing is the journal *Geometry & Topology*

<http://www.msp.warwick.ac.uk/gt/about/journal/about.html>

that was born as an initial alternative to troubled "Topology".

Perhaps a consortium of universities throughout the world will decide that they can provide a cheaper alternative to traditional and initiatives like Geometry & Topology will spring in other branches of mathematics. Such an initiative will succeed only the leaders in the respective fields get involved and lend their reputation to such start-ups.

239. *A statement on the cost of knowledge declaration « What's new* Says:
February 8, 2012 at 6:38 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] non-cooperation with Reed Elsevier in protest of their research publishing practices, inspired by this blog post of Tim Gowers. Awareness of the protest has certainly grown in these two weeks; the number of signatories is [...]
240. *James Brew* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 12:08 am | [Reply](#)
Thanks for the great article. Well worth theread
241. *Academic Spring: scientific publisher under fire | The Anthropocene Journal* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 8:29 am | [Reply](#)
[...] this situation*, not all are content with the status quo. In late January, Cambridge mathematician Timothy Gowers blogged about his own long-running boycott of Elsevier. The blog was picked up by others leading to [...]
242. *Boycotting Elsevier | hyperbole* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 2:23 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] case you haven't heard, this was set up in response to a blog post of Tim Gowers proposing such a site, and has gained several thousand signatories in the first few weeks. See also [...]
243. *Anonymous* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 5:00 pm | [Reply](#)
Finally. Finally, this discussion is starting to reach beyond select faculty in the know, beyond specific disciplines. It is the faculty, the authors of scholarship, who hold the keys and who will effect change in scholarly publishing and end predatory practices by Elsevier, Springer, Fabrizio Serra, and an increasing number of publishers, including in the Humanities and Social Sciences. No, unfortunately, the problem is not limited to Elsevier:
<http://www.claudiogiunta.it/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/quanto-ci-costa-leditoria-e>
— other Italian, German and Dutch publishers in the Humanities and Social Sciences could be named here. All are following Elsevier's basic model.
244. *Elsevier's practices, politics spur scientists' boycott | Aggie Research* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 8:56 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] surge appears to have been generated by the high-profile British mathematician Timothy Gowers. His original blog post last month has generated at least 315 responses and inspired the creation of The Cost of Knowledge [...]
245. *Academics are starting to boycott Elsevier, a big publisher of journals « difisin* Says:
February 9, 2012 at 10:51 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] <http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/elsevier-my-part-in-its-downfall/> [...]

246. [*Elsevier boycott gathers pace* | *newsworlddigest.com*](#) Says:
[February 10, 2012 at 6:18 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] the University of Cambridge, UK, and a winner of the Fields medal, mathematics' highest honour, declared his boycott in a blog post on 21 January. He cited Elsevier's high prices; the practice of bundling journals, [...]
247. [*Four for Friday \(14\)* | *Shafaly Yogendra*](#) Says:
[February 10, 2012 at 7:05 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] academic publishing is ripe for disruption: a Cambridge mathematician makes the case against publishing giant Elsevier. The Economist weighs [...]
248. [*Un appello per boicottare gli editori troppo cari* | *agora-vox.bluhost.info*](#) Says:
[February 10, 2012 at 9:27 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] Gowers dell'università di Cambridge che l'ha descritta con altri particolari sul proprio blog: "Mi vien in mente che potrebbe essere d'aiuto se ci fosse un sito da qualche parte, [...]"
249. [*Gowers on Elsevier* | *CUNYMath Blog*](#) Says:
[February 10, 2012 at 5:11 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] medalist and Polymath founder Timothy Gowers has some bellicose thoughts on the state of the journal [...]
250. [*GOOD SCIENCE\(tm\): Is the Elsevier Boycott well-founded and rational?* | *AgroEcoPeople*](#) Says:
[February 10, 2012 at 11:21 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] the extended letter by 34 mathematicians explaining the boycott from their point of view (as the boycott was started by mathematician Timothy Gowers) [...]
251. [*About the Elsevier Controversy and Essential Science* | *Emerging Technologies Librarian*](#) Says:
[February 11, 2012 at 4:00 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] "So I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but I am saying so publicly." Tim Gowers, mathematician. Elsevier — my part in its downfall: <http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01...> [...]
252. [*Bruce Blackadar*](#) Says:
[February 11, 2012 at 8:21 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
There has been some disagreement about whether to specifically target Elsevier with a boycott when other publishers are apparently at least nearly as bad. The question is partially what we hope to accomplish: is it to improve reprehensible business practices on the part of one or more publishers, or to take commercial publishers out of the loop entirely?

If it is the first, then targeting one business is a common tactic long used by social movements, sometimes to great effect, e.g. in the U.S. civil rights movement. If successful, other similar businesses can then be pressured to follow suit or face similarly targeted boycotts.

Even if it is the second, targeting Elsevier seems like a good first step. If we succeed in showing we don't need Elsevier, it would be a lot easier to show we don't need the others either.

It is always good to have lofty ambitions, but also to have some practical goals along the way. We mathematicians often tend to be too utopian. Boycotting Elsevier seems to me to be a step in the right direction which has some realistic prospects for success.

◦ *Manas Patra* Says:

February 11, 2012 at 10:56 pm

I agree with Bruce that after venting our disontenet and dissatisfaction with the state of academic publishing in general and Elsevier in particular maybe we should start to plan some constructive action.

If we are fairly agreed on what we dont want we must move on to what we do want. I take it as given that we all want good quality peer reviewed research work as widely accessible as possible. This requires planning and organization at a fairly large scale. My first suggestion is that we invite ideas for viable models. We have to involve people in the publishing business. So why not think of an international consortium of small publishers. I have no pretensions to knowledge about business and organizational models. But I am sure our colleagues in economics and management schools will have ideas. The point is we could really try to come up with something practical and different.

253. *solinpavel* Says:

February 12, 2012 at 5:35 am | [Reply](#)

Hello,

I am a computational scientist, so I would like to present an analogy between what the Journals do (not only Elsevier), and what commercial companies do in the area of computer modeling. They take the knowledge created in academia, use the fact that academia is incapable of making their products accessible and usable, and they do it for us. As a result, obsolete numerical methods that were developed in academia years ago cost \$20 – \$40K per software license. And they are sold back to universities. I deeply disagree with this model. The way to fight it is to make our findings more easily and more widely accessible. Then no intermediary should be needed. Let us go back to the Journals for a moment. I am doing some editorial work. The Journal is always doing the distribution and sales, but they cannot review papers. People in academia do it for free, probably because they were born as servants. Taking into account that paper printing and distribution of hard copies is history, one might infer that the role of Journals will be vanishing. However, I am forced to publish in high-impact journals (such as Elsevier). I have to publish there, or my work does not count. Hopefully when you read this, your situation is different. So my question is — what if people in academia received credit from their superiors not only for publishing papers, but also for reviewing papers and helping manage non-profit online journals managed by academia? Would the traditional Journals be still needed?

254. *Math 2.0 and Peer Review 2.0, or A revolution in math and science publishing just around the corner?* « *Successful Researcher* Says:

February 12, 2012 at 6:49 am | [Reply](#)

[...] all began with the blog post Elsevier — my part in its downfall by the Fields medalist Timothy Gowers which has caused quite a stir and culminated in the creation [...]

