Miss Morals Speaks Out about Publishing

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Ludwig Wittgenstein once likened doing philosophy to swimming under water--there is an almost irresistible temptation to come up for air. Many of us, I daresay, feel the same way about writing for publication. We're tempted to surface when we stare for an hour or so at that blank first page, when the dreadful suspicion grows on us that everything we're saying has already been said much better by everybody else, and when we hit the point where, in the vivid image of Margaret Urban Walker, we've set our hair on fire and are trying to put it out with a tack hammer. What keeps us going is our desire to participate in the ongoing debates and discussions in the discipline, intellectual curiosity about some topic we want to understand better, or a rash promise to an editor. The standing expectation at our various institutions that we will be productive scholars doesn't hurt, either.

As a reasonably well-broken-in author, the current editor of *Hypatia*, former editor at the *Hastings Center Report*, editor of a number of collections of essays, general coeditor of two book series, and--worst of all--a moral philosopher by trade, I've developed some tolerably fixed views over the years about the ethics of academic publishing. I therefore devote this Musings to unloading these views on *Hypatia's* unsuspecting readership. In what follows, I'll identify what I take to be the more important, commonly shared understandings of the responsibilities attached to the five roles that make the wheels of publication go round: the author, the publisher, the editor,

the reviewer, and the graduate student mentor. I begin with the most important role--that of the author, without whom all is in vain.

Authors

As Alasdair MacIntyre might have said but didn't, academic publishing is a practice--a settled, socially recognized, rule-governed activity involving a number of people in the exercise of a set of skills aimed at some specific end. MacIntyre argues that unlike such external goods as money and social prestige, a practice's internal goods can only be attained by exercising the virtues that inhere in the practice (MacIntyre 1984, 187-91). If that is so, authors can't have the satisfaction of getting the argument just right, understanding something difficult, contributing to a growing body of knowledge, and the like unless they possess the requisite virtues.

The ancient Greek virtues of courage, practical judgment, and temperance surely attach to publishing: it takes courage to subject one's work to the scrutiny of peers and to keep writing even when reviewers have panned one's most recent book. It takes practical judgment to structure one's arguments properly and to be a good critic of one's own work. And it takes temperance to refrain from becoming self-important and to allow for the reasonableness of other opinions. Add to these the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love--faith in one's work, for example, hope that the scholarly enterprise increases understanding, and love of the written word--and it becomes clear that she who would reap the benefits internal to publication must be well steeped in the virtues.

Because virtues are qualities of character, however, they can't show authors their responsibilities to others except in the most general terms. To understand more

specifically what authors owe the other participants in the practice of publishing and to the reading public, it's necessary to identify the socially normative expectations that seem to be operating at the moment and then assess those expectations to see whether they withstand moral scrutiny.

First, a diatribe about something that authors are *not* expected to do. If they are philosophers, authors are not expected to understand how gender, race, sexuality, disability, and other abusive power systems work, even though it's been demonstrated, repeatedly, that this inattention distorts philosophical inquiry. By the same token, authors are not expected to acknowledge that these power systems are themselves pressing topics for philosophical reflection. Could everybody please cut this out right this minute? It is a kind of treason to the profession, I think, to espouse a commitment to the truth while at the same time institutionally marginalizing an important methodology for arriving at it. I hereby decree that authors working in the more influential discourses of philosophy *engage* with feminist work, taking up what is valuable and criticizing what strikes them as wrong. Otherwise, Miss Morals will scold.

Second, authors are expected to be honest. But you knew that, didn't you? Writing things you know are false, or suppressing inconvenient premises, or misrepresenting other authors' positions is simply Not Done. Third, authors owe their colleagues consideration as their work undergoes prepublication review. Most philosophy journals operate on a shoestring with no extra money in their budgets for paying referees, yet the work of reviewing is a critical part of how the discipline monitors itself. Because it's burdensome and time-consuming to do a decent job of refereeing, it's inconsiderate of authors to submit a paper to several journals simultaneously. To do so is to make

promiscuous demands on what is, after all, a limited resource. For the same reason, authors shouldn't rely on a journal's referees to help them revise their work, nor should they submit a new, improved draft after the earlier one has already gone out for review.

If ever you run across book--as opposed to journal--publishers who expect you to submit your manuscript to only one firm at a time, though, you have license from me to explain to them just exactly where they can stuff said manuscript. Book publishers are business people who expect to make money on the books they acquire and they pay their referees, so they operate in an entirely different environment from academics who edit journals for love and not money. It's greatly to a book publisher's advantage, of course, to have an exclusive right to accept or refuse a manuscript without having to compete with other publishers for it, but why should authors play by their rules? Philosophers aren't going to make much money from their published books anyway (unless, possibly, from a textbook), which is a further reason not to enter negotiations with "Fleece Me" written across your chest.

