# We can shift academic culture through publishing choices

Considering this is an opinion piece, my peer-review should be regarded more as a discussion. Judging whether an opinion is scientifically valid makes no sense to me; it is still worthwhile to discuss the contents nonetheless.

In general, this opinion piece aims to incentivize a shift towards more Open Access (OA) publishing, and specifically more ethical OA publishing. In the first two sections ("The problem" and "Exploitative route to publication") the author aptly summarizes the current situation, albeit sometimes implying that the reader is familiar with certain aspects of the discussion.

Moreover, in the first section, the author makes quite a promising statement: "I will focus on how researchers can instigate a cultural shift to change the incentive structure by valuing the improvement of research rigor through ethical publishing." However, in the sections following, I was disappointed to see that the author primarily focusing on describing the landscape instead of actually providing ways to instigate cultural change. Understanding the landscape is important, but what the effective, actionable aspect of the piece that was offered in the beginning remains absent. As such, the piece does not deliver.

In the next section on exploitation, the author mentions exploitative and ethical publishing. Although I tend to agree that OA is less exploitative, calling it ethical is rather difficult without an explanation as to what normative framework is being applied to judge this. Why, for example, is the APC range of 0-2900 USD seen as ethical, when in the first paragraph it is mentioned that publishing costs range between 1.30-318USD? I understand many of the underlying principles, but I think the discussion of these issues can be honed and would make it much more convincing for people unfamiliar with many of the underlying principles that are implicit for OA proponents. E.g., is the ethical statement made from a Kantian viewpoint that OA is more sustainable? If so, please make it more explicit so it can show the underlying logic instead of just the conclusions.

Continuing with providing explanations as to why certain things are considered ethical, I think the piece could really benefit from justification as to why keeping money inside academia would be considered more ethical. For-profit businesses can very much contribute ethically to the knowledge ecosystem and retain the profits, albeit it would require some changes in how the system is setup (e.g., knowledge should no longer be commodified). It is rather narrow to state that keeping money within academia is beneficial to academia more so than a combination, at least without thorough analysis as to why that would be the case. The premises seem to be implied now, which makes it rather unconvincing (despite that I somewhat agree with the outcome).

As such, it seems to me that the perspective proposed here is lacking in thoroughness of the reasoning proposed (despite that I am a proponent of OA). As such, I would encourage the author to make the implicit steps taken in the reasoning more explicit. Moreover, calling something ethical without providing a framework is, to me, rather difficult. Deeming something ethical is always subject to cultural context and the normative framework taken.

Finally, I would like to ask the author whether she thinks that philanthropic efforts to increase OA are ethical in themselves. For example, OA is promoted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), but recent efforts that put pressure on publishers have created an OA privilege so it seems. Researchers funded by the BMGF now have the possibility to publish gold-OA in Science for example [1], but non-BMGF financed researchers do not. As such, considering the ethical framework within science of Merton, this decreases equality between researchers. If OA is deemed ethical, are the means to an end here deemed ethical as well? It seems that this is a crucial question that is being neglected throughout this opinion article.

[1] http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/02/gates-foundation-strikes-deal-allow-its-researchers-publish-science-journals

Conflicting interests: I am and have been a vocal proponent of Gold Open Access and have advocated for more OA publishing.