255. [*A boycott of Elsevier*](#) Says:

[February 12, 2012 at 4:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Elsevier, a publisher of many of the world's top academic journals, is doing business. Citing a blog post by Tim Gowers, The Register says that the high cost of subscriptions and the company's [...]

256. [*A statement on the cost of knowledge declaration*](#) | [t1u](#) Says:

[February 12, 2012 at 7:48 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] non-cooperation with Reed Elsevier in protest of their research publishing practices, inspired by this blog post of Tim Gowers. Awareness of the protest has certainly grown in these two weeks; the number of signatories [...]

257. [*Boicote a Elsevier, Higgs e Moriond*](#) « [*Ars Physica*](#) Says:

[February 12, 2012 at 10:28 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] na blogosfera científica tem sido o boicote à editora Elsevier. Ele foi iniciado pelo matemático Tim Gowers e posteriormente refinado numa declaração mais detalhada com 34 iminentes matemáticos como [...]

258. [*Web freedoms fuel 'academic spring' journal protest*](#) | [*Journal of Technology and Economic Development*](#) | [*Future Technology*](#) | [*Green Technology*](#) | [*Military Technology*](#) | [*Business*](#) | [*Trading*](#) | [*Finance*](#) | [*Computer*](#) | [*Robots*](#) | [*Entertainment*](#) | [*Games*](#) | [*GPS*](#) Says:

[February 13, 2012 at 5:37 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] protest began last month when Timothy Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, wrote a blog post objecting to what he called Elsevier's "very high" prices and its practice of [...]

259. [*Web freedoms fuel 'academic spring' journal protest*](#) | Says:

[February 13, 2012 at 5:46 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] protest began last month when Timothy Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, wrote a blog post objecting to what he called Elsevier's "very high" prices and its practice of [...]

260. [*February 2012*](#) Says:

[February 13, 2012 at 6:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] restrict access to work that should be much more easily available. He asked for a boycott in a blog post on January 21, and as of Monday evening, on the boycott's Web site The Cost of Knowledge, nearly [...]

261. [*techtings*](#)» [*Web freedoms fuel 'academic spring' journal protest*](#) Says:

[February 14, 2012 at 12:16 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] protest began last month when Timothy Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, wrote a blog post objecting to what he called Elsevier's "very high" prices and its practice of [...]

262. [Researchers Boycott Elsevier Journal Publisher | Finance Easy](#) Says:
February 14, 2012 at 6:46 am | Reply
[...] protest grew out of a provocative blog post by the mathematician Timothy Gowers of Cambridge University, who announced on Jan. 21 that he would [...]
263. [5,000 profs join boycott of Elsevier publications in international "academic spring" | Ebooks on Crack](#) Says:
February 14, 2012 at 7:41 am | Reply
[...] The protest began last month when Timothy Gowers, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, wrote a blog post objecting to what he called Elsevier's "very high" prices and its practice of "bundling" [...]
264. [情報の値段：論文誌出版社を学者がボイコット\(3\) - 増田まとめ](#) Says:
February 14, 2012 at 9:12 am | Reply
[...] 長年に渡ってエルゼビア社の論文誌をボイコットしている理由について、ブログに書いた。 [...]
265. [The Breakfast Meeting: Apple Begins Inspections and Lin Scores for MSG - NYTimes.com](#) Says:
February 14, 2012 at 1:36 pm | Reply
[...] boycott of the scientific publisher Elsevier, which stemmed from a provocative blog post by a Cambridge University mathematician last month decrying the prohibitive cost of academic [...]
266. [The Breakfast Meeting: Apple Begins Inspections and Lin Scores for MSG Rhonn Mitchell Rhonn Lighton Mitchell](#) Says:
February 14, 2012 at 1:41 pm | Reply
[...] boycott of the scientific publisher Elsevier, which stemmed from a provocative blog post by a Cambridge University mathematician last month decrying the prohibitive cost of academic [...]
267. [Dave](#) Says:
February 15, 2012 at 7:06 am | Reply
Buy a copy of Indesign, corral a group of mathematicians to act as your editorial board, edit the submitted papers, import the papers into Indesign, add a few graphics and a nice cover design, and produce a pdf that can be freely distributed to subscribing institutions. They can print their own hard copy. Post the pdf online for all to download. Get server space from your institution, or rent it for \$10/month from your favorite webhost.
268. [El coste del conocimiento « Clionauta: Blog de Historia](#) Says:
February 15, 2012 at 8:21 am | Reply
[...] de acceso a los trabajos deberían cambiar. Lo hizo en una entrada de su blog el pasado 21 de enero, y desde entonces su web The Cost of Knowledge no ha dejado de recibir adhesiones (cuando escribo [...])
269. [An Elsevier Boycott | Healthcare](#) Says:
February 15, 2012 at 9:01 am | Reply

[...] been a movement afoot to boycott Elsevier journals. It's started over in the mathematics community, led by Timothy Gowers, a serious mathematician indeed. The [...]

270. *walkerjian* Says:

[February 15, 2012 at 12:05 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

any body else get one of these in their mail:

<http://hitechspace.net/gearth2012>

there's an ip address in the original email that harks from the Netherlands.

Maybe I am too paranoid

271. *Wednesday: Geeks vs Rentiers « The Confluence* Says:

[February 15, 2012 at 4:33 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] the University of Cambridge, UK, and a winner of the Fields medal, mathematics' highest honour, declared his boycott in a blog post on 21 January. He cited Elsevier's high prices; the practice of bundling [...]

272. *Media Decoder Blog: The Breakfast Meeting: Apple Begins Inspections and Lin Scores for MSG | Liberty Reporter* Says:

[February 15, 2012 at 4:51 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] boycott of a systematic publisher Elsevier, that stemmed from a provocative blog post by a Cambridge University mathematician final month decrying a restricted cost of educational [...]

273. *Elsevier à la BnF : histoire d'un "big deal" | Bibliothèques en Lutte ! (FSU)* Says:

[February 15, 2012 at 6:50 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] Le mouvement de boycott de l'éditeur Elsevier s'amplifie, plus de 6000 chercheurs ont signé la pétition du site Cost of knowledge initiée à la suite d'un article du mathématicien Tim Gowers. [...]

274. *Martin Goldberg* Says:

[February 15, 2012 at 8:55 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I would suggest that, if the 3 Fields winners and other eminent mathematicians founded a new peer-reviewed journal, possibly getting university funding to hire a few editorial staff, it would almost immediately have a huge impact factor rating. (I have not published in a refereed journal since 1985, but I am not an academic).

275. *i2ads newsletter | Notícias | Elsevier Publishing Boycott Gathers Steam Among Academics* Says:

[February 16, 2012 at 12:17 am](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] restrict access to work that should be much more easily available. He asked for a boycott in a blog post on January 21, and as of Monday evening, on the boycott's Web site The Cost of Knowledge, nearly [...]

276. *LibraryBuzz » WNYC's On The Media Takes On Academic Publishing* Says:

[February 18, 2012 at 12:45 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] the current state of academic publishing and the recent boycott of Elsevier, initially inspired by this blog post, and discussed further [...]

277. *The Cost of Knowledge* | *Academic Spring* Says:

February 19, 2012 at 12:14 am | Reply

[...] for researchers to publicly boycott Elsevier. It was built as a response to Tim Gower's call to action, in which he states: I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals [...]

278. *Fer* Says:

February 19, 2012 at 3:57 pm | Reply

Objective of ideal researcher: increasing and spreading human knowledge.