Once when I was an editor at the *Hastings Center Report*, a well-known bioethicist who shall remain nameless missed a deadline for a paper he'd been invited to write. When I nudged him he replied, "Oh, promises to editors are written in water." I admired his *chutzpah*, which is probably healthier than panicking, losing sleep, and pushing oneself to the breaking point to turn something in on time. All the same, authors are expected to keep their promises. (You knew that too, didn't you?) And promises to editors involve *follow-through*: writing to length as well as to deadline, responding to editorial queries promptly, reading page proofs quickly and carefully, turning in the

author's questionnaire (for books) in a timely manner, letting editors know one's

whereabouts during the production process, and so on.

Publishers

If the author's activity sits at the center of the practice of publishing, it's the publisher

who provides the infrastructure--the compositors, sales or subscription managers, printing

firms, warehouses, financial record keepers, and all the rest--that allows us to get our

work into print at all. Although from an author's point of view it sometimes looks as if

academic book publishers are in the business of thwarting any attempt to publish

anything that doesn't sell a hundred thousand copies in its first year, they actually do a

pretty good job, given the current economic climate, of making available books that are

of interest mainly to scholars in the relatively small field of philosophy. In addition to

putting books in the hands of the reading public, though, publishers have a number of

other responsibilities, not all of which are discharged equally well by each.

For starters, book publishers are expected to provide authors with acquisitions and

production editors who support their work rather than impeding the process of getting the

book written and into print. They are expected to use copy editors who actually know

how to edit copy and book designers who can--well, design. Then they are expected to

market books intelligently, targeting the readers who are actually likely to buy them.

And, finally, they are expected to keep books in print for a reasonable length of time and

reprint them if there's a continuing demand for them. Authors almost never think

publishers are doing these things properly. Publishers almost always think authors expect

too much. I personally think first-time book authors in particular are apt to have

overinflated expectations of how well their book could sell if only the marketing people would DO SOMETHING. Then again, my last book didn't do as well as it should and I do think the marketing department . . .

The responsibilities enumerated above (except for competent copyediting) apply primarily to publishers of books. Other responsibilities apply to publishers of books and scholarly journals alike. Both sorts of publishers are expected to respond promptly to requests for permission to reprint excerpts from previously published work. And, in that connection, neither sort is supposed to demand permission from authors to reprint their own work, though the author is expected to acknowledge the publisher in a note saying that the work is reprinted. Although some book and journal publishers require authors to seek their permission to quote short passages from material to which the publisher holds copyright, I think this is a rotten requirement. Publishers are supposed to *promote* the free circulation of ideas. They are supposed to, as it were, make people's ideas public. They ought, therefore, not only to set generous quotation policies, but also to charge reasonable reprint fees--say, no more than a hundred dollars for a chapter or a journal article.

Editors

Editors are the people who sign rejection letters and so are universally hated. Book acquisitions editors are expected to produce a list of books of high scholarly quality, while at the same time limiting their acquisitions to books that will sell reasonably well. Journal editors are expected to take responsibility for the quality of the journal's contents, while at the same time making rationing decisions about how and to whom the limited space of an issue is to be allocated. Mediating between these somewhat contrary

expectations requires both kinds of editors to function, under conditions of moderate scarcity, as gatekeepers to a resource whose value they are charged with preserving. No one ever thinks editors do this fairly.

Editors' most important moral responsibility is to maintain the integrity of the editorial review process. This means sending submissions to competent reviewers--for journal submissions, at least two reviewers, though book series editors can get away with one (they count as the other one). Editors must not discount unfavorable reviews simply because the author is well known in the field, or is one of the editor's protégées, or is someone the editor likes. And, since reviewers are unfortunately human, the editor (who nobody thinks is human) must, to the best of her ability, set aside or assign less weight to reviews that are based on a sloppy reading of the submission, or that are malicious and spiteful.

It's a mark of editorial irresponsibility to keep authors waiting for many months, let alone years, before a decision is made whether to accept their submissions. Because it can take a couple of months to find two or three competent scholars who are willing to read a manuscript and another month before these people actually get around to it, we at *Hypatia* think a four-month review period is reasonable for journal submissions. But that schedule works only when our referees cooperate--which happily in our case, they usually do. While a journal manuscript can be reviewed in a single afternoon (so why not do it as soon as it arrives?), book manuscripts have to be read in snatches, sandwiched in between committee meetings or over lunch or after class. They're too bulky to take on a plane trip (my favorite venue for reading journal submissions) and too daunting to read at night, so six months may be needed to complete the review.

Equally irresponsible is to keep authors waiting several years before their work sees print. This can't always be avoided, especially by prestigious journals with high rates of submission, but it's terribly unfair not only to people who are trying to get tenure, but to the scholars who read the journals and need to know what their colleagues are thinking about.

