Thomas Graves October 24th, 2025

Who should control open access, the markets or the commons?

In Publishing Beyond the Market, **Samuel A. Moore** *examines the ills of a marketised system of academic publishing that can justify charging over £9000 for a single paper and outlines how commons-based approaches could be an alternative. Readers will have much to gain from the book's theorisation and championing of scholar-led publishing, writes* **Thomas A. Graves**.

***Publishing Beyond the Market: Open Access, Care, and the Commons*. Samuel A. Moore. University of Michigan Press. 2025.**

Why make publications open access? Who benefits from the current systems of open access academic publishing? How does the marketisation of open access affect scholarship? How can open access be reoriented according to the research needs and academic freedom of scholars, rather than large corporate publishers?

In Publishing Beyond the Market, scholarly communication specialist Samuel Moore addresses these key questions and makes a passionate argument for open access (OA), and academic research and assessment, to be brought under the governance of many and varied scholarly commons.

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lead to more equitable, less market-driven academic publishing.

The book starts by tracing the journey of OA publishing from the excitement of scholar-led journals set up in the early days of the internet through to today's marketised system of six big publishers dominating academic publishing while charging sky-high article processing charges (APCs). Moore leads the reader through these developments with an argument focused on how the concept of the commons could lead to more equitable, less market-driven academic publishing.

Following this useful contextualising introduction, Moore offers several incisive critiques of where the academic publishing model has gone wrong. In particular, how the aim of UK government policy to make publicly funded research publicly accessible through OA mandates by creating a market where academics would seek to publish in journals with lower APC costs, fundamentally misunderstood the structural drivers of academics' publishing choices.

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University promotion models which reward publications in prestigious journals, and transformative agreements, which push the burden of APC payment onto library budgets, mean that APC cost does not factor in most researchers' choices. Further, commercial academic publishers have a captive market of customers who rely on access and publication via their platforms and thus are not price sensitive. A competitive market for journal APCs as envisioned by UK government policy makers was therefore never possible.

Moore also notes that while creative commons licences aim to make publications openly accessible and reusable, they also reinforce a marketised, Eurocentric system of academia. Specifically, by promoting an individualised model of authorship and by focusing on the openness of the output without concern for how that output was produced.

Chapter three captures the heart of Moore's argument, and his solution to the marketisation of scholarly publishing. In it, he explores how groups of scholars have worked to set up their own non-

profit scholar-led academic journals, working predominantly on the voluntary labour of academics, with a researcher-oriented, rather than market-oriented publishing agenda. The chapter also looks into how these groups have operated diamond OA systems, whereby neither the author nor the reader pays for the published version to be publicly accessible.

Throughout, the book addresses itself towards two conflicting notions of the commons. First, the neoliberal idea of the commons, as simply a space where outputs are freely accessible to all, is exemplified by creative commons licences and Elsevier's Digital Commons repository software. Second, Moore's preferred concept of the commons, based in systems of collaboration between equals in a convivial, non-commercial, and more or less localised way, is exemplified by scholar-led journals. By arguing for localisation for the commons, Moore proposes an antidote to the homogenising force of large publishers, and publications that are more sensitive to the particularities of disciplinary concerns. Yet, he is also aware of localisation as a potentially exclusionary practice. For him, commoners are people within a community who have the right to democratically set rules, access, and maintain a resource, necessitating the exclusion of non-commoners from these processes.

A truly commons-based approach to credit, he argues, could entail a removal of the boundaries between author and non-author contributors

The conclusion takes this argument beyond open access. He suggests that the horizontal, localised, and "scaled-small" methods of governance used by scholar-led journals could usefully be extended to broader systems of academic governance. In so doing, they could provide a model to combat the wider marketisation and neoliberalisation of higher education. A truly commons-based approach to credit, he argues, could entail a removal of the boundaries between author and non-author contributors (including institutional professional services staff who facilitate publishing). This approach, for Moore, could also be brought into systems of academic recruitment and research assessment based on principles of care rather than excellence.

However, there are two key criticisms I would make of Moore's proposed solutions to the problems of marketised OA publishing. One of these is located in his diagnosis of the problem. If prestige journals are still valued highly by academics, then why would they switch to publishing in scholar-led journals? The second is that Moore's approach to bottom-up, community driven solutions to OA

and Higher Education governance would not be sufficient to overcome the large-scale problems of marketisation in OA and Higher Education. His advocacy of "pockets of radical activity that can be sustained with care and conviviality in an otherwise commercial environment" only amounts to the small areas of resistance that already exist, and leaves the larger-scale problems of academic publishing untouched. In short, he has identified the problems, but his solutions could prove insufficient to fully address them.

Many of the factual parts of this book will come as no surprise to academic library professionals. However, the theorisation Moore delivers them with gives food for thought regarding how to proceed in the "Open Access wars" to ensure that research is as accessible as possible, in as equitable and affordable a way as possible. Researchers will also have much to take from this book, and may consider taking up Moore's call to look for alternative routes for publication through scholar-led publishing. The most benefit, however, would come from policymakers and politicians reading this book. This could lead to a reconsideration of the sorts of top-down open access mandates included in Plan S or the REF policy in favour of more scholar-driven solutions rather than APC-based approaches.

You can read the book open access (of course) from the University of Michigan Press here.

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About the author

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Thomas Graves is an Open Research Library Assistant at LSE, where he works to promote discussion and adoption of Open Research methods. He also holds a PhD in Music from Durham University, where his research on emotional experiences of qawwali listeners in India combined qualitative ethnographic methods and quantitative psychological methods. He has

published on the relationships between music, emotion, spirituality, and politics. He is interested in what different fields can learn from each other with regards to open research and methodology.

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