Objective of ideal private publisher: making money.

Once this is clear, why are some people surprised of the publisher's attitudes? Do we want knowledge to be freely spread, a group of people interested in this should manage the scientific communications, not a private institution.

279. *I am not a radical, but I am boycotting Elsevier* | *Geometry Bulletin Board* Says:

February 19, 2012 at 7:40 pm | Reply

[...] signed the Elsevier boycott declaration at the costofknowledge site inspired by Tim Gowers' blog post on the many problems with Elsevier's [...]

280. *Elsevier Econ : David Jinkins Webpage* Says:

February 19, 2012 at 9:28 pm | Reply

[...] of academic journal holding company Elsevier, initiated by no less than Fields Medal recipient Timothy Gowers. I had never thought deeply about the way journals work, but it is a bit ridiculous. Academics pay [...]

281. *Édition scientifique : la parabole des fermiers. « Droits d'auteur* Says:

February 20, 2012 at 9:36 am | Reply

[...] à Cambridge, lauréat de la médaille Fields, allume la mèche avec un billet de blog : « Elsevier — my part in its downfall ». Le 23, il lance le projet The Cost of Knowledge : les universitaires du monde entiers [...]

282. *Anonymous* Says:

February 21, 2012 at 2:15 am | Reply

As a graduate student in the humanities, I fully support this.

283. *"Won't publish, won't referee, won't do editorial work": Boicot de investigadores a Elsevier STM Journals. « InVito* Says:

February 21, 2012 at 9:21 am | Reply

[...] pura y estadística matemática de la Universidad de Cambridge publica en su blog un post titulado Elsevier- my part in its downfall, en el que promueve un boicot a Elsevier STM Journals por lo que considera prácticas abusivas de [...]

284. *EIF Dinner Debate: Open Data* Says:

February 21, 2012 at 9:27 am | Reply

[...] TimothyGower'sblog a couple of days before the dinner sparked a debate in the press including thisarticleintheEconomist on the boycott of research publications by academics. At time of writing the blog had been retweeted over 700 times, and shared on Facebook over 500 times. Filed Under: EDITORIALS, LATEST POSTS [...]

285. *Anthony Quas* Says:

February 22, 2012 at 12:56 am | [Reply](#)

I should add that the postscript applies not only to non-British readers, but also to ignorant British readers such as myself.

286. *EIF Dinner Debate: Open Data* Says:

February 22, 2012 at 3:41 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] TimothyGower'sblog a couple of days before the dinner sparked a debate in the press including thisarticleintheEconomist on the boycott of research publications by academics. At time of writing the blog had been retweeted over 700 times, and shared on Facebook over 500 times. [...]

287. *Why do we need academic journals in the first place? — Tech News and Analysis* Says:

February 22, 2012 at 6:04 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] boycott of Elsevier (please see disclosure below) seems to have become the flashpoint for many in the academic publishing world, and much like the recent grassroots protest against supporters of proposed anti-piracy bills SOPA [...]

288. *Stimmen zum Elsevier-Boycott | wisspub.net* Says:

February 23, 2012 at 6:49 am | [Reply](#)

[...] durch einen Blogbeitrag von Fields-Medaille-Träger Tim Gowers startete der Mathematik-Doktorand Tyler Neylon am 23. Januar [...]

289. *journeau* Says:

February 23, 2012 at 6:49 pm | [Reply](#)

There is still another solution, which goes in the direction mentioned by several (to begin with gowers but the remarks of skaperen, adph, etc..) of new concepts, practices and methods for scientific publishing, using the Internet: with a team of researchers from diverse domains we are testing a 'Discinnet process', see; <http://www.discinnet.org>, as a radical new way for researchers to make their results known.

It is true that this mostly applies to experimental sciences, but comes from the fact that scientific publishing is currently expensive for libraries not only when publishers have high margins but because everybody, including open access solutions, has too high costs.

Therefore reducing costs should benefit everyone, including publishers themselves.

Now one reason why costs are so high is that readership is too limited because people, from students to engineers, journalists, experts and researchers in their own field themselves, have no more time to read too many papers (1.6 million per year) which are more and more specialized.

There is a trend towards shorter papers and more affordable solutions though preprints (for instance thanks to ArXiv in physics) but we have at Discinnet pushed the logic, with a few research communities, to its extreme and switched to a radical shift into synthesizing a paper into one point (vector) in a hypercube of validating measurement units and categories.

How does this cope with the cost of publishing / cost of knowledge? This makes a research community appear as a cluster of points, each point corresponding to a published or targeted paper, hence to a team and to their discriminating results. What this means is that not only researchers but also students, engineers, research funders, etc.. can snapshot at a glance provisional to definite results/ papers.

This will facilitate reading by widened communities, which is a first solution to decrease costs by making a result (or paper) practically readable by many more potential readers, hence decrease the cost per reader. Another impact is that a potential stakeholder may immediately see when to click and fully read the paper corresponding to such point, and then for instance order the article on-line to the publisher : this obviously does not go with bundles but many publishers, whether open access or not, might enlarge their readership and therefore decrease their unit price.

There are many other arguments and obviously also issues going beyond, yet this is not the place to get to a full white paper, but practical solutions have to come with cost-cutting, hence basically efficient (industrial) processes for a benefit to be felt about the 'cost of knowledge' real issue.

Keeping open to discuss a solution such as Discinnet's.

- Ian Walker Says:

February 23, 2012 at 10:37 pm

An obvious solution is for the libraries themselves to be held accountable for budgets by the people who fund them. As in the publicis the shareholder and the librarians and universities are tasked with getting best value for them – or else. This might entail the libraries themselves hosting the servers – treating the publications like 'big data' in a distributed sense – Then onto the issue of the current publish or perish deluge of papers. There needs to be an 'API' – a class library as it were of accepted wisdom. You instantiate new objects of knowledge by inheriting from the conventional wisdom, or even overriding! Rarely will truly new knowledge come along and this would undoubtedly be met with great joy! Ultimately the job of citing a reference becomes much more concrete, and is directly traceable all the way back to the bare metal of the knowledge class library. And yes I know that this is straining the analogy to OOP past the limit, but I think it best gets what I am trying to convey... Some papers may be reduced to just a few lines of new data... Many may not do anything new at all, and may not 'pivot' the standard ontologies in new ways – so they perish! Wolframs' CDF is one example of how this can be done, and so is SICM...

It should be possible to run a query over the 'standard model' and have an up to the second 'paper' written for you presentable at various levels of detail – from

precis to full blown survey, with computation built in, pivotable, in next to no time...