The moral understandings surrounding editors' gatekeeping functions are, I think, quite widely shared, even if editors don't always do a very good job of living up to them. There is, however, another moral understanding that I would like to see between editors and authors that is, as far as I can tell at the moment, not widely shared at all. That is the expectation that editors will *help* authors. That when the book is under contract, the editor will read as much of the manuscript as she can and provide encouragement and intelligent feedback. That when the article has been accepted for publication, the editor will work with the author to get it into first-rate final shape. That when authors ask for advice or help, it will be cheerfully--and promptly--forthcoming. I've been blessed with a number of such editors and am deeply grateful to them all. And, to tell the truth (you know you're supposed to tell the truth, don't you?), supporting, encouraging, and appreciating authors is what makes the job of editor so much fun.

Peer Reviewers

If they play their cards right, peer reviewers are almost as likely as editors to break an author's heart. Leigh Turner (2003) has written a wonderfully wicked guide for the sadistic reviewer. To make sure that a submission is rejected, or at least sent back for numerous rounds of revisions, Turner recommends that the reviewer make impossible

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demands. If, for example, a journal imposes a 2,000-word limit and the author does a splendid job of laying out competing views of 'objectivity' in feminist epistemology and arguing in favor of one of them, the reviewer can reject the piece on the grounds that it does not sufficiently address the literature in moral epistemology, philosophy of science, object-relations theory, and philosophy of mind. A second strategy is to review manuscripts lying far outside the referee's area of expertise, but criticize the author for not using the referee's preferred topics and methods. And, as anonymous review protects referees from accountability, Turner invites them to be as vicious and venomous in these comments as they please.

When manuscripts that didn't make the first cut have been revised and resubmitted, Turner claims that "most journal editors send [them] to a new set of reviewers" (208) rather than to the ones who originally identified problems and could now see if they've been resolved, but this (I hope) is just Turner's fun. *I* certainly don't send a revised manuscript to any but the original reviewers and I don't know of any journal editor who does. I wouldn't want to discount the possibility, though, that Turner keeps lower company than I do.

He closes his essay by arguing, seriously this time, for a system whereby reviewers' identities are known to the author, so they can't do sneaky or mean things behind the cloak of anonymity. Transparency between authors and their referees--now, *there's* a suggestion. Can we just declare open season on reviewers and be done with it? Authors are often and understandably protective of their work and touchy when it is criticized. When a review is negative, even if authors have the self-discipline to refrain from arguing with the reviewer (and many don't), they are bound to feel resentment. And

how handy to have a named target toward whom to direct their wrath. I once (back in the dawn of the world, when I was young) naively revealed my name to an author whose manuscript I had given a negative review, and not only did he send me a lengthy e-mail to explain, unconvincingly, why he was right and I was wrong, but I discovered several months later that he was on the search committee for a job for which I'd applied. Probably I wouldn't have gotten the job anyway, but I still duck when I run into him at conferences.

<div align="center">Graduate Student Mentors</div>

I close with a brief reflection on what senior scholars can do to initiate their graduate students into the mysteries of academic publishing. When I agree to become a student's director, I extract a promise that he or she will never, *ever* send a manuscript out for publication without showing it to me first. That saves inflicting raw or half-baked work on a busy editorial staff and its reviewers. Sometimes the students break this promise (you do know you have to keep your promises, don't you?), send out their stuff anyway, and go straight to hell.

Students might also be encouraged to look at a journal's Web site to see if it accepts unsolicited book reviews (*Hypatia* doesn't), what editorial style the journal uses, how long a paper should be, and how to send a submission. In addition, professors sometimes ask students to write their seminar papers as if they were going to submit them to, say, *Hypatia* or *Mind*. Another strategy is to ask students to write critical reviews of books as a partial requirement for a course and then show them how the reviews can be improved.

Faculty often involve their graduate students in their own editorial projects, relegating certain chores such as assembling the bibliography, reading proofs, or even preparing the index to their research assistants. One name for this is mentoring, but if done with sufficient verve and panache, it is also called exploitation. More valuable is the experience of working with a graduate student on an edited collection, so that the student learns how to send papers out for review, select the ones that will appear in the collection, assist in establishing a coherent order for the papers, write the introduction, and shepherd the collection through the production process. Ideally, the student does all the work, the mentor coaches, and the student's name alone appears on the cover of the book. Less ambitiously, Laura Purdy suggests that the mentor might give her graduate student a copy of a manuscript the mentor is reviewing for a journal and ask the student to write up a set of comments. Then, when the mentor has written her own comments, the student can trade papers with her and learn how it's done.

Shedding light on some aspect of life that is philosophically puzzling, developing a piece of feminist theory, doing empirical research that allows us to understand better how particular people or social groups actually think, feel, and act--this sort of research becomes a part of the ongoing philosophical conversation only through the shared cooperative activity of many people. Everyone--authors, publishers, editors, reviewers, and mentors--must do his or her part. But you already knew that you have to play nicely with others, didn't you?

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