The trick is then (as usual TANSTAAFL) to ask the right questions

290. *Dr Rosie Redfield, her pink hair, and challenging NASA* | Hayley Dunning Says:
February 23, 2012 at 11:56 pm | Reply
[...] Research is taxpayer funded, yet it has always amazed me, and many others, how that research ends up behind published journal pay-walls, prohibitively expensive to the public who wants to be able to read broadly on one or many topics. In the science communication class I'm a teaching assistant for, we had a class on peer review the other day, and there were audible gasps from the audience when it was revealed scientists often have to pay to have their articles published, then pay to be able to read other scientific literature. Seems backwards doesn't it? It's been that way for a long time though. But as the internet demands openness and sharing, so more people are reacting against this system (for example, the recent attention-grabbing campaign by one disgruntled maths professor to boycott the publishing giant Elsevier). [...]
291. *The Cost of Knowledge : towards an Academic Spring in Science and Maths?* « Documentation Says:
February 24, 2012 at 10:00 am | Reply
[...] The post that triggered the polemic – by Cambridge University Mathematician and Fields Medal Winner Timothy Gowers. [...]
292. *The Research Works Act (RWA): why Scientific Publishing needs FOSS Methods - Resume – Resume* Says:
February 24, 2012 at 12:44 pm | Reply
[...] boycotts. Tim Gower, a British mathematician (and Fields medalist), is a pivotal name here. His protest of Elsevier competence turn an iconic text. If all of that hasn't angry we enough, we can supplement publishing feign journals to [...]
293. *An undergrad on the opportunities of the "academic spring"* | Culture Lag Says:
February 24, 2012 at 9:16 pm | Reply
[...] publishing industry. The mathematician Timothy Gowers, a Fields medal recipient, announced in a blog post last month that he would personally boycott all of the many academic journals owned by the Elsevier [...]
294. *Boycotting Elsevier?* « Travels through Flatland Says:
February 26, 2012 at 1:37 am | Reply
[...] normally don't write about academic politics, but today I found myself challenged by them. It all started with the joint resignation of the whole editorial board of Topology and a post in [...]
295. *Women in math, and the overhaul of the publishing system* « The Accidental Mathematician Says:
February 26, 2012 at 6:02 pm | Reply
[...] you have not yet heard of the Elsevier boycott, you have a lot of reading to catch up on. I'll wait. I'm not likely to miss [...]

296. *G. Bridgwater* Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 2:21 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Please add Springer as another publisher following in the business model of Elsevier – and then washing editorial quality out of its own publications. Also, Springer has refused to disclose its position on SOPA, another reason to add them to the Elsevier boycott. They are not German, they are owned by a Swedish private equity and a sovereign wealth fund (18%) in Singapore. Since Springer was acquired, their contempt for authors has soared and their interest in quality has plummeted. And they sue, sue, sue authors and libraries. A stable of lawyers, not editors.

◦ *Ian Walker* Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 3:12 am](#)

Ah yes...

This is what is needed – a precise understanding of the players! In other words who and what and where and when are these entities we are dealing with, and what is their *raison de'tre*... And the shareholders – who are they, not just holding companies please – many surprises here I wager... As always a precise definition of the problem and all the actors is most of the solution... Something to watch out for here is the fragmentation and chaos to come – this can be capitalised upon and there are games being formulated now to do so... so best be careful what we ask for, lest we get it... Don't want to be worse off now do we? don't want to be manipulated into breaking the ancien regime and replacing it with one far worse, and concentrated into the hands of the 1% or less of a particular countries elite all which we hold green and good and true now do we? hmmm?

297. *Oklahoma* Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 2:32 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Let us craft legislation protecting authors.

First, copyright permission gets returned to author(s) after 24 months.

Second, no galley proofs of an article can be published without author corrections and approval. Yes, several publishers now insist that the first submission must be perfect and no changes can be made no matter what.

Third, publisher must get signed author permission before publishing before its copyright permission goes into effect. No signing, no right to publish. Yes, major publishers are on the slippery slope, publishing WITHOUT final author approval and an author has not a shred of recourse. Want to see your academic reputation in tatters by these new "lean-and-mean" business models?

We need legislation to protect authors and those who count on us to furnish the best knowledge available. Elsevier and Springer have inched into business models which are both exploitative and litigation-focused.

298. *Ian Walker* Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 3:16 am](#) | [Reply](#)

meta question

who/what owns this blog?

299. United Academics Says:
February 27, 2012 at 11:02 am | Reply
Dear Dr. Gowers,

At United Academics we admire your criticism with the publishing house Elsevier. Being aware of the situation that derived from your blog post "My part in its downfall" we want to let you know that we tried to help this cause by featuring this concern in our blog <http://acd.mic.io/yAlVga>

United Academics is an Internet start-up, providing a platform where one can easily share and find academic content while connecting with other academics. Members can publish, discuss and comment on academic works, collaborate on developing new knowledge, and stay informed on their field of interest. The company was founded in 2007 by Louis Lapidaire to help academics from all over the world to interact, communicate, publish and share their ideas. Publishing and promoting scientific works is a complex, time-consuming and expensive process. In addition, not all works are freely accessible for students, scientists and businesses. Therefore useful knowledge is not often used to its fullest potential or even gets lost.

We run a peer-reviewed and open access Journal of Social Sciences (<http://acd.mic.io/z0K74j>) which publishes themed issues bimonthly, each consisting of a collection of articles, work-in-progress pieces and book reviews. Our publishing team also produces a monthly popular-scientific magazine that discusses every kind of research on the edge of science and society.

Our mission is connect science and society. To create a world where academic knowledge is easily accessible for everyone. Where everybody with the right skills set can publish academic works. Where the author decides on copyrights and incentives. Where peer review becomes a test of quality, rather than a barrier to publish. A place where companies, institutes and academics together collaborate on developing knowledge. A platform that unites Science & Society.

We aim every initiative like this to help knowledge to be open. It is clear that today, scientists have the tools to go through the whole process of publishing and distributing their research in a much easier, cheaper and instant way than 15 years ago. This is something that our company, United Academics, has understood very well.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Laura Tapia PhD.

Communications and Graphic Design Officer | United Academics

300. PAMnet Monitor | Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Division Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 1:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] On a related note, Fields Medal winner Timothy Gowers put up a blog post titled "Elsevier, my part in its downfall." [...]

301. [Elsevier Withdraws Support for Research Works Act, Continues Fight Against Open Access](#)
« Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 4:09 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] one month ago, Fields Medalist Tim Gowers complained in a blog post about Elsevier's publication practices, which inspired the mathematics PhD student Tyler [...]

302. [New paradigm in science diffusion « genomeek](#) Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 5:20 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] informed on the problem here, or here (and for those who prefer French link, ici). And eventually support the boycott [...]

303. [porton](#) Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 5:31 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

The troubles with journal articles were discussed comprehensibly. But no one has said anything about publication of math books (including textbooks and research monographs).

What are pros and contras of the current scientific book publishing?

Article authors do not receive money for their writing work. But as far as I know book authors receive royalties. Does it makes it different?

I ask this among the other reasons, because I want to write a book about my research. (That book is to be written by me in such a way, that it can be used also as a textbook). Most probably I will keep a freely downloadable PDF with full text of my book. Maybe you'll also suggest which publisher to choose?

304. [Ian Walker](#) Says:

[February 27, 2012 at 11:08 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

No reason why books should not be sold for profit. Look at the iTunes model – use iBooks to create your work for free, sell for .99c to \$10 (or more or less) if you want to. You could also use an advertising funded web site. This way popularity drives revenue – and if a similar payment scheme could be worked out for citations then you may be in clover... Begs the question though – is your book worth writing? If it is a dramatised depiction of your research "the polar bear ate my gamma ray scintillometer and how I lived to tell the tale" then maybe... Such popularisations are fun to read. If it is a textbook then what distinguishes your tome from the body of work already extant? Why should your work be published if it contains just a few lines of new work and the rest of it is just a denormalisation of the corpus wrapped in opinion... A great number of physics texts (for example) are just rehashes of the classics with reworked problem sets and rarely some new stuff is included... And they cost! This has become old very quickly with the advent of electronic publishing; when the body of accepted wisdom is so readily available these days... isn't it? Why hasn't this already been put to the sword by the education authorities of various nations? I

could go on but maybe the short answer to your question is to just self-publish. As to why you may want to mix autobiography with textbook I will leave for you to expound upon – is it for meta-data? To elucidate the socio-politico-authorial mindset that give rise to the new knowledge? Great! Now we are cooking with gas, but should such meta-data be mixed in with the textbook? Or should it exist separately as ‘markup’. Maybe the AI people could help...

305. *David Craven Says:*

February 27, 2012 at 11:46 pm | [Reply](#)

For those people who have not been Elsevier authors in the past — I assume that is why they sent me this e-mail — I quote it below in full. I mention that this should not be the end of the boycott but merely the beginning, the proof that we actually do have power and can demand ever greater concessions from the beast.

A letter to the mathematics community.

We are writing to let you know of a series of changes that we are making to how the Elsevier mathematics program will be run. Some of these are new initiatives, and some reflect changes that we have been working on over a longer period.

We have been listening actively to the community and we see a number of issues that we need to address, not least being open to what the community has to say:

Pricing

Mathematics journals published by Elsevier tend to be larger than those of other publishers. On a price-per-article, or price-per-page level, our prices are typically, but not always, lower than those of other mathematics publishers.

Our target is for all of our core mathematics titles to be priced at or below US\$11 per article (equivalent to 50-60 cents per normal typeset page) by next year, placing us below most University presses, some societies and other commercial competitors. Where journals are more expensive than this, we will lower our prices, as we already have in recent years for journals such as the Journal of Algebra and Topology and its Applications, among others.

We realize that this is just part of the concerns about pricing -and we will seek to address concerns about the nature and composition of the large discounted agreements, through which most Universities now access journals – but addressing the base line pricing is a necessary first step.

Access and Open Archives

To make clear that we are committed to wider access, we have made the archives of 14 core mathematics journals open, from four years after publication, back to 1995, the year when we started publishing digitally. All current and future papers featured in these journals will become free to read, for subscribers and non subscribers alike. This initiative is part of a number of open access publishing options we have available which give researchers the freedom to choose to open their research beyond the

academic community. For more information about Elsevier's open access options, visit <http://www.elsevier.com/openaccess>.

We are a founding partner in Research4Life, a public private partnership providing journal content to researchers in the developing world. More than 1600 Elsevier journals, including our mathematics titles, are available in more than 100 developing countries.

Our position on RWA

Elsevier has announced today that we are withdrawing our support for the Research Works Act. In recent weeks, our support for the Act has caused some in the community to question our commitment to serving the global research community and ensuring the best possible access to research publications and data. We have heard concerns from some Elsevier journal authors, editors and reviewers that the Act would be seen as a step backwards for expanding options for free and low cost public access to scholarly literature. That was certainly not the intention of the legislation or our intention in supporting it. Please read our full statement online.

Moving forward

Now that we have explained the steps we have taken so far we want to stress this is just the beginning.

We will create a scientific council for mathematics, to ensure that we are working in tandem with the mathematics community to address feedback and to give greater control and transparency to the community and we will engage actively with leaders in a number of countries to ensure that our mathematics program is meeting the needs of the community, globally and locally.

There are many other issues where we wish to engage with the community, including our efforts to improve digital rendering of mathematics, the use and misuse of citation measures for the discipline and our efforts to ensure high standard across all of our journals.

We welcome your views on these and all our efforts at: mathematics@elsevier.com

306. *dr ivan tesigo* Says:

[February 28, 2012 at 2:54 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I did some research on this subject a while back, and the Elseviers saga is much longer and much worse than described

Starting as a third rate Dutch weekly is suddenly rose to fame a decade ago by buying up a large proportion of the most prominent scientific journals (over 800 medical journals were purchased as well as a good number of journals from other scientific disciplines)

The first CEO of Reed-Elseviers as the multinational company became known; one Crispin Davies, who was also a director for `Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK), one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, and speculations were that the money for the purchases come from drug companies (pharmaceuticals)

Gradually Elseviers took over the journals and set up a vast web portal through

which all submissions to all these journals had to be channelled, so they in effect control both submissions and digital back issues, and there have been several documented cases where papers were removed from the journals by Elsevier's directives, and to my knowledge one where the editor was fired (the journal of medical hypotheses was one of these journals)

Presumably the motives are control and censorship over material that could compromise the 'stakeholders'

Financially it has also been a very attractive proposition, for uniquely among publications, scientists receive no payment for their contributions, so while tens of thousands of scientists labour away writing papers, and reviewing those papers for free, the CEO of Elsevier was receiving an annual salary of around 2 million pounds plus bonuses, not to mention his salary as director of GSK that was far higher than that of top medical specialists.

307. *Nipotusta niputuksesta* « *Akateeminen talousblogi* Says:

February 28, 2012 at 10:59 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] tammikuussa boikotin Elsevier-kustantamon jurnaleita vastaan. Gowersin perusteluihin voi tutustua hänen blogissaan. Hänen neljästä pointistaan tärkein eli Elsevierin journalien korkea hintataso on pätevä [...]

308. *Elsevier's letter to mathematicians* « *Xi'an's Og* Says:

February 28, 2012 at 11:13 pm | [Reply](#)

[...] through [not] publishing / refereeing / editing in Elsevier's journals, an action started by an earlier blog of Timothy Gower. He has now posted his extensive reaction to this email and, as it perfectly fits [...]

309. *This Means War* | *OU Math Club* Says:

March 1, 2012 at 1:44 am | [Reply](#)

[...] little over a month ago Tim Gowers, mathematician and blogger, posted a manifesto saying he wasn't going to take it anymore. That is, he was going to boycott [...]

310. *Robin Hood of Plant Science* Says:

March 1, 2012 at 6:25 am | [Reply](#)

And you thought that Wall Street was bad?!

Similar content (without names) published to the following blogs.

[h](#)

<http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2012/02/thousands-of-scientists-vow-to-boycott-elsevier>

We share some very fundamental qualms and concerns regarding Elsevier, its pricing policies. Please note, dear colleagues, while you are getting angry about pricing, this is simply the tip of the ice-berg in the rot that is Elsevier. I have been doing intensive investigation myself. Read next.

In addition, I would urge you to do some more investigating regarding the ethical issues of the parent company Reed Elsevier, whose CEO claimed publically that all

links to the weapon's industry would be cut, but who continued to support the weapon's fairs in the USA in 2011. 100% hypocrisy and lack of moral standing for a publisher who claims to uphold the highest levels of moral standing. How can a company that supports the sales of weapons and the military-industrial complex of the US empire publish medical journals that support life? This is not compatible and breaches the very fabric that is morality. When will Elsevier and big publisher stop treating us like serfs and give us our due respect? We are the 99% (intellectually and financially).

To cap this list, I have a great argument to show how the ethical guidelines are actually contradictory and how this would actually annul, in my view, the validity of all copyright agreements. This could be the slam dunk to bury this beast forever and get the necessary mass to move forward in our campaign to squash this monopolistic publisher and others like it.

Other issues you should consider while advancing:

- a) The link between these big publishers and Thomson Reuters and the monopoly that is the Impact Factor;
- b) The management and the ethical standing of management and editors in chief of top apparently "respected" ethical societies such as ICMJE, WAME and COPE.
- c) The notion that non-profit data-bases like CABI are making 20 million US\$ profit a year off scientists' work and efforts.
- d) The explosive world of online publishing leading to massive fraudulent publications and 419-style Nigerian scam publishers reaping equally unethical profits as Elsevier but at the other extreme of the morality curve. A complex issue trying to attack PIPA, SOPA, ACTA while trying to preserve the rights of authors to free and open access without feeding shark publishers.
- e) The lack of responsibility by the ISSN in stripping unethical publishers or journals of their ISSN numbers.
- f) The collusion between law and publishing in Elsevier and Reed Elsevier, namely LexisNexis to provide the legal backbone to induce fear to shoo away critics.
- g) The fact that Elsevier + others are on the executive board or advisory committees of anti-plagiarism software (iThenticate), Cross-Ref and DOI.
- h) By providing paid services for writing. Elsevier is implicitly stimulating ghost-writing. The common thread at Elsevier i.e., that money has superior value over morals. BY the way, do you notice that Elsevier appears as part of the spell-check in Word. What corruption.
- i) Ironically, Dr. Eisen is the Academic Editor-in-Chief of PLoS Biology that charges hundreds if not thousands of US dollars for ONE manuscript to appear online as Open Access. Same nonsense with BMC group and these other publishers (Elsevier,

Wiley-Blackwell, OUP, Springer, etc.) who charge an arm and a leg from those very same who bring credit to their journal and publisher. How about paying scientists royalties rather than just offer a free-view PDF as a cheap carrot, which costs about 5 bucks to process? Dr. Eisen should feel ashamed to take such an aggressive stance since he practices double-standards. Where do these people live? Is this the same planet where we are seeing millions of people suffering because of the financial corruption caused by governments, banks and the publishing industry?

I have some ideas how we can boycott Elsevier and how we can deal with issues a to i above (also related to Elsevier).

Liberate Science 2012 (the science spring has arrived) note I take credit to be the first one to call this here!

311. *Los investigadores se rebelan contra las revistas científicas | El Bioclub* Says:

March 5, 2012 at 1:59 am | Reply

[...] en enero pasado, cuando Timothy Gowers, matemático de la universidad de Cambridge, escribió una entrada en su blog para explicar por qué había decidido, ya hace años, boicotear a Elsevier. Premiado [...]

312. *Why I am not boycotting Elsevier « Turing's Invisible Hand* Says:

March 5, 2012 at 8:31 pm | Reply

[...] blogosphere has been abuzz lately with news of the boycott against Elsevier and its unexpectedly quick impact. Indeed, the fact that the Research Works Act was shelved is a [...]

313. *Urs Hartl* Says:

March 8, 2012 at 1:21 pm | Reply

I'm an associate editor of the "Journal of Number Theory (JNT)" published by Elsevier and would like to report on current developments within the editorial board of JNT. I would be very interested to hear about the developments at other journals.

So far I have not signed the boycott because that would imply that I resign from the editorial board, and I hope instead that the JNT can divorce Elsevier. Actually the editorial board of JNT is discussing this divorce controversially with no decision yet.

Of course it is not so easy to leave Elsevier with JNT because first of all the name JNT is owned by Elsevier. So it seems our only option is to all resign from the editorial board and relaunch our own JNT under a new name. (One could also try to buy the name free, but if I were Elsevier I would estimate the price by several billion dollars, given its subscription price.)

→ If you have a different idea, I will be happy to hear it !

Laura Hassink and David Clark both from Elsevier were informed of our discussion. (They wrote the reply in the LMS newsletter on p.30

http://old.lms.ac.uk/newsletter//current_issue.pdf?q=newsletter/current_issue.pdf

and I think the "open letter") They take this boycott very serious and keep saying that Elsevier's politics truly changes dramatically, and I would believe that this is also

their personal wish (in fact it doesn't, see <http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/02/26/elseviers-open-letter-point-by-point-and-s>). But they (and other Elsevier staff) have been cooperating quite well with the editorial board of JNT, open minded for its concerns. So for us Elsevier is not just an anonymous enemy.

Laura Hassink and David Clark invited the editorial board of JNT to a meeting which will take place in Chicago on Saturday, March 24, 11 am – 3 pm. Unfortunately it seems that most editors from outside north america (including me) won't come. Also to me the purpose of the meeting is not clear. The agenda draft (http://www.math.uni-muenster.de/u/urs.hartl/Chicago-meeting_120324.txt) suggests that we will be informed of the changes announced by Elsevier. I don't know whether there will be true negotiations.

It seems that Elsevier is (deliberately or not) using the approved method "divide and conquer". There will be meetings with editorial boards (-> actually, are there other board meetings besides ours?) and on an individual basis in familiar atmosphere editors will be convinced that there's no need to desert Elsevier. It seems to me that there are (so far) no negotiations on an equal footing. Also because the boycott is an individual issue and we are not orgnized in kind of unions. There should be attempts to coordinate action among the editorial boards of all Elsevier journals. I will contact some of the math journals.

Maybe there also should be a list of demands on Elsevier. In my oppinion it should contain something like:

1. Elsevier must donate 50% of its annual profit back to the scientific community. (According to <http://www.nasdaq.com/article/reed-elsevier-2011-profit-increases—quick-facts-2012> the profit of Reed Elsevier in 2011 was 760 million pounds "largely driven by strong performances from the company's core electronic subscription". This is just tax money which Elsevier has harvested !)
2. 30% price cut for all bundles offered world wide (Elsevier has announced a price cut of 30% for JNT. But price cuts for individual journals are useless for all those who buy bundles.)
3. Elsevier must make the whole archive of its journals open access. (The JNT archive 1995-2007 is open access by now, but the years 1969-1994 are not, although they are already digitalized.)

I admit that these demands sound unrealistic. But everything short of this is only a cosmetic change and not the dramatic change that Elsevier is proclaiming.

Best regards,
Urs

- *Anonymous* Says:

March 8, 2012 at 5:19 pm

I was an associate editor of Journal of Number Theory before I signed the boycott. Thank you for giving the news that the editorial board is seriously considering to divorce Elsevier. This is an important information.

314. Scott Morrison Says:

March 8, 2012 at 5:28 pm | [Reply](#)

Dear Urs,

I think it's wonderful that you've brought Elsevier to the negotiating table (whether they realize it or not), and that you and others on the JNT editorial board are getting ready to fight!

(FC has been asking over on <http://publishing.mathforge.org/> about some background information he wants before going to this meeting.)

I think one of the most constructive things you could do in the long run is to get a clear statement from them answering: "If we felt that it was in JNT's best interest to divorce from Elsevier, what would Elsevier want in exchange for letting us keep the name and back issues?"

I don't have any serious hope that we can realistically achieve this. But I think demanding a concrete statement from them would be fantastic for our cause. It looks like a hostage situation to me — no matter what the editorial board thinks, Elsevier only cares about extracting rent from their copyright on journal. Making this clear to everyone would be a great step.

best regards,
Scott Morrison

◦ Henry Cohn Says:

March 8, 2012 at 9:05 pm

It's great that journals are negotiating with Elsevier. One tricky issue is that I don't think it's wise to strategize too much on the web regarding how much support there is for demanding various things, since this will tell Elsevier the least they can offer to win popular support and defuse the situation.

Regarding the name and back issues, I don't think the community should be willing to pay anything for them. Elsevier ought to make the back issues open access anyway, at the risk of losing even more of their business if they refuse, and things will get much worse for them if they roll back the steps they have taken in that direction. There's still the pre-1995 issues, but I think that's a winnable fight.

I believe Elsevier's bargaining position here is much weaker than is commonly believed. They will fight hard, but they won't actually be able to hold journals hostage or extract enormous profits. We should push hard for what we need.

315. Bruce Reed Says:

March 9, 2012 at 1:54 pm | [Reply](#)

I am on the board of the Journal of Combinatorial Theory B which is also an Elsevier Journal. We too are discussing how to negotiate with them. I agree that it is probably unwise to strategise in public. But I do want to suggest that the negotiations should be mainly about rejigging the relationship so the Boards have more or indeed ultimate control in the future rather than just about demanding concessions from Elsevier to deal with immediate concerns.

◦ *walkerjian* Says:

March 10, 2012 at 12:35 am

yikes

“it is probably unwise to strategise in public”

kind of quietly damning no? People seemingly wary of the motives and moves and posturings of a SCHOLARLY JOURNAL!!!! Seemingly having to tiptoe and peep and whisper... cringe and cower like a beaten red headed step-child in cuffing distance of a cruel and vindictive master...

316. *Mr.* Says:

March 16, 2012 at 6:58 pm | [Reply](#)

The system is reversed, we produce the content (i.e. product) of the publishers' inventory, yet we pay. However, I fail to see how anything short of every scientist immediately refusing to pay would fix this.

Also, I see no method to help the aspiring grad student deal with this issue. It is easy for an established, well-known scientist to not publish in high impact papers. Once an author is known to produce high quality, high impact work, others will seek out that authors work. However, the grad student like me has no choice. We must attempt to publish in the highest impact journal for our field to make ourselves known.

Until that paradox is fixed, and we can provide peer-review for self publishing, nothing will change.

◦ *Ian Walker* Says:

March 17, 2012 at 1:09 am

The place for taxpayer funded research to be published is in taxpayer funded organisations. Such as NAP and public libraries. There could also be a heirarchy where the directly funded body hosts publications. Such as the University or research body the academic/researcher works for, perhaps as part of library services. Arxiv to be used for preprints as it is now – and in fact could be the model to be distributed to universities/research institutes. That is each university/research institute has their own arxiv server operating from their library, and it houses both preprints and published works. Works are then distributed to national servers. The National servers talk to each other. This is a little like DNS for scholarly works except that it is used to locate knowledge encapsulated in publicly funded scholarly research. Digital certificates could be used to keep the bad (and dumb) away, the bad and smart cannot be stopped. Except by repeated exposure. Certification could be used to mandate peer review. This could be used to stop companies that wish to troll the large repositories of knowledge to pharm out new stuff (in a way the robber barons of elsevvy and

others have protected us from that for now). All the infrastructure is in place for this. Libraries in Universities and also public libraries – this could also act to save public and university libraries from the current death march they are on at the hands of eMedia robber barons. Coordination and set-up to be orchestrated by twitter, and maybe peer review too. Wikipedia like pages maybe used for access and interpretation.

This could happen very quickly indeed. Because quite frankly what is happening now is a kind of payola protection scheme and is probably illegal...

And no more of this “you must pay to play” BS... this is all taxpayer funded and housed on taxpayer funded devices... If anyone tries to insinuate ‘pay for play’ with this lot then they need to be called out, exposed as a stooge, and punished...

What has happened is yet another example of the 1% establishing a racket to boost money for no work, and we let it happen. To allow it to continue is cowardice, and laziness.

cheers

317. *RCUK: Paywall for six months, free-for-all thereafter* « *Purse String Theory* Says:

March 17, 2012 at 8:46 am | Reply

[...] academic publishers as “parasitic overlords”. Academics and researchers have even driven a campaign against individual publishers such as [...]

318. *Tucson DJ* Says:

March 19, 2012 at 11:53 pm | Reply

He has truly done some great work in mathematics.

319. *Gemeingüter » Der Preis von Wissen* Says:

March 20, 2012 at 4:05 am | Reply

[...] Wissenschaftsverlag. Am 21. Januar hatte der Mathematiker Timothy Gowers aus Cambridge auf seinem Blog erklärt, dass er fortan nichts mehr mit dem Elsevier-Verlag zu tun haben werde. Zwar würden bei [...]

320. *Associazione Italiana Biblioteche* Says:

March 20, 2012 at 9:45 am | Reply

AIB, the Italian Library Association, in line with its statement on Open Access made in 2006, joins the protest of the international researcher community and calls for an agenda to be set in Italy to discuss scientific publishing and open access to knowledge in order to promote and to implement alternative scholarly communication models.

The official position of AIB, made on March, 6, can be read at

<http://www.aib.it/attivita/comunicati/2012/19926-the-cost-of-knowledge/>

321. *8,200+ Strong, Researchers Band Together To Force Science Journals To Open Access* « *VirginonMedia Blog* Says:

March 21, 2012 at 12:50 pm | Reply

[...] to Congress. About a month later, Timothy Gowers, a mathematics professor at Cambridge University, posted rather innocently to his primarily

mathematics-interested audience his particular problems with [...]

322. [IOsoft Software Consultants » Boycott Elsevier](#) Says:

[March 21, 2012 at 8:12 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] About a month later, Timothy Gowers, a mathematics professor at Cambridge University, posted rather innocently to his primarily mathematics-interested audience his particular problems with [...]

323. [Researchers Boycott Elsevier Journal Publisher - World Bad News : World Bad News](#) Says:

[April 6, 2012 at 1:00 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] criticism grew out of a provocative blog post by a mathematician Timothy Gowers of Cambridge University, who announced on Jan. 21 that he would [...]

324. [Master Angry blogpost plus 9,000 academics add up to a scientific journal boycott](#) Says:

[April 9, 2012 at 7:06 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

[...] in January this year, Gowers wrote an article on his blog declaring that he would henceforth decline to submit to or review papers for any academic journal [...]

325. [1maia](#) Says:

[April 10, 2012 at 11:37 am](#) | [Reply](#)

It has a big effect on students like me at poorer universities. I am studying at the Open University because I need to work and, like a lot of female students, was trying to get pregnant or had small children. They have taken a big cut in funding and cannot afford to suscribe to all the journals, although they subscribe to a lot. Their online journals constitute my only library, as I do not live near to another university. They do have library use agreements for their students at other universities, so i enquired about travelling to Birmingham for the day, only to be told they could not allow me to even just read their online journals because that was against their subscription agreement! For my psychology project, i ended up mainly using abstracts from pubmed, ordering photocopies of three experiments from the British Library via my local Shrewsbury Reference Library, at a cost of just over £2 each to me and over £12 to the taxpayer. (One of them turned out to be useless.) That excellent library was closed a few months back in the cuts, if i had chosen to finish my degree I would have had no way to obtain the necessary cognitive psychology studies.

326. [Laura](#) Says:

[April 10, 2012 at 1:17 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Thanks for starting this discussion and bringing it to a wider audience. I used to work in a university but have now moved out of academia. Since I left I have been diagnosed with a rare disease which many doctors have no knowledge of and those who do, often base their treatment plans on old research. I am working within a patient support group to help those newly diagnosed understand the current research, statistics and best practice so that they can ensure their doctors are informed and providing the correct treatment. However, getting access to the research is proving extremely difficult and is hampering our efforts considerably.

327. [Nick Mick](#) Says:

[April 10, 2012 at 7:45 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Universities should set up their own journals online. I'm sure it can be done pretty cheaply and provide completely free access to all or maybe even get the government/British Library/MRC to run some again providing completely free access.

328. Dhru Says:

April 10, 2012 at 9:03 pm | Reply

What a truthful article. I started an online dental community to share articles and discussions for free. I have struggled to get authors as there is no payment. Even opinion pieces are difficult. Yet with effort and hard work have managed many articles. The reason I say this is because many authors have suggested that I should charge the members an annual subscription fee for access of these high quality articles. For me that would mean paying the authors so everyone is adequately remunerated for their efforts.

Right now all access to all article is free

Now looking at Elsevier, or ScienceDirect – I always wondered where they spent their incomes. I knew that the contributors to all journals – including medical and dental – were highly respected academics who wanted a publication or a few.

Anyways those are my thoughts....

Dhru

329. Disintermediation in science | Bitcoin Media Says:

April 11, 2012 at 12:26 pm | Reply

[...] January, a distinguished mathematician called Tim Gowers, made a frustrated blogpost about a particularly odious science publishing company called Elsevier. He declared his intent to [...]

330. simon Says:

April 11, 2012 at 1:01 pm | Reply

100% with you on the knowledge sharing barrier created by the whole academic peer review process – for both the readers who want to access the latest and best online and for the researchers who create the new knowledge.

For just the same reasons and completely independently the Journal of Improvement Science was designed and launched online this week in its prototype format – so please visit and support open-access to new knowledge and help us improve JOIS.

<http://www.saasoft.com/jois>

331. A web of mathematics | MA TUM Blog Says:

April 11, 2012 at 4:25 pm | Reply

[...] medallist, also uses his blog to share his ideas and views on political issues. His recent public announcement to refuse to cooperate with the publisher Elsevier shows what impact a blog post can have: soon [...]

332. alsablo Says:

April 12, 2012 at 11:01 am | Reply

Reblogged this on Alsablo's Blog.

333. *The "Cost of Knowledge" – On the Elsevier boycott and the push for more open access* | *AMS Graduate Student Blog* Says:
April 12, 2012 at 8:44 pm | [Reply](#)
[...] seen most recently in the ongoing Elsevier boycott. In January, Fields medalist Timothy Gowers wrote an article on his blog urging fellow mathematicians to boycott the publisher Elsevier; he also wrote how he [...]
334. *Quora* Says:
April 13, 2012 at 7:22 pm | [Reply](#)
Why has the Internet not disrupted the scientific publishing industry to the same extent that other forms of media have been affected?...
- I think this question may be in need of an update! In early 2012, a series of events occurred described as "the Academic Spring". To date (April 2012) these have been collated and described nicely by the Guardian newspaper (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/h...>)
335. *kanvah* Says:
April 14, 2012 at 3:01 am | [Reply](#)
I am from India and I am not a mathematician. I am from one of those many institutes India established to develop scientific temper and technology. We try to subscribe to these journals and as you had rightly pointed out, they are way too expensive and they don't care whether we buy or not. Some journals have local offices and pay local salaries but still stick to US/Europe pricing.
- When inquired they said, oh!! so and so institute in India has already bought it so they won't come down on pricing purely playing with the psyche of researchers' need.
- I wish all institutes in India Get together and ban these journals for a few months to see what impact it might have on their year end finance forecast. It would be humongous cost not to target India.
- Sriram
336. *Scientific Publishing Link Roundup* | *AMS Graduate Student Blog* Says:
April 14, 2012 at 6:37 am | [Reply](#)
[...] colleague covered the particular airing of grievances following Timothy Gowers' blog post in January. As a graduate student still working to finish up course requirements, I think about the publishing [...]
337. *Open access, peer review, grants and other academic conundrums* Says:
April 15, 2012 at 12:01 am | [Reply](#)
[...] mathematician, Tim Gowers, has a rather hard-hitting blog on open access and scientific publishing, Elsevier – my part in its downfall. I'm right with him. Although his post lacks the detailed numbers of mine, it shows that [...]
338. *Connecting research « lotus of knowledge* Says:
April 16, 2012 at 7:38 am | [Reply](#)

[...] network is dominated by a few highly centralised and powerful nodes, the publishing houses. The angry maths blog rallied researchers to protest this centralisation of information resulting in over 9,000 [...]

339. *El El Yarbrough* Says:

April 22, 2012 at 10:37 pm | Reply

I'm not an academic. or a scholar, or have a degree. But I'm angry and you should be too. Many people have experienced this scenario. I am now with my phone company, who bundles all their products, re-brands the same bundle over and over; maybe charging less for the internet and an astronomical amount their land-line and cable service.

I bought, for anyone who want's me to transfer it to them for free:

elsefear.com

340. *Elsevier: What is the Elsevier boycott about? - Quora* Says:

April 23, 2012 at 7:37 am | Reply

[...] in January of 2012 laying out the details of the issues he had with Elsevier's publishing model.<http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012...> Gowers main points.1. It charges very high prices — so far above the average that it seems [...]

341. *simonlhu* Says:

April 23, 2012 at 10:34 am | Reply

hi,

i'm not a student (except of life), a professor, or even a professional in any discipline, or any such thing, but i do find that these practices abusive and unfair. a quote from someone i heard a long time is ago is "information wants to be free". if you take say, a bird, or a galaxy, and try to trap it in a cage, what do you think would happen? it would wither away eventually. this is what's going on with these "publishers". i publish more than these corporations do on my own blog, on my own server.

this isn't my bailiwick, but i think the people getting behind this effort are doing humanity and the planet a big favour. anything to stop the greed disease from continuing is good, i think.

as for my personal experiences and situation in brief, i am poor (financially), indigenous north american, who often tries to go read a journal article because it was referenced somewhere, and i usually find it behind a paywall; or the abstract is free, and the rest is behind a paywall. even 5\$ is a lot of money to go read something you'll want to go back to say next week, and have to pay for it again. i refuse to.

information wants to be free. free access to all.

personally, i'd much rather give that 5\$ to someone who actually wrote the article, and did all that work that went behind it, than some greedy fat corporation who's just going to rip /me/ off *and* the article writer(s).

342. [Eric F. Van de Velde](#) Says:
[April 24, 2012 at 1:31 am](#) | [Reply](#)
Here is how to set information free. A boycott is not sufficient. We need a new way to do business. Here it is:
<http://scitechsociety.blogspot.com/2012/04/annealing-library.html>
343. [mariathermann](#) Says:
[April 25, 2012 at 3:50 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
I spend six miserable years working for the blighters in London – I attribute all my wrinkles to their at times awful treatment of staff and the business magazines we all worked for. Any plotting of Reed Elsevier’s downfall gets my vote!
344. [“Le coût du savoir”: Grogne des chercheurs contre les editeurs commerciaux](#) « [Says:](#)
[April 26, 2012 at 11:22 am](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] initiative est née d’un article sur le blog d’un mathématicien de l’Université de Cambridge, Timothy Gowers, médaille Fields en 1998. Ce mathématicien a [...]
345. [A Few Thoughts on the Academic Spring](#) « [The Past Speaks](#) Says:
[April 26, 2012 at 7:58 pm](#) | [Reply](#)
[...] mathematician, sparked the current wave of protest against the academic publishing industry with a blog post in January in which he basically declared war on Elsevier, one of multinationals that publishes a [...]
-

Theme: [Kubrick. Blog at WordPress.com.](#)
[Entries \(RSS\)](#) and [Comments \(RSS\)](#